Effects of Gender Schematic Processing on the Reception of Political Commercials for Men and Women Candidates

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What is This?
Effects of Gender Schematic Processing on the Reception of Political Commercials for Men and Women Candidates

The article tests hypotheses from gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) in the context of political television commercials for men and women gubernatorial candidates. Subjects viewed authentic commercials for three pairs of candidates, each pair comprising a man and a woman candidate competing for office. The experimental design varied the tone of the commercials (positive, negative, neutral) in addition to candidate gender. Findings included enhanced recall of ad information from content domains of family and appearance in the case of women as opposed to men candidates, and enhanced recall from the domain of campaign activities in the case of men as opposed to women candidates. Men's attack ads on women elicited greater emotional reaction than women's attacks on men.

When women constitute approximately one half of the general population, why are they represented by an astoundingly small percentage of women politicians (e.g., Kahn, 1994a, 1994b; Werner & Bachtold, 1974; Young, 1955)? Most of the research examining the question has focused on sociological factors (e.g., women's socialization) and contextual factors (e.g., incumbency, seat) rather than on voter response to candidates. For example, it is clear that women are socialized into a less politically active role than men and are reluctant to run for office (e.g., Jennings, 1983). Moreover, given the confidence to run, women's chances of being elected have been damaged by being pitted too often against incumbents (Welch & Studlar, 1988) and by being generally allocated to throwaway or hopeless seats (Deber, 1982).

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Nevertheless, when factors such as incumbency and number of challengers are controlled for, the full impact of voter response still does not emerge clearly from the behavioral data provided by electoral results (Deber, 1982; Norris, Vallance, & Lovenduski, 1992). Even if women are as successful as men in elections, it does not necessarily follow that there is no bias against women, who may need to be better qualified to attract comparable voting rates to men (Sigelman, Thomas, Sigelman, & Ribich, 1986). In other words, much may be gained by broadening the dominant approach and adopting the perspective taken in this article, which focuses on voters’ perceptions of candidates and measures the psychological process that intervenes between the presentation of information about candidates and end variables such as voting behavior.

Previous research that has adopted more of a psychological orientation has nevertheless examined a limited selection of fixed response measures. A consistent finding is that men candidates tend to be rated higher on “men’s issues,” such as defense, terrorism, and crime, whereas women candidates were higher on “women’s issues,” also referred to as “compassion issues,” “conscience issues,” “feminine duties,” and “female issues,” such as education, the elderly, minorities, and welfare. Men’s issues tend also to be rated as more important than women’s issues (Ogletree, Coffee, & May, 1992; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989; Rosenwasser & Seale, 1988). Whereas voting intention measures have failed to show a preference for men versus women candidates, estimates of who will win an election still favor men candidates (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989; Sapiro, 1981-1982).

By continuing this shift in focus to the process by which stereotypes are formed, this article strives to produce greater theoretical development. Just as incumbents may benefit from voters relying on senatorial or presidential schemata when processing information relevant to incumbents but not challengers (Kinder, Peters, Abelson, & Fiske, 1980), we suggest that candidates may be perceived differentially because of the gender schema they activate (Bem, 1981). Because schemata help direct the encoding and retrieval of information (e.g., Bellezza & Bower, 1981; Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Lingle & Ostrom, 1979), we would expect gender schema-based processing to be evident in process measures, such as those provided by subject protocols. Recall and cognitive response measures not taken to date should also provide greater insight into use of gender schema while processing information about candidates.

Mass Media as a Source of Political Information

A prominent source of information about candidates are the mass media. Indeed, voter perceptions are based largely on exposure to candidates
through the media rather than on personal contact. Preliminary findings on
news coverage demonstrate that men and women candidates are covered
differently by reporters and that the differential coverage changes voters'
perceptions of candidate viability (Kahn, 1992, 1994a; Kahn & Goldenberg,
1991). Candidates of both genders are considered more viable when covered
like men candidates rather than like women candidates. Races with men
candidates receive more press attention, for example, and are presented as
more competitive; men candidates are specifically depicted as more viable.
It is not clear to what extent differences in coverage are attributable to
different information projected by candidates or to different news selection
by reporters and editors.

