Spring 2018

Battleground Texas: Gendered Media Framing of the 2014 Texas Gubernatorial Race

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Abstract: Feminist political theory is a sprawling theoretical field that intertwines sociological and philosophical perspectives and applies them to the study of campaigns, policy, voting, and the general structure of what Americans call politics. In Western democratic republics, the concept of participation has been hotly debated, specifically with regard to voting. Applying the critical lens of an intersectional feminist perspective introduces questions about the participation of different genders, races, classes, and cultural groups in political action, voting, and running for office. Before equal representation can be attained (if that is, indeed, desirable), it is important to understand how our politics are constructed. Feminism in the field of political communication is almost as old as the discipline itself. In this paper, the researchers explore a specific mixed-gender race in Texas, using the underlying assumptions of feminist political theory as a lens to examine how the race was rhetorically constructed in the media. By mixing methodologies and multiple analyses, both content-related and critical, these stories of mixed-gender campaigns may illuminate how gender is constructed in political races by the media and elucidate the potential constraints imposed on candidates seeking office.

Keywords: feminist political theory, Battleground Texas, Davis (Wendy), Abbott (Greg), framing, gubernatorial race, politics

Battleground Texas was a grassroots organization that raised money and supported the Democratic candidate for governor in 2014, Wendy Davis. Davis had previously made headlines with a filibuster worthy of statewide attention in the Texas Senate during the debate about an antiabortion bill. The last woman to win the governorship in Texas was Ann Richards, a Republican, in 1990. Some thought that the Democratic Party might take a governorship in Texas (a known and established Republican stronghold) with a candidate like Davis. Her recent popularity indicated that she might have support and that her opponent, Greg Abbott, could be challenged. In fact, most predicted that Davis would not win but would make the race a close contest and therefore strengthen the Democratic Party in Texas. Ultimately, Abbott and Davis began the race on equal footing, as he was Attorney General of Texas and she a now-recognizable state senator. Both had experience and a sense of incumbency. Expectations dictated that Abbott would win, but at the same time the expectations for Davis closing the gap in the race were high. In the end, Davis not only lost the race but did so by more than 20 points (Root 2014), which was a number too great to pose any indication of a strong Democratic Party propensity for success in Texas. Money for Davis's campaign poured in from outside states (Brown 2014) and the Democratic National Committee (DNC), and while such an influx can

sometimes shift a campaign's course, in this case it mattered more where the money came from (i.e., from outside Texas). Ultimately, the prevailing expectations of an Abbott governorship and a Democratic defeat were fulfilled.

Foundational Theories

Communication theorists often speak of constructivism, which from the sociolinguistic perspective means that language upholds our institutions and helps create the public discourse (Brock, Scott and Chesebro 1990; Gronbeck 1978). In media theory, the concept of constructivism informs theories such as framing (McCombs and Shaw 1993; Tewksbury and Scheufele 2009). Framing, as a part of agenda setting, is the study of how the media create a certain style, persona, or perspective for a story. In the larger scope of public discourse, the creation and maintenance of a persona or character of a political candidate is key to the way voters receive a campaign. Political communication theorists have examined how candidates handle the media (Kaid and Johnston 2001); how candidates change style for their own goals (Campbell 1998; Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Dow and Tonn 2009; Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 1996); how candidates attack and defend (Benoit 2014); and how surrogates impact campaigns (Trent and Friedenberg 1983). Media and communication studies attempt to grasp the language and subsequent creation of the public discourse surrounding a campaign, but do not often examine the link between media framing, critical theory, and the outcome of elections. Borrowing from political science literature, communication literature, and media theory, the authors question how candidates Davis and Abbott were constructed in the public discourse during their campaigns. A small sample of one campaign is required for a close analysis and a critical understanding of the impact of the media interpretation. The claims that when women run they tend to win (Sanbonmatsu 2003) and that more women need to run in order to have more female representation (Sanbonmatsu 2003) are encouraging for success in mixed-gender races, but only if it is also understood how the media impact the narrative of those campaigns.

In hindsight, the Texas gubernatorial race was a foreshadowing of what was to come in both the presidential race of 2016 and the Georgia congressional race in the sixth district, in which, following the 2017 resignation of Tom Price, a special runoff election was held and Republican Karen Handel defeated Democrat Jon Ossoff by 51.8% to 48.2%. Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump fell into similar patterns of the Texas gubernatorial race when gender was considered. Clinton was often talked about in terms of her demeanor and appearance, whereas Trump was contextualized in terms of his experience (i.e., business rather than governmental). Yet again, in the sixth district of Georgia in 2017, external money and momentum was on the side of the Democrat, and voters in Georgia did not like that influence any more than those in Texas. In both state races, the Democrat lost despite money spent and the candidate's qualifications. In the presidential race and the Texas race, both female candidates were framed differently from their male counterparts. It is therefore understandable that the Texas gubernatorial race of 2014 is often mentioned when political commentators in the media discuss both the 2016 presidential race and the Georgia sixth-district election in 2017.

