

Gender and Media Coverage  
in the 2008 Senatorial Elections

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## Abstract

*Multiple studies have analyzed how the media portray female and male candidates differently in races for elected office, but does the media coverage change if two women run against each other, and if so how? This study will look at three 2008 United States Senate races to analyze how the candidate's gender effects the media's coverage and portrayal of that candidate. Two men competed for the Senate seat in Oregon, while in New Hampshire a female challenged a male incumbent and won, and in North Carolina a female incumbent was ousted by a female challenger. This study will specifically focus on how the media cover the candidates' prior experience, physical appearance and personal life, and will also compare how the media connect certain issues with each gender. In each state, articles written about the campaign between the primary and general election were coded for prior experience, physical appearance, personal life and political issues. The data was then compared between the two candidates in each state and between the races based on the candidates' sex. The results suggest little or no difference in media coverage between male and female candidates. When two women ran against each other, the journalists wrote sexist comments about both candidates, but not enough to show a significant correlation.*

## Introduction

The number of women successfully running for political office continues to increase and the media is often a key component of campaigns, especially on the state and national level. But are the media treating women fairly compared to their male counterparts? Studies of female candidates in the 1990s conclude that the media treat

male and female candidates running for the same office differently, which can either hinder or help the female candidate. The more recent studies show the gender gap in media coverage is less pronounced, but still present.

This study will add a layer to the research by examining a newly emerging phenomenon of a female candidate running against another female; there have been few female-female races on the national level so research in this area is lacking. The study will analyze news coverage of three 2008 Senate races: Oregon where two men vied for the seat, New Hampshire where a female challenger unseated a male incumbent, and North Carolina where a female candidate challenged the female incumbent and won. Through an analysis of newspaper articles from two newspapers in each state, the paper will study how the media coverage of a candidate's prior experience, physical appearance, family and traditionally gendered issues (i.e. the economy, military, health care and education) varies depending on the gender of the candidate and the candidate's opponent.

### Research Questions

This paper will ask: how the media cover female and male candidates running for the United States Senate differently compared to the gender of his or her opponent. It will also inquire how newspapers cover state wide races in which two female candidates run against each other; does the media treat both candidates as women have been treated in the past, or something else?

Specifically, this study will analyze the role gender plays in the media's coverage of a candidate's family, physical appearance and campaign issue coverage. Past studies

have shown a large “gender gap” concerning media coverage of candidates (Kahn 1992, 1994 and Kahn and Goldberg 1991). These early studies concluded the media provide more coverage to male candidates and focus more extensively on female candidates’ physical appearance and family life, while providing little to no coverage of male candidates’ personal life (Kahn 1992, 1994). The media has also connected certain issues with candidates based on their gender; men are perceived to be more able to handle issues concerning the military, the economy and security, while women are more apt at issues relating to health care, education and the environment (Kahn 1992, 1994, Kahn and Goldberg 1991). More recent studies affirm the conclusion that the media continue to focus more extensively on the female candidate’s personal history and relate issues to candidates based on gender (Bystrom et al. 2004), but the gender gap is narrowing in terms of the amount of coverage given to each candidate (Bystrom et al. 2001, 2004).

This study will ask these questions:

- Is the candidate’s personal history or family mentioned? Do these references to personal history or family occur more for female candidates than male candidates?
- Is the candidate’s physical appearance mentioned? Do these references to appearance occur more for female candidates than male candidates?
- What issues are discussed in the articles? Do the issues vary for male and female candidates?
- When two women run against each other, do references to personal history or family occur less frequently?

## Literature Review

### *Women as Candidates*

While women make up the majority of the population, far more men are elected to political office than women. Today, it is much more common for women to enter the political world than a few decades ago; the public even believes that more women holding office would be positive for the country (Lawless 2004). There are a number of reasons why women continued to be underrepresented in office. According to Fox and Smith (1998) women are not recruited to run as often as men and then are not as willing to run for office as men if they are recruited. Also, female candidates continue to be viewed through gender stereotypes about their ideologies, characteristics and policy expertise (Lawless 2004).

But once women decide to run for office, they win elections as often as male candidates (Lawless 2004, Palmer and Simon 2006). Some scholars suggest this as evidence that voters are not biased against female candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2002). After elected to office female incumbents also tend to win more often than male incumbents and by larger electoral margins (Palmer and Simon 2006).

Despite women's ability to successfully run for public office, scholars claim voters use gender to judge the candidates' traits and issue positions. Women are typically associated with traits such as more willing to compromise, more passionate and more people orientated, while men are connected with traits of being assertive, active and self-confident (Sanbonmatsu 2002, Lawless 2004: 480). Voters are more likely to perceive male candidates as stronger and as more assertive than female candidates (Lawless 2004).

Voters also believe that female candidates, in general, are more liberal and Democratic (Chang and Hitchon 1997, Sanbonmatsu 2002).

These traits matter to voters when choosing which candidate to support. Studies have found that when a candidate displays “masculine” traits, the candidate is viewed as more competent and thus a better choice for office; the opposite holds true for “feminine” traits, which voters do not value in their officeholders (Bystrom et al. 2004, Lawless 2004). But stereotyping female candidates can either hinder or help them, depending on the broader context of the race, which issues are important in that race and what office the candidate is running for (Chang and Hitchon 1997). Female candidates, thus, hold an advantage when the campaign issues focus on female strengths (Sanbonmatsu 2002).

These traits are all part of gender stereotypes voters can use to critique candidates. Voters can use a candidate’s gender as a “low-information shortcut” to make judgments about the candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2002: 21). The general public does not pay much attention to politics, so gender often serves as a shortcut on how voters judge candidates: “voters can simply transfer their stereotypical expectations about men and women to male and female candidates” (Lawless 2004: 480). Yet Lawless (2004) found that even when voters have more political information, it does not lessen the likelihood that the voter will use gender stereotypes to judge the candidate. So despite the liberal attitudes people have developed toward women in politics, voters still take gender into account when evaluating candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2002).

Sanbonmatsu (2002) and Chang and Hitchon (1997) argue that some people prefer to vote for men and be represented by men in public office while others prefer women. Sanbonmatsu (2002) also found that overall, women prefer female candidates

and women's under-representation in office leads to women wanting more women in office. These claims can be explained by gender stereotyped beliefs voters attach to female and male candidates, also known as gender schemas. "One way to think about voters' baseline gender preference is as a summary judgment about whether male or female candidates are best able to represent the voter" (Sanbonmatsu 2002: 22). For example, individuals who believe that the male candidate is more likely to agree with his or her beliefs about government spending will be more likely to vote for the male candidate (Sanbonmatsu 2002). "The preference for male candidates can be explained by negative stereotypes about female traits, positive stereotypes about men's ability to handle stereotypically male issues, and the perception that male candidates are closer to the respondent on government spending" (Sanbonmatsu 2002: 31). These voter preferences can play a large role in races without much information on the candidate or party cue (Chang and Hitchon 1997, Sanbonmatsu 2002).

While women work to overcome their gender stereotypes, they should also not confine their campaigns to traditional female issues. Chang and Hitchon (1997) assert that female candidates should emphasize their masculine strengths, since past research has shown that masculine strengths do not hurt voters' perceptions of female candidates' warmth and honesty. If female candidates fail to stress their masculine traits, such as toughness and leadership, then voters will be more likely to rely on traditional gender stereotypes when casting their ballot (Chang and Hitchon 1997).

It is not only gendered stereotypes, but also institutional limitations that hinder women running for office. Chang and Hitchon (1997) have identified three factors that can explain why women are elected to public office less than men: socialization,

professional preparation and structural constraints. From a young age girls are socialized into roles where they are taught that politics is for men. Through this socialization, fewer women opt to run for political office (Chang and Hitchon 1997). “Politics is more ‘normal’ for men, with the result that his gender does not play as distinctive a role for a male politician as her gender plays for a female politician” (Chang and Hitchon 1997: 31).

Women are also hindered by professional preparation because society expects them to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. These roles impede women’s ability to obtain political resources such as money, time, contacts and organizational experience (Chang and Hitchon 1997). Women also generally do not begin their political careers until after they have raised their children, setting them at another disadvantage because their competitors will mostly likely be either younger or more experienced (Chang and Hitchon 1997).