An increasingly important source of information projected and controlled
by the candidate is political advertising. Expenditures on mass media adver-
tising as a percentage of campaign costs have risen dramatically since the
first political television advertising campaign for the presidential race in
1952 (West, 1993). In the 1992 elections, advertising absorbed an average of
60% to 70% of the total campaign budget, with television advertising being
increasingly perceived as essential despite its enormous expense (Jacobson,
1992; West, 1993).

Perhaps the most salient question in political advertising concerns the
effectiveness of attack ads. Although academic research demonstrates that
the public disapproves of emotional attacks by candidates on their opponents,
many political consultants believe that such negative commercials are
uniquely effective in moving votes (Pfau, Parrott, & Lindquist, 1992). Find-
ings from an initial case study—the Wilson/Feinstein gubernatorial race
(Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1991)—combined with different schema-based
expectations about a candidate’s level of aggression suggest that the public
may react differently to an attack depending on the gender of the candidate.
The purpose of this article is then to focus on political advertising as a form
of mass media that can influence voter perceptions and to examine whether
the kinds of memories and thoughts elicited by political commercials of
positive, negative, and neutral tones reveal the content and operation of
gender schema.

Gender-Schematic Processing

A schema can be defined as a mental representation of a category (Neisser,
1976; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). It provides a network of cognitive associations
that guide the individual’s processing of category-related information. Once
developed, the schema sets up expectations about how the world works that
impose meaning onto incoming information (Hastie, 1981).
Gender schema theory is specifically concerned with the generalized readiness on the part of individuals to encode and organize information about self and others according to gender (Bem, 1981). It involves grouping people with respect to cultural definitions of maleness and femaleness, regardless of their differences on a variety of dimensions unrelated to gender (Bem, 1984). A gender schema is a representation of a social category. It is particularly powerful because the practices of our culture have made it the center of a large associative network, assigning the category functional importance. Once activated, a gender schema, like any other schema, can be expected to guide recall and drive evaluations (see Markus & Zajonc, 1985, for a review).

Researchers continue to explore the similarities between social categories, including gender schema, and categories of natural objects as conceptualized by Rosch (1978). A central question concerns whether social categories should also be conceptualized in hierarchical terms (Hamilton, 1981; Taylor, 1981). In other words, are men and women superordinate categories, broad classifications that subsume a number of more specific, basic-level concepts or subtypes? Although controversy persists regarding whether specific predictions from the hierarchy model are upheld in the context of social categories, there is robust evidence that specific subtypes can be identified in the case of gender (Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985; Eckes, 1994). For example, Noseworthy and Lott (1984) asked a large group of subjects to generate defining characteristics of stereotypical subtypes of women. A second group of subjects, presented with the list of generated characteristics in random order and without mentioning stereotypes, demonstrated clustering in free recall that reflected the same stereotypical groupings—career woman, sex object, housewife, and female athlete (Noseworthy & Lott, 1984). Such clustering in free recall to standard memory test instructions provides support for the proposition that information about social categories, and specifically about gender, is organized in memory into specific subcategories. This raises the issue whether information about politicians is organized into subtypes, male politician and female politician; and, if so, what prototypical characteristics the subtypes possess.

Neither male nor female politicians have featured in research on the level of categorization of gender stereotypes. Research in political cognition, however, provides clear articulation of the “candidate schema,” which is by definition male (Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). Moreover, voter perceptions of women candidates appear very consistent with the global woman category, presumably because limited exposure to women politicians has not yet afforded the subtype clear differentiation. Specifically, the personality traits associated with men candidates include: independent, competitive, strong leader, insensitive, aggressive, ambitious, tough (Kahn &
Goldenberg, 1991); assertive, coarse, tough, aggressive, stern, self-confi-
dent (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993); assertive, forceful, self-sufficient, defends
own beliefs, strong personality (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989). By contrast,
female traits include: dependent, noncompetitive, passive, gentle, weak
leader, compassionate (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991); gentle, sensitive, cau-
tious (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993); compassionate, sensitive to the needs of
others (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989). Thus, it appears that distinct differences
exist between our mental representations of men as opposed to women
political candidates.