Mixing theoretical positions and methodologies requires an understanding of how theories may work together to build a lens for interpreting sociopolitical phenomena. The operations of the campaigns are not in question here, nor are differences between women and men; rather, what we ask is whether the position of the woman-as-speaker impacts the media construction of a campaign and if so, how? As theorized by Campbell, the woman-as-speaker, especially when "speaking to males, speaking on an equal basis with

males ... challenge[s] male authority and rationality" (Campbell 1988, 124). Women who speak in the public sphere are seen as assuming the culturally masculine traits of aggressiveness, competitiveness, ambition, and expertise. At the same time, politics requires public speaking, which exacerbates this apparent female usurpation of stereotypical male traits, creating conflict for a woman politician or candidate for office.

In this regard, several assumptions must be made clear. First, the authors come from a position that the media impact the public discourse surrounding a political campaign. It is also assumed that the media frame candidates based on what they think their audience wants to hear. It may also be assumed that candidates of different genders are not attached to particular issues any more than political parties "own" issues, although the literature still advances some debate about stereotypes of gender and party. In that same vein, the authors write under the assumption that politics is shaped by the patriarchal ideas of hierarchy, power, and categorical roles based on sex. Finally, it is assumed that researchers understand how a campaign or candidate may be framed for the audience and how understanding that frame impacts voters. These are rather large assumptions but not illogical leaps, as it is understood that a campaign in context, analyzed through a critical lens, using conclusions drawn from an established media theory, can elicit new information that contributes to understanding the impact of gender differences on public discourse.

Gender within Political Parties

Campaigning on women's issues is not a new strategy for candidates of both genders, but the two main political parties approach it differently. Schaffner (2005) observed that candidates focus more on female issues when the state's population is more concerned with them, and women become more likely to vote as Democrats when women's issues are at the forefront of the campaign's focus. A former senator in the Texas legislature, Davis decided to run for the open governor's seat after Rick Perry announced he would not seek another term. She had skyrocketed to fame after her eleven-hour filibuster on June 25, 2013, to block the passage of a Senate bill that would restrict the availability of abortions to Texas women (Dart 2013).

Davis's ability to woo the female voters was assumed, since as a woman Davis could stereotypically be framed as being more adept to handle pressing "female" issues, such as abortion, and to utilize Texas's recent and well-publicized debate about a woman's right to choose, bringing it to the forefront of the campaign discourse. However, Texas is typically considered a Republican and pro-life state, which could steer the votes away from Davis and toward Abbott as the Republican candidate. Additionally, some research suggests that women who run for office still downplay running as a wife or mother, despite the possible electoral benefits of highlighting their gendered family status. In a study of ninety-two websites of women candidates who ran for Congress in 2010, Schreiber discovered those women "were not running as mothers or wives," revealing "that gender conformity and masculine norms are still salient for women as they seek positions of institutional power" (2012, 562). The sum of this literature might lead to theorizing that Davis, given how she rose to fame on a "female" issue (an abortion bill filibuster), had no choice but to emphasize her gender on the campaign trail. This utilization, rather than mitigation, of her gender identity might have forced Davis into adopting a more "feminine style" (Campbell 1998) to construct herself when acting as woman-as-speaker. As such, Davis would also identify with stereotypical "women's issues" as part of her platform. Discussing women's issues, adopting the feminine style in politics, and campaigning in a patriarchal state (Texas) with feminism as a cornerstone would allow the media to highlight gender differences in the race. Through the lens of feminist political theory, where the feminine is seen in contrast to the standing institution of the patriarchy (politics, generally) through the lens of the media, the study of

this campaign in terms of media representation becomes imperative. Therefore, the following examination of media framing was executed, and the resulting data was not surprising, supporting the hypothesis that women-as-speakers are presented to voters differently than men who are already assumed to take on aggressive, competitive masculine traits as opposed to soft-spoken, timid feminine traits. The data also helps us understand *how* media framing highlights that difference.

Framing

The media can engage in framing (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007), which takes into account how issues are portrayed when presented and discussed in media outlets. Framing is the characterization by the media that can influence how the public views any given issue, both on a macro level, to present and explain complex ideas, and on a micro level, to show how people "use information and presentation features regarding issues as they form impressions" (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 12). Both framing and agenda-setting roles are crucial but separate—agenda setting can be summarized as *whether* the audience thinks about an issue, and framing influences *how* they think about it (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007, 11). The media can have a powerful impact in gendered political campaign coverage through its framing of candidates. *How* a candidate or event is reported not only brings the story to the attention of the public but can influence the public opinion. This is potentially one of the most salient effects of media and has been used in the past to reinforce the masculinity of political offices and the femininity of female candidates. Kahn and Blair (2013), in their study of the media coverage of the 2008 Democratic presidential primary, discovered that the media framed Bill Clinton's support for his wife according to "traditional gender scripts" (56) and reinforced the link between the presidency and masculinity, as the intense coverage highlighted his own political power, not that of his wife who was running for office.