Another impediment women face to entering politics is institutions such as education and the economy, which traditionally have been developed to help men’s careers. “Main institutions in such domains as education, the economy, and the law were traditionally shaped to provide men with more opportunities, benefits, and protection, but failed to offer women the same advantages” (Chang and Hitchon 1997: 31). Party elites also often place a woman in races they do not believe she can win, such as running against an incumbent or in a race with a lot of competitors, but they support the female candidate so they can claim politics is gender neutral (Chang and Hitchon 1997).



### *Covering the Campaigns*

After women decide to run, they must court not only voters but also the media where many candidates receive their political information from. The news media are an important part of any community by both reflecting public opinion and influencing impressions of public opinion (Christen and Huberty 2007: 316). When an individual receives new information on a person, or in this case a candidate, he or she immediately forms perceptions of that candidate without meaning to do so (Druckman and Parkin 2005). The press plays a special role by emphasizing certain topics in political campaigns and, thus, aid in defining the nation's problems and potential solutions. The press either echoes the political elites' discussions or add a dissenting or alternative voice to the political arena (Kahn and Kenney 2002). "Voters often base their candidate evaluations on the issues emphasized in the news (priming), and they form their opinions about events in ways that correspond with how the news frames those events (framing)" (Druckman and Parkin 2005: 1030). Campaign effectiveness was largely predicted by the amount of media exposure (Christen and Huberty 2007). But people also have to be interested in the campaign for the media to have an effect (Weaver and Drew 2001).

The press's role during a campaign is particularly important and has been the subject of many studies. During elections, the press is an outlet for candidates' to disseminate their views to the public (Kahn and Kenny 2002). Media informs readers and viewers about issues, campaign strategies and which candidate is winning and losing the race (Weaver and Drew 2001). Reporters and editors not only write about the issues they believe important, but also react to political campaigns' activities when planning what to write about. News coverage of a political campaign increases when the race is perceived

as competitive (Kahn and Kenney 2002). “In competitive races, newspapers publish more criticisms of the candidates and are more likely to use negative traits to describe the candidates” (Kahn and Kenney 2002: 383). Challengers also generally receive more favorable news coverage when they become “more experienced and more skillful” (Kahn and Kenney 2002: 383).

Past research has found that voters who watched television news were most likely to know the candidates’ positions on issues (Weaver and Drew 2001). Weaver and Drew (2001) found that for the 2000 election, television news coverage was the only media to have a statistically significant impact on voters’ knowledge of issues. “TV news had a significant effect on issue learning, but attention to newspaper campaign coverage was more likely to be associated with campaign interest and likelihood of voting” (Weaver and Drew 2001: 794-5).

Weaver and Drew (2001) also found that exposure to news and election information on the Internet are not significant predictors of voter knowledge on issues positions. “The more traditional news media of newspapers and television still seem to be the dominant forces for public information and involvement in presidential campaigns” (Weaver and Drew 2001: 797). Christen and Huberty (2007) do not dismiss the Internet as easily, but instead claim the influence of Internet news on public opinion may differ. Internet news consumers can only visit Web sites that agree with their preexisting ideologies, but consumers are also producers of Internet news content through blogs and e-mail, for example.

Beyond standard news stories, newspaper endorsements may also play a special role in how the media influence potential voters. Druckman and Parkin (2005) suggest

that editorial slant may subconsciously affect vote choice because the editorial endorsement, or lack of, influences how the other sections of the newspaper cover the political campaign, despite the journalists best efforts to keep the two departments separate. “The slant of candidate information in a newspaper thus might matter regardless of whether the readers consciously recognize the slant” (Druckman and Parkin 2005: 1032).

Kahn and Kenney (2002) explore a different view of editorial slant in newspaper coverage. Kahn and Kenney (2002) suggest that even though there is an assumption that a newspaper’s opinion and news sections are completely separate, a newspaper’s endorsement may inadvertently be reflected in the newspaper’s coverage of the candidates. They found in their 2002 study that endorsed incumbents receive much more positive coverage about their policy positions and in general than unendorsed incumbents; but journalists did not treat endorsed challengers more favorably. The same does not hold true for how newspapers cover incumbents’ personal traits; for both incumbents and challengers, the newspaper’s editorial endorsement does not influence slant about candidates’ personal traits. The impact of endorsements also significantly increased with the amount of coverage (Kahn and Kenney 2002). Additionally, endorsements also matter for newspaper viability coverage; journalists described incumbents who were not endorsed as less electable (Kahn and Kenney 2002). The influence endorsements and coverage affected by endorsements is more powerful in the public’s opinion for people who read the newspaper on a regular basis, who are also the people more likely to vote (Kahn and Kenney 2002). While newspaper endorsements do not affect the newspaper’s coverage of the challenger, they receive indirect benefits:

“when challengers capture endorsements, their opponents – the nonendorsed incumbents – receive more negative coverage” (Kahn and Kenney 2002, 387). Yet, the authors admit that the relationship may be inversed, that newspaper coverage may influence endorsements (Kahn and Kenney 2002).

### *Newspaper Coverage of Female Candidates*

Female candidates are placed in a media world that has been shaped by male candidates and are thus often compared to them (Chang and Hitchon 1997). Multiple studies have examined how the news media, specifically newspapers, treat female candidates who run for political office (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991, Kahn 1992, 1994, Banwart et al. 2003a, Bystrom et al. 2001, Kropf and Boiney 2001). These studies varied in their areas of research from focusing on state legislature races (Kahn 1994), gubernatorial races (Bystrom et al. 2001, Banwart et al. 2003a) to mayoral races (Atkeson and Krebs 2008) and federal office races (Banwart et al. 2003a, Kahn and Goldenberg 1991, Kahn 1992, Kropf and Boiney 2001).

Research in the 1990s showed that female candidates, overall, receive less media coverage than men, are not treated as viable for office as men and are connected with certain “female” issues such as health care, education and senior citizen awareness (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991, Banwart et al. 2003a, Lawless 2004). The media also mention a female candidate’s personal life, such as marital status and family, much more often than male candidates (Bystrom et al. 2001, 2004, Banwart et al. 2003a). More recent studies have shown that some media bias against female candidates is reversing. The media is treating female candidates more fairly compared to male candidates; female candidates

receive as much, if not more, coverage than their male counterpart, and the media treat female candidates as viable as male candidates (Bystrom et al. 2001, 2004). But the press continues to define female candidates by their gender, which encourages the portrayal of stereotypes (Niven and Zilber 2001). Women are associated with specific issues and are more likely to have articles written about their personal lives and physical appearance than men simply because of their gender.

Kahn has conducted multiple studies in an experimental environment to measure how the news media affect a female candidate's ability to win an election. Kahn concluded that female candidates receive "clear and consistent differences" in campaign coverage in contrast to male candidates (Kahn 1992, Kahn 1994). In elections in the 1980s and 1990s, male candidates were the dominant focus of 39 percent of articles, compared to 26 percent for female candidates. In the 2000 election, however, those numbers greatly shifted; 43 percent of articles focused on women and only 14 percent of articles on men (Bystrom et al. 2004). It has also been suggested that in primary races, female candidates are more often the dominant focus of articles; whereas in general elections, gender did not matter in terms of which candidate was the dominant focus of articles (Banwart et al 2003a).

Even though female candidates are receiving as much coverage as male candidates, political issues are still divided along gender lines. A key disadvantage female candidates face is their lagging issue coverage compared to male candidates (Kahn and Goldberg 1991, Kahn 1994, Chang and Hitchon 1997, Bystrom et al. 2001). Candidate issue coverage is important, because if the media provide less coverage to a candidate, he or she is less likely to be supported by the electorate (Bystrom et al. 2004).

Within issue coverage, the news media often confine female candidate coverage to specific “soft” issues, while male candidates’ issues coverage is wider in range and includes “hard” issues such as taxes and the economy (Kahn and Goldberg 1991, Banwart et al. 2003a, Bystrom et al. 2004, Lawless 2004). Female issues focus on nurturing and the family, such as social security, the environment, education and health care; male issues are associated with strength, focusing on the military, the economy and national security (Lawless 2004). “Thus, by selecting and highlighting certain issues more than others, news media subtly shape the criteria by which people assess the performance of their leaders” (Cho 2005: 297).