Person impressions and judgments tend to be strongly influenced by
schemas that are active when information about an individual is initially
presented. Some schemas are always active; race and gender schemas are
considered to be among the most powerful (Markus & Zajonc, 1985). We can
therefore expect a gender schema to be active when viewers watch a commer-
cial for a woman political candidate about whom they know little if anything.
Although a gender schema may still be active in processing information about
a man candidate, it is likely that the more specific candidate schema will also
be activated. Encompassing independent and aggressive maleness, the can-
didate schema can also imply a lack of sincerity and candor (Miller et al.,
1986).

Individuals tend to remember best information that is consistent with a
prevailing schema (e.g., Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Cantor & Mischel,
1979). Recall of schema-inconsistent information tends to be superior to that
of schema-consistent information only when the inconsistency is extreme and
the individual is required to make use of it (Johnson & Judd, 1983). In the
context of viewing political ads, it is the woman candidate's underlying
application for political office that is inconsistent with the gender schema,
rather than anything about her actions or words in the ad. Moreover, viewers
can choose which information to process from a rich variety of cues that have
been designed to create a coherent persuasive message and to avoid dramatic
inconsistencies. We can thus expect recall and other processing variables
considered here to be schema-consistent rather than schema-inconsistent.

Political Advertising as a Source of Gender
Schema-Relevant Information

For a schema to be activated, the individual needs to be exposed to informa-
tion that is associated in some way with information stored in schematic
memory. Content analysis of political advertising suggests that it can indeed
act as a source of gender schema-relevant information. While promoting
themselves, both men and women candidates reveal much about their past
political record, issues they believe to be important, and their private stand-
ing and character (Benze & Declercq, 1985). Some aspects of this information
that are consistent with expectations about men candidates will be inconsis-
tent with expectations about women candidates, and vice versa. Differential
levels of recall for aspects of ad content can be expected to result, therefore,
based upon candidate gender.

Politics is generally considered a male sphere of activity. Jennings (1983)
analyzed parental and family behavior patterns across eight nations to infer
young people's gender-related expectations regarding political participation.
He found that fathers exceeded mothers in their rate of political activity in
all countries studied and were the most sought-out partners for political
discussions everywhere except the United States, where mothers are gener-
ally preferred for one-on-one conversations. Male political candidates are
also considered more efficacious and more courageous in facing up to the
demands of the job (Hedlund, Freeman, Hamm, & Stein, 1979). Based on the
expectation of schema-consistent recall, therefore, recall of a man candidate's
identity should exceed that of a woman candidate's identity upon exposure
to their advertising. Moreover, recall levels of typical campaign activities can
also be expected to be higher in the case of a male politician than in the case
of a woman candidate.

H1: Candidate name is better recalled for men than women candidates.
H2: Campaign activities are better recalled for men than women candidates.

Political advertisements depict a candidate's physical appearance, a char-
acteristic that has moderated gender-schematic perceptions in many studies.
Attractive women were viewed as more feminine than unattractive women,
and, correspondingly, attractive men were viewed as more masculine than
unattractive men (Gillen, 1981). In professional contexts, men were preferred
for masculine jobs and women for feminine jobs, a preference that was
strengthened when the job candidate of either gender was attractive (Cash,
Gillen, & Burns, 1977). Effects became less symmetric across gender when
women sought or executed professional duties usually performed by men—
the same degree of attractiveness that benefited men could become a liability
for women in the same jobs (Cash & Trimer, 1984; Heilman & Sariwatari,
1979). In other words, assessment of attractiveness occurs for both genders.
But, whereas physical beauty has a straightforward, positive impact on
conclusions about a man's professional worth, it becomes a complex focus of attention for women.

This is amply documented in the realm of politics. Although Sigelman et al. (1986) did not find that physical attractiveness detracted from women's electoral success, only men candidates benefited from being physically attractive. In a later study, Rosenberg, Kahn, and Tran (1991) established that longer faces, longer hair, and youth increased attractiveness in women candidates but actually damaged their political image. Bowman (1984) also found subjects were more likely to vote for less attractive women. Sigelman, Sigelman, and Fowler (1987) detected no direct effect of a woman's attractiveness on likelihood to vote for her, but they found an indirect effect through perceptions of her dynamism and niceness.