Carlin and Winfrey (2009) discussed the impact of media framing of traditional gender roles for female candidates. Besides the focus on their appearance, in the 2008 presidential race, both Clinton and Sarah Palin faced questions about their abilities as mothers and their "selfish" use of their children to further their political ambitions, which diminished both candidates' credibility (Carlin and Winfrey 2009). In addition, media have framed nonverbal events of candidates according to traditional gender roles. Shepard (2009) discussed the effects of crying on a candidate's campaign, highlighting Clinton's 2008 crying incident in New Hampshire, which media characterized as sensitive and authentic. In contrast, Ed Muskie's 1972 crying incident led media to characterize him as temperamental and weak (Shepard 2009). Displays of emotion can be beneficial to a candidate's campaign but only as a function of their gender—crying is deemed acceptable for female candidates but not for their male counterparts (Shepard 2009). This research hypothesizes frames that were used to report news about Davis, and these frames will focus on her traits, on the "female" issues she raised in the campaign, and on her appearance.

Gendered Traits

Another obstacle that female candidates face is the perception of "female" versus "male" traits, which influence the idea of "female" vs. "male" policy issues. The perception that women are better suited to tackle issues particular to their gender is pervasive in elections and can position a woman as less able to handle the "masculine" issues with which a political office is typically associated. Voters at times rely on assessment of personality traits to help them make a decision about their vote. Traits coded as feminine, like warmth

and compassion, are associated with feminine issues like welfare and education. Masculine traits, like assertiveness and self-confidence, are associated with handling military crises and economic issues (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Fridkin and Kenney (2011) observed that, as news media coverage of a campaign escalates, voters increasingly assess the personality traits of candidates, and those personality traits may influence the voters' overall impression of the candidate. Male and female candidates may be perceived as more competent in different areas (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993), partially because they are stereotyped as possessing masculine or feminine traits, and those gendered characteristics help define which issues a candidate may be understood as adept at handling.

According to Huddy and Terkildsen,

Typical female traits such as warmth, sensitivity and compassion were thought to qualify female candidates for dealing better with compassion issues, such as education, health care, and the problems of the poor and aged. Assertiveness, aggressiveness, and self-confidence, typical male traits, were thought to aid male candidates in coping better with military or police crises. Candidates with typical masculine traits were also perceived as more competent to handle economic issues. (1993, 140)

However, a woman running for office is not doomed by her inherently feminine traits; a female candidate can reverse the gender stereotype by portraying herself as having masculine traits, and future female leaders could benefit from showcasing both feminine and masculine traits during a race (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Although a rhetorical reversal of gender stereotypes would eradicate all questions of woman-as-speaker, the discourse surrounding the institutions of political offices would shift. In short, women could be perceived as legitimate speakers, without seeing their credibility questioned, and, ultimately, more women may choose to run for office, opting to use gender to their benefit. As Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall contend, "gender stereotypes are likely to lead people to perceive male candidates as more aggressive and forceful, while women candidates are more likely to be perceived as kind, sympathetic, and less willing to be aggressive" (2009, 56). A woman using her gender can be especially effective when it comes to combating negative attack ads. Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall (2009) discovered that potentially harmful gender stereotypes can also insulate a woman from being damaged by negative attack advertisements by a male competitor, as viewers who rely on gender stereotypes to filter the information they receive may consider an attack on a woman as unfair.

Conversely, Atkeson and Krebs (2007) assert that trait coverage is not pronounced in political campaigns, and that female and male traits tend to be applied equally to candidates of both genders. In races they examined, the presence of a female candidate did not lead to more coverage of "female" traits, which they enumerate as "soft, gentle, kind, passive, consensus builder, honest" (2007, 243). On the other hand, Heldman, Carroll, and Olson (2005) discovered that media paid more attention to Elizabeth Dole's personality traits and appearance in her campaign for the Republican presidential nomination than they did to her (male) opponent's personality traits. Yet, being female could be an asset to female candidates wishing to woo female voters. Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes reported that "female candidates do indeed gain a strategic advantage when they target women's or social groups and stress issues voters associate favorably with female candidates" (2003, 249–50). Women who utilize those strategies have an 11% higher chance of winning the election than do other candidates. Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes concluded that gender, when used as an asset rather than camouflaged as a liability, can help women boost their chances of electoral success. Contrary to conventional wisdom, displays of emotion can potentially help a female candidate. Brooks (2011) determined that female candidates are not penalized for crying, and crying may discourage voters from seeing them as "unemotional," which is negatively correlated with likely political effectiveness.

Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) found that people organize information they receive about other people by traits and social judgments rather than by behavior. The implications of this finding for a political campaign include the possibility that a candidate, especially a female candidate, may be disadvantaged by framing, as constituents could rely on trait portrayal in deciding their vote rather than on the candidate's behavior.

> H1a: There will be more mentions by newspaper media of Davis's stereotypically "female" traits in her gubernatorial race than of stereotypically "male" traits.