Prominent campaign issues are likely to correspond to the media’s agenda (Kahn 1994) , as previously discussed. But it could also be that male and female candidates structure their campaigns around different issues. “That is perhaps female and male candidates are emphasizing different issues in their campaigns, and this is reflected in their media coverage” (Banwart et al. 2003b: 148). The same study found, however, that newspaper articles do not reflect the issues promoted by the candidates (Banwart et al. 2003b), leading one to believe that gendered issues coverage is more a result of a media bias. In their study, Banwart et al. (2003b) found that male candidates’ issue coverage and advertisements were more closely linked than that of female candidates’ issue coverage and advertisements, which are mostly produced by the campaign so reflect the issues the campaign wants to stress.

The issues the media focuses on during campaigns are the issues the media chooses to cover, not necessarily the issues the candidate would like to have written about. For example, a female candidate may structure her campaign around her

determination to lower taxes, which is traditionally a male issue but, because taxes are a male issue and the candidate is female, the media may cover her views on education or the environment even though they are not important facets of her platform. Multiple articles that focus on certain attributes of female candidates will then bias readers to view the female candidate in a certain way, especially because of lagging issue coverage of female candidates (Chang and Hitchon 1997). Gendered issue coverage then matters, depending on the office candidates are running for; if voters consistently connect health care and education to female candidates running for federal office, but those are not the important issues of the year while the economy is faltering, they may be more likely to vote for a male candidate whose media coverage stresses his knowledge of taxes and the economy.

Lawless (2004) found “an overwhelming gender gap in terms of the sex of the politician respondents believe is more competent to deal with military crises” (483) in her study after the attacks on September 11, 2001, when issues such as military and national security became prominent. “If women fare as well as men when the political climate is dominated by issues that play to women’s stereotypical strengths, but are disadvantaged when ‘men’s issues’ dominate the political agenda, then we must reconsider the conclusion that ‘winning elections has nothing to do with the sex of the candidate’” (Lawless 2004: 480). It is also interesting to note that when a female candidate is in a race, issues traditionally related to female candidates are discussed more often by both candidates and female reporters write about female issues more often (Kahn and Goldberg 1991).

Despite differing issue coverage, the media treat female candidates as equally viable as male candidates (Bystrom et al 2001, 2004). Bystrom showed in her research that in the 1998 campaign, the news media treated male and female candidates equally in terms of positive or negative slants in their coverage; however, in the 2000 campaign, news media articles treated female candidates much more favorably than male candidates. “Journalists now present female candidates to be at least as viable as men” (Bystrom et al. 2004).

Today, the media generally treats female and male candidates equally in terms of viability and the amount of coverage (Bystrom et al. 2001, Banwart et al. 2003a, 2003b), but there are still some differences in how the news media treat female candidates based on non-political issues. The media are more likely to stress the fact that the candidate is a woman and discuss her marital status (Palmer and Simon 2006, Bystrom et al. 2001, 2004, Banwart et al. 2003a). The media are also still “obsessed” with female candidates’ appearances (Bystrom et al. 2004). Female candidates complain the media focus on their wardrobe, family relationships, hairstyle and feminine attributes. News stories are much more likely to write about a female candidate’s marital status and age than a male candidate (Bystrom et al 2004). Bystrom asserts that “[b]y focusing on the appearance of women political candidates, the media treat them less seriously than men candidates and distract attention from their issue positions” (Bystrom et al. 2004: 185). Thus, the media content tends to reinforce gender stereotypes.

Yet Niven and Zilber (2001) assert that the media cannot be blamed for their stereotyping of female candidates. “The complexity of the media’s task thus necessitates categorizing members, and categorizing members encourages the media to portray certain



members as concerned about agriculture, taxes and/or women's issues" (Niven and Zilber 2001: 150). They also claim that since reporters read their colleagues' work and receive story ideas from them, they are exposed to stereotypes that they perpetrate (Niven and Zilber 2001).

While a woman running against a woman is not new, it is still a rare occurrence. The first time two women ran against each other was in 1934 for a United States House of Representatives seat. The first all female Senate race was not until 1960 in Maine when incumbent Senator Margaret Chase Smith defeated challenger Lucia Cormier (Palmer and Simon 2006). All female races are becoming more frequent but are still extremely rare. "Since 1916, only about 3 percent of all primary and general House and Senate races have featured multiple women candidates" running on behalf of one of the two major parties; many women ran as third party candidates before the 1950s (Palmer and Simon 2006: 130). The number of all female races peaked in 1998 with 13 races, the next election cycle in 2002 only featured 10 such races and the numbers have declined since then (Palmer and Simon 2006: 131). Because there have been so few races, there is little analysis of the phenomenon.

### Conceptual Framework, Theory and Hypotheses

Past scholars have taken two general approaches in their studies. Kahn conducted her research via experiment (1992, 1994). She used fabricated newspaper articles and altered the sex of the candidate in the articles to gauge audience reaction to candidates solely based on sex. By conducting such experiments, Kahn was able to measure readers' receptions to the candidates based on gender. By switching the name, and thus gender of

the candidates, but keeping the rest of the story constant, Kahn learned how those readers take gender into account when voting. Kahn also conducted a content analysis of a variety of published articles.

Other researchers, such as Banwart et al. (2003a), Bystrom (2001, 2004) and Lawless (2004), used a content analysis in their studies. They surveyed one type of race across the country, i.e. state government races, gubernatorial races or national government races. The researchers chose articles published after the primary season and coded the articles for various key terms. This paper will base its methodology on these study designs.

Despite gains in gender equality in media coverage, I believe this paper will show that some gender stereotypes still persist. I believe the research will find that a disparity exists in how the news media cover non-political information about the candidates, such as family and physical appearance. In general, I believe the gendered issue bias to remain true but do not think it will be reflected in this study. The major issue of the campaign was the economy and candidates could not avoid addressing it; before that energy was the dominate issue, both of those issues are typically associated with male candidates.

Prior to the economic crisis, in the New Hampshire race, where a female challenged a male, I believe gendered issue coverage will persist to some extent, but not as prominently as has been seen in past studies. The New Hampshire race is unique because the candidates ran against each other for the same seat in the 2002 election and the female candidate is a well established politician in New Hampshire, she served three terms as governor before running for the Senate seat. Even though the female candidate has proven herself in the political realm, I believe the media will not be able to

completely break from their biases against women candidates and especially their issue connections. The New Hampshire race is similar to the races that have been studied in the past. In the North Carolina race, I believe the media will treat the two female candidates equally in terms of nonpolitical factors and issue coverage. The two women will both face gender stereotyped coverage. I also believe traditionally female issues will be largely absent from the Oregon race and there will be little to no mention of the candidates' family life and physical appearance because of past research; and, there is no reason to believe there have been any major changes in how the media cover all male races. I believe physical appearance and familial life will be addressed almost exclusively in articles about the female candidates in the New Hampshire race, will rarely be addressed in the Oregon race and will be used against both candidates in the North Carolina race.

### Study Design

The three races this paper analyzes are: Republican Senator Gordon Smith versus Democratic challenger Jeff Merkley in Oregon, Republican Senator John Sununu versus Democratic challenger Jeanne Shaheen in New Hampshire and Republican Senator Elizabeth Dole versus Democratic challenger Kay Hagan in North Carolina. I called the office of each state's other Senator to determine which two newspapers in each state have the largest readership and are most closely followed for political news coverage. The six newspapers in this study are: *The Oregonian* and *The Register-Guard* in Oregon, the *New Hampshire Union Leader* Manchester Edition and the *Concord Monitor* in New Hampshire, and *The News and Observer* in Raleigh and *The Charlotte Observer* in North Carolina.

Articles published in the news sections were coded from the day after the primary to the day of the general election, November 4, excluding Web site story updates of the winners on November 4. The Oregon primary was held May 20; New Hampshire, September 9; and North Carolina, May 6. Only articles written about the campaign or the challenger responding to the Senator's action and how he or she would conduct him or herself differently were coded. All of the stories were published in the news section to exclude any stories in feature sections, which would be more likely to focus on personal history and physical appearance and would bias the study. A total of 80 articles were coded in the Oregon race, 64 articles in the New Hampshire race, and 474 in the North Carolina race.