Overall then, a candidate's physical image has a powerful impact on the vote regardless of gender (Rosenberg, Bohan, McCafferty, & Harris, 1986; Rosenberg & McCafferty, 1987). We would therefore expect viewers of political ads to pay attention to a candidate's appearance. The question remains whether the salience of appearance varies by candidate gender. Given that the relationship between attractiveness and candidate appeal is more straightforward for men candidates, viewers are likely to elaborate on women candidates' appearance to a greater extent, producing higher recall levels.

H3: Candidates' appearance is better recalled for women than for men candidates.

It would be hard to dispute that a woman's gender role is more family-oriented than a man's (Ogletree et al., 1992). In a political context, Carroll's (1989) survey found that state legislators and federal appointees perceived family responsibilities as having greater impact in a variety of ways on the political careers of women than men. Because issues of family are central to women's gender role, we expect candidates' familial status to be a more salient domain of ad content in the case of women as opposed to men candidates, producing higher levels of recall for the domain.

H4: Candidates' families generate higher levels of recall for women than for men candidates.

While attacking other candidates competing for the same office as themselves, politicians may also be engaging in a form of behavior that generates differential levels of recall. Aggressive behavior is more consistent with category representations for male politicians than for female politicians.
Thus, it would be consistent with representations of men candidates to attack an opponent in a negative ad, but inconsistent with the prevailing conception of women candidates to do so. Recall levels of men attacking women should therefore be higher than of women attacking men.

H5: Men's attacks on women are better recalled than women's attacks on men.

The constraints arising from limited information-processing capacity mean that categorical structures need to drive evaluation and judgments, in addition to influencing recall. The tendency for individuals to transfer their evaluations of an entire category (e.g., male politicians) onto a single member (e.g., a specific male politician) is known as schema-driven, or schema-triggered affect (Fiske, 1982). Open-ended protocols elicited in response to ads have in the past revealed the influence of categorical structures on evaluative thought processes (e.g., Sujan, 1985). The kinds of thoughts believed to mediate message acceptance are cognitive responses and affective responses (Batra & Ray, 1986; Greenwald, 1968; Wright, 1973). Cognitive responses are favorable and unfavorable thoughts about a message; affective responses are feelings elicited by a message. Both kinds of response are believed to contribute to the formation of an attitude and should therefore reflect the operation of schema-driven affect.

Although there is no solid basis for predicting a general difference in numbers of cognitive and affective responses by candidate gender, the specific technique of using attack ads can be expected to generate important gender-related judgments. Despite evidence that they have a positive impact on voting behavior for the attacker, negative ads tend to produce unfavorable attitudes toward both the ad and the attacker (e.g., Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991). Extrapolating from schema-based expectations of candidates' characters, we suggest that attitudes will be significantly less favorable toward the aggressive male attacking the dependent female than vice versa, and the formation of less favorable attitudes will be detectable in cognitive and affective responses.²

H6: There is an interaction between Message Tone and Candidate Gender on affective responses, such that men's attacks against women produce more negative affective responses than women's attacks against men. H7: There is an interaction between Message Tone and Candidate Gender on cognitive responses, such that men's attacks against women produce fewer favorable and more unfavorable cognitive responses toward the ad and the candidate than women's attacks against men.
Method

Experimental Design

A 3 (Message Tone: positive, negative, neutral) × 2 (Candidate Gender: male, female) within-subject factorial design was used. Three candidates of each gender were selected, so that each subject saw one ad for each candidate and all Message Tone conditions, but one emotional treatment condition per candidate.

Independent Variables

Message Tone was manipulated at three levels. A negative tone was conveyed by ads that attacked the political opponent in a critical, aggressive manner; positive ads were upbeat and heartwarming; neutral ads promoted the candidate in a straightforward, informational way. In order to include all three kinds of appeal from each candidate, we used ads for male (female) incumbents and also ads from their female (male) opponents.