> H1b: There will be more mentions by newspaper media of Abbott's stereotypically "male" traits in his gubernatorial race than of stereotypically "female" traits.

Issues

Fridkin (1992) conducted a study that highlighted the differences in print-media coverage between male and female incumbents and political challengers, accounting for "horse race" coverage, length of the articles, and content of issues and traits mentioned in the articles, among other characteristics. "Horse race," as used here, describes the media's political coverage of an election when trying to predict the winner. The impact of gender in the different types of coverage was pronounced—female candidates (both incumbents and challengers) were consistently ranked better on issues dealing with education, women, and health. Overall, though, candidates who received stereotypical "male candidate" coverage were always perceived as more viable than candidates who received "female" coverage (Fridkin 1992). Atkeson and Krebs (2007) also found that in female-male races, as compared to male-male races, education and social welfare issues received more coverage, indicating that perhaps having a female candidate in more electoral contests could expand the scope of issues debated during the campaigns.

> H2a: There will be more mentions by newspaper media of Davis's stereotypically "female" issues in her gubernatorial race than of stereotypically "male" issues.

> H2b: There will be more mentions by newspaper media of Abbott's stereotypically "male" issues in his gubernatorial race than of stereotypically "female" issues.

Physical Appearance

Another obstacle women face when in the public eye is the rampant sexualization of their gender by the media. Atkeson and Krebs (2007) found in their study of mayoral races that female candidates receive more coverage of their appearance than men. This is experienced by many more women than just political candidates, but the effects can be especially pronounced in a high-profile campaign. Anderson (2011) asserts that the pornification of political figures, especially women, has become commonplace, and such pornification is a constant reminder of the backlash women have faced in exchange for their political gains. Carlin and Winfrey (2009) found that, in the 2008 presidential election, media outlets concentrated both on Palin's appearance to dismiss her as a serious candidate and on Clinton's mature image to characterize any show of femininity by her as out of place. This negative coverage of the two female candidates, especially when focused on their appearance and other "female" aspects of their identity, including motherhood, had the potential to cast doubt on both candidates' suitability to be in the White House (Carlin & Winfrey 2009).

> H3: There will be more mentions by newspaper media of Davis's appearance in the gubernatorial race than of Abbott's appearance in the gubernatorial race.

Methods

Sampling and Procedure

This study utilized content analysis by coding newspaper articles to ascertain the distribution of mentions of implied personality traits, issues, and physical appearance between two gubernatorial candidates. Content analysis is defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff 2013, 24). LexisNexis was used to obtain a sample of newspaper articles from two time periods; each period corresponded to a different stage of the Texas gubernatorial race.

Time periods

Period 1 encompassed political coverage from June 25 to October 2, 2013, included Davis's filibuster of Senate Bill 5, and ended the day before she announced her candidacy for governor; data analysis from this period was used as a baseline. For Period 1, articles were selected that had only "Wendy Davis" in the body, as Abbott had not yet announced his candidacy. After a total of 621 articles were pulled, 103 articles were randomly selected for coding by starting at the fourth article listed and choosing every sixth article afterwards. Three of the selected articles were not used because they did not fit the criteria (specifically, all three mentioned a different Wendy Davis), bringing the total of coded articles to 100.

Period 2 started on October 3, 2013, and ended on November 4, 2014. This period included Davis's and Abbott's declarations of candidacy, and it ended on the Texas Election Day. LexisNexis was used to pull newspaper articles with "Wendy Davis" and "Greg Abbott" in the body of the article, leading to a sample of 653 articles. 300 articles were randomly selected for coding by starting at the second article and selecting every other article subsequently. Two of the randomly selected articles were not used because they were reproductions of a previously published piece.

Approximately 30% of the articles obtained through LexisNexis were from the *Austin American-Statesman*, a leading newspaper in Texas, and a total of 42% of articles overall were from Texas newspapers. Two sets of coding were used for each article to determine implied personality traits, issues, and appearance. Each article was coded once, and 30% were coded for a second time. Intercoder reliability was computed using Cohen's kappa, correcting for chance agreement, and all questions reached acceptable levels above .8 (Cohen 1960, 1968). All Period 1 articles were about Davis (since Abbott was not a candidate at this time); Period 2 articles included articles about both Davis and Abbott.

Coding of Personality Traits and Policy Expertise

Previous research identified stereotypical traits and areas of policy expertise for men and women found in the coverage of political campaigns and other forms of media representation. Huddy and Terkildsen's 2001 study listed warmth, sensitivity, compassion, and attention to education, health care, and aging issues as primarily female traits. They listed assertiveness, aggressiveness, self-confidence, and handling economic and military/police issues as typically male traits.

Fridkin (1992) also found differences between perceived female and male traits and policy areas. Participants in the study believed that female candidates were more compassionate and honest than their male counterparts, and thus more qualified to deal with issues of education, health, and women's rights,

while male candidates were often believed to be strong leaders and more qualified in areas of economics and defense (Fridkin 1992, 506). Fridkin found overall that people ascribe traits of "dependency, compassionate, honest, passive, gentle, emotional, weak leader" to women and traits of "independent, strong leader, aggressive, ambitious" to male candidates (507). The literature referenced by Fridkin also delineated male candidates as being perceived as more competent in dealing with issues of foreign policy, defense spending, arms control, and the economy, while female candidates were considered more competent in dealing with issues like day care, helping the poor, education, health care, women's rights, drug abuse, and the environment (507). Atkeson and Krebs asserted that "traditionally, male issues are considered economics, crime, management, and infrastructure [while] female issues are often considered compassion issues and include education, social welfare, and the environment" (2007, 243).

From these studies' variables, semantic differentials were chosen for the content analysis with a five-point Likert-type scale to include the following opposing traits: tough vs. gentle, unemotional vs. warm, ambitious vs. trustworthy, and strong leadership skills vs. strong people skills. The latter skills are "female" traits mentioned above, while the former are usually attributed to male candidates. The five-point Likert-type scale used for the answers consisted of the following choices: "Strongly agree," "Somewhat agree," "Neutral," "Somewhat disagree," and "Strongly disagree." Next, a list was compiled of seven policy areas: economic development, infrastructure/transportation, crime, education, social welfare, quality of life, and family issues. Family issues included the controversial topic of abortion, while quality of life issues dealt with access to health care and other health-related matters. The first three policy areas in the list are traditionally "male" areas of expertise, while the latter four are considered female areas of expertise. A five-point Likert-type scale was used for the answers with the following choices: "Very competent," "Somewhat competent," "Neutral," "Somewhat incompetent," and "Very incompetent." If the policy area was not mentioned, the researcher would code the answer "3" for a neutral selection.

Coding of Physical Appearance

This study sought to determine the prevalence of physical appearance coverage by the media of a female candidate versus a male candidate. Atkeson and Krebs found that "female eventual winners had greater media coverage of family and appearance issues than male eventual winners" (2007, 247). A five-point Likert-type scale was used for the answers with the following choices: "Very positive," "Somewhat positive," "Neutral," "Somewhat negative," and "Very negative." If appearance was not mentioned, nothing was coded. See Table 1 for a list of the variables that were used.

Table 1
Variables Used for the Content Analysis Questions

Variables

Traits	Issues	Physical Appearance
Tough	Strong leadership/ administration skills	Physical appearance
Gentle		
Unemotional	Strong people skills	
Warm	Economic issues	
Ambitious	Infrastructure/ transportation issues	
Trustworthy	Crime issues	
	Education issues	
	Social welfare issues	
	Quality of life issues	
	Family issues	
Total:	**Total:**	**Total:**
6 variables	9 variables	1 variable

Results

A one-sample *t* test was conducted on the first period to evaluate how Davis was perceived right after her filibuster and while she was getting ready to announce her candidacy. The *t* test was used to discover whether the mean was significantly different from 3, the midpoint between 1 and 5 for the scores about Davis, since Abbott had not declared candidacy at this time. The following traits were found to be significant: tough (*M* = 3.79, *SD* = .74), $t(99)$ = 10.64, *p* = .00; gentle (*M* = 2.85, *SD* = .44), $t(99)$ = -3.45, *p* = .001; ambitious (*M* = 3.33, *SD* = .68), $t(99)$ = 4.84, *p* = .00; trustworthy (*M* = 3.16, *SD* = .58), $t(99)$ = 2.75, *p* = .007; strong leadership skills (*M* = 3.33, *SD* = .64), $t(99)$ = 5.18, *p* = .00; strong people skills (*M* = 3.14, *SD* = .47), $t(99)$ = 2.97, *p* = .004; social welfare issues (*M* = 3.17, *SD* = .49), $t(99)$ = 3.44, *p* = .001; and family issues (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = .80), $t(99)$ = 8.02, *p* = .00.

Analyzing the data from Period 1 (i.e., before running for office), we find that the media depict Davis as tough, not very gentle, ambitious, trustworthy, having strong leadership skills, having strong people skills, and being knowledgeable about social welfare issues and family issues. Appearance had 19 mentions, (*M* = 3.42, *SD* = .96), $t(19)$ = 1.91, *p* = .07, and was not significant during this period, although the mentions were mostly positive. There was not enough data for significance.

A 2 (candidate's sex) x 2 (time periods) multivariate analysis was performed on 16 dependent variables: tough, gentle, unemotional, warm, ambitious, trustworthy, strong leadership skills, strong people skills, economic issues, infrastructure/transportation issues, crime issues, education issues, social welfare issues, quality of life issues, family issues, and physical appearance, with polynomial contrasts specified for period

effects. Results revealed significant multivariate main effects for sex, Wilks's = .74, $F(18, 577) = 11.52$, $p < .01$, ² = .26, but not for time period, Wilks's = .90, $F(18, 1154) = 1.71$, $p > .05$, ² = .05; and a significant sex x time period interaction, Wilks's = .83, $F(36, 1154) = 3.05$, $p < .01$, ² = .08. This study is concerned with the significant univariate effects for variable differences as a function of sex, which are as follows: tough, $F(1, 598) = 12.38$, $p < .05$, ² = .02; unemotional, $F(1, 598) = 23.33$, $p < .05$, ² = .04; ambitious, $F(1, 598) = 8.15$, $p < .05$, ² = .01; trustworthy, $F(1, 598) = 12.52$, $p < .05$, ² = .02; leadership skills, $F(1, 598) = 18.81$, $p < .05$, ² = .03; people skills, $F(1, 598) = 18.62$, $p < .05$, ² = .03; economy, $F(1, 598) = 2.67$, $p < .05$, ² = .02; education, $F(1, 598) = 15.84$, $p < .05$, ² = .03; social welfare, $F(1, 598) = 19.65$, $p < .05$, ² = .03; quality of life, $F(1, 598) = 14.37$, $p < .05$, ² = .02; family, $F(1, 598) = 17.14$, $p < .05$, ² = .03; and appearance, $F(1, 598) = 2.33$, $p > .05$, $\eta^2 = .004$. Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables for sex.

Table 2

Group Means and Standard Deviations for Variables by Candidate's Sex

Candidate's Sex

Variables	Female		Male	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Tough*	3.62	0.72	3.41	0.70
Gentle	2.73	0.60	2.79	0.55
Unemotional*	2.86	0.74	3.13	0.57
Warm	2.98	0.64	2.96	0.49
Ambitious*	3.76	0.71	3.59	0.72
Trustworthy*	3.21	0.95	2.95	0.87
Leadership skills*	3.34	0.90	3.04	0.77
People skills*	3.23	0.81	2.97	0.63
Economy*	3.13	0.49	2.99	0.41
Infrastructure	3.02	0.17	3.01	0.18
Crime	3.02	0.33	3.05	0.32
Education*	3.17	0.58	3.00	0.44
Social welfare*	3.13	0.46	2.97	0.42
Quality of life*	3.09	0.47	2.96	0.39
Family*	3.28	0.70	3.07	0.46
Appearance	2.64	1.40	3.05	1.45

Note: *Mean for female differs significantly from mean for male at $p < .05$.

Overall Effects of Candidate's Sex on Variable Ratings

The candidate's sex significantly affected ratings of several variables, as shown in Table 2. Davis was more likely to be portrayed as tougher, more emotional, more ambitious, more trustworthy, having more

leadership skills, having more people skills, more aware of economic issues, more aware of education issues, more aware of social welfare issues, and more aware of quality of life issues than was Abbott.

Summary of Results

Traits

Davis was more likely to be portrayed as tougher, more emotional, more ambitious, more trustworthy, having more leadership skills, having more people skills, more aware of economic issues, more aware of education issues, more aware of social welfare issues, and more aware of quality of life issues than was Abbott. Hypothesis 1a was partially supported in that Davis was portrayed as significantly more emotional, more trustworthy, and having more people skills than Abbott, which are all stereotypically "female" traits. Hypothesis 1b was partially supported in that Abbott was portrayed as significantly less emotional, less trustworthy, and having fewer people skills than Davis, which are all stereotypically "male" traits. Hypothesis 2a was partially supported in that Davis was portrayed as significantly more knowledgeable on educational issues, social welfare issues, and quality of life issues than was Abbott.

Issues and Appearance

Hypothesis 2b was partially supported in that Abbott was portrayed as less knowledgeable on educational issues, social welfare issues, and quality of life issues than was Davis. Hypothesis 3, concerning Davis's physical appearance being mentioned in newspapers, was not supported because the data size was too diminutive, although Davis's physical appearance was generally found to be negative when mentioned in data from the second time period, while Abbott's physical appearance was generally found to be positive.

Examples of physical appearance of the two gubernatorial candidates in newspaper coverage include multiple mentions of Davis as the "Abortion Barbie" (Barabak 2014; Chozick 2014; Fernandez 2014; Frean 2013; Henderson 2014; Tilove 2014; Torregrossa 2013) or, in other cases, as a "flaxen-haired damsel" (Parker 2013), "flashy" (Draper 2014), or as sporting a "prominent nose" (Draper 2014). Abbott's appearance, in contrast, was mentioned far less in newspaper coverage. When noted, it was usually in neutral or positive terms, referring to his use of a wheelchair after a tree limb fell on him, costing him the use of his legs (Tilove 2014).

Discussion

There is little doubt that women struggle to balance the feminine and masculine traits that are associated with political office in the minds of the polity. Most researchers would argue that women have not been represented in the same way as men—due to history, structure of gender relations, and socioeconomic conditions—which makes the prospect of occupying political office more difficult for women than for men. What theorists in communication, sociology, and political science have found is that the expectations for women and men as speakers in the political arena are different. As Lublin and Brewer found in their survey of Southern elections, "rather than winning elections as executives or in law enforcement, women are chosen more often to carry out process-oriented jobs" (2003, 391), which shows that they are still not

perceived by the voters as adept at leadership roles. Rather, female candidates are apprehended as suited to process jobs, while more leadership-heavy roles are still delegated to male candidates.

Gendered expectations lead to differences in behavior and ultimately in citizen assessment of fitness for office, especially along gender-trait boundaries. Finding campaigns in which qualified mixed-gender candidates are competing is difficult, as women are still underrepresented in politics, yet the best way to understand the impact of gender on political speech is to evaluate individual political races. Most research focuses on national races, as they have been most visibly defined by gender differences in the past two decades, but examining races at the state and local levels evens the playing field in context and culture. Examining mixed-gender state and local races is also crucial because these races are usually stepping stones to higher political office. If women are not winning elections at state and local levels, research could explain the lack of gender parity among presidential or federal legislative candidates. The Texas gubernatorial race is a prime example of women and men vying for political office, and the data herein reinforces what is found in national-level politics: Women-as-speakers are expected to function differently than men even in the same rhetorical situation of the political campaign, which puts women into a bind or places them at a disadvantage.

Ultimately, candidate Davis was perceived as more emotional, more trustworthy, more relational, and more knowledgeable about perceived domestic issues (e.g., social welfare and quality of life); she was also perceived as the loser throughout most of the horse-race reporting on the contest between her and Abbott. This aligns with the literature about female traits and expertise in domestic issues, showing that the reporting of Davis's traits and perceived areas of expertise was indeed gendered. Given that Davis was consistently reported as being likely to lose and Abbott was frequently covered as likely to win, one can assert that the coverage of the contest may have influenced voter attitudes about Davis. Abbott was perceived as a winner, a candidate who was less emotional but equally knowledgeable about immigration, infrastructure, and crime. The media, according to Boyle, have "a tradition of focusing on horse [-race] coverage of campaigns and it makes up a major content of campaign coverage" (2001, 34). Using gender as a shortcut for this type of coverage is effective and efficient.

Both Davis and Abbott were perceived as equally warm, a typically feminine trait, which indicates that Abbott could appear as feminine, while Davis was merely viewed as adhering to her stereotypical feminine identity. The woman-as-speaker commonly finds herself in this position, adhering to stereotype expectations, while a male counterpart may use feminine traits to his advantage. As an example, Schreiber found in the survey of Republican women in the 2010 general election "that overall, and despite partisan affiliation, these women [were] not running as women or mothers" (2012, 562). These gendered roles are perceptional frameworks female candidates are acutely aware of and, in some cases, seek to distance themselves from in order to appeal to voters looking for more masculine traits in political officeholders.

In short, Abbott appealed to the feminine and masculine traits and issues, while Davis had to appear warm and knowledgeable about feminine issues as well as display masculine traits such as leadership. Leadership skills are generally equated with being assertive, aggressive, or, in this case, with being too ambitious for a woman. Given the consistent coverage of Davis as likely to lose the election, it is unsurprising that she was portrayed as ambitious throughout her campaign.

It is not clear that Abbott won this election because of his gender or the role gendered issues, especially the women's right to choose, played in the campaign. What is clear is that Abbott and Davis were treated differently. Although the quantity of references to their appearance was not significantly different, the nature of those references is at least qualitatively different. Davis was more often criticized for her appearance,

while Abbott's appearance was most often treated in a positive light, as noted above. In summary, the analysis of newspaper coverage showed that a blond female candidate received far more negative coverage than her male opponent. The difference in the way the candidates were treated regarding appearance is not new in political discourse. In 2008, Clinton and Palin were treated in similar ways, with the discussion of their politics being colored by their physical, gendered, or sexual traits (Carlin and Winfrey 2009).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research. While these newspaper articles were found online, the researchers do not know how many Texans actually read the articles or were influenced by them. Additionally, the researchers might have exhibited researcher bias when conducting the content analysis, since the researchers are female. The utilization of LexisNexis for locating the articles could be limiting since there were most likely more articles written about this race than were indexed in LexisNexis.

Future Directions

Consistently, women are perceived differently than men in the political sphere. Overcoming these differences requires more than merely electing more women to office, and additionally will require studies such as this one to highlight what those differences are and how they are constructed. The hypotheses based on the literature were supported and further studies should begin to delineate exactly what relevant gender differences are and how they function in the political sphere. The variables in this research would be interesting to utilize for understanding the presidential election of 2016 and how gender played into the voting by US citizens. The election of Donald Trump and the unsuccessful run of Hillary Clinton provide rich content for further analysis. Fascinating in hindsight to the data collection and the election of 2016 is that the Texas gubernatorial campaign of 2014 has been used as a point of comparison for other races, as an example of a mixed-gender campaign and due to its focus on women's issues and the amount of party support received by the candidates.