The articles were coded for key phrases in four areas, prior experience, physical appearance, family and issues. Key terms include:

- Prior experience – refers to any mention of the candidates' prior political or professional experience
- Clothes – refers to any mention of what the candidate is physically wearing or general style comments
- Hair – refers to any comment about the candidate's physical appearance, but not what he or she is wearing
- Family – refers to any mention of the candidate's family or his or her role in the family, such as mother, wife, husband, father, child, parent and family
- Personal attributes – refers to any mention of the candidates' personalities

The article coding was combined into four broad categories: prior experience, non-political issues, male issues and female issues. The non-political issues are defined as mentions to the candidates' family, clothing or personality. The male and female issues were grouped in accordance with prior scholarly research. Male issues are defined as reference to immigrants, crime, veterans, foreign affairs, trade, terrorism, war, taxes, farms, the economy, energy, the death penalty and tobacco. Female issues are defined as mentions of civil liberties, Social Security, rape, seniors, GLBT issues, abortion, environment, health care, stem cell research, education and gender issues. Any mentions of offshore drilling, which was a prominent issue in the North Carolina race, was coded under energy, not the environment. If an article referenced the issue, it was coded as a 1, if it did not, a 0. The number of times an issue was mentioned was not counted, each category was either coded yes (1) or no (0).

A chi-square test was then run for each candidate in each race on the four issues to ascertain if any of the four areas held a stronger connection for one candidate or the other. The dependent variables in these tests were the candidates and the independent variables were prior experience, non-political issues, male issues and female issues. I also combined all of the races and ran a chi-square test for the six candidates. I ran three tests in which I divided the candidates by sex, state and party. For these tests, the dependent variables were sex of the candidate, the state and the party; the independent variables again were prior experience, non-political issues, male issues and female issues.

## Oregon

Former-Oregon House Speak Jeff Merkley prevailed over former Senator Gordon Smith in Smith's bid for reelection.

### *Gordon Smith*

Smith served two terms in the U.S. Senate before Merkley ousted him. He was first elected in 1996 and was known as a moderate in the Senate. He served on the Senate Finance Committee ([gordonsmith.com](http://gordonsmith.com)). Smith began his career in public office in 1992 when he was elected to the Oregon Senate where he became the Senate President in 1995 ([gordonsmith.com](http://gordonsmith.com)). Smith also operated his family's frozen food processing company prior to his 1996 election.

### *Jeff Merkley*

Merkley served as Speaker of the House in Oregon until his 2008 election to the United States Senate. He began serving in the state House in 1998; Merkley was elected Democratic leader in 2003 and Speaker in 2007 ([Merkley.senate.gov](http://Merkley.senate.gov)).

### *The Race*

The 2008 race for Senate in Oregon turned into a close election; a winner was not declared until Thursday morning when Smith called Merkley to concede. After 92 percent of the ballots were counted, Merkley received 48.79 percent of the vote while Smith only received 45.71 percent, according to unofficial results from the Oregon secretary of state's office (CNN, November 6, 2008).

Overall, the campaign was extremely negative with both candidates ruthlessly slinging multiple attacks. Smith focused his campaign on his bipartisanship, stressing his work with Democrats and his more moderate stance on issues; he is against the war in Iraq and has pushed for renewable energy. Smith even ran an ad highlighting his ties to President Barack Obama (Mapes, June 25, 2008). But Smith's record is more partisan than he would project, he voted with former-President George W. Bush 85 percent of the time during Bush's tenure, according to Congressional Quarterly (Steves, October 30, 2008).

Shortly after winning their respective primaries, Merkley and Smith began campaigning for what the newspapers dubbed as "among the nation's most hard-fought Senate contests" (Steves, May 22, 2008). Polls consistently showed a close race. The major issues discussed in the campaign were healthcare, education, the economy, taxes, rape and crime, the bailout, environment, gay marriage and the Iraq War. Merkley focused his campaign on a departure from the Bush era. "Wherever he goes, his message is a Reader's Digest version of the speech he's been making since he started running more than a year ago. He's the son of a millworker who wants policies that prevent companies from shipping jobs overseas. His opponent supports 'big oil' and is a carbon copy of President Bush" (Esteve, November 2, 2008). His rival, Smith, attempted to assert his independence from his faltering Republican party and highlighted his work with big name Democrats.

Yet, attack ads appeared to be the main focus of the campaign with both candidates running them and saying how they disliked them at the same time. Merkley ran numerous ads connecting Smith to Bush on various issues, one of the most

contentious was the \$700 billion bailout. At the same time, both candidates said they were not supportive of attack ads. Merkley said he did not run any attack ads personally but the negative ads were paid for by the Democratic Party and other outside sources, while Smith said he found them necessary (Steves, October 10, 2008). Smith said he ran attack ads because they are the only ads people remember and he needs to respond to the falsities the Merkley campaign is spreading about Smith and his record (Esteve and Pope, Sept. 21, 2008).

### *Analysis*

The two newspapers studied in Oregon, *The Oregonian* and *The Register-Guard*, covered the candidates fairly equally, as assumed. The chi-square test found no significant difference in the coverage of the two candidates for prior experience. In fact, there was only one story covering Merkley that discussed prior experience. The article, titled “Merkley jumps in headfirst with optimism, dogged work” and published October 5 in *The Oregonian*, described Merkley as a candidate and his political history. In that type of story, it is expected, and almost necessary, for the journalist to write about the candidate’s prior experience. How Merkley succeeded, or failed, in prior political battles could project how he will fair during his first term as junior Senator from Oregon.



Table 1

		Prior experience		Total
		Not Mentioned	Mentioned	
Gordon Smith	Count	81	0	81
	Percent within Smith	100%	.0%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	50.3%	.0%	50%
	Percent of Total	50%	.0%	50%
Jeff Merkley	Count	80	1	81
	Percent within Merkley	98.8%	1.2%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	49.7%	100%	50%
	Percent of Total	49.4%	.6%	50%
Total	Count	161	1	162
	Percent within Race	99.4%	.6%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	99.4%	.6%	100%

As Table 2 shows, there was also no significant difference in the coverage of non-political issues. In the 80 articles, non-political issue references totaled four for Smith and six for Merkley. There is no significance and the few references can be expected since candidates often highlighted their families. Merkley even ran an ad with his two children where he painted himself as a family man. But this is not unusual to see in a political race.

. *The Oregonian* wrote about Smith's "impeccable clothes." "For those outside Oregon, he [Smith] is known more for his impeccable clothes and pondering approach than for singular legislative achievement" (Pope, October 5, 2008). This is not an important aspect of the article and it gives no more details about Smith's clothes. The article focused on Smith's congressional record that cannot be easily labeled, the article claims. The reference is used to make a point about Smith and his wealth. A few weeks later, *The Oregonian* wrote about Smith's hair in passing. "Earlier in the week, a Fox News crew rolled tape as Smith got his hair trimmed by a Salem barber" (Esteve, October 25, 2008). But the reference was not important or a main point in the article. It was the first sentence of the third paragraph in a story headlined "Nation keeping its eye on Smith-Merkley battle." The sentence was used merely as an example of how closely the race was being followed on a national scale. Overall, there was very little coverage of non-political issues in this race.

Table 2

		Appearance		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Gordon Smith	Count	77	4	81
	Percent within Smith	95.1%	4.9%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	50.7%	40%	50%
	Percent of Total	47.5%	2.5%	50%
Jeff Merkley	Count	75	6	81
	Percent within Merkley	92.6%	7.4%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	49.3%	60%	50%
	Percent of Total	46.3%	3.7%	50%
Total	Count	152	10	162
	Percent within Race	93.8%	6.2%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	93.8%	6.2%	100%

Finally, as Tables 3 and 4 show, there was also no significant difference in the coverage of male and female issues. However, it was interesting to note that while the economy dominated the issues coverage during the later months of the campaign, traditionally female issues were key in the earlier months. Smith spent a significant amount of time highlighting his stance and progress on crime, which is a traditionally male issue. However, his “tough stance” on crime was specifically connected to tougher prosecutions for rape, which is a traditionally female issue. Crime in general, but rape

specifically, was the main topic of multiple ads; Smith even ran an ad that featured a rape victim promoting Smith. Even though there is no significance in the issues covered, I find it extremely interesting that a female issue was so important in the campaign and that female issues were a topic discussed so often because past research has shown that if the race is between two male candidates, female issues are not important in the campaign.