Stimuli

Existing television political advertisements were obtained from the University of Oklahoma Political Commercial Archive (see Appendix). They were selected by an archivist unfamiliar with the research hypotheses, who was instructed to provide political ads from both male and female candidates in the same gubernatorial race with three kinds of message tone: positive, negative, and neutral. Ads contained no party identification, and candidates were unfamiliar to subjects. It should be noted that these factors may contribute to greater gender schematic processing because subjects have relatively little information about the candidates (Kahn, 1992).

Six orders of experimental tapes were then constructed. Five filler ads were inserted among the test ads. A filler occurred in first and last positions of each tape to avoid serial position effects, and the remaining fillers were then randomly distributed among stimulus ads. The order of the fillers was then randomized across conditions. The order of the six test ads was counterbalanced so that no given ad occurred in the same position or preceded or succeeded the same ad across the six orders.

Despite some evidence to the effect that both the audio and visual content of political commercials tends to be remarkably similar across candidate genders (Benze & Declercq, 1985), the use of authentic commercials in this
research prompted inclusion of multiple candidates to help wash out effects idiosyncratic to a single commercial. Nevertheless, a good faith effort to assess the equivalence in content among test commercials also seemed warranted. It is not without interest to political communication researchers if differences in content produce differences in processing. However, the primary purpose of this research was to show differential processing of similar content, resulting from the match between that content and gender schemata. Identifying instances where systematic differences in ad content tend to occur because of candidate gender or emotional technique thus helps to specify the implications of our findings.

Two judges independently coded the test ads for the presence of the content domains specified by our hypotheses: candidate name, appearance, campaign activities, family, issue, and attack. Both audio and visual content was coded. Interrater reliability of 99.21% was assessed satisfactory. Instances of initial disagreement between coders were resolved by discussion and consensus (Schneider & Schneider, 1979). Findings confirmed that the ads were very well matched in content. Nevertheless, the following discrepancies were identified. A female and a male candidate included no family mention in either their positive or neutral ads. Because the omission occurred for both genders in the same emotional conditions, it was not a source of confound. No family mentions occurred in any of the negative ads. No attacks occurred in the positive or neutral conditions. These differences were taken into account in the explication of findings.

Subjects and Experimental Procedure

Seventy-five respondents were recruited from introductory mass communication classes at a large Midwestern university. Due to missing values for some measures, the number of subjects for any one measure was less than 75 in some analyses. Students were given extra credit for one hour of research participation. To prevent any sense of coercion, respondents were offered an alternative means of earning the extra credit if they wished.

Upon arriving, students were told they were participating in a study concerning television advertising and were asked to complete a consent form. They were given limited information as to the nature of the study in order to avoid demand effects. They were told that they would be shown some television ads and then asked a few questions. Respondents then viewed 11 ads (6 test ads and 5 fillers). Afterward, they completed a questionnaire containing the measures outlined below. The entire procedure lasted 45 minutes.
Dependent Measures

RECALL

The choice of recall as a major dependent variable was guided by both theoretical and practical concerns. Numerous early studies on the effects of schemata on memory demonstrated that recall, but not recognition, varies with the activation of a schema (e.g., Alba, Alexander, Hasher, & Caniglia, 1981; Birnbaum, Johnson, Hartley, & Taylor, 1980). Studies suggest that a schema operates at retrieval rather than encoding, with the result that originally presented material that is not part of a schematic representation can be recognized on a second presentation rather than being the equivalent of information that was never presented (e.g., Anderson & Pichert, 1978; see also Alba & Hasher, 1983, for a review). Recall is thus the appropriate measure to detect schematic influence on memory.

From a practical perspective, candidates need to have, and sustain, an impact on voter memory. Because the impact of television commercials on memory is measured with recall, and print media are generally tested with recognition, recall of candidates’ names and other details provide an industry-consistent measure (Singh & Rothschild, 1983). Unaided recall of candidates’ names was assessed by asking subjects to list as many of the ads they had just seen as they could. Afterward, subjects were cued with each candidate’s name and asked what they could remember about the candidate’s ad and for their thoughts and feelings about the ad.