Conclusion

What can be learned from the Texas gubernatorial race is that women as political candidates are portrayed differently than men as political candidates, although it could also be observed that the issue of abortion was at the root of the matter for a mostly Republican state. Still, while researchers continue to study gender in political campaigns, it would serve the field well to acknowledge that women who are not perceived as feminine or who are perceived as either insufficiently or overly feminine are at a greater risk of hypercriticism than men, as they run contrary to societal standards for gender roles. In fact, these standards additionally require that women not speak or speak very little, and the role of woman-as-speaker and a voice for her constituents still seems to be called into question.

Public discourse may suggest that progress has been made in accepting or desiring women in political positions, but the barriers to women's attempts to occupy political office are not solely material. The public discourse suggests more progress than has actually been made in campaigns, as indicated by previous research and the study herein. Therefore, what should be emphasized from studies of mixed-gender political races is the myriad power constraints that affect the woman-as-speaker, and the observation that

these power constraints have never applied to men. For example, Senator Claire McCaskill's (D-Missouri) memoir, *Plenty Ladylike* (2015), addresses the issue of her election as a woman in a conservative state, facing Todd Akin, who took on the issue of rape and abortion in his campaign. Sadly, being a woman still constrains female candidates' success in politics, and being a politician appears antithetical to being feminine or, to use McCaskill's term, "ladylike." McCaskill discusses style and traits of being a female candidate and a woman running for office specifically in terms of campaigning, commenting on how she acted and communicated differently than other women by following a lesson learned from her father: "I have a reputation for being direct and to the point, a trait I got partly from my Dad" (2015, 28). Her association of being direct with masculinity is not surprising, but it is McCaskill's explanation of how she learned about political communication that illuminates her understanding of the difference between men and women in politics. McCaskill's mother ran for city council in Columbia, Missouri, and was elected. The night she was sworn in, she brought an apron, a picture of her children, and a vase of flowers to put on the council's table. In her memoir, McCaskill reflects on the meaning of these events: "While I didn't realize it at the time, I was learning valuable political lessons about risk taking and communication…. Those lessons stuck. I also saw [my mother] alienate her colleagues in making a point at their expense, and that stayed with me, too" (2015, 32).

McCaskill also notes that she has been the target of criticism as a woman, with derogatory remarks directed at her by some in the Missouri state legislature. She did not know what she would face in the Senate, but she knew that her "direct" style would be more acceptable once she won the race. Still today, talking to McCaskill reveals the same person seen in television news clips: direct, to the point, and unafraid of the risk of being a woman-as-speaker.(1) Her reelection prospects in 2018 are tenuous, and some would argue that is because of her gender, but she will tell you it is because of her willingness to reach across the aisle and address others in the Senate chamber with the same directness she claims to have learned from her father.

There is a fine line between becoming angered or outraged about the fact that women-as-speakers are perceived differently than men and addressing that problem by encouraging more women to take the risk of running for office. Women running campaigns for local office could help resolve this quandary, but the barrier holding women back from the highest-level national political office was not suddenly brought down with the candidacy of Hillary Clinton. If nothing else, her presidential run solidified the results of past research, and it is now long overdue for researchers to address the issue of woman-as-speaker and stop ignoring the rhetorical exigencies and constraints of being a woman. The "feminine style," addressed in such detail in political communication research, serves a purpose in attempting to determine whether there is a difference between men and women as speakers. However, studies that focus on a style accessible to both men and women ignore the initial double bind of women in the place of speaker/candidate. Until the public discourse—aided by media coverage—that surrounds political campaigns changes, women will not reach the level of success (in the form of election results) that men are able to achieve. While it is controversial to state so blatantly that women are systematically, structurally, and rhetorically constrained as speakers, studies from 2016 and beyond remain mired in the tautology of questioning how women and men differ in their speaking styles rather than addressing the problem of the construction of woman-as-speaker. Our public discourse must stop celebrating that women *can* run for office and start addressing the *success* of humans as political actors. Media provide the way for how the polity views politics and perpetuate the continued misappropriation of gendered traits as indicative of political talent. Until the social construction of woman-as-speaker changes discursively, and until this change is accepted, researchers will continue

to question the success or failure of campaigns as hinged on gender stereotypes. Future study of mixed-gender campaigns as they are represented in the media may use the results found here as a place to start, with the rejection of essentialized gender differences and the acceptance of rhetorical constraints tied to the political act. If the presidential election of 2016 and Battleground Texas are any indication, then the time is now to stop falling into the patriarchal trap of traditional study of political campaigns and start breaking apart the assumptions of the construction of political campaigns, which pitch men versus women-as-speakers instead of candidate versus candidate. There is no path to having equal numbers of female and male candidates without promoting a perception of candidates that emphasizes equality in the quality of media coverage as much as in the quantity.

Note

1. Based on Elizabeth Dudash-Buskirk's experience of talking to McCaskill on several occasions between 2010 and 2018, the senator describes her personality accurately in her memoir, and her interpersonal style appears to match her Senate-floor performance. McCaskill has made news in the Senate, and late-night talk shows and news programs often use clips of her speaking, for example on June 8, 2017, when she addressed Senator Orrin Hatch, or on November 14, 2017, when she was given time to speak about tax codes.

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