Table 3

		Male issues		Total
		Not Mentioned	Mentioned	
Gordon Smith	Count	45	36	81
	Percent within Smith	55.6%	44.4%	100.0%
	Percent within Male issues	49.5%	50.7%	50.0%
	Percent of Total	27.8%	22.2%	50.0%
Jeff Merkley	Count	46	35	81
	Percent within Merkley	56.8%	43.2%	100.0%
	Percent within Male issues	50.5%	49.3%	50.0%
	Percent of Total	28.4%	21.6%	50.0%
Total	Count	91	71	162
	Percent within Race	56.2%	43.8%	100.0%
	Percent within Male issues	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Percent of Total	56.2%	43.8%	100.0%

Table 4

		Female issues		Total
		Not Mentioned	Mentioned	
Gordon Smith	Count	55	26	81
	Percent within Smith	67.9%	32.1%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	50.9%	48.1%	50%
	Percent of Total	34%	16%	50%
Jeff Merkley	Count	53	28	81
	Percent within Merkley	65.4%	34.6%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	49.1%	51.9%	50%
	Percent of Total	32.7%	17.3%	50%
Total	Count	108	54	162
	Percent within Race	66.7%	33.3%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	66.7%	33.3%	100%

While the Oregon race was the control variable, as this analysis confirms, it is unusual for a newspaper to even mention a male candidate's physical appearance. Yet, these two passing references are not significant enough to claim that newspapers are beginning to write more about the physical appearance of men. The candidates focused on typically male issues, which also happened to be the main issues in the campaign and the newspapers rarely wrote about their physical appearance, personal background or family.

## New Hampshire

Democratic challenger Jeanne Shaheen ousted Republican incumbent John Sununu in the 2008 Senatorial race by winning 52 percent of the vote compared to Sununu's 45 percent in New Hampshire (cnn.com).

### *John Sununu*

John Sununu was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1997 and served until 2003; Sununu ran for the open Senate seat in 2002 and won. He lost his bid for reelection to Jeanne Shaheen in 2008 (Biographical Directory of the United States Congress). In the House, Sununu voted solidly conservative. He served on the House Appropriations Committee and former-House Speaker Dennis Hastert appointed him vice chairman of the Budget Committee in 2001. When running for the Senate, Sununu challenged incumbent Republican Bob Smith and defeated him in the primary, which was the first time an incumbent Senator lost his party's reelection bid in over a decade (Hoch, 2002). Sununu is the son of former New Hampshire Governor and White House Chief of Staff for George H.W. Bush John Sununu (MacGillis, October 29, 2008).

### *Jeanne Shaheen*

Jeanne Shaheen won her bid for the U.S. Senate against Republican incumbent Sununu in 2008. Shaheen is assigned to the Foreign Relations Committee, Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee and the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Prior to winning her Senate seat, Shaheen served three terms as New Hampshire governor in 1996, 1998 and 2000 (White 2008). Shaheen is both the first female governor and senator from New Hampshire (Dorgan, October 31, 2008). She also ran for the Senate seat in 2002 but lost. After leaving office as governor, Shaheen was a senior fellow at the Institute of Politics at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and the College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. From 2005 to 2007, Shaheen directed the Institute of Politics (White 2008).

### *The Race*

This was not the first U.S. Senate race between Shaheen and Sununu. The two candidates ran against each other in the 2002 race for the New Hampshire Senate seat; Sununu prevailed in that race by four points (Dorgan, November 2, 2008). Multiple newspaper articles mentioned both candidates' personal and political background and the 2002 Senate race. The New Hampshire newspaper coverage hardly discussed Shaheen's gender, but rather stressed her past political experience and race against Sununu.

The campaign coverage focused on a few major issues, such as the economy, and the many meetings between the two candidates. It was also a largely negative campaign as the candidates constantly attacked each other both in person and through advertising. Shaheen and Sununu met almost weekly, sometimes twice-weekly, for debates and forums (Fahey, October 26, 2008). The main issue in the campaign was the economy and the divide over Sununu's support of Bush's bailout and Shaheen's condemnation of it (Dorgan, November 2, 2008). Sununu also claimed he called for regulation of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac before they crashed and the mortgage problem reached beyond the

two lenders; additionally, Sununu highlighted his pro taxpayer position (Dorgan, September 19, 2008). Shaheen addressed the issue of stem cell research and campaigned with Michael J. Fox for increased funding. Sununu is against additional funding for research (Ramer, September 24, 2008). Other issues the candidates spared on were Social Security, taxes, the Iraq War and energy, specifically nuclear power. Both promised to act independently from their respective parties on many occasions as well.

Shaheen led Sununu in the polls throughout the campaign. A week before the election, Shaheen held a 10 point lead in a Concord Monitor poll, 52 to 42 percent and held an even greater lead in polls before the race began (Dorgan, November 2, 2008). Sununu was able to gain ground, first trailing by 15 points a year before the primary. He narrowed Shaheen's lead to 10 points over the 2008 summer until Shaheen only held a 6 point lead a little less than a month before the general election (Dorgan, October 12, 2008). Other polls by Rasmussen showed the race much closer, with Shaheen leading 50 to 45 percent a month before the election. A little more than a month before the election, the Rasmussen poll had Sununu hedging out Shaheen 52 to 45 percent (*New Hampshire Union Leader*, October 4, 2008).

### *Analysis*

New Hampshire voters saw a rematch of the 2002 Senate race but with a different outcome this time. Old rivals Jeanne Shaheen and John Sununu competed for the Senate seat but Shaheen was able to unseat Sununu. Maybe because both candidates had long and prominent political careers, Shaheen served as governor for three terms, or because the race was a rematch of six years ago, but the media did not treat Shaheen as the typical



female candidate scholars have studied. The chi-square tests did not show significance for the candidates in any of the tests: experience, non-political issues, male issues or female issues. The candidates received about equal mentions of prior experience, as Table 5 demonstrates. Shaheen received more mentions, but this is not surprising because her political career, I believe, was one of the main reasons the two newspapers did not treat Shaheen as a stereotypical female candidate. So, while prior experience is not significant for either candidate, the mentions are more important for Shaheen than Sununu and possibly allowed the voters to view her in a different way than most female candidates would be perceived.

Table 5

		Prior experience		
		Not Mentioned	Mentioned	Total
John Sununu	Count	61	5	66
	Percent within Sununu	92.4%	7.6%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	51.3%	38.5%	50%
	Percent of Total	46.2%	3.8%	50%
Jeanne Shaheen	Count	58	8	66
	Percent within Shaheen	87.9%	12.1%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	48.7%	61.5%	50%
	Percent of Total	43.9%	6.1%	50%
Total	Count	119	13	132
	Percent within Race	90.2%	9.8%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	90.2%	9.8%	100%

While the non-political issues did not show significance as found in Table 6, Sununu received four mentions and Shaheen received five mentions. Many of Shaheen non-political mentions were in relation to stem cell research. Michael J. Fox campaigned with Shaheen promoting the importance of allowing stem cell research; Shaheen is personally connected to the issues because her granddaughter has juvenile diabetes. The *Concord Monitor* and *Manchester Union Leader* did not write about her physical

appearance or family except in connection to stem cell research. On the other hand, Sununu's family was written about in the newspaper coverage. Sununu's father was mentioned in multiple articles; he was the former New Hampshire governor and chief of staff to George H. W. Bush. The two newspapers devoted a lot of space to writing about the candidate's personal political backgrounds and how the political landscape changed since the last time the two candidates met; and journalists wrote about how the current political world benefited Shaheen this time. Because of the long political career of the candidates, the media often wrote about previous positions Shaheen took on issues, such as nuclear energy in the 1980s or the Iraq War in 2002. In both instances her position changed, Sununu then dubbed her as a flip-flopper, but that claim did not seem to resonate with voters.

Besides their political backgrounds, the *Concord Monitor* wrote an article in which both politicians were labeled "soft-spoken and cautious" (Dorgan, September 11, 2008). No other newspaper articles about candidates mentioned character traits. Since Dorgan described both Shaheen and Sununu as "soft-spoken and cautious" it cannot be cried as sexism.