Recall of candidates’ physical appearance was noted. These responses included statements like “he had gray hair,” and “she wore a lot of makeup.” To the extent that candidates either talked about or were seen with family members, subjects had opportunity to recall the relationship and characteristics of the relatives. Typical comments were “she was sitting with her son” or “he danced with his wife.” Recall of many of the executional details of the ad fell into the category labeled campaign activities: pennants promoting the candidate flapping in the wind, the candidate shaking hands with constituents, and so on. Subjects’ memories of “mudslinging,” the candidate “attacking his/her opponent,” were coded into an attack category.

In referring to their past record or in outlining future plans for their districts, candidates raised issues. Given that the stimuli were authentic aired commercials that contained mention of multiple, heterogeneous issues, no attempt was made to classify issues as masculine versus feminine. Whereas past research has found defense to be clearly classifiable as masculine and education as feminine, for example, our commercials featured the
legalization of marijuana, property tax rates, renovation of historic buildings, and many other issues that could not be clearly said to relate to one gender rather than the other. Moreover, subjects' protocols were sparse rather than extensive on any given category, because they viewed multiple ads and were recalling content as well as providing insight into their thoughts and feelings. Finally, previous research indicates that issue stereotyping only occurs for issues not mentioned at all in the stimulus information (Kahn, 1992). Recall of any issue was therefore counted simply as an instance of issue recall, rather than being classified as recall of a particular type of issue.

COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE RESPONSES

Among cognitive responses, thoughts favorable to the topic of the communication—here, a political candidate—are termed support arguments, and thoughts critical of the topic of the communication are called counter arguments. Statements like “he seemed calculating” and “he seemed like a nice guy” were classified as counter arguments and support arguments, respectively. Favorable and unfavorable thoughts about the ad itself were broken out and coded separately, as commercial bolstering and commercial discounting.

Cognitive responses have more recently been supplemented by the recognition affective responses (Batra & Ray, 1986), moods and feelings evoked by the ad. Although only negative feelings were relevant to our hypothesis regarding affective responses, analyses of neutral and positive feelings were conducted for exploratory purposes. Because commercial categories were positive, negative, and neutral, subjects' feelings were classified accordingly. For example, “seeing candidate X doing X made me feel good” would be classified as a positive feeling. Statements that the commercial was “scary” or “threatening” were considered to reflect negative feelings. Neutral feelings were expressed with words like “bland”.

MESSAGE TONE

Six standard bipolar items from standard accepted consumer research were used to assess subjects' perception of message tone (e.g., Averill, 1980; Thorson & Friestad, 1989). The bipolar adjectives were presented as 7-point scales: emotional-unemotional, happy-sad, warm-cold, fearful-not fearful, full of feeling-empty of feeling, entertained-not entertained.
Results

Preliminary Analysis

Subjects' protocols were coded independently by two coders unaware of the research hypotheses. Initial interrater reliability was 98.44%. Instances of disagreement among coders were settled via discussion and consensus (Schneider & Schneider, 1979.)

The six items selected to measure the tone, of the commercials were summed into a scale, the reliability of which was assessed as satisfactory at a Cronbach's alpha level of .78. A single-factor ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceived Message Tone based on treatment conditions, $F(2, 148) = 75.26, p < .01$. A priori contrasts confirmed that subjects perceived the positive ads ($M = 4.63$) as significantly more positive than the neutral ads ($M = 4.44$), $t(74) = 1.98, p < .05$. Moreover, negative ads ($M = 3.43$) were perceived as communicating a significantly more negative message tone than neutral ads, $t(74) = 9.91, p < .01$.

Because ads were presented in six experimental tapes, preliminary analysis was conducted to detect either order or set effects. Analysis of variance yielded no main effects of order on: name recall, $F(1, 73) = 1.33$, n.s., campaign recall, $F(1, 73) = .33$, n.s., family recall, $F(1, 73) = 1.47$, n.s., appearance recall, $F(1, 69) = .03$, n.s., recall of attacks, $F(1, 73) = 2.37$, n.s., or number of thoughts, $F(1, 69) = .15$, n.s.). Interactions between order and either gender or tone were statistically nonsignificant.

No significant main effects emerged by groups on: campaign recall, $F(2, 72) = .42$, n.s.), recall of candidate appearance, $F(2, 69) = .89$, n.s., recall of candidate's family, $F(1, 48) = 1.54$, n.s., recall of attacks, $F(2, 72) = 1.56$, n.s., or number of thoughts, $F(2, 69) = .58$, n.s. No significant interaction occurred between groups and gender or tone.

All dependent measures were analyzed ad by ad to check for any differences by gender of subject. No significant differences were found on any dependent measures. In sum, preliminary analyses indicated that design and procedures were adequate to allow substantive analyses to be conducted.

Recall

NAME RECALL

Schematic processing facilitates recall of material consistent with the schema (e.g., Rothbart, Evans, & Fulero, 1979; Snyder & Uranowitz, 1978).
Given that politicians are generally expected to be men, it was predicted that the identities of men candidates would be more clearly recalled. Two measures were examined: unaided recall of candidates' names and then, once cued with a name, error in attributing the content of an ad to the wrong candidate. Although no effects were observed for unaided recall of name, findings with regard to errors in name recall provided some support for H1, with ads for women candidates generating significantly more errors in name recall than ads for men candidates, $F(1, 74) = 4.91, p < .03$.

There was also a main effect of tone, with negative ads producing more errors in recall of candidate name than positive or neutral ads, $F(2, 148) = 3.97, p < .02$. Because the focus of negative ads is the target (the opponent under attack), it is not surprising that the name of the advocated candidate is not as strongly tied to the ad as in the directly promotional messages of the positive and neutral conditions.

CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

H2 proposes that executional details in the ad that characterize the typical politician are more strongly associated with men than women and, therefore, generate greater recall of ads for men candidates. A main effect of gender emerged, with greater recall of men's campaign activities than women's campaign activities, $F(1, 74) = 8.43, p < .01$.

A main effect of tone revealed that positive commercials produced the highest levels of campaign recall, followed by neutrals and then negative ads, $F(2, 148) = 10.55, p < .01$. Once again, the main effects were qualified by a gender by tone interaction, $F(2, 148) = 6.39, p < .01$. As Figure 1 shows, it is only in response to positive ads that campaign recall varies significantly: Commercials for men candidates generate higher levels than commercials for women candidates. H2 obtained qualified support therefore.

APPEARANCE

Because physical attractiveness is considered more important for women than men in our culture, H3 predicted that the appearance of women candidates would generate more recall than the appearance of men candidates. A main effect of gender was indeed found, with greater recall of appearance occurring for women candidates than men, $F(1, 74) = 5.92, p < .02$. The tone of the ads also had an impact, with neutral ads producing
stronger memory for candidate appearance than either positive or negative ads, $F(2, 148) = 6.65, p < .01$.

Both main effects were qualified by an interaction between gender and tone, however. As depicted in Figure 2, recall of the appearance of both men and women candidates was reduced in the case of negative ads; it is primarily in neutral commercials that women's appearance becomes more memorable than men's, $F(2, 148) = 3.10, p < .05$. Once again, the findings provide partial support for the hypothesis.

**FAMILY**

Analyses were conducted on the eight commercials that contained family mention. Consistent with H4, women candidates' families were better recalled than men candidates' families, $F(1, 47) = 26.44, p < .01$. Positive ads produced significantly higher levels of family recall than neutral ads, $F(1, 49) = 20.78, p < .01$.

A significant gender by tone interaction qualified these findings, $F(1, 49) = 16.30, p < .01$. It is when family mention for women is communicated with
positive, warm tone that it exceeds recall of family mention for men candidates (see Figure 3). H4 thus received limited support.

ATTACKS

Men's attacks on women were expected to be better recalled than women's attacks on men, because active aggression is more strongly associated with men. H5 was supported, with recall of men's attack ads on women significantly exceeding recall of women's attack ads on men, $t(73) = 10.70, p < .01$.

ISSUES

Given previous research that categorizes issues as either masculine or feminine and the impossibility of dichotomizing issue-mentions in our real-world stimuli, no hypothesis was generated with regard to ads' issue content. Nevertheless, post hoc analyses revealed a main effect of candidate gender, with recall of issues mentioned in women's ads exceeding those in men's ads,
Figure 3: Impact of candidate gