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JESSICA M. HAYDEN
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GENDER, PARTISANSHIP, AND WOMEN'S ISSUES
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DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

Dr. Michael H. Crespín, Chair

Dr. Keith Gaddie

Dr. Mackenzie Israel-Trummel

Dr. Hank Jenkins-Smith

Dr. Samuel Workman

Dr. Lindsey Meeks

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ABSTRACT

Despite much scholarly attention to women's issues and women's representation in recent decades, the definition of a women's issue is not settled either in political science or public opinion. In this project, I present a new approach to evaluate the content of congressional communication about conventional women's issues. In doing so, I demonstrate that the conventional characterization of certain policy areas as a "women's issues" is not always accurate, and instead should vary by the time and forum in which it is presented.

In this series of three essays, I make three major contributions to the debate surrounding the definition of women's issues. First, I use quantitative text analysis to identify rhetorical patterns most prevalent in three policy areas conventionally understood as women's issues. I then compare the influence of gender and party on the content of communications surrounding these issues. Finally, I use an original survey experiment to test whether the gender of the messenger of these political messages influences the public's evaluation of the messenger's quality. I find that gender is less influential on most rhetoric surrounding "women's issues" than prevailing theories suggest. I argue that the new approach to defining and assessing women's issues that I present can help us better understand women's representation and communication about women's issues in Congress.

INTRODUCTION

The 2016 campaign season saw a surge in the popularity of the phrase “All issues are women’s issues,” as Kellyanne Conway took to the campaign trail to spread this message. She goes on to say, “I’ve never...heard the phrase ‘men’s issues’. There’s a reason for that...everyone thinks men can talk about all the issues...”¹ This rhetorical strategy is at once benign and a turn from how we as scholars and citizens think about women’s interest. It requires both an expansion of what we consider women’s issues, and a reduction of which issues we consider women to have a special expertise or interest. It holds the promise of inclusion without any assurance that women will benefit from it. This turn of phrase, however, does not belong to one side of the aisle. Kamala Harris, now a Democratic Senator from California, provided almost exactly the same sentiment in an interview with a women’s magazine while she was on the campaign trail earning her current seat in elected office.

But, if this modification of definition represents a potential change in the way we think about these issues, what do we presume to be the established landscape of women’s issues? The answer is that there are no clearly established delineations, but there are some helpful guidelines. First, women’s issues can be considered women’s rights issues, or only those issues that have the “presence of intention...for which women are the intended beneficiary, constituency, or object.” (Wolbrecht 2000, p. 18). Alternatively, women’s issues can include policies that are “owned” by women

¹ Conway, Kellyanne. (August 18, 2016). *Hardball* New York: MSNBC

because women are asymmetrically interested in them (Shaffner 2005; Fridkin and Kenney 2014).

This second definition is both more inclusive and more widely utilized by scholars and the media. This definition is used for two reasons: Women in elected office have stated the intention to represent women on particular issues, and the electorate expects women in office to do the same. For example, research has found that the public perceive women in office to care more about and have more expertise than their male colleagues on issues like abortion, education, and health care (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Fridkin and Kenney 2014). And, regardless of policy position, women in Congress have expressed a desire to represent women on these issues (Swers 2005; Evans 2005; Carrol 2002; Walsh 2002; Norton 2002). However, particularly in a political environment characterized by partisan polarization, we may expect that women's interests to be sorted and absorbed by the two major party platforms. In that case, all issues should be women's issues, as constituent and representative—regardless of gender—would be expected to hold their party's policy position. Some scholars have found evidence that the latter trend is true. For example, when measured by roll-call vote patterns women are nearly indistinguishable from their male co-partisans in Congress (Frederick 2013).

My dissertation squarely addresses these conflicting expectations, and pushes the literature on women's representation and partisan polarization further by analyzing this puzzle beyond the roll-call vote. Instead, I analyze two corpuses of text to identify how and when gender influences congressional communication and how this influence compares to the influence of party on these same communications. In

my first essay, I analyze a corpus of more than 30,000 newsletters sent by members of Congress to their constituents between the years 2009-2016 that contain the words abortion, education, or health care. Using structural topic models, I first identify the major topics found within these texts by issue. I then use regression models to estimate the relative influence of gender and party on the choice of topics used to discuss each women's issue. In the second essay, I take the same approach to analyze a corpus of about 4,600 campaign advertisements aired during the campaign seasons from the years 2002-2014 (excluding 2006).

In my third and final essay, I analyze data collected from an original survey experiment. In this survey experiment, I present respondents one abortion newsletter featuring a topic used more often by women members of Congress, and one abortion newsletter featuring a topic more often used by men in Congress. As the treatment, I randomize the gender of the member who presents either message, and then ask a series of questions about how the respondent rates the quality of the newsletter messenger.

The analyses in these three essays provide much insight into the current character of women's issues both from the vantage point of congressional communication patterns and the influence of these communications on public opinion. Overall, I find that gender is more influential on messages about abortion and education, and less influential on health care messages. This finding confirms my expectations that health care messages have become dominated by partisan pressures since the passage of the Affordable Care Act has moved the issue toward national salience and economic rhetoric. I also find that gender is more influential over the

content of newsletters than on the content of campaign advertisements. The longer-form, targeted, low-cost communication format of newsletters allows more room for gender than the high-cost, widely distributed campaign advertisement format. Finally, through analysis of the survey experiment responses, I find that when the gender of the abortion newsletter messenger matters, it is male messengers who are almost always preferred.

Together, these three essays represent important contributions to the literatures on Congress, women's representation, and partisan polarization. They indicate that gender is still an important influence on representational behavior, but that this influence is mediated by the political context. The influence of gender varies by both the women's issue presented, and the format in which it is presented. Particularly, it may be only the most politically interested who are exposed to gender differences in congressional communication, as newsletters exhibit substantially more variation between men and women than the ubiquitously seen campaign advertisement format. Moreover, these findings suggest that even when women in Congress do communicate differently on women's issues like abortion, it may have unintended consequences. Specifically, women may be punished in public opinion and at the polls for sending women's issue messages—regardless of its content—compared to men who send the exact same message. Ultimately, this series of essays presents both theoretical and methodological contributions to American politics, and representational behavior. As we as a discipline move forward in analyzing the evolving nature of women's issues, utilizing the power of text analysis on

understudied transcripts like campaign advertisements and newsletters is an approach full of promise.

ESSAY 1
GENDER, PARTISANSHIP, AND WOMEN'S ISSUES
IN CONGRESIONAL NEWSLETTERS

In 1992, the media, politicians, and scholars alike heralded the congressional election as marking the “Year of the Woman.” Scholarship around this time found that women in Congress, regardless of party, were more liberal on women’s issues than their male counterparts and that women communicated differently in both chambers. Since then, however, we have witnessed a surge of partisanship and ever-growing polarization.

Increasingly, this partisan polarization has influenced the way women in in both parties communicate about women’s issues, and the way voters interpret these messages (Wolbrecht 2000; Fridkin and Kenney 2014). Scholars have found that though both Republican and Democratic women both intend to be descriptive representatives, how they conceptualize this role varies between parties (Carrol 2002; Evans 2005) and by issue. This trend has in turn affected the way Democratic and Republican women communicate about women’s issues. Little scholarly work has been executed, however, that systematically analyzes the influence of party and gender in congressional communications.

This project presents theoretical and methodological contributions to the literatures on representation and communication in Congress by reconciling these two discordant literatures and disentangling the relative influence of gender and partisanship on women’s issues in congressional communication. On the one hand, literature on communication and women’s representation predicts that women

should communicate about women's issues distinctively from men, on the other hand we have witnessed a rise in partisanship that predicts that party should be one of the most important influences on all representational behavior.

As such, women representatives must navigate the dual pressures of their partisan interests as well as gender expectations. In this paper, I push the scholarship on women's representation and partisan polarization forward by empirically testing these two competing predictions using a corpus of nearly 30,000 e-newsletters. Using unsupervised content analysis, I assess how the influence of gender and partisanship varies based on the type of women's issue presented in these congressional communications. I find that women continue to provide a distinctive voice in Congress, but this influence is more pronounced on the issues abortion and education compared to health care. I argue that this finding is consistent with the trend that health care has become a nationally salient, economic issue.

GENDER STEREOTYPES IN CONGRESS

The link between descriptive representation and the substantive representation of women has a mature theoretical development. First presented by Pitkin (1967), a descriptive representative represents the population with which she shares an identity simply by being present and contributing perspectives and life experiences that are different from other groups (Reingold 2000; Mezey 1994). But most scholars expect that increasing descriptive representation of women (by electing more women to Congress) should also increase the substantive

representation of women's interests. Research indicates that women in Congress intend to, and do in fact, act as descriptive representatives to substantively represent women as a group (Rosenthal 1995). Women in Congress engage in policy activity that is substantially different from their male colleagues, and these differences "reflect the gender differences found in surveys in the mass public" (Swers 2005). Women in Congress are more committed to women's issues during the legislative process (Dodson 2006; Swers 2002), represent more diverse interests in committees, bill introductions and cosponsorships (Wolbrecht 2002; Walsh 2002), and demonstrate a more collaborative leadership style (Volden, Wiseman, and Wittmer 2013).

In addition to legislative activities, research shows that women communicate to their constituents distinctively from their male counterparts and in turn, voters have different expectations concerning men and women in Congress and running for office. Whether because of socialization or the greater impact these issues have on women in the United States, research finds women in Congress to tend to be more liberal in their policy preferences concerning women's rights and social welfare issues. For example, women candidates are viewed by the electorate as having ownership in policy areas like health care and education (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Schaffner, 2005).

Men and women are also associated with owning different traits. Recent research supports the claim that women candidates are seen by the electorate as compassionate and caring, while their male counterparts are viewed as confident and strong (Evans and Clark, 2015). Together, these stereotypes establish men as

more competent on issues dealing with foreign policy and the economy, and convey women as more competent on issues dealing with reproductive rights, child care, healthcare, and education. This perception persists regardless of a representative's actual policy position, and leads voters to tend to prefer women candidates who run on women's issues (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993).

Women can utilize these perceived characteristics to their advantage in campaigns. In their book *The Changing Face of Representation: The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communication*, Fridkin and Kenney (2014), expound on theories of issue and trait ownership to develop the theory of strategic stereotyping. They argue that “gender stereotypes force politicians to emphasize stereotypical strengths in certain messages, while revising stereotypical weaknesses in other communications in order to maximize their chances of reelection” (p. 15). They find that the most powerful policy messages that representatives send are those that confirm stereotypes, because they are the messages that will be picked up and reinforced by the media. In practice, this results in women candidates reinforcing gender stereotypes policies that women own—like competence on health care and education—and mitigating gender stereotypes when discussing their personal background (Fridkin and Kenney 2014). This tactic leads women to communicate with competence and compassion on women's issues like health care, and education.

WOMEN'S ISSUES AND POLARIZATION

Women in office are generally assumed by the electorate to care about—and have expertise on—social welfare issues like education and health care as well as women's rights issues like abortion voters (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Fridkin and Kenney 2014). But we also know that women's issues—particularly abortion—are some of the most divisive partisan issues on the national agenda (Adams 1997; Wolbrecht 2000). So, why should we expect women to represent their constituents differently than their male co-partisans?

The theoretical argument that establishes women as representatives of a female constituency is rooted in Hanna Pitkin's (1967) concept of descriptive representation. A descriptive representative represents the population with which she shares an identity simply by being present. For example, a legislature that has a racial composition comparable to the nation would be considered racially descriptively representative, regardless of the members' intentions or policy preferences. A surrogate representative, on the other hand, must identify with a broader constituency based on identity, and choose to represent their interests generally (Mansbridge 1999, 2003). Research indicates that women in Congress do engage in the policy activities of a surrogate representative for women generally. Congresswomen engage in policy activity that is substantially different from their male colleagues, and that these differences “reflect the gender differences found in surveys in the mass public” (Swers 2005). Women representatives express a desire to be surrogate representatives (Carrol 2002), have been found to be more committed to women's issues during the legislative process (Swers 2002), and to represent more diverse interests in

committees, bill introductions and cosponsorships (Wolbrecht 2002; Walsh 2002). These differing representational styles have resulted in policy change on reproductive issues and welfare reform (Norton 2002).

Notwithstanding the influence of gender on congressional politics, it is partisan polarization that defines the contemporary United States political landscape and congressional behavior. Three decades of scholarship have observed the rise of partisan politics in Congress and its effect on candidate participation, representational behavior, and electoral politics (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Levendusky 2009; Jacobson 2013; Abramowitz 2015; Abrams and Fiorina 2015). Partisanship is also one of the primary predictors of the content of messages sent to constituents (Lipinski 2004). Women in Congress are equally exposed to partisan pressures as their male counterparts (Carrol 2002; Evans 2005; Frederick 2013; Thomsen 2015; Thomsen and Swers 2017). These factors can constrain women as surrogate representatives and can influence perceptions concerning what a women's issue is and what policy position is appropriate (Carrol 2002; Evans 2005). These divisions are a result of electoral politics, party culture, and genuine differences of opinion across party and ideological lines (Evans 2005). For example, a congresswoman from a conservative district may choose not to prioritize women's rights issues like abortion or labor policies, and if she does her policy position will likely diverge from a representative of a liberal district. Ideology can conflict with activism on even mainstream women's issues. Scholars have found that some conservative congresswomen interpret their role as a surrogate representative as a responsibility to increase economic opportunities for women while down-playing social services (Carrol 2002). The

partisan and ideological polarization that we have observed in recent decades should only serve to exacerbate these constraints.

More recently, scholars have observed that women in the House of Representatives have voting records that are virtually indiscernible from their male colleagues, even on women's issue votes (Frederick 2013). A major contribution of this project is to assess whether partisanship is also closing the gap between co-partisan men and women's communication strategies about women's issues.

THEORY

A major theoretical contribution of this project is to identify the relative influence of gender and party on communication about women's issues in Congress. Specifically, I ask if women communicate similarly across party on women's issues, and whether this varies based on the type of women's issue. In doing so, the project contributes to the literature on the growing partisan polarization of women's issues (Wolbrecht 2000; Adams 1997), and pushes the literature forward by comparing how gender and partisanship affect communication about women's issues. These questions address a growing conflict between two scholarships that predict representational behavior: women's representation and partisan polarization. Specifically, much women's representation literature predicts that women—across party—should use similar rhetorical strategies when discussing women's issues, while the literature on political polarization predicts that all members—regardless of gender—should talk about issues similarly compared to their co-partisans.

Throughout these essays I examine three issues that are conventionally characterized as “women’s issues”: abortion, education, and health care. I utilize these three because together they represent different aspects of what scholars consider “women’s issues.” Abortion, for example, is one of the most written about women’s issues in political science scholarship. As a women’s rights issue, abortion is also an issue that has cleaved the parties for more than three decades (Wolbrecht 2000). Education is a women’s issue not because it is a women’s rights issue but because it concerns children and families. In comparison, education policy is much less divisive and is often utilized as a valence issue; in recent years, education rhetoric has focused on improvement without sharp differences between the policy positions of the parties. Finally, I examine health care. Like education, health care is considered a women’s issue because it concerns social welfare, children, and families. Unlike education, however, health care has ebbed and flowed in national salience, as well as its characterization as a women’s issue. Using these three different types of women’s issues I examine the influence of gender and partisanship on each, and evaluate whether these influences change over time.

My theory is guided by Fridkin and Kenney’s (2014) strategic stereotyping theory, detailed in their book *The Changing Face of Representation: The Gender of US Senators and Constituent Communications*. In this text, Fridkin and Kenney expound on theories of issue and trait ownership to develop the theory of strategic stereotyping. They argue that “gender stereotypes force politicians to emphasize stereotypical strengths in certain messages, while revising stereotypical weaknesses in other communications in order to maximize their chances of reelection” (p. 15). In

practical terms, strategic stereotyping results in women being more likely than men to “highlight their political experience, discuss committee work, and describe their leadership activities in the chamber.... [and] to talk about issues such as health care and education” (Fridkin and Kenney, 2014, p. 158).

I expect that women across party lines will utilize strategic stereotypes (Fridkin and Kenney 2014) by highlighting similar topics in messages about abortion and education because women across party are still considered by the electorate to have higher competence on these issues than men. This expectation does not imply that women will communicate similar policy positions on these issues, but rather that they will communicate similar policy frames as a coalition of owners of these issues. For example, concerning abortion women might discuss women’s health, or Planned Parenthood more often than men, but I do not expect Republicans and Democrats to send congruent messages within these topics. In this way, I am able to identify similarity in communication strategies regardless of policy positions. By utilizing similar topics, I expect women members of Congress to invoke similar stakeholders and prioritize similar values and goals to one another that are distinctive from those communicated by men members of Congress. However, this expectation varies by type of women’s issue, on abortion and education I expect that women will communicate distinctively from men, but on health care I expect party pressure to eclipse the influence of gender.

I expect health care messages to be less influenced by gender because this issue has become nationally salient as an economic issue since the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010. As Winter (2008) found that health care messages

became gendered as a partisan strategy around 1993, I expect that rhetorical strategy since 2010 has focused on health care through an economic lens, which should diminish the influence of gender on this issue that is conventionally understood to be a women’s issue. From this expectation I generate my hypothesis:

Gender will be more influential on abortion and education newsletter topics than on health care newsletter topics.

Ultimately a goal of this research is to identify when women communicate distinctively on conventional women’s issues. If my hypothesis is confirmed—that women employ different topics from their male counterparts on abortion and education but not on healthcare, this indicates that health care may be moving from a women’s issue to an economic, and thus partisan—issue.

DATA AND METHODS

In this analysis, I use congressional e-newsletters about the women’s issues abortion, education, and health care. I choose e-newsletters because they are utilized by every member of the House as an important medium for position-taking on a range of issues facing Congress (Cormack 2016), but are understudied by scholars of congressional representation. The dataset contains the full text of all congressional e-newsletters from 111th – 114th Congress—all of the complete congresses in the database—which contain the words “abortion,” “health care” (or “healthcare”), or “education.” The newsletters are publicly available through the database DC Inbox.² This dataset also contains metadata associated with each e-newsletter: the gender

² Many thanks are owed to Lindsey Cormack and the Stevens Institute for Technology for establishing and maintaining this database.

and party of the member as well as the year and congress in which the newsletter was sent.

I refine the corpus by utilizing a keyword in context technique to generate excerpts from each newsletter, retaining only the 100 words surrounding each keyword. I exclude the remaining words to ensure that messages about other policies are not analyzed; I maintain the surrounding 100 words due to my observation that most members discuss a single issue for about a short paragraph, between 60-200 words.

Cormack (2016) finds that men and women send position-taking e-newsletter messages at similar rates, and that overall, they discuss similar bills at similar rates across gender. However, I find that men and women discuss women's issues in e-newsletters at dissimilar rates that vary by specific women's issue. For example, Democratic men send more e-newsletters about education than their representation in Congress suggests. Health care, in contrast, is discussed at high rates by Republicans compared to their level of representation in Congress.³ Finally, the data show that Republicans send messages about abortion in e-newsletters much more frequently than their level of representation suggests. While Democratic members make up just under 50 percent of members in the House of Representatives in the timeframe observed, they send fewer than 10 percent of the messages found in e-newsletters that contain the keyword "abortion."

³ Likely due to the negative messages surrounding "Obamacare" within the sample that spans President Obama's tenure as president.

Utilizing this corpus, I pre-process the text data,⁴ and estimate structural topic models using the R package “stm” developed by Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley (2013). Topic models have been found to be an efficient and accurate way to measure agenda setting topics (Quinn et al. 2010), and I argue that this approach is an equally accurate and efficient technique for identifying heresthetic similarities across demographic groups on a single issue. I choose this unsupervised learning method to estimate the probability of employing a topic on women’s issue within each newsletter, because unsupervised methods can be particularly useful in research that “can identify organizations of text that are theoretically useful, but perhaps understudied or previously unknown” (Grimmer and Stewart 2013, p. 281). In this case, communication sent directly to constituents—specifically newsletters—are an understudied resource.

When using the package ‘stm’ (Roberts et al. 2013), structural topic models are estimated as mixed-membership models, meaning that each document is represented as a mixture of topics, “thus, each document can be represented as a vector of proportions that denote what fraction of the words belong to each topic” (Roberts et al. 2014). Rather than sorting each document into a single, most probable topic, the technique estimates the proportion of each document that belongs to a given topic. Throughout my analysis, my dependent variable is the proportion of each document that belongs to a single topic.

⁴ I employ the `textProcessor` command in the “stm” package which removes common English stop words, punctuation, and numbers, converts the text to lowercase, and stems all words in the corpus.

ANALYSIS

In this section, I first present the five topics identified by the structural topic models for each issue. I then use a data frame which includes the proportion of each newsletter that belongs to each topic, along with the member's gender and party to estimate beta regression models.⁵ This multi-step analysis provides me with the leverage needed to evaluate the relative influence of partisanship and gender on the communication strategies employed within newsletters about women's issues.

Women's Issue Topics in e-Newsletters

Using structural topic models, I identify the five most prevalent topics present in all newsletters from 2009-2016 that include the words abortion, education, or health care. When using any type of topic model, the choice of the number of topics is specified by the researcher. I choose to generate the five most prevalent topics, (which number is fewer than some scholars suggest for a corpus of this size) so that only those topics used consistently and distinctively by members are identified.⁶ These very prevalent topics, then, are those most favored by members, and are those most frequently conveyed to constituents.

⁵ Logit models are also appropriate for models which include proportional data as the dependent variable, however, beta regression models have the added benefit of allowing for non-normal distribution of the dependent variable—which is present in this data (Cribari-Neto and Zeileis 2010).

⁶ Sensitivity analyses of the individual topic models also indicates that, for a vast majority of the models, estimating more or fewer than five topics does not substantially increase the explanatory power of the models. Previous iterations of this research utilized 10 topics, for example, but at this number I observed considerable overlap in topic content or the topics are otherwise not meaningful (including day or month names, for example). For virtually all of the models in this research, the estimated five topics are both distinct and explain most of the variance between texts.

I present the topics for each issue in Table 1.1. One of the challenges presented to researchers who utilize topic modelling is the burden to infer the qualitative meaning of generated topics (Quinn et al. 2010). In this analysis, I bear the same burden. Fortunately, the ‘stm’ package provides several helpful tools to complete this process accurately, including the power to generate lists of the most common words and the most distinctive words associated with each frame, as well as the documents that have the highest proportion of words in each topic. I use these tools and lists of words to assign a label to each topic, a common practice with topic models. These labels and a few associated keywords are also included in Table 1.1.

For example, one topic within newsletters about abortion is labeled *Roe v. Wade*. The newsletter excerpts that predominately feature this topic include those from Republicans mourning the anniversaries of the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, and Democratic members who discuss the importance of protecting the right to abortions outlined in the *Roe* decision. Despite the different policy preferences of these members, each is using *Roe v. Wade* as a rhetorical strategy to send messages about abortion and the importance of the Supreme Court as an arbiter of abortion rights. Aside from the word *Roe*, common words used to employ this frame are right, choice, and birth.

Another example is the topic Local Values found in health care newsletters. Newsletters featuring this topic frequently invoke a location or its residents. For example, a newsletter highly associated with this topic references Montanans and “Montana values,” while another called for action from Texans. These newsletters

frequently include an invitation to join a meeting either in Washington or a town hall in the district. Overall, members that choose this topic are making a call to their constituents to weigh in on health care reform.

Table 1.1: Topic Labels and Keywords by Women’s Issue

Abortion				
<u>Roe v. Wade</u>	<u>Women’s Health</u>	<u>Babies</u>	<u>Taxpayer Funding</u>	<u>Religious Beliefs</u>
Right, choice, birth	Parent, choice, health	Protect, fight, unborn	Tax, spend, cut	Obamacare, religion, fight
Education				
<u>Contact Me⁷</u>	<u>Loans</u>	<u>Veterans</u>	<u>Economy</u>	<u>K12</u>
Website, contact, office	Borrow, students, families	National, service	Health, debt	Schools, teacher, students
Health Care				
<u>Expand Coverage</u>	<u>Contact Me</u>	<u>Obamacare</u>	<u>Local Values</u>	<u>Veterans</u>
Medicare, marketplace	Constituents, contact, website	Repeal, jobs, run	Reform, location	Service, care, access

Topic Relationships to Partisanship and Gender

To assess the influence of gender and partisanship on the topics presented in newsletters about women’s issues, I estimate beta regression models for each topic by issue. The dependent variable for each model is the proportion of words in each document that belong to the given topic. The independent variables are the gender (woman=1; man=0), and party (Democratic=1; Republican=0) of the member who sent the newsletter. A substantive and significant difference between men and women or Democrats and Republicans indicates a more substantial influence of gender or party, respectively, on the likelihood of use of a given topic.

⁷ Two issues—education and health care—include the topic I label “Contact Me.” These messages included in the “Contact Me” topic ask constituents to call, write, or visit the member’s website. While not a policy message, these messages are important indicators of the accessibility of the member (Evans and Hayden 2017), and are therefore still of interest regarding the relationship of this communication strategy to a member’s gender and party.

Table 1.2: Average Marginal Effects of Gender and Party by Topic, by Women’s Issue

Abortion Newsletters (N=2,839)						
Topic	Gender	AME	Party	AME	R²	
Roe v. Wade	Women	.06	---	---	.02	
Women’s Health	Women	.04	D	.14	.07	
Babies	Women	.03	R	-.12	.08	
Taxpayer Funding	Men	-.04	---	---	.05	
Religious Beliefs	Men	-.03	D	.04	.02	
Education Newsletters (N=9,176)						
Topic	Gender	AME	Party	AME	R²	
Contact Me	---	---	D	.02	.01	
Loans	Women	.06	D	.07	.05	
Veterans	Women		R	-.03	.01	
		.01				
Economy	---	---	R	-.04	.02	
K12	Men	-.03	R	-.01	.02	
Health Care Newsletters (N=15,133)						
Topic	Gender	AME	Party	AME	R²	
Expanded Coverage	---	---	D	.08	.11	
Contact Me	---	---	D	.01	.01	
Obamacare	---	---	R	-.17	.24	
Local Values	---	---	R	-.06	.05	
Veterans	---	---	D	.11	.06	

Note: Only relationships with $p < .05$ are reported.

As is demonstrated in Table 1.2, the influence of gender and party varies by issue and topic. Almost every topic in every issue is predicted by party. The only exceptions to this finding are the topics Roe v. Wade and Taxpayer Funding on the issue of abortion. Women are more likely to send messages about Roe v. Wade, and men are more likely to send messages about Taxpayer Funding. The most substantively influential effects of party—as evidence by the strength of the average marginal effect and the fit of the model—confirm that utilizing structural topic models can help elucidate communication patterns without supplemental supervised analysis. Three examples are the Women’s Health and Babies topics within abortion

newsletters and the Obamacare topic within health care newsletters. Democrats, on average, have a .14 point (out of one) higher proportion of the Women's Health topic with abortion newsletters. These newsletters frequently discuss the value of women's health facilities like Planned Parenthood not only with a woman's right to choose and reproductive health, but also about the other services Planned Parenthood provides to women's overall health. Also within abortion newsletters, Republicans on average have .12 higher proportion of the Babies topic in abortion newsletters. This topic includes words like protect and unborn, and—less often, but distinctively—words like murder, pain, and sex-selection. These two topics will be very familiar to those who have been exposed to American abortion policy discourse, and each topic is representative of the distinctive party platforms: the Democratic party highlights the rights and needs of women, and the Republican party highlights the rights and needs of the unborn.

Party is also highly influential on the choice to employ the Obamacare topic in health care newsletters. This topic frequently utilized the word Obamacare, even before it was embraced by both parties. Common keywords include repeal and replace, less common but distinctive key words include government-controlled and takeover. This topic is clearly dominated by Republicans given the content identified in the newsletter, and the model estimates bear-out this expectation: Republicans, on average, have .12 points higher proportion of this topic within any newsletter.

Gender has a statistically significant relationship with the proportion of a number of topics within newsletters about education and abortion. Women are more

likely to employ the topics Roe v. Wade, Babies, and Women's Health topics—discussed above—compared to men. In contrast, men are more likely to use the topics Taxpayer Funding and Religious Beliefs compared to women. Taxpayer funding messages are sent by both Republicans and Democrats. On the Republican side, they utilize the message to promise constituents they are working hard to keep taxpayer dollars from funding abortion. On the Democratic side, these messages are usually pointing to the argument that taxpayers do fund abortion as erroneous.

The finding that men utilize the Taxpayer Funding topic more often than women is particularly important to this research. Though the substantive difference between men and women on this topic is somewhat slight, the proportion of newsletters containing this topic is only .04 points higher than for women, the finding still suggests that men tend to capitalize on the gender stereotypes that benefit them, even on the issue of abortion. While women discuss women's health more often concerning abortion, men try to frame abortion rhetoric as an economic issue more often than women.

Gender also has some influence over the choice of topics used in newsletters about education. Men are more likely to utilize the K12 topic—which frequently reference federal standards—as are Republicans. This finding makes sense considering that the sample is taken exclusively from newsletters sent while Obama was in the Oval Office. Republicans were more likely during this time to send messages criticizing Obama's policy preferences for K-12 education. In education newsletters, women include the topics Loans and Veterans at .06 and .01 higher proportions than men, respectively. Overall, gender was influential over the

newsletters about abortion and education, as expected.

Also confirming my hypothesis, gender is not influential on the choice of topics within health care messages, while party is influential to each topic choice. On health care, Democrats are more likely to send messages about Expanding Coverage and Veterans by .08 and .11 points, respectively. As discussed above, Republicans have about .17 higher proportion of Obamacare and have .06 points higher points on Local Values than their Republican counterparts.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper is to assess the relative influence of gender and party on topic prevalence within newsletters about women's issues. My hypothesis predicts that gender should be more influential on abortion and education messages than on health care messages. I generate this expectation based on theories of strategic gender stereotyping coupled with the increasingly economic salience of health care since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. By generating topics from the text, and comparing these topics by gender and party I have largely confirmed this hypothesis: gender is somewhat influential on the choice of topics in abortion and education newsletters and gender is not influential on the choice of topics in health care newsletters. Broadly, these assessments are meant to aid in the reconciliation of the competing expectations for women's representational behavior from the descriptive representation and polarization literatures. My findings affirm that there is room for both party and gender to influence congressional communication about women's issues, but this influence can be diminished as the

issue is framed as an economic one, rather than a women's issue.

Health care is a particularly interesting example of an issue on which the rhetoric surrounding it has evolved over time. Winter (2008) finds that health care rhetoric became gendered in 1993. However, at least since the passage of the Affordable Care Act, health care communication seems to be less influenced by gender than other the other women's issues in this research. Future research should focus on testing how women's issue rhetorical strategies change over time, and whether the influence of gender fluctuates not only between issues but over time. In my next essay I tackle a piece of this very question: whether the influence of gender varies over time on campaign advertisements aired between the years 2002-2014.

These findings bode well for the strength of the link between the descriptive and substantive representation of women. Though roll-call votes may indicate that women behave similarly to their co-partisan men on all women's issues, this content analysis of congressional communications suggests that women in Congress—across partisan lines—continue to utilize similar topics in newsletters about abortion and education. Women manipulate the dimensions of women's issues and expand the conflict to include different values and stakeholders than their male counterparts—despite differing policy positions across party: women are more likely to communicate about the importance of the courts concerning women's issues, are more likely to discuss the institutional value (or lack thereof) of women's health centers, more likely to talk about how the unborn are affected by abortion, and more likely to discuss veterans in newsletters about education. On the other hand, women are statistically significantly less likely to include taxpayers in discussion about

women's issues. This suggests that women focus more intensely on the institutions and values that directly affect women's issues, while men tend to focus attention on the national economy when discussing women's issues.

Overall, these findings confirm that women's representation continues to be a distinct influence on representational behavior in ways that might be obfuscated in studies that focus only on policy positions, like roll-call votes or even co-sponsorships. I find that women, as the conventional owners of women's issues, do in fact use congruent policy frames in a way that (even when policy position disagreement may exist) suggests that gender continues to influence communication about women's issues, even when the influence of partisanship is strong.

ESSAY 2
GENDER, PARTISANSHIP, AND WOMEN’S ISSUES
IN CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENTS

The accusation that Republicans are waging a “war on women” did not begin in 2010. In fact, the term dates at least as far back as political consultant Tanya Melich’s (1996) book, whose title alleges as much. But it was in 2010 when the slogan picked up momentum. In response to political reactions from the right concerning some provisions in the Affordable Care Act, several prominent Democratic women alleged that the Republican party was waging a “war on women.” Outlets ranging from liberal to conservative entered the debate. A cursory LexisNexis search returns thousands of unique newspaper mentions on the topic. The New York Times published an editorial in 2011 that began “Republicans in the House of Representatives are mounting an assault on women's health and freedom that would deny millions of women access to affordable contraception and life-saving cancer screenings...And this is just the beginning”⁸. More conservative writers responded that the real war on women is associating women’s interests with only liberal policies.⁹ By 2012, even Republican women were accused in campaign advertisements of waging a war on women’s health by Democratic candidates.

Post-Obamacare, it seemed that an established women’s issue had cultivated the national spotlight. However, the newspaper coverage and political communication surrounding health care had become almost purely partisan. But, can an issue be a

⁸ N. A. (February, 25, 2011). Opinion, “The War on Women.” *The New York Times*.

⁹ N.A. (2011). Opinion. *The Washginton Post*.

“women’s issue” if the rhetoric surrounding it is divided purely along partisan lines? The purpose of this project is to analyze the text of campaign advertisements about women’s issues—abortion, education, and health care—from 2002-2014 to assess the relative influence of gender and party on these messages. In doing so I contribute to the puzzle presented by post-Obamacare messages: does partisanship eclipse the influence of gender on communication about women’s issues, or is there room for both influences to co-exist?

In this project I examine the text of House Representative candidate television advertisements from 2002-2014 about abortion, education, and health care. Using this corpus, I then use topic modelling to identify the most common topics present in the ads by issue and time period (2002-2008 and 2010-2014) and compare the influence of gender and party on the adoption of the identified topics. The identification and comparison of the rhetorical topics present in campaign advertisements is particularly well-suited to elucidate the impact of gender and party on the text of these advertisements because of the greater potential variation within verbal communication compared to that of other legislative and representational activities.

I find that partisanship is substantially influential on campaign advertisements about abortion and health care, confirming my expectations, but gender has very little discernible impact on the topics chosen on any issue in either time period. Since at least 2002, men and women co-partisans discuss similar topics about women’s issues in campaign advertisements. This indicates that while the influence of gender and party might not be zero-sum, the influence of gender pales in comparison to partisan affiliation in campaign advertising about women’s issues.

CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENTS

Political campaigns are the primary mechanism to win United States congressional elections, beginning with party centered campaigns and shifting to candidate-centered campaigns after WWII (Wattenberg 1991). Since that time, scholars have established that candidates are strategic actors who use all of their available campaign resources to cultivate support from the electorate (Evans and Clark, 2015), including utilizing paid media attention like posters, buttons, mail, and advertisements. Among these, however, television advertising is the dominant form of paid campaign media. Ads are often the most expensive element of a congressional campaign (Brader 2006), costing billions each election cycle since 2008 nationwide (Kaid 2012).

Ads are also the primary way in which candidates and parties communicate with voters during an election (Ridout et al. 2014), and a primary source of information about campaign issues for voters (McClure 1976). Candidates use these advertisements to shape and focus the attention of the public toward issues they believe will benefit them at the polls on election day. Candidates deliver messages to constituents that highlight strengths and attenuate weaknesses (Shaffner, 2005). As Sides (2005) explains, candidates should “structure the election’s agenda so that the issues where their positions are popular come to the fore in voters’ minds, then a larger number of voters will support them” (p. 410). To accomplish this, candidates can highlight their record on issues on which they align with the public (Sellers, 1998), accentuate their ability to maintain a good economy or turn a bad one around

(Vavreck, 2009), or focus attention on those issues on which they have a competitive advantage over their opponent (Flowers, Haynes, and Crespín, 2003).

Conceiving of a campaign in this way, as one that successfully focuses attention rather than one that primarily persuades voters, is a theory of campaigns that utilizes heresthetics—the manipulation of the agenda to build the best possible image of the candidate in the mind of the electorate (Riker, 1998). Specifically, a candidate should run on issues on which she has a recorded advantage. To positively distinguish herself, it benefits a candidate to convince the electorate that she has a tangible record on issues when her preference is in line with the majority of voters (Sellers, 1998). A practical application of this theory can be understood through the content of messages candidates send about the economy (Vavreck 2009). The economy, however, is just one issue on which a candidate can limit the campaign agenda and amplify her strengths. A candidate should tailor all her messages to “limit the field of competitors and to define the competitive structure of the race” (Flowers, Haynes and Crespín, 2003, p. 260).

Issues that amplify the strengths of a candidate based on demographic characteristics are issues that the candidate, and others in the same group, “own.” According to the theory of issue ownership, candidates will prime issues they own to create an advantage during an election season. Petrocik, Benoit, and Hansen (2003) argue that the Republican and Democratic parties own different issues, meaning that each party has built a reputation for handling certain issues well. While these reputations aren’t static, in the contemporary political environment it is a fair assessment that “Republicans are viewed as likely to protect traditional American

values, keep taxes low, government small, and national security strong. Democrats are expected to help the elderly, protect Social Security, reduce unemployment, protect the environment, and ensure fair treatment of minorities” (Petrocik et al., 2003, p. 603). The media perpetuate these reputations by framing policy choices and rhetoric that confirm the pre-existing perceptions of issue ownership; candidates reinforce these reputations by shaping campaigns and policy choices that reify these perceptions. While highlighting one’s strengths is always a good idea during a campaign, another successful strategy is for a campaign to focus on salient issues the candidate’s party owns that divide the opposing candidate’s party. For example, Republicans can woo conservative Democrats with anti-abortion rhetoric, and Democrats might appeal to moderate Republicans with pro-stem cell research messaging (Hillygus and Shields, 2008).

It is not only the parties who own issues during an election, however. Other demographic characteristics and associations can send equally strong messages to the public about the issues in which candidate will be most the competent and committed. An African-American member of Congress, for example, is likely to be a member of the Black Caucus and committed to addressing issues that face African-Americans and perhaps other racial minorities in the United States. A candidate’s gender also sends signals about issue ownership. Whether because of socialization or the greater impact these issues have on women in the United States, women tend to be more liberal in their policy preferences concerning health and education, so women candidates are viewed by the public as having ownership in these policy areas (Shaffner, 2005). Recent research supports the claim that women candidates are seen

by the electorate as compassionate and caring, while their male counterparts are viewed as confident and strong (Evans and Clark, 2015). This advantages men on issues dealing with foreign policy and the economy, and advantages women on issues dealing with social welfare, child care, healthcare, and the environment.

Particularly for women, the relative advantages are not equally balanced. In fact, in American politics so-called “women’s issues” are often considered niche, or of secondary importance. Lawless and Fox (2005) find, for example, that women do not feel as confident as men do to even launch a campaign. In an environment where being aggressive is necessary but also detrimental to a woman’s image, hesitancy is understandable. Women running for office are placed in a unique dilemma in which they have a clear advantage in a particular policy space on which women voters—more than half the electorate—are likely to be aligned, but if the candidate chooses to run on these “women’s issues” she may be seen as weak, ineffective, or unrepresentative of the general population. Evans and Clark (2015) find, however, that there are some campaign tactics that can diminish these disadvantages. For example, when women can run on their “out-group” status they will run “women-centered” campaigns, when this tactic won’t work, however, they can focus their energies on appealing to people as a partisan rather than as a woman (p. 3).

Despite the vast knowledge we have cultivated about how candidates shape campaign advertisement messages, little scholarship has systematically considered how gender and party work together—or in conflict—to influence campaign advertisements. This is particularly true concerning campaign advertisements about women’s issues. A major theoretical contribution of this project is to identify the

relative influence of gender and party on the text of television advertisements about women's issues in campaigns for the House United States House of Representatives.

WOMEN'S ISSUES AND POLARIZATION

Women in office are generally assumed by the electorate to care about—and have expertise on—social welfare issues like education and health care as well as women's rights issues like abortion voters (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003; Fridkin and Kenney 2014). But we also know that women's issues—particularly abortion—are some of the most divisive partisan issues on the national agenda (Adams 1997; Wolbrecht 2000). So, why should we expect women to represent their constituents differently than their male co-partisans?

The theoretical argument that establishes women as representatives of a female constituency is rooted in Hanna Pitkin's (1967) concept of descriptive representation. A descriptive representative represents the population with which she shares an identity simply by being present. For example, a legislature that has a racial composition comparable to the nation would be considered racially descriptively representative, regardless of the members' intentions or policy preferences. A surrogate representative, on the other hand, must identify with a broader constituency based on identity, and choose to represent their interests generally (Mansbridge 1999, 2003). Research indicates that women in Congress do engage in the policy activities of a surrogate representative for women generally. Congresswomen engage in policy activity that is substantially different from their male colleagues, and that these differences “reflect the gender differences found in surveys in the mass public”

(Swers 2005). Women representatives express a desire to be surrogate representatives (Carrol 2002), have been found to be more committed to women's issues during the legislative process (Swers 2002), and to represent more diverse interests in committees, bill introductions and cosponsorships (Wolbrecht 2002; Walsh 2002). These differing representational styles have resulted in policy change on reproductive issues and welfare reform (Norton 2002).

Notwithstanding the influence of gender on congressional politics, it is partisan polarization that defines the contemporary United States political landscape and congressional behavior. Three decades of scholarship have observed the rise of partisan politics in Congress and its effect on candidate participation, representational behavior, and electoral politics (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Levondusky 2009; Jacobson 2013; Abramowitz 2015; Abrams and Fiorina 2015). Partisanship is also one of the primary predictors of the content of messages sent to constituents (Lipinski 2004). Women in Congress are equally exposed to partisan pressures as their male counterparts (Carrol 2002; Evans 2005; Frederick 2016; Thomsen 2015; Thomsen and Swers 2017). These factors can constrain women as surrogate representatives and can influence perceptions concerning what a women's issue is and what policy position is appropriate (Carrol 2002; Evans 2005). These divisions are a result of electoral politics, party culture, and genuine differences of opinion across party and ideological lines (Evans 2005). For example, a congresswoman from a conservative district may choose not to prioritize women's rights issues like abortion or labor policies, and if she does her policy position will likely diverge from a representative of a liberal district. Ideology can conflict with activism on even mainstream women's

issues. Scholars have found that some conservative congresswomen interpret their role as a surrogate representative as a responsibility to increase economic opportunities for women while down-playing social services (Carrol 2002). The partisan and ideological polarization that we have observed in recent decades should only serve to exacerbate these constraints.

More recently, scholars have observed that women in the House of Representatives have voting records that are virtually indiscernible from their male colleagues, even on women's issue votes (Frederick 2016). A major contribution of this project is to assess whether partisanship is also closing the gap between co-partisan men and women's communication strategies about women's issues.

THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

A major theoretical contribution of this project is to help untangle the conflicting expectations we have about the influence of gender and partisanship in congressional communication. To do so, I identify the relative influence of gender and party on the text of women's issues in House candidate television advertisements. Specifically, I ask whether Republicans and Democrats and whether men and women communicate distinctively about women's issues in campaign advertisements. In doing so, the project contributes to the literature on the growing partisan polarization of women's issues over time (Wolbrecht 2000; Adams 1997) and pushes the literature forward by analyzing if gender and party influence communications about these issues differently. These questions address a growing conflict between two scholarships that predict congressional behavior: descriptive representation and

partisan polarization. Specifically, the descriptive representation literature predicts that women should communicate about women's issues similarly across party, while the literature on political polarization predicts that all members—regardless of gender—should toe the party line in most congressional advertisements. By examining communication beyond the Hill and roll-call votes, I have the leverage to find patterns that have been frequently overlooked in congressional scholarship.

My theory is guided by Fridkin and Kenney's (2014) strategic stereotyping theory, detailed in their book *The Changing Face of Representation: The Gender of US Senators and Constituent Communications*. In this text, Fridkin and Kenney expound on theories of issue and trait ownership to develop the theory of strategic stereotyping. They argue that "gender stereotypes force politicians to emphasize stereotypical strengths in certain messages, while revising stereotypical weaknesses in other communications in order to maximize their chances of reelection" (p. 15). In practical terms, strategic stereotyping results in women being more likely than men to "highlight their political experience, discuss committee work, and describe their leadership activities in the chamber.... [and] to talk about issues such as health care and education" (Fridkin and Kenney, 2014, p. 158).

Building on this theory, I posit that women will capitalize on these gender stereotypes in women's issue campaign advertisements by discussing topics that are distinctive from their male counterparts. Examples derived from prior scholarship that women will include more diverse groups in their advertisements (like children or the poor), or that women may talk about their experience that is not shared with men (for example, as mothers or women in the workplace). In any case, I expect women to

choose topics in women's issue advertisements that are different from the topics chosen by men in order to distinguish their expertise and experience in a way that men cannot or are unlikely to do. This leads to my first hypothesis:

H1: Men and women will discuss distinctive topics in abortion, education, and health care advertisements in both time periods.

I do not expect women to capitalize on gender stereotypes similarly across issues or years, however. Instead, I expect partisanship and polarization to influence campaign advertisement communication—and diminish the influence of gender—differently by issue and time period. Specifically, I expect the influence of party on health care messages to increase from the time period 2002-2008 to the time period 2010-2014 due to the passage of the Affordable Care Act (the ACA, or Obamacare). This piece of legislation is a deeply divisive partisan issue and has been since its enactment. I posit that the heightened national attention and intense partisan pressure surrounding health care after 2010 will result in women employing strategic stereotyping on this issue less often. From these expectations come my second and third hypotheses.

H2: Republicans and Democrats will discuss distinctive topics on health care more often between the years 2010-2014 than in the years 2002-2008.

H3: Men and women will discuss distinctive topics on health care less often between the years 2010-2014 than in the years 2002-2008.

On the other hand, the issues of abortion and education have not had similarly fractious events during the time period examined.¹⁰ Therefore, I do not expect the

¹⁰ Abortion is an intensely polarized topic, but it has been since the 1970s (Adams 1997; Wolbrecht 2000).

influence of party or gender to vary substantially between the time periods. From this expectation I generate my final hypotheses:

H4: The influence of party and gender will not change over time in abortion campaign advertisements.

H5: The influence of party and gender will not change over time in education campaign advertisements.

DATA AND METHODS

In this analysis, I use all 30-second or longer¹¹ congressional campaign advertisements that include the women's issues of abortion, education, and health care. The dataset for candidates' advertisements are from the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG) for the years 2002 through 2014 that contain references to abortion, health care, and education coded by CMAG as aired by, in support of, or in opposition to any Democratic or Republican candidate for Congress (n=4618). This dataset also contains metadata associated with each advertisement: the gender, party, and year the advertisement aired.

Types of Women's Issue Advertisements by Gender and Party

As a first pass, I examine how the number of advertisements varies between issue by time period (years 2002-2008 and 2010-2014). Advertisements on health care have more than doubled since 2008, likely due to the salience and partisan

¹¹ Ads that are 15 seconds are excluded from this analysis because the text of these ads are too similar. These primarily include an introduction of the candidate, a short statement about multiple positions, and an approval of the message.

divisions surrounding the Affordable Care Act. However, while abortion and health care have become more popular issues within congressional campaign advertisements in the years after 2010, the number of ads referencing education has marginally decreased.

Democratic men and women and Republican men at least doubled their advertisements about abortion 2010 and later compared to 2002-2008. But Republican men, who increased these types of ads by almost 300% have by far the most ads about abortion for either time period. On the other hand, Republican women aired just 6 and 7 abortion ads in these time periods. Concerning education, Republican men and women decreased their advertisements by about half, while Democratic men and women sent about the same amount of education ads, respectively, in each time period. Finally, in health care ads, women from either party sent about the same amount of ads for the years 2010-2014, just a fraction compared to their male counterparts, however. Male Republicans again take the lead, in the post-Obamacare years, by sending a total of 893 health care advertisements in this time period.

While women constitute a much smaller percentage of House Representatives in any given year, and while Republican women are particularly few, the number of ads aired by Republican women about abortion and education are a bit surprising. Considering we expect women from either party to “own” both of these issues, they show up very rarely in this demographic’s ads. On the other hand, Republican men air many more abortion and health care advertisements between 2010-2014 than their

numbers would suggest. This is likely due in part to the controversy surrounding Obamacare, and advertisements in reaction to it.

Content of Women's Issue Ads

The next step in this analysis is to identify the major topics common to these advertisements by issue and time period. For those advertisements included in the analysis, I transcribed the content of the advertisement to text from the included storyboards (for the years 2002, 2004, and 2008), or video files (for the years 2006, 2010, 2012, and 2014).¹² Utilizing this corpus, I pre-process the text data,¹³ and estimate structural topic models using the R package “stm” developed by Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley (2013). Topic models have been found to be an efficient and accurate way to measure agenda setting topics (Quinn et al. 2010). I choose this unsupervised learning method to identify the topics by women's issue within these texts, because unsupervised methods can be particularly useful in research that “can identify organizations of text that are theoretically useful, but perhaps understudied or previously unknown” (Grimmer and Stewart 2013, p. 281). This is particularly useful in a medium like campaign advertisements, which are frequently studied for their tone, images, music, and policy issues—but are understudied as quantitative text data.

I use structural topic modelling to generate five topics for each issue—abortion, education, and health care—for the years 2002 through 2008 and the years

¹² I utilized optical character recognition software to transcribe all storyboards and Google Cloud's speech-to-text software via the R package “googleLanguageR” to transcribe video files (Edmondson 2017).

¹³ I employ the textProcessor command in the “stm” package which removes common English stop words, punctuation, and numbers, converts the text to lowercase, and stems all words in the corpus.

2010 through 2014 (see Table 1.2). Using the keywords generated by a function within the `stm` package, as well as an examination of text of the campaign advertisements most strongly associated with each topic, I have assigned a label to each topic generated by the structural topic model. These labels, along with a few keywords for each topic, are listed in Table 1.2.

Take for example the topics identified about abortion between the years 2002-2008. The first topic, which I have labeled “Too Extreme” crosses partisan lines and is characterized by candidates accusing opponents of holding extreme positions on abortion. For Democrats, that is pointing out opponents who oppose abortion even in the case of rape or incest, for example. For Republicans, these ads often highlight an opponent who voted did not vote for the “partial-birth abortion” ban. On the other hand, the topic I have labeled “Faith & Local” is utilized primarily by Republicans. These ads highlight how local values and Christian faith have influenced their choices in Congress. One ad introduces the candidate as an “independent man of Louisiana,” while another asks you to imagine a man from Dale County Alabama, who “learned the value of hard work, respect, and the strength of faith.” One difference between these two topics is that while “Too Extreme” explicitly relates to the candidate’s position on abortion, “Faith & Local” describes the candidate, and his or her position on abortion is part of that description. Both patterns are common within the topics identified for these three women’s issues. Another example of a quality-centered abortion topic is the one I have labeled “Pro-life conservative.” Candidates who utilize this topic generally do not give details about abortion policy, and instead list “pro-life” as one of many appealing qualities in addition to qualities like “pro-gun,”

“anti-tax,” and “conservative.” Notably, Democratic men also frequently use this topic in an abortion advertisement.

Another example of topic contents is “Social Good” under Health Care 2002-2008. Advertisements that prominently feature this topic discuss reforming health care or fighting for health care as one of their many positive attributes. For example, in a very broad stroke one candidate says she’s “striving to increase access to healthcare, expanding quality education for our children, growing our economy, and protecting existing jobs.” Another states that he will “work to improve child health care, access to higher ed, and protect our elderly.” Compare this to the more policy-centered statements about health care within the “Funding Care” topic, which is strongly associated with the keyword taxes. Ads that feature this topic include statements like “taxpayer funded healthcare” and references bills that either increase or decrease taxes, or funding for health care in the state or nation.

These thirty identified topics are the subject of the remainder of this essay. For each advertisement on a woman’s issue within one time period, I have used the “stm” package to estimate the proportion of each advertisement belonging to a given topic. In the resulting data frames, each ad about abortion between the years 2002-2008 and the years 2010-2014 is an observation that contains one value for each of the five topics associated with abortion. For each ad a proportion (a number between 0 and 1) is assigned to each topic, indicating the strength of its relationship with that topic. For example, an ad that predominantly discusses an opponent’s desire to outlaw or criminalize abortion would have a high association with a “Too Extreme” topic, and a lower associated proportion with a “Taxes” topic. Whereas a more quality-centered

advertisement that lists a desire to cut taxes or boost the economy along with a passing statement about abortion policy would be more strongly associated with the “Taxes” topic than other topics identified within the abortion advertisements from 2002-2008.

Table 2.1: Topic Labels and Keywords by Issue and Time period

Abortion 2002-2008				
<u>Too Extreme</u>	<u>Pro-life Conservative</u>	<u>Protect Unborn</u>	<u>Funding</u>	<u>Faith & Local</u>
Right, choice, birth	Pro-life	Fight, believe	Tax, spend, fight	Work, life, protect
Abortion 2010-2014				
<u>Immoral</u>	<u>Criminalization</u>	<u>Pro-life Conservative</u>	<u>Right to choose</u>	<u>Anti-Liberal</u>
Abort, baby, anti	Rape, outlaw, incest	Conservative, life, fight	Right, choose, job	Work, life, protect
Education 2002-2008				
<u>Our Place</u>	<u>Social Good</u>	<u>K-12 Reform</u>	<u>Values</u>	<u>Funding</u>
Work, believe, locations	Kids, work, jobs	Class, school, teach	Fight, value	Tax, fund, cut
Education 2010-2014				
<u>Health Care</u>	<u>Middle Class</u>	<u>Jobs</u>	<u>Families</u>	<u>Too Extreme</u>
Health, spend, jobs	Dollars, break, class	Jobs, fight	Family, children, care	Abolish, department
Health Care 2002-2008				
<u>Kids and Seniors</u>	<u>Social Good</u>	<u>Funding Care</u>	<u>Kids</u>	<u>Expand Coverage</u>
Drugs, child, prescription	Job, schools	Tax, cut	Kids, children	Fight, cover
Health Care 2010-2014				
<u>Seniors</u>	<u>Banks</u>	<u>Obamacare</u>	<u>Women’s Health</u>	<u>Anti-Liberal</u>
Seniors, cut, tax	Bailout, wall street,	Obama, fight, repeal	Women, vote	Pelosi, debt, trillion

ANALYSIS

I first turn to my expectations for the impact of party on campaign advertisements. To assess the impact of party on advertisement topics, I estimate beta regression models¹⁴ that include topic proportions for each issue by time period as the dependent variables, and the party (0=Republican, 1=Democrat) and gender (0=Men, 1=Women) of the favored candidate in the ad as the predictor variables. As a first look at these models, Table 2.2 shows which party (if any) is statistically significantly more likely to include a topic on a given women's issue by time period. This table includes the average marginal effect (AME) for each model, negative values indicate a higher predicted proportion of a given topic is present in Republican advertisements, and positive values indicate a higher predicted proportion of a given topic is present in Democratic advertisements.

Predicting Partisan Variation

Beginning with abortion, we can see that three topics are associated with a party in each time period. From 2002-2008, Democrats have about a 12% higher predicted probability of utilizing the topic "Too Extreme" compared to Republicans. This topic features candidates accusing opponents of holding extreme positions—in this case Democrats accusing Republicans of wanting to criminalize abortion. Democrats were also more likely to talk about funding when discussing abortion.

¹⁴ Logit regression modelling is also an appropriate choice for modelling dependent variables bounded between 1 and 0. I choose to estimate beta regression models because the assumptions underlying the model allow for more flexibility in the distribution of the data. Specifically, beta regression models are well-suited to "continuous random variables that assume values in (0, 1), such as...proportions" even when the distribution is substantially skewed, as is the case in the distribution of my dependent variable, topic proportions (Cribari-Neto and Zeileis 2014, p. 2). See also: Williams 1982, Prentice 1986, and Ferrari and Cribari-Neto 2004.

These ads generally do not focus primarily on abortion, and instead talk about where all funding priorities lie in addition to protecting the right to choose. Republicans have a 16% higher predicted probability than Democrats of including a “Faith & Local” values topic within an advertisement. In these ads, statements invoke “American fundamental freedoms,” the “people of Alabama,” and “bedrock Christian principles” among other things.

In the next time period (2010-2014) Republicans air ads that invoked “Taxes & Funding,” usually about how abortion related to Obamacare or other tax funding. Notably, I observed many Democratic instances of this same topic when Democrats aired ads refuting the notion that taxpayer money pays for abortions. Republicans were also more likely to utilize a topic I label “I’m Pro-Everything” which ads feature statements like “I’m pro-life and pro-gun and I approve this message,” “100% pro-life,” or, as one congressman did, invoke “a proven conservative record of cutting, spending, protecting personal liberties, and limiting government. Pro-life. Pro-family.” These types of ads cue viewers to the candidate’s membership in conservative circles by noting many right-leaning positions, often in quick succession. Again, I found several instances of Democratic men utilizing this same topic, but in contrast to the “Taxes and Funding” ads aired by Democrats, these ads tout the Democrat’s conservatism, particularly on abortion and guns. This interesting, but statistically insignificant relationship, highlights abortion policy as a thorny wedge issue between the parties. Finally, Democrats--as should be expected—are more likely to use the topic “Right to Choose” in these campaign ads with goals like “protecting the rights of women,” and to “defend a woman’s right to choose.

Table 2.2 Average Marginal Effects of Gender and Party by Topic, by Women’s Issue and Time Period

Abortion											
Years 2002-2008 (N=109)						Years 2010-2014 (N=286)					
Topic	Party	AME	Gender	AME	R ²	Topic	Party	AME	Gender	AME	R ²
Too Extreme	D	.12	---	---	.267	Too Extreme	---	---	W	.07	.044
Pro-Life Cons.	---	---	---	---		Taxes & Funding	R	-.11	---	---	.116
Protect Unborn	---	---	---	---		Right to Choose	D	.18	---	---	.284
Funding	D	.11	---	---	.093	I’m Pro-Everything	R	-.18	---	---	.265
Faith & Local	R	-.16	---	---	.157	Protect Unborn	---	---	---	---	
Education											
Years 2002-2008 (N=441)						Years 2010-2014 (N=389)					
Topic	Party	AME	Gender	AME	R ²	Topic	Party	AME	Gender	AME	R ²
Our Place	---	---	---	---		Health Care	---	---	---	---	
Social Good	---	---	---	---		Middle Class	---	---	---	---	
K-12 Reform	---	---	---	---		Jobs	R	-.05	---	---	.05
Values	---	---	---	---		Families	---	---	---	---	
Funding	---	---	---	---		Too Extreme	---	---	---	---	
Health Care											
Years 2002-2008 (N=546)						Years 2010-2014 (n=1352)					
Topic	Party	AME	Gender	AME	R ²	Topic	Party	AME	Gender	AME	R ²
Seniors	R	-.06	---	---	.048	Seniors	R	-.14	---	---	.251
Social Good	---	---	M	-.03	.010	Economy	D	.07	---	---	.054
Funding Care	---	---	---	---		Repeal Obamacare	R	-.07	---	---	.046
Kids	---	---	---	---		Women’s Health	D	.20	---	---	.345
Expand Coverage	D	.07	---	---	.034	Anti-Liberal	R	-.13	M	-.06	.152

Notes: All reported relationships are significant at the $p < .05$ level. “---” = no significant relationship.

Overall, the use of distinctive topics by party is similar between time periods in both direction and magnitude, consistent with my expectation. These findings also help validate my method of using structural topic modelling to generate topic proportions as my dependent variable. The topics generated and the topics' relationship to party confirm intuitive expectations. For abortion ads, these partisan arguments are familiar, and the text analysis method utilized in this project identified them without supervision or training.

Education advertisements only have one statistically significant partisan division: during the years 2010-2014 Republicans are more likely to use a "Jobs" driven advertisement. These ads usually include education as a passing concern and discuss jobs in more detail. This is a fairly weak relationship, Republicans include this topic about 5% more often than Democrats. I had no theoretically-driven hypotheses about this relationship, and therefore this weak finding does not confirm or diminish any expectations.

I next test my hypothesis that topics in advertisements about health care are more strongly divided along partisan lines since so-called "Obamacare" was passed in 2010. We can see that for the years before the ACA was passed, Republicans and Democrats had two fairly weak topic divisions on health care ads. Republicans include "Seniors" as a topic about 6% more than Democrats do in the years between 2002-2008; Democrats are about the same amount more likely than Republicans to include the topic expanding health coverage in the same year.

In the years since Obamacare has passed, however, partisan divisions in health care advertisements has increased substantially. Each of the five generated topics is

statistically significantly related to partisan affiliation. Republicans again include the topic “Seniors” more often, but in this time period they discuss the issue 14% more than Democrats do. Republicans in this time period additionally discuss “Repealing Obamacare” and “Anti-Liberal” as advertisement talking points, as well. “Repealing Obamacare,” as a topic, is seemingly straight-forward, however, Republicans only discuss this topic about 7% more than Democrats do even though Democrats do not usually advertise wanting to end Obamacare. The confusion lies in the number of Democratic advertisements bemoaning an opponent’s efforts to undue Obamacare, often citing that the opponent has no other plan or will harm the district’s constituents. Finally, Republicans employ an “Anti-Liberal” topic about 13% more often than Democrats do. These advertisements frequently attack a Democratic opponent who “sides with Pelosi” a certain percent of the time, and increased the debt or cut Medicare by trillions of dollars.

Democrats, on the other hand, include the topic I have labeled “Banks” about 7% more often than Republicans. The ads most associated with this topic frequently discuss how an opponent supported a Washington, bank, or Wall Street bailout and only touch on health care tangentially. Democrats are about 20% more likely to talk about the topic “Women’s Health” post-Obamacare. These ads include statements about “fighting for women,” the Violence Against Women Act, and guaranteeing women access to birth control and other reproductive issues.

Predicting Gender-Based Variation

My next set of hypotheses predict that the difference in topics between men and women will decrease over time, specifically from the years 2002-2008 to the years 2010-2014. To assess impact of gender on advertisement topics, I estimate the same beta regression models¹⁵ that include topic proportions for each issue by time period as the dependent variables, and the party (0=Republican, 1=Democrat) and gender (0=Men, 1=Women) of the favored candidate in the ad as the predictor variables. Table 2.2 shows which gender (if any) is statistically significantly more likely to include a topic on a given women's issue advertisement by time period. Again, this table includes the average marginal effect (AME) for each model, negative values indicate a higher predicted proportion of a given topic is present in advertisements that favor a man, and positive values indicate a higher predicted proportion of a given topic is present in advertisements that favor a woman.

As evidenced in Table 2.2, the influence of gender on topics chosen in women's issue advertisements is substantially less than the influence of partisanship demonstrated in Table 2.2. In fact, only three models out of the thirty displayed evidence any difference between the topics that men and women include, and these differences are weak. Women are more likely to include only the "Too Extreme" topic in abortion ads aired between 2010-2014. Women who do air these ads generally point to their opponent as too extreme because he or she wants to

¹⁵ Logit regression modelling is also an appropriate choice for modelling dependent variables bounded between 1 and 0. I choose to estimate beta regression models because the assumptions underlying the model regarding the distribution of the data are more flexible. Specifically, beta regression models are well-suited to "continuous random variables that assume values in (0, 1), such as...proportions" even when the distribution is substantially skewed, as is the case in the distribution of my dependent variable, topic proportions (Cribari-Neto and Zeileis 2014, p. 2). See also: Williams 1982, Prentice 1986, and Ferrari and Cribari-Neto 2004.

criminalize or ban abortion in all situations. In health care ads, men are more likely to include a “Social Good” topic between 2002-2008, or an “Anti-Liberal” topic between 2010-2014. These findings, overall, indicate that gender is not influential on the topics utilized in women’s issue advertisements. This evidence tends to disconfirm my hypothesis that gender influences topics on each issue and that the impact should vary between time periods in health care advertisements.

CONCLUSIONS

I find overwhelmingly that partisanship is a better predictor of the content of advertisements about abortion and health care than gender. This finding reinforces what others have found about other partisan representational behavior, like roll-call votes (Frederick 2016). The relationship between party and abortion communication confirms my hypothesis that party should be equally influential between the examined time periods because this issue has divided the parties long before 2002. In contrast, the influence of party on health care messages has increased post-Obamacare. For the years 2010-2014 all five topics associated with health care advertisements can be predicted by party. This trend tends to confirm my hypothesis that the partisan divisions in health care ads have become more rigid since 2010. However, my findings do not confirm my hypotheses that gender is a distinctive influence on campaign advertisement content, or that the influence of gender is diminished by increased partisan division. In fact, gender wields virtually no influence over the choice of topics examined in any of the advertisements analyzed in this research.

While the findings in this project have not yielded results that distinguish men and women's communication choices in campaign advertisements, this does not mean men and women do not represent differently. Substantial scholarship has found that women prioritize different issues and consider marginalized groups more often than men in their representational behavior. It is very possible that the short-format, high-cost, publicly accessible forum of campaign advertisements diminishes the influence of gendered communication. In short: when given 30 seconds to reach an entire district, party cues are likely to be the key to votes. Instead, gender may be more influential on other types of representational communication that are lower-cost, targeted, or longer-format. Future research should implement the method utilized in this research to study these types of communications, like floor speeches and e-newsletters. Ultimately, these findings do not indicate that gendered representation does not exist, but they do indicate that there is usually only room for party in televised campaign advertisements.

ESSAY 3

GENDER, PARTISANSHIP, AND WOMEN'S ISSUES IN PUBLIC OPINION

Abortion policy is one of the most clearly established women's issues on the American political landscape. It is also one of the most politically divisive women's issues, cleaving the party platforms since the 1970s. As women continue to fill more seats in the US Congress and as national attention has towards women's issues has increased, messages and advertisements from Congress about abortion have become only more common. Despite these co-occurrences, however, it is not women in Congress who are leading the national discourse on abortion. Instead women in both parties (but particularly Republican women) have fewer campaign advertisements and newsletters per-capita that communicate about abortion policy than their co-partisan men in Congress. In fact, between the years 2009-2016, Republican men sent more than 75% of newsletters that contained the word abortion.

As Republican men dominate abortion policy discourse that flows from members to their constituents, I find that they poise the issue as one about taxpayers and the economy, as opposed to the far fewer women's messages about abortion that tend to focus on women's health. In this third and final essay, I push these findings further—moving from an analysis of how men and women's messages in Congress vary to an analysis of how these varying messages impact public opinion and vote choice. Using an original survey experiment,¹⁶ I find that the public tend to prefer men who send abortion messages compared to women who send the same messages,

¹⁶ This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Award No. 1747459.

regardless of the gendered nature of the message, its political leanings, or the partisan identification or abortion policy preference of the respondent.

This trend has important implications for the representation of women in Congress. Scholars generally agree that gender stereotypes have—at most—a marginal effect on vote choice, but these stereotypes may be more influential on the public’s assessment of messages about women’s issues. If gender stereotypes are indeed activated when members of Congress communicate women’s issues, and these stereotypes tend to disfavor women compared to men, it challenges our conventional assumptions about the mechanisms underlying both the descriptive and surrogate representation of women in our national legislature.

This essay proceeds with the theoretical expectations I have for the results of this survey experiment, followed by analysis and discussion, but first I outline below why newsletters are such an important resource for information about members’ policy preferences, and why they promise for identifying how elite political communication influences public opinion.

NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters have been an important medium for members of Congress to reach their constituents on policy issues for decades. Before the ubiquity of e-newsletters, members established the habit of sending regular mass-mailings in the form of newsletters to constituents, and since at least the 1980s these have been the primary form of direct communication flowing from members to constituents (Lipinski 2004). Scholars have argued that newsletters are the most reliable way to

identify the messages members would most like to convey to constituents (Canon 1999). One of the most important benefits of utilizing newsletters compared to advertisements or press-releases is the ease with which they can target or micro-target audiences within the constituency (Lipinski 2004). Each of these claims continue to be true today, as members have moved from franked mass-mailings to nearly complete adoption of e-newsletters as regular, subscription-based emails to constituents. E-newsletters have the increased advantage that they can be targeted any size constituency or sub-constituency with ease, and are virtually costless aside from the staff required to write them up and click send (Cormack 2016; Evans and Hayden 2017).

The most common form of representational activity present in e-newsletters is position-taking (Cormack 2016). And since the public release of DC-Inbox (Cormack 2018), a repository of all e-newsletters sent by all members of Congress beginning in 2009 and updated daily, e-newsletters may be the most content-rich and accessible resource through which to gather information on this important representational activity. In this project, I take advantage of the vast amount of information contained in e-newsletters by utilizing computer-learning software to analyze the text of messages about established women's issues sent by members of the House.

In a previous essay, I identify the rhetorical patterns most common to men and women, respectively, within messages about abortion. I find that women are statistically significantly more likely than men to send abortion messages about women's health (Women's Health messages), and that men are statistically significantly more likely than women to send abortion messages about taxes (Tax

messages).¹⁷ In the instant essay, I utilize these gendered messages to assess the impact they have on public opinion and what influence, if any, the gender of the messenger has on public opinion. Specifically, I utilize a survey experiment in which respondents are exposed to two newsletter excerpts about abortion, one Women’s Health message and one Tax message (see Table 3.1). For each, the gender of the messenger is randomized and the respondents’ evaluation of the quality of the messenger and his or her likelihood to vote for the messenger in the next election is recorded.

Table 3.1: Messages Presented in Survey Experiment

Tax Message

In a recent newsletter, _____ stated that “I am proud to do my part in protecting life and the most vulnerable among us: the unborn.” He/She goes on to say, “On Capitol Hill, I advocate for life by voting yes on laws that will ensure that those citizens who morally object to abortion are not financing it with their tax dollars. That’s why I voted YES on the recent bill that prohibits tax credits and subsidies from being used to purchase health plans that cover abortion, except in case of rape, incest, or preserving the life of the mother.”

Women’s Health Message

In a recent newsletter, _____ stated that “An abortion is one of the safest medical procedures women can have, but my opponents continue to attempt to pass laws that decrease access to abortions by imposing unreasonable regulations on women’s health clinics.” He/She writes, “These bills may make obtaining an abortion more difficult, but they would also limit access to many other essential health services including cancer screenings and contraceptive services. That’s why I voted NO on the recent bill that threatens women’s health by imposing unnecessary regulations on these health care clinics.”

¹⁷ While these messages also tend to divide the parties (Women’s Health messages are more common to Democrats, Tax messages are more common to Republicans), many of these messages are moderate relative to other abortion policy messages common in e-newsletters.

In the following sections, I analyze the influence of the messenger's gender on public perception of the message and messenger and discuss the implications my findings have for theories of women's representation. First, however, I discuss my theoretical expectations and present several sets of hypotheses.

THEORY

Experimental studies have found that women running for elected office are considered by the electorate to be less competent on issues concerning the economy and national security, and that women in the House are viewed by the electorate as more liberal than men (Lawless 2004; McDermott 1998; Alexander and Andersen 1993), particularly on women's issues (Koch 2002). Regardless of the candidates' policy positions, the electorate are more likely to perceive women as more compassionate and knowledgeable on the stereotypically-feminine policy issues like health care and education (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Rosenwasser and Seale 1988). Gender stereotyping also occurs in evaluations of candidate traits, as the public evaluates male candidates as tougher, more decisive, and generally more agentic, while female candidates are considered to be more moral and compassionate (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Fridkin and Kenney 2014). As a candidate, it can be difficult to avoid these stereotypes because the relative rarity of women running for Congress necessarily draws attention to a female candidate's gender (Koch 2002).

Though women running for office are often harmed by these stereotypes, in the right context, women may be able to use these stereotypes to their advantage. For example, in application of their theory of strategic stereotyping Fridkin and Kenney

(2014) find that women in the Senate highlight their strengths as leaders on women's policy issues and are rewarded at the polls for the strategy. In my experiment, I utilize only messages from members to constituents about the women's issue abortion.

Because all of the messages center on a women's issue, on which the public associates women with more interest and expertise, I expect that women should be evaluated more highly than men regardless of the content of the abortion message.

This leads to the first hypotheses:

H1a: *Respondents will rate women as having higher quality than men.*

H1b: *Respondents will be more likely to express intention to vote for women than men.*

Gender-stereotyping is not relegated only to the understanding of types of issues, however. Instead, stereotyping can be triggered through subtle nuances in the rhetoric surrounding an issue. This occurs through the process Winter calls gender implication (2005; 2008), in which political elites use gendered language to "symbolically evoke people's ideas about gender" (Winter 2005, p. 454). He finds that even implicit frames lead "people to evaluate an issue through their gender schema without realizing it" (2008, p. 23). This heresthetic change alters mass-perception of the issue, and potentially poll results in campaigns where the gendered issue is salient. For example, Winter argues that gender implication changed the rhetoric concerning health care in the early 1990's, moving the issue from an argument about health security and big government to an argument framed by gender. This change to gender-centered rhetoric can be used to create, or fracture partisan and ideological alliances on a given issue.

To this end, I employ two gendered messages. The “Taxes” message is male-gendered: This frame focuses attention a traditionally male trait (economic expertise), and is also utilized more often by men in congressional newsletters. The “Women’s Health” message is female-gendered: This frame focuses attention on a traditionally female trait (women’s health expertise). I expect these different gender-implication strategies to impact respondents’ evaluations of women differently. Drawing again from strategic stereotyping theory, I expect that women who utilize a stereotypically female gendered message to be rewarded. Specifically, I expect women who present a Women’s Health message to be evaluated more highly than women who present a Tax message. I present my second set of hypotheses:

H2a: *Respondents will rate women who present the Women’s Health frame as having higher quality than women who present the Taxes frame.*

H2b: *Respondents will be more likely to express intention to vote for women who present the Women’s Health frame than women who use the Taxes frame.*

Abortion is generally assumed to be a women’s issue, but it also deeply divides the party platforms (Wolbrecht 2000). Some recent research finds that women running for office are not subject to gender stereotypes that supersede assumptions based on party and ideology. Therefore, I expect that partisanship will affect the evaluations of the messengers as well. This is particularly true because, as discussed in the “Newsletters” section, above, while the messages presented within the survey are both fairly moderate compared to much of abortion policy rhetoric, the male-gendered tax frame leans toward the right and the female-gendered women’s health

frame leans toward the left. Considering this trend is both characteristic of current partisan rhetoric concerning abortion and embedded within my survey design I expect partisanship to mitigate the influence of the gender. Specifically, I expect that when subdivided by party the gender of the messenger will not affect the evaluation of the messenger's quality, or the likelihood of respondents voting for the messenger.

H3a: *When subdivided by party, the gender of the messenger will not impact quality evaluations of the messenger.*

H3b: *When subdivided by party, the gender of the messenger will not impact the respondents' likelihood to vote for the messenger.*

Though abortion does divide the parties at the elite level, its divisiveness at the mass-level is less clear (Winter 2005). For example, Hillygus and Shields find that about 25% of the electorate does not agree with their party on abortion policy. Therefore, an analysis subdivided only party may be too blunt an instrument. To further analyze how varying political positions mediate the influence of gender on respondents attitudes toward abortion messages, I further subdivide the analysis by abortion policy position. First, I expect those at the extreme end of the abortion debate to be uninfluenced by the gender of the messenger. This group—those who think that abortion should never be permitted and those who think abortion should always be permitted—have chosen a strong policy position that is unlikely to be influenced by the political context, including the gender of the messenger.

On the other hand, those who either believe abortion should be available in the cases of rape or incest, or should also be available for other demonstrable needs may struggle to identify completely with an abortion message. Therefore, I expect this

group (those who support more moderate abortion policy preferences) to look toward other cues—like the gender of the messenger—in order to evaluate the quality of the messenger and the likelihood they will vote for the messenger. This attention to the messenger’s gender should cause the respondent to weigh established gender stereotypes and the gendered-frame of the message when making evaluating a messenger. In accordance with the expectations of strategic stereotyping, those who hold these moderate abortion policy positions should reward women who present the female-gendered frame (Women’s Health) and punish women who present the male-gendered frame (Taxes). This brings me to my final hypotheses:

H4a: Respondents will rate women who present the Women’s Health message as having higher quality than men who present the Women’s Health message.

H4b: Respondents will rate women who present the Tax message as having lower quality than men who present the Tax message.

H4c: Respondents will be more likely to express intention to vote for women who present the Women’s Health message than men who present the Women’s Health message.

H4c: Respondents will be more less likely to express intention to vote for women who present the Tax message than men who present the Tax message.

DATA

The data used in the analysis include several demographic characteristics, as well as data on respondents’ abortion policy positions, which are utilized as the

covariates. The dependent variables in this analysis are the respondents' evaluation of messenger quality (Quality Evaluation), and respondents' likelihood to vote for the newsletter messenger (Vote Choice). Both of these types of variables are discussed below.

Covariates

The data include information about the respondents' demographics, their impressions of the messenger of the newsletter, and their opinions on a range of gender egalitarian issues, including questions about abortion policy positions. Though only a few of these variables are utilized to test my hypotheses, many of them are useful here to sketch a picture of the sample's political viewpoints and representation of the general population.

There is a total of 844 responses in the final data set.¹⁸ As covariates in the analysis, I include the type of message presented, the gender of the messenger, and the gender, partisan identification, ideology, and abortion policy position of the respondent (see Table 3.2). The survey design utilizes quotas in order to assure similar representation of men and women and Republicans and Democrats within the sample. Women represent about 52% of respondents, and Republicans comprise about the same percent of the responses. Out of the 32 respondents who identified as "Independent" all but one leaned toward one of the major parties (61% leaned Democratic).

¹⁸ The original data includes 911 individual responses. Respondents who did not finish the survey, or who participated for fewer than three minutes in the survey are excluded from the data.

Within my sample, a substantial majority lean toward gender-egalitarianism. For example, only 15% stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that a woman should not be president of the United States, lower than the 20% found in a 2008 Pew Research Study. Less than 9% opposed requiring employers to pay men and women the same for equal work. Opinions on abortion policy, however, varied more substantially. About 13% of respondents most closely agreed that abortion should *never* be permitted, 36% of respondents agreed that abortion should *always* be permitted, 33% agreed that abortion should only be allowed in cases of *rape and incest*, and about 17% think that abortion should be permitted when there is a *demonstrated need*. Figure 3.1 shows these categories' partisan composition. As should be expected, strong Democrats comprise the bulk of those who support always permitting abortion, and strong Republicans represent a vast majority of those who support never permitting abortion.

There is, however, substantial partisan variation within each category. In only two cases does any one group have fewer than 10% in agreement on a given abortion policy:

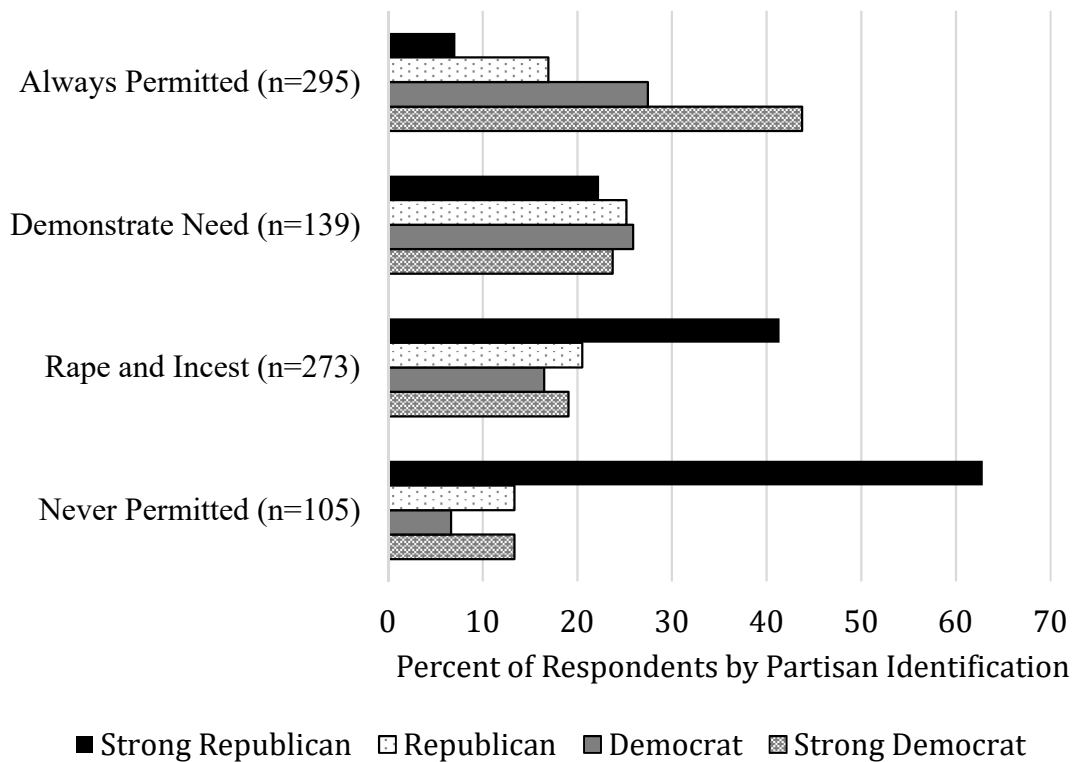
Table 3.2: Covariate Labels, Descriptions, and Values

Label	Description	Values
Tax Message	Frame of the message in the newsletter presented to the respondent	Health Frame=0 Tax Frame=1
Messenger Woman	Gender of the member presenting the message within the newsletter. This is randomized within the survey.	Man=0 Woman=1
Respondent Woman	Self-identified gender of respondent.	Man=0 Woman=1
Abortion Position	Self-identified position on abortion of respondent.	1=Always Permitted 2= Demonstrated Need 3= Rape and Incest 4=Never Permitted
Party ID	Self-identified party and partisan strength of respondent.	1=Strong Democrat 2= Democrat 3=Lean Democratic 4=Lean Republican 5= Republican 6=Strong Republican
Ideology	Self-identified ideology of respondent.	1=Very Liberal 2=Liberal 3=Moderate 4=Conservative 5=Very Conservative

strong Republicans agree less than 10% of the time that abortion should always be permitted, and Democrats agree less than 10% of the time that abortion should never be permitted. The distribution between partisan identifications is nearly equal in the second most permissive category in which respondents agree that abortion should be permitted with a demonstrated need. Both strong and middling partisans from each party represent between 20-30% of this group. These findings confirm prior

scholarship that finds while the party platforms are sharply divided on the issue of abortion, in the electorate abortion continues to be a substantial wedge issue, on which about 25% of voters hold a policy position incongruent with their party (Hillygus and Shields 2008).

Figure 3.1: Abortion Position¹⁹ by Percent of Respondents with each Partisan Identification



¹⁹ The text of this question is adapted from the 2016 ANES survey, and reads:
 “ Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view?
 By law, abortion should never be permitted.
 The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger.
 The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established.
 By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.”

Dependent Variables

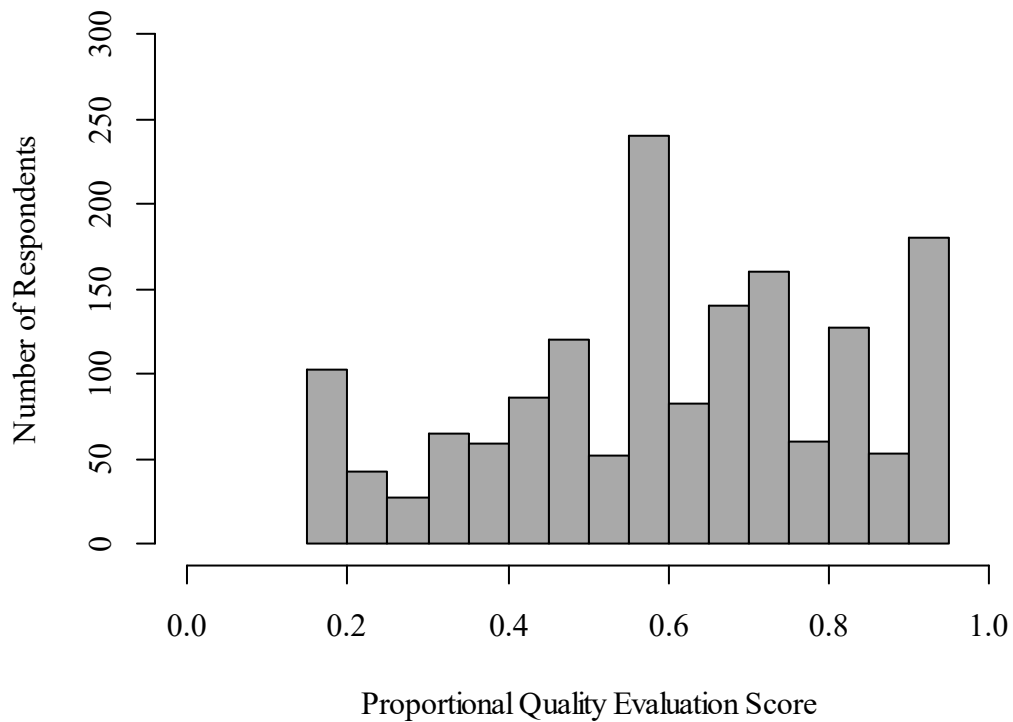
The dependent variables are derived from responses to several questions asked immediately after the introduction of each of the two newsletters. The first three ask the respondent to evaluate the competency, likeability, and trustworthiness of the newsletter messenger on a scale five-point scale ranging from very low (1) to very high (5). These three questions are presented on the same page, in matrix format. The second set of three ask the respondent to evaluate the newsletter messenger on his or her understanding of abortion policy, tax policy, and health care policy. This is also ranked on a five-point scale ranging from very weak (1) to very strong (5).

Preliminary analysis reveals that within and between each set of questions the associated responses have correlations between 75-82%. Because the questions are highly substantively related and highly correlated, I merge all of these numerical answers to create a single Likert-scale measure that accounts for the respondents' Quality Evaluation of the newsletter messenger, which ranges from 6-30. For ease of interpretation, I have transformed this Likert-scale measure into a proportion that is bounded between zero and one, in which Quality Evaluations closer to 0 indicate the lowest evaluations and those closer to 1 indicate the highest evaluations.

As demonstrated in Figure 3.2 the mode for both the Quality Evaluation proportional score is around .56. This indicates that respondents scored newsletter messengers most often as just above average, or just above the evaluation of "Fair." Most of the answers lean toward positive evaluations, though there is a significant spike at the very lowest end of the scale.

The second dependent variable in my analysis is the respondents' likelihood to vote for the newsletter messenger. I code this variable as 0=Unlikely to Vote and 1=Likely to Vote. Like the Quality Evaluation score, respondents are more favorable to the messengers in this survey than unfavorable: 578 indicate being unlikely to vote for the messenger, and 934 indicate that they are likely to vote for the messenger.

Figure 3.2: Number of Respondents by Proportional Quality Evaluation Score



ANALYSIS

To assess my first hypothesis, I estimate beta regression models using the proportional Quality Evaluation proportional score as the dependent variable.²⁰ In the

²⁰ Logit regression modelling is also an appropriate choice for modelling dependent variables bounded between 1 and 0. I choose to estimate beta regression models because the assumptions underlying the model regarding the distribution of the data are more flexible. Specifically, beta

first model, I utilize the entire data set to estimate the relationship between the predictor variables of interest—specifically the gender of the messenger—as well as other covariates, with the Quality Evaluation proportional score.

I then estimate a logit model, using likelihood to vote as the dependent variable (0= unlikely to vote for, and 1=likely to vote for), using the same model covariates (See again Table 3.2) None of the covariates predicts how likely the respondent is to vote for the member who distributed the newsletter (see Table 3.3). As should be expected, because each of these models includes evaluations of the right-leaning men’s frame and the left-leaning women’s frame, neither Party ID, Abortion Position, or Ideology is statistically related to Quality Evaluation. These findings disconfirm my expectation that women should be evaluated more highly than men when talking about the women’s issue abortion. I next investigate if the relationship between the messenger’s gender and evaluations of quality vary based on the frame utilized, or the party or abortion position of the respondent.

regression models are well-suited to “continuous random variables that assume values in (0, 1), such as...proportions” even when the distribution is substantially skewed, as is the case in the distribution of my dependent variable, topic proportions (Cribari-Neto and Zeileis 2014, p. 2). See also: Williams 1982, Prentice 1986, and Ferrari and Cribari-Neto 2004.

Table 3.3: Beta Regression Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender and Respondent Quality Evaluations

	Quality (SE)	AME**
Messenger Woman	-.047 (.051)	---
Respondent Woman	-.021 (.051)	---
Abortion Position	-.001 (.027)	---
Party ID	-.005 (.016)	---
Ideology	-.003 .028	---
Taxes Newsletter	-.004 (.051)	---
Constant	.523* (.134)	
Adjusted R	.001	
N	1287	

*p<.05

**Average marginal effects reported only for statistically significant relationships

Table 3.4: Logit Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender and Vote Choice

	Vote (SE)	PP**
Messenger Woman	-.026 (.121)	---
Respondent Woman	-.074 (.121)	---
Abortion Position	.099 (.065)	---
Party ID	-.016 (.039)	---
Ideology	-.093 (.067)	---
Taxes Newsletter	-.015 (.121)	---
Constant	1.086* (.323)	
AIC	1563.1	
N	1287	

* p<.05

**Predicted probabilities reported only for statistically significant relationships.

My second set of hypotheses predict that women will be rewarded for presenting stereotypically feminine messages about abortion. Therefore, I expect women to have higher Quality Evaluations than men on Women’s Health messages, and lower than men on Tax messages. As demonstrated in Table 3.5, the gender of the messenger has no relationship with Quality Evaluation, even when the data is subdivided by the type of message. However, as should be expected, the Abortion Position, Party ID, and Ideology of the respondent are statistically significantly related to the Quality Evaluation by the message type in the correct direction. Respondents holding more conservative abortion positions, more conservative respondents, and respondents who lean toward the Republican party all prefer the Tax

Message. Respondents holding more liberal abortion positions, more ideologically liberal respondents, and respondents who lean toward the Democratic party all prefer the Health Message.

The gender of the messenger does have an impact on respondents' likelihood to vote for the messenger when the Women's Health message is presented (see Table 3.6). This relationship, however, is not in the expected direction. When the Women's Health message is presented, respondents have a 6.5% higher predicted probability to express an intention to vote for a male messenger compared to a female messenger. This is opposed to my expectation that women should be rewarded for presenting a stereotypically feminine message on abortion. Instead, when all respondents are included in the model, respondents are more likely to vote for a man presenting a Women's Health message, while neither gender is preferred generally when presenting a Tax Message. This relationship is further examined in the next two hypothesis tests.

Table 3.5: Beta Regression Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender and Quality Evaluations, by Message Type

	Health Message		Tax Message	
	Quality (SE)	AME	Quality (SE)	AME
Messenger Woman	-.068 (.063)	---	-.009 (.063)	---
Respondent Woman	.096 (.063)	---	-.105 (.063)	---
Abortion Position	-.274* (.033)	-.062	.339* (.034)	.075
Party ID	-.048* (.020)	-.012	.043* (.020)	.009
Ideology	-.169* (.034)	-.038	.173* (.034)	.039
Constant	.371* (.161)		.804* (.163)	
Adjusted R	.300		.351	
N	637		637	

* p<.05

Table 3.6: Logit Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender and Vote Choice, by Message Type

	Health Messages		Tax Messages	
	Vote (SE)	PP	Vote (SE)	PP
Messenger Woman	-.407* (.207)	-.065	.358 (.226)	---
Respondent Woman	.103 (.206)	---	-.134 (.226)	---
Abortion Position	.796* (.107)	.126	-1.238* (.127)	-.178
Party ID	-.200* (.059)	-.031	.195* (.066)	.028
Ideology	-.472* (.107)	-.075	.270* (.125)	.039
Constant	.707 (.481)		2.558 (.564)	
AIC	599.2		504.6	
N	637		637	

* p<.05

My next set of hypotheses predicts that there should be no relationship between the gender of the messenger and the Quality Evaluations and Vote Choice of respondents. These hypotheses are generated from a broader expectation that, all else equal, party should predict how men and women are evaluated on messages sent about abortion. However, as demonstrated in Table 3.7, Republicans give higher Quality Evaluations to men than women overall. When the messenger is a man, Republicans' Quality Evaluation score is, on average, about .17 points higher (out of one) for men than women. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 8, Republicans have about an 8% higher predicted probability of expressing a likely intention to vote for a man than a woman.

This relationship is somewhat driven by Republicans' evaluation of the Women's Health message. While the gender of the messenger is not predictive of either Quality Evaluation or Vote Choice when the Tax message is presented, when the Women's Health message is presented—a message that leans slightly toward the left—Republicans overall are about 11% more likely to vote for a man than a woman. While it is interesting that Republicans tend to prefer a man who presents a Women's Health message over a woman who does the same, in reality a Republican who is congruent with his or her party on abortion policy would likely not vote for either gender presenting this message.

Table 3.7: Beta Regression Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender and Quality Evaluations, by Party

	Democrats		Republicans	
	Quality (SE)	AM E	Quality (SE)	AME
Messenger Woman	.039 (.072)	---	-.172* (.075)	-.041
Respondent Woman	-.018 (.073)	---	.017 (.075)	---
Abortion Position	-.033 (.039)	---	.031 (.039)	---
Ideology	-.028 (.040)	---	.012 (.037)	---
Constant	.598* (.188)		.391* (.197)	
Adjusted R	.002		.01	
N	636		609	

* p<.05

Table 3.8: Logit Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender and Vote Choice, by Party

	Democrats		Republicans	
	Vote (SE)	PP	Vote (SE)	PP
Messenger Woman	.220 (.176)	---	-.340* (.170)	-.081
Respondent Woman	-.012 (.177)	---	-.013 (.178)	---
Abortion Position	-.221* (.098)	.052	.043* (.098)	-.010
Party ID	-.064 (.193)	---	.043 (.201)	---
Ideology	.041 (.107)	---	-.220* (.094)	---
Constant	1.083* (.490)		1.066 (.124)	
AIC	754.1		752.6	
N	636		609	

* p<.05

Though party has some influence over the relationship between respondents' Quality Evaluations and Vote Choice, an important characteristic of abortion policy is that it continues to be a wedge issue between the parties. Therefore, we should expect to see differing relationships between the gender of the messenger and the dependent variables when abortion policy preferences of respondents are examined separately. Specifically, I expect that gender will not influence those who hold the two extreme abortion policy positions—those that think abortion should always be permitted and those who think abortion should never be permitted—because those holding these strong policy positions will be less likely to use the gender of the messenger as a heuristic clue to evaluate the quality of the messenger or the likelihood to vote for the messenger when the message leans either right or left. Necessarily, the analysis must examine the two abortion messages separately, as one leans toward more restrictive abortion policy (Taxes), and one leans toward less (Women's Health). Tables 3.9 and 3.10 confirm my expectations.

First, in Table 3.9, I demonstrate that respondents holding the most extreme positions on abortion did not consider the gender of the messenger in their Quality Evaluations. More conservative Republicans who believe that abortion should always be permitted preferred the Tax Message compared to more those who are more liberal or Democratic, and more liberal respondents prefer the Women's Health message compared to conservatives who think abortion should always be permitted. Beyond these findings, no other political variables have a statistically significant relationship with Quality Evaluations in this portion of the sample. Notably, however, men who

believe abortion should never be permitted rate the Women’s Health message about .10 (out of one) points higher than women in the same group.

This finding indicates that women who think abortion should never be permitted may hold more conservative positions about women’s health clinics than men in the same group. Concerning Vote Choice, respondents who think abortion should always be permitted have about a 12% higher predicted probability of voting for a woman presenting the Tax Message than a man presenting the same message (see Table 3.10). However, those who believe abortion should always be permitted are unlikely to vote for someone presenting the Tax Message in an actual voting booth.

Table 3.9: Beta Regression Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender and Respondent Quality Evaluations, by Abortion Position by Issue

	Tax Messages Only				Health Messages Only			
	Always Permitted		Never Permitted		Always Permitted		Never Permitted	
	Quality (SE)	AME	Quality (SE)	AME	Quality (SE)	AME	Quality (SE)	AME
Messenger Woman	.156 (.102)	---	-.027 (.198)	---	-.018 (.101)	---	-.016 (.200)	---
Respondent Woman	-.068 (.101)	---	-.071 (.200)	---	.105 (.101)	---	-.418* (.198)	-.101
Party ID	.104* (.040)		-.0311 (.063)	---	-.075 (.038)	---	-.091 (.062)	---
Ideology	.125* (.062)		.235 (.093)	---	-.181* (.063)	-.035	-.102 (.097)	---
Constant	-.729* (.150)		.281 (.347)		1.618* (.155)		1.049* (.344)	
Adjusted R	.152		.107		.151		.159	
N	232		72		247		83	

* p<.05

Table 3.10: Logit Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender Respondent Vote Choice, by Abortion Position by Issue

	Tax Messages Only				Health Messages Only			
	Always Permitted		Never Permitted		Always Permitted		Never Permitted	
	Vote (SE)	PP	Vote (SE)	PP	Vote (SE)	PP	Vote (SE)	PP
Messenger Woman	.728* (.357)	.115	-.008 (.921)	---	-.057 (.434)	---	.214 (.601)	---
Respondent Woman	-.422 (.349)	---	.153 (.969)	---	.017 (.436)	---	-1.126 (.587)	---
Party ID	.321* (.129)	.051	.139 (.297)	---	-.268 (.143)	---	-.204 (.162)	---
Ideology	.104 (.215)	.017	-.223 (.491)	---	-.589* (.237)	-.056	-.480 (.266)	---
Constant	-2.440* (.538)		2.439 (1.737)		4.405* (.778)		2.537* (.952)	
AIC	214.22		49.66		155.79		89.64	
N	232		72		247		83	

* p<.05

My final set of hypotheses posits that those respondents who hold relatively moderate abortion positions in my sample (those who believe that abortion should be permitted in cases of rape and incest, and those who believe abortion should be available to a woman who demonstrates need) will be more likely to use the gender of the messenger as a heuristic when evaluating an abortion message. I group these two moderate abortion positions together because, when evaluating the moderate abortion positions in my example newsletters, they should be less likely than those at the extremes to hold strong positions on either the Tax or the Women’s Health message. Again, I first estimate beta regression models to assess the relationship between the gender of the messenger and the Quality Evaluation by the respondent (see Table 3.11). While the gender of the messenger is not statistically related to Quality

Evaluation of the Women's Health message, it is statistically significantly related to the Quality Evaluation of the Tax message. On average, those who hold moderate abortion positions rate men presenting the Tax message about .04 points (out of 1) higher than women presenting the same message. The substantive effect of this relationship is relatively small, but the finding does tend to confirm my hypothesis that women who present the Tax message will have lower quality ratings than men who do.

As expected, those who identify as more conservative and those who hold more conservative abortion positions rate the Quality of the Tax messenger more highly, and more liberal respondents rate the Women's Health message more highly (see Table 3.11). While the gender of the messenger does not affect the Quality Evaluation in this model, Table 3.11 demonstrates that—as with the most conservative abortion policy position holders in Table 3.8—the gender of the respondent does affect evaluation of the member presenting the Women's Health message. Unlike those who think abortion should never be permitted, however, women who are more moderate on abortion policy rate the presenter of the Women's Health message more highly than men in the same group.

Table 3.11: Beta Regression Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender and Quality Evaluations, by Issue (Moderate Abortion Positions Only)

	Tax Messages		Health Messages	
	Quality (SE)	AME	Quality (SE)	AME
Messenger Woman	-.191* (.089)	-.040	-.087 (.087)	---
Respondent Woman	-.053 (.089)	---	.208* (.087)	.050
Abortion Position	.411* (.093)	-.086	-.364* (.093)	.088
Party ID	.014 (.025)	---	-.020 (.025)	---
Ideology	.188* (.046)	.039	-.176* (.045)	-.042
Constant	1.218* (.281)		-.058 (.280)	
Adjusted R	.198		.153	
N	303		338	

* p<.05

Finally, I analyze the relationship between respondent Vote Choice and the gender of the messenger. As shown in Table 3.12 the relationship is not statistically significant on for Tax messages, but it is for Women’s Health messages. Specifically, those holding relatively moderate abortion policy positions have about a 13% higher predicted probability of expressing intention to vote for a man presenting the Women’s Health message than a woman presenting the same message. This relationship is not in the expected direction, as this group is rewarding men (or punishing women) for presenting a more feminine abortion message.

Table 3.12: Logit Estimates of Relationship between Messenger Gender Respondent Vote Choice, by Issue (Moderate Abortion Positions Only)

	Tax Messages		Health Messages	
	Vote (SE)	PP	Vote (SE)	PP
Messenger Woman Respondent	-.016 (.335)	---	-.666* (.275)	-.126
Abortion Position	.222 (.335)	---	.401 (.270)	---
Party ID	1.417* (.333)	-.190	-1.491* (.289)	.282
Ideology	.115 (.090)	---	-.179* (.074)	-.034
Constant	.459* (.176)	.061	-.476* (.138)	-.090
AIC	2.897* (1.006)		-1.170 (.795)	
N	245.6		350.6	
	303		338	

* p<.05

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis demonstrates that ideology, the strength of partisan identification, and abortion policy position are all very influential when the public form opinions about abortion messages. However, in some very important ways, the gender of the messenger can also be influential. These findings elucidate public opinion patterns that suggest gender stereotypes can be employed in messages about women’s issues in ways that impact the evaluation of male messengers and female messengers differently depending on the audience. These findings have important implications not only for future research about gendered communication in Congress, but also practical implications for elected officials who desire use gender stereotypes to their advantage.

First, I find that when addressing the general public—as might be done in a campaign advertisement that reaches a large media market—people express that they are more likely to vote for a man than a woman who presents a message that highlights how abortion policy influences women’s health. This is an important finding because, in the campaign and newsletter essays included in this dissertation, it is women who are more likely to send these women’s health messages than men. At least in the case of messages that do not target specific audiences, women may want to choose a different abortion message (or none at all, possibly), and men may benefit from maximizing on the identified benefit of utilizing counter-stereotypes.

However, even when specific audiences are analyzed—by party and abortion policy preferences—when the gender of the messenger is related to quality evaluation or vote choice, men are the favored gender in all but one instance.²¹ This is true of both moderates for the women’s health and tax messages, for the women’s health message regardless of party identification or abortion policy preference, and for Republicans generally. Overall, men—regardless of the gendered nature of the message—are preferred over women when presenting these abortion messages.

This finding has important implications for research on how gender stereotypes influence public opinion. Thus far, research has generally found that men and women who run are equally likely to win (Lawless and Fox 2005; Lawless 2004), and that particularly when political context is included gender stereotypes do not tend to influence vote choice (Dolan 2014). I find, however, that when the very specific

²¹ And in this instance, it is those who believe abortion should always be permitted who prefer women presenting the tax message. Again, this is unlikely to hold much influence over a vote on election day.

context of abortion messages is presented to potential voters they consistently prefer men over women, regardless of the political leanings or gendered content of the message and regardless of the party or ideology of the respondent (excepting those most liberal on abortion policy who expressed a preference for women presenting abortion messages referencing taxes). This indicates that on some issues—particularly women’s issues—gender stereotyping could impact men and women differently at the polls.

This research also contributes to research on women’s representation and Congress more generally. Abortion policy is unique on the political landscape because it is one of very few issues in which women are clearly the primary target or beneficiary of these policies and they are both divisive and nationally salient (Wolbrecht 2000). It is women who are immediately and personally impacted by any change in abortion policy. It impacts women’s representation in Congress, then, that the public prefers men who communicate about this subject compared to women, regardless of the content of the message. While it is true that women’s interests are diverse, if women are disfavored for presenting either side of an established women’s issue it threatens the quality of women’s representation in Congress and in elected office generally.

Future scholarship should continue to systematically explore how gender and gender stereotypes influence public opinion on women’s issues and on those who communicate from elected office about women’s issues. As women continue to fill more seats in the House, Senate, and state offices it will only become more important that we understand how the electorate—and women’s issue policy—is influenced by

the gender of our representatives. Through this line of research, we have the leverage to continue to explore and assess the evolving presence and quality of women's representation in Congress.

CONCLUSION

A primary purpose of this project is to present a systematic and reproducible way to assess the impact of gender on communication about women's issues. In doing so, I contribute to the ongoing debate about what should (and should not) be characterized as a women's issue by identifying when (and whether) women communicate distinctively on issues scholars conventionally call "women's issues." At the core of these essays is the idea that rhetoric about a women's issue should be at least somewhat influenced by the gender of the member communicating a women's issue message. Further, I expected this relationship to be mediated by the political context: the more partisan the issue, the less influence gender should wield over the communication. If these expectations had been wholly confirmed by my analyses, we could conclude that our long-held categorizations of women's issues are not only theoretically sound, but also reinforced by the fact that women in Congress choose to communicate distinctively about these issues to constituents and voters. Instead, however, I find that—for the issues and fora I examined—gender is not statistically significantly or substantially influential on the content of most women's issue messages. In fact, in campaign advertisements about these issues, the influence of gender is almost entirely absent. Men and women campaigning for Congress do not substantially vary the primary topics they choose to highlight in advertisements about abortion, education, or health care. This pattern is also true concerning health care newsletters: I find that the influence of gender is largely inconsequential on newsletter messages about health care.

In contrast, men and women do choose to utilize distinctive topics when sending messages about abortion in newsletters to constituents. Gender is influential on all five of the most prevalent topics sent within newsletters about abortion. While women on both sides are more likely to talk about *Roe v. Wade*, women's health, and babies in messages about abortion, men are more likely to talk about taxpayers and religious beliefs.

That abortion messages are influenced by gender in newsletters and not campaign advertisements is an important finding. This pattern is likely due to both the messenger's available choices and the audience that vary between newsletters and campaign advertisements. First, the number of choices available to members sending newsletters is greater than the number of choices available to candidates airing campaign advertisements. This is due, in part, to the long-format style of newsletters. Messages in newsletters can range anywhere from paragraphs to pages, with little difference in the cost to the member's office. This opportunity for exposition may result in more gendered messages. While campaign advertisements generally only have room for specific position-taking and party-cues, newsletters leave more room for explanation and justification. Particularly for abortion I find that the justifications for abortion positions are where men and women in Congress vary. Women are more likely to justify their abortion positions by talking about women's health or babies—two groups that are both underrepresented in Congress and affected by abortion policy—while men are more likely to talk about taxpayers—an economic stakeholder. Likely, part of the reason these differences do not show up in campaign advertisements is that there simply isn't room for them.

There are likely audience-motivated reasons for the differences between ads and newsletters as well. For example, party-led abortion positions might be the most common in campaign advertisements because those are the messages that garner the most votes for the candidate and for the party. This results in the patterns observed in the abortion campaign advertisements in which partisans argue that the other side is “too extreme,” “too liberal,” or “too conservative.” Messages that capture voters’ attention through aired ads, therefore, may not be the same messages that capture constituents’ attention in text-based newsletters.

Overall, the findings presented in essays one and two concerning patterns in congressional communication largely suggest that gender only influences women’s issue messages in a few political contexts. This conclusion holds true regarding the results of my survey experiment: the gender of the messenger rarely matters in respondents’ evaluations of the messenger. However, I do find that when gender matters respondents almost always prefer men compared to women who send the same abortion message. This finding is important because it does not confirm most of the extant research in this area. Contrary to my theoretical expectation that women should be rewarded by confirming gender stereotypes simply by sending any abortion message—particularly a feminine-leaning abortion message—when gender matters in abortion messages, women consistently had lower quality scores and vote choice scores compared to men.

Taken together, the findings from this series of three essays suggest that gender does not influence most messages about policies we conventionally consider to be “women’s issues.” And when gender is influential on these messages—as it is

on abortion newsletters—this difference may not benefit women in public opinion. These findings are important because they require us to question how we define women’s issues in the contemporary political landscape. As one side continues to pride itself as the party of women, the other has attempted to gain ground by appealing to women outside the liberal-fold. What was once often considered a large interest group is now divided even on “women’s issues,” not only in their policy positions but also in the way they communicate about these issues. If this trend continues to be uncovered in these and other issues and media, we may soon conclude that all issues are women’s issues, and therefore that women’s issues are no longer meaningfully distinguishable as a category.

This need not be the case, however. Future research should compare not only the influence of gender on communications about women’s issues, but also on non-gendered issues. This type of research design may discover that gender is influential on topics we don’t currently consider “women’s issues,” or that gender is substantially more important in fora I have not considered in these essays. Regardless, I posit that as we continue to refine and categorize what we consider women’s issues in our dynamic political landscape, we should do so with an eye toward how gender influences what members of Congress are saying about different issues in varying political contexts. To this end, I argue that the methodological approach presented in these essays—which is capable of identifying when gender (or any demographic characteristic) matters to the content of political communications—can aid scholars in the pursuit to define the quality and character of women’s representation in Congress.

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