Table 6

		Non-political issues		Total
		Not Mentioned	Mentioned	
John Sununu	Count	62	4	66
	Percent within Sex	93.9%	6.1%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	50.4%	44.4%	50%
	Percent of Total	47%	3%	50%
Jeanne Shaheen	Count	61	5	66
	Percent within Shaheen	92.4%	7.6%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	49.6%	55.6%	50%
	% of Total	46.2%	3.8%	50%
Total	Count	123	9	132
	Percent within Race	93.2%	6.8%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	93.2%	6.8%	100%

Lastly, the male and female issues also do not conform to prior research, as Tables 7 and 8 demonstrate. Neither type of issue was written about to any extent to show a level of significance; however, it does not appear that because Shaheen, a female candidate, was part of the race female issues were discussed more than if she was not. Female issues are mentioned far fewer times than in the all-male Oregon race. Additionally, in stories about Shaheen male issues are mentioned more often than female issues; plus, Sununu was connected to female issues more often than Shaheen in the coverage.

Table 7

		Male issues		
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	Total
John Sununu	Count	30	36	66
	Percent within Sununu	45.5%	54.5%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	51.7%	48.6%	50%
	Percent of Total	22.7%	27.3%	50%
Jeanne Shaheen	Count	28	38	66
	Percent within Sex	42.4%	57.6%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	48.3%	51.4%	50%
	Percent of Total	21.2%	28.8%	50%
Total	Count	58	74	132
	Percent within Race	43.9%	56.1%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	43.9%	56.1%	100%

Table 8

		Female issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
John Sununu	Count	45	21	66
	Percent within Sununu	68.2%	31.8%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	47.9%	55.3%	50%
	Percent of Total	34.1%	15.9%	50%
Jeanne Shaheen	Count	49	17	66
	Percent within Shaheen	74.2%	25.8%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	52.1%	44.7%	50%
	Percent of Total	37.1%	12.9%	50%
Total	Count	94	38	132
	Percent within Race	71.2%	28.8%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	71.2%	28.8%	100%

The New Hampshire race did not meet any of the hypotheses or conform to the prior research on female candidates. Shaheen was not the typical female candidate and she was not treated like one, as this analysis confirms. Shaheen's physical appearance or family background were rarely, if ever, written about and there was no indication of female issues having significance in the newspaper coverage. This could be because Shaheen was a prominent political figure in the state who was well respected or because the candidates had already run against each other. The lack of significance in the

newspaper coverage could also be a result of this specific election, in which the economy was such a prominent issue the candidates could not avoid discussing it. Regardless, these findings are a positive indication for female candidates because it shows that the media and voters are able to look beyond stereotypical gendered roles and issues to focus on the candidates. Gender stereotype free coverage allows voters to decide which candidate to support based on qualifications and issue positions that matter in politics instead of superficial traits such as physical appearance.

### North Carolina

Republican incumbent Elizabeth Dole lost her bid for reelection for the United States Senate seat to Democratic challenger Kay Hagan in 2008. Hagan won 53 percent of the vote compared to Dole's 44 percent (CNN).

### *Elizabeth Dole*

Elizabeth Dole had a long career in politics. She served as the U.S. secretary of transportation from 1983-1987; the U.S. secretary of labor 1989-1990; and ran an unsuccessful campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000. Dole was elected to the Senate in 2002. She served as the chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee from 2005 to 2007. Dole was also the president of the Red Cross from 1991 to 2000 (Biographical Directory of the United States Congress).

Dole first entered politics as a Democrat and worked in Lydon B. Johnson's Department of Health, Education and Welfare. When Richard Nixon was elected president, Dole switched her affiliation from Democrat to Independent and was appointed

executive director of the President's Committee for Consumer Interests. Then, when she married Bob Dole, Elizabeth Dole switched her party affiliation one more time to Republican ("Elizabeth Dole").

### *Kay Hagan*

In her role as U.S. Senator, Kay Hagan serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee ("Candidate Biography: Kay Hagan").

Hagan first became involved in politics when she put bumper stickers on cars for her uncle Lawton Chiles, former governor and U.S. Senator from Florida ("About Kay Hagan"). She served in the North Carolina state senate for 10 years after beating a Republican incumbent in 1998 where she co-chaired the state budget committee and the appropriations committee in 2003 ("About Kay Hagan"). Hagan worked at the North Carolina National Bank (now Bank of America) for 10 years; she was promoted to vice president in the estates and trust division ("About Kay Hagan").

### *The Race*

The North Carolina race mimicked the New Hampshire and Oregon races in that the economy was the major issue, Hagan attempted to tie Dole to Bush and Dole painted Hagan as a tax-happy liberal. The race was also largely negative with millions spent on attack ads.

The most contentious issue of the race was Dole's "Godless" ad she ran against Hagan. The ad ran only a few weeks prior to the election and dominated the news. The ad



stated that Hagan attended a fundraiser hosted by the Godless American PAC and features a different woman's voice at the end saying "There is no God," which is supposed to make viewers believe it is Hagan's voice. Hagan sued Dole over the ad, claiming it was defamatory. Dole then quit running the ad, but ran a similar ad for the rest of the campaign. Hagan responded with an ad highlighting her religious beliefs and her work as a Sunday school teacher. During those few weeks, the ad seemed to be the only topic the two newspapers wrote about; there was very little issue coverage.

A few articles were also written about the strides women had taken in politics, especially in North Carolina. It was the state's first Senate race featuring two women as the prominent political candidates. In the 2008 election, 12 women ran for statewide, non-judicial, offices in North Carolina, which was the second most number of women on the ballot only behind California (Barrett, October 26).

### *Analysis*

The North Carolina 2008 Senate race featured two female candidates, a first for the state and one of few female-female national races ever. Since there have been so few races, the media coverage of those races have not been studied. Surprisingly, none of the tests, prior experience, nonpolitical issues, male issues and female issues, showed any significance for the race. The two newspapers, *The News and Observer* in Raleigh and *The Charlotte Observer*, however, did print a number of the same articles. Prior experience was a non-issue in the race, as can be seen in Table 9. Neither candidate received many mentions, although Dole's prior experience was written about more often.

Table 9

		Prior experience		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Elizabeth Dole	Count	226	11	237
	Percent within Dole	95.4%	4.6%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	49.7%	57.9%	50%
	Percent of Total	47.7%	2.3%	50%
Kay Hagan	Count	229	8	237
	Percent within Hagan	96.6%	3.4%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	50.3%	42.1%	50%
	Percent of Total	48.3%	1.7%	50%
Total	Count	455	19	474
	Percent within Race	96%	4%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	96%	4%	100%

The candidates received about equal coverage for nonpolitical issues, Dole received 11 mentions and Hagan 12, as seen in Table 10. The two women were largely portrayed the same as any other candidate. It was interesting to note, however, that Hagan was usually introduced in newspaper articles as Dole's opponent for the Senate, but Dole's name was never written as Hagan's opponent.

Although there were some overt examples of sexism that were not present in the other two races, it does not appear that the sexism was a result of the journalists' stereotypical portrayals but of sexist attitudes towards women in politics. The journalist

can be cited for choosing to publish examples of sexism; but the journalist did not make the sexist statements, those were from the candidates' various opponents. In one example, both newspapers ran the same two part profiles on each candidate. The profiles discussed the candidates' political histories as well as their personalities and some personal background. But since both candidates were written about equally and the information would most likely appear in any profile, the profiles should not be deemed sexist. Except, in the October 5 profile on Hagan, which described her as "high-energy" in the headline, the writer included the quote, from former Republican state Senator Mark McDaniel, who lost to Hagan in 2002,: "'She'll be Harry Reid in a skirt,' he adds, referring to the U.S. Senate Democratic leader" (Morrill, October 5, 2008). There are a number of issues with that quote. First, it overtly characterizes Hagan by her sex and also specifically portrays her in a negative light. McDaniel was talking about how Hagan would not think independently and simply follow the party line. McDaniel is also personally biased. He was not only a former state senator but he lost an election to Hagan.

Another example of men attempting to shut women out from politics was found in an article about the number of women on the North Carolina ballot, which cited an anecdote about Hagan's first day in office 10 years ago. Hagan said she walked into the legislator's cafeteria but was told to leave. "'That would never happen to a man,' said Hagan" (Barrett, September 6, 2008). Later in the article, the author added: "And in the U.S. Senate race, gender-tinged barbs fly both ways. First, a Democratic ad alluded to Dole's age. Then Dole fired back, comparing Hagan to a yappy dog" (Barrett, September 6, 2008). This sentence was preceded by a short paragraph about why people said they would not vote for Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nominee for president and then

followed by a statement about fundraising barriers. While it can be seen positively that the journalist took the initiative to write about some of the difficulties female candidates face when running for elected office, the topic is not explored in enough details and the article contains sexist jabs of its own.

At the bottom of a series of briefs was a short piece from *Working Mother* magazine that rated Dole as one of the best members of Congress to work for because of the benefits she offered. Dole employed 11 working mothers on her staff of 45 and offered good perks, according to the article. “‘Employees’ hours and work-from-home options are flexible in extenuating circumstances,’ the magazine wrote. ‘For example, when one staffer’s husband was sick, she was encouraged to use a flexible schedule to balance family and work obligations, and when another employee had a difficult pregnancy confining her to bed rest, her home was set up so she could work remotely’” (Beckwith et. al, August 25, 2008). This would most likely not be written about a male politician. But it also cannot be viewed negatively. It is important for women with families to have the option of flexible schedules to be able to take care of their children and not worry about their professional career suffering.

Possibly one of the more disconcerting issues occurred when the newspapers ran a series of articles and briefs on what names the candidates would like to be called. Dole grew up with the childhood nickname Liddy and the Hagan campaign called her Kay wherever possible on the Web site. Dole asked not be referred to as Liddy but there were multiple articles and briefs written about her nickname and its history, how she allowed people to call her that name in her past campaigns and during her husband’s presidential run. Yet, this subject was turned into one of importance in the campaign, which would

never happen if two men were competing for the seat. The candidates' names, especially nicknames, are hardly an issue of political importance and should not be addressed.

Table 10

		Non-political issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Elizabeth Dole	Count	226	11	237
	Percent within Dole	95.4%	4.6%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	50.1%	47.8%	50%
	Percent of Total	47.7%	2.3%	50%
Kay Hagan	Count	225	12	237
	Percent within Hagan	94.9%	5.1%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	49.9%	52.2%	50%
	Percent of Total	47.5%	2.5%	50%
Total	Count	451	23	474
	Percent within Race	95.1%	4.9%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	95.1%	4.9%	100%

Table 11 confirms that male issues were the focus of a large number of articles, which is not expected for an all-female race. As discussed previously, if a female is one of the two major candidates in a race, female issues are mentioned more often than if a female is not in the race. While all-female races have not been studied, one could assume that this concept would extend to all-female races, perhaps female issues would dominate the coverage. However, in the North Carolina race between Dole and Hagan, this was hardly the case. The major issue of the campaign, like the others, was the economy,

which is a male issue. But before the economy dominated the news, North Carolina voters heard the female candidates discuss a number of stereotypical male issues, such as immigration and the military. One article even overtly wrote about how unusual it was for the female candidates to highlight their role with the military. “The issue of base closings is a political trifecta for Perdue and Dole, allowing them to cast themselves as champions of economic development, as pro-military, and as effective in what traditionally has been viewed as a man’s world” (Christensen, June 23, 2008). Perdue was the female candidate running for re-election as governor. It is astounding that a newspaper would go so far as to claim gendered issues when the opposite was true in the race it covered. This could be construed as women making strides across the gender issue line, but the more important aspect is that it was mentioned, which calls attention to gender stereotypes and perpetuates them.

Table 11

		Male issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Elizabeth Dole	Count	153	84	237
	Percent within Dole	64.6%	35.4%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	46.9%	56.8%	50%
	Percent of Total	32.3%	17.7%	50%
Kay Hagan	Count	173	64	237
	Percent within Hagan	73%	27%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	53.1%	43.2%	50%
	Percent of Total	36.5%	13.5%	50%
Total	Count	326	148	474
	Percent within Race	68.8%	31.2%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	68.8%	31.2%	100%

Similarly to the New Hampshire race, Table 12 shows that female issues were hardly important in the North Carolina race. One may believe that because the race is against two females, the media coverage would abound with female issues since the media stereotypically corner female candidates into a box around certain issues. It is unknown, however, if two women run against each other, if the female issue coverage increases. The lack of female issue coverage in this race could be because of the unavoidable male issues, such as off-shore drilling and the economy.

Table 12

		Female issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Elizabeth Dole	Count	225	12	237
	Percent within Dole	94.9%	5.1%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	50.4%	42.9%	50%
	Percent of Total	47.5%	2.5%	50%
Kay Hagan	Count	221	16	237
	Percent within Hagan	93.2%	6.8%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	49.6%	57.1%	50%
	Percent of Total	46.6%	3.4%	50%
Total	Count	446	28	474
	Percent within Race	94.1%	5.9%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	94.1%	5.9%	100%

However, there was one positive article that prevailed among all of the stereotypes. In the *Charlotte Observer* September 28 profile on Dole, a prominent part of the article was devoted to how Dole grew up in a time when women were expected to stay home and raise a family; instead Dole decided to enter law school and enter politics. “When she told her mother that she would attend Harvard Law School instead of settling down to raise a family, her mother could be heard retching that night in her hotel room” (Christensen, September 28, 2008). The article discussed how Dole resisted social



pressures to conform, but it also stated that she never had children. This profile highlighted how unusual it was for Dole to follow her career path when she was growing up, but it also demonstrates that there are exceptional women who can resist the stereotypes. The 2008 Senate race in North Carolina was one of few all-female races, and because of their rarity there is almost no scholarship on the subject. The race between Dole and Hagan fit some of the female candidate stereotypes but defied others. It will be interesting to learn how this race fits with future all-female political races and how the media covers them.

### Race Comparisons

After each race was compared and analyzed individually, all of the races were analyzed as a whole. A chi-square test was run for all of the races grouping the candidates' sex, party and the state against the previously mentioned variables (prior experience, nonpolitical issues, male issues and female issues). Surprisingly, when the candidates were grouped by sex, the tests did not show any level of significance. Table 13 details the number of times prior experience was mentioned for the male versus female candidates. The amount of times female candidates' prior experience was written about more than triples the number of times for the male candidates. This could demonstrate to the voters that the female candidates are as credible and electable as the male candidates. Because of these multiple mentions, voters will have not doubts that the female candidates are qualified to win the election.

Table 13

		Prior experience		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Male Candidates	Count	222	6	228
	Percent within Men	97.4%	2.6%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	30.2%	18.2%	29.7%
	Percent of Total	28.9%	.8%	29.7%
Female Candidates	Count	513	27	540
	Percent within Women	95%	5%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	69.8%	81.8%	70.3%
	Percent of Total	66.8%	3.5%	70.3%
Total	Count	735	33	768
	Percent within Races	95.7%	4.3%	100%
	Percent within Prior experience	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	95.7%	4.3%	100%

However, Table 14 confirms past research about the media covering physical appears and other non-political issues about female candidates to a much greater extent than male candidates. Male candidates only received 14 mentions while female candidates received 28. The difference does not amount to a significant correlation for the candidates based on gender but still provides disheartening statistics. The media showed they believe these women electable but continue to publish information about their personal lives and physical appearance to a much greater extent than their male

counterparts. Yet there were only 28 mentions in 540 articles written about Shaheen, Dole and Hagan, a small percentage overall. The small number of articles that mentioned non-political issues connected to female candidates could become part of a larger trend where the media start covering the campaigns without considering gender.

Table 14

		Non-political issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Male Candidates	Count	214	14	228
	Percent within Men	93.9%	6.1%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	29.5%	33.3%	29.7%
	Percent of Total	27.9%	1.8%	29.7%
Female Candidates	Count	512	28	540
	Percent within Women	94.8%	5.2%	100%
	Percent within Non-political issues	70.5%	66.7%	70.3%
	Percent of Total	66.7%	3.6%	70.3%
Total	Count	726	42	768
	Percent within Races	94.5%	5.5%	100%
	Percent within Appearance	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	94.5%	5.5%	100%

The female candidates surpassed the male candidates in the number of mentions of male issues, as seen in Table 15. But the percent of articles that associated male issues with Smith, Merkley or Sununu was higher than articles that associated male issues with Shaheen, Dole or Hagan. This finding conforms to prior research. It is not surprising that

the female candidates were connected so often to male issues because, for the three races that were studied, the all-female North Carolina race almost solely concentrated on off-shore drilling, which was coded as energy, and the economy, as previously discussed. The economy was also a major issue in New Hampshire. This shows the media covered the major issues in the campaigns and disregarded the gender of the candidates running for elected office. If this is seen in other races, the findings would suggest the media possibly are beginning to focus on the issues pertinent to the campaign and not the gender issues they have previously attached to male and female candidates.

Table 15

		Male Issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Male Candidates	Count	121	107	228
	Percent within Men	53.1%	46.9%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	25.4%	36.6%	29.7%
	Percent of Total	15.8%	13.9%	29.7%
Female Candidates	Count	355	185	540
	Percent within Women	65.7%	34.3%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	74.6%	63.4%	70.3%
	Percent of Total	46.2%	24.1%	70.3%
Total	Count	476	292	768
	Percent within Races	62%	38%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	62%	38%	100%

Finally, the findings in Table 16 are surprising and seemingly contrary to previous research. Female issues were connected to male candidates for both a higher number and percent of the articles compared to female candidates. Female issues were connected to male candidates in 32.9 percent of the articles but only connected to female candidates in 9.6 percent. This, however, did not show a level of significance. Past research has found that when a female candidate is in the race, female issues are mentioned more often than if the race was between two males. These results do not support that finding. While female issues were not a major part of any of the three campaigns, they were featured most prominently in the all-male Oregon race, which is why the number is higher for the male candidates. A major issue in the Oregon race between Smith and Merkley was rape. Because the male-female New Hampshire primary was in September, the candidates discussed the economy most often and the all-female North Carolina race concentrated on energy and the economy. Similarly to the male issues comparison for male and female candidates, these results suggest that the media covered the issues the candidates choose to promote in the race instead of the gendered stereotypes.

Table 16

		Female issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Male Candidates	Count	153	75	228
	Percent within Men	67.1%	32.9%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	23.9%	59.1%	29.7%
	Percent of Total	19.9%	9.8%	29.7%
Female Candidates	Count	488	52	540
	Percent within Women	90.4%	9.6%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	76.1%	40.9%	70.3%
	Percent of Total	63.5%	6.8%	70.3%
Total	Count	641	127	768
	Percent within Sex	83.5%	16.5%	100%
	Percent within Female issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	83.5%	16.5%	100%

Interestingly the only two categories that showed a .05 level of significance were state versus male issues and state versus female issues, as seen in Tables 17 and 18. The tables show the opposite of what one would expect. Male issues received the highest percentage of overall mentions in the all-female North Carolina race (19.1 percent) and the fewest number in the all-male Oregon race (9.2 percent). The opposite holds true for female issues, where they were mentioned the most, overall, in Oregon (7 percent) and the least in North Carolina (4.6 percent).

The 2008 political campaigns for any office probably do not conform to the perceived gendered issues because male issues dominated the national stage. Energy, and more specifically offshore drilling, dominated the political speech of the summer and then the coverage focused on the economy in the fall. Both of those issues are deemed male issues. The candidates could not avoid addressing either issue because it held such great importance. Hence, it is logical that the gendered issues would be discussed to a level of significance; but, why the issues were not significant within the state races or when the candidates were grouped by their sex is more complex. Counter to what one might believe, male issues were discussed most often in the North Carolina race. Immigrants were also a major issue in the campaign and the state debated drilling off of its own coast. Similarly, the Oregon race prominently featured crime, which is a male issue, but associated with rape, a female issue. So those two states do not fit the stereotype.

Table 17

		Male issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Oregon	Count	91	71	162
	Percent within Oregon	56.2%	43.8%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	19.1%	24.3%	21.1%
	Percent of Total	11.8%	9.2%	21.1%
New Hampshire	Count	58	74	132
	Percent within New Hampshire	43.9%	56.1%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	12.2%	25.3%	17.2%
	Percent of Total	7.6%	9.6%	17.2%
North Carolina	Count	327	147	474
	Percent within North Carolina	69%	31%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	68.7%	50.3%	61.7%
	Percent of Total	42.6%	19.1%	61.7%
Total	Count	476	292	768
	Percent within State	62%	38%	100%
	Percent within Male issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	62%	38%	100%



Table 18

		Female Issues		Total
		Not mentioned	Mentioned	
Oregon	Count	108	54	162
	Percent within Oregon	66.7%	33.3%	100%
	Percent within Female Issues	16.8%	42.5%	21.1%
	Percent of Total	14.1%	7.0%	21.1%
New Hampshire	Count	94	38	132
	Percent within New Hampshire	71.2%	28.8%	100%
	Percent within Female Issues	14.7%	29.9%	17.2%
	Percent of Total	12.2%	4.9%	17.2%
North Carolina	Count	439	35	474
	Percent within North Carolina	92.6%	7.4%	100%
	Percent within Female Issues	68.5%	27.6%	61.7%
	Percent of Total	57.2%	4.6%	61.7%
Total	Count	641	127	768
	Percent within State	83.5%	16.5%	100%
	Percent within Female Issues	100%	100%	100%
	Percent of Total	83.5%	16.5%	100%

## Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that women are being treated equally to men in terms of newspaper coverage for state-wide races. The results also suggest that the media are not perpetuating sexist stereotypes as much as those stereotypes are enforced in politics. The journalists and editors at the newspapers consciously decide to publish sexist statements; but they do not create the situations or say the quotes. This may suggest a new trend in how the media cover female candidates and would require much more research. These results have shown that the six newspapers in this study do not neatly compartmentalize female and male candidates into media stereotypes research has found in the past. Instead, these newspapers appear to give female candidates equal coverage but still publish examples of how women are discriminated against in politics in general.

Additionally, I would hesitate to suggest the results could or should be applied to a wider context. First, even though the chi-square tests did not show a significant association between gender and non-political issues, the North Carolina race newspaper coverage showed many examples of explicit sexism. The New Hampshire race was also unique because the two candidates previously competed for the same seat. It is beyond the scope of this study, but it would be interesting to see if Shaheen was treated more like a stereotypical female candidate in the 2000 race for the Senate. I believe because this race was a rematch and Shaheen had already proven herself in state-wide politics, the media did not treat her the same way they would normally treat female candidates. The earlier race may have contained many references to Shaheen's appearance and family, but the media could not report the same story from six years ago.

Another reason I hesitate to suggest a victory for woman earning equal treatment in terms of media coverage is the issues of the campaign. The economy essentially crashed a few months before the general election so the candidates could not avoid addressing the issue. The economy is typically considered a male issue, but in this election that did not hold true. Every candidate running for office pitched his or her ideas of how to improve the economy to the voters. Exit polls showed the economy was the number one issue for the majority of voters. Because the issue could not be avoided, I do not believe it can be considered a male issue in this race. Before the economy began to fail, energy was considered among the top issues of the campaign. Energy is also considered a male issue, but it was the major debate in the North Carolina race. Hence, because of the circumstances of the major issues surrounding the race, it may not be valid to connect that issue to a gender.

Yet, these results are extremely positive for female candidates. They also suggest a need to continue studying this issue for future races. There will most likely be more races where two female candidates compete against each other, which will allow scholars to analyze how the media cover such races. Studies also need to be completed on a larger scale, three races is not enough to attempt to show that the media are not treating male and female candidates differently. Hopefully future studies will show similar results to this study; then, it is appropriate to conclude that the media are beginning to cover candidates without considering gender. The results of this study are hopeful that the media are beginning to move in that direction but not conclusive.

Even though the number of women running and winning elections for political office is increasing, men continue to dominate the field. In 1956, only 15 women were

elected to the House of Representatives and one to the Senate; in 2008, 74 women were elected to the House and 17 to the Senate (Center for American Women and Politics). Part of the reason may be beyond the control of the candidates themselves and may be caused by the bias in the media against female candidates or women deciding not to run for elected office. By relating specific issues to candidates of a certain gender, the media implies that one candidate will be able to do a better job on that issue than the candidate of the other gender. When the media focus more on a candidate's physical appearance and personal life than policy issues, it may suggest those qualities are more important than issues, again leaving female candidates at a disadvantage.

Women run for political office at increasing rate, which will result in an increasing number of races with only female candidates. Future research could monitor if these type of races increase in number and if the media coverage of female-female races persist in conveying the gender stereotypes past studies have found. It is also important to discover if female candidates are actually being treated more equally in terms of issue coverage when male issues cannot be avoided. This study results are interesting, and seemingly counter, the findings leave many questions unanswered.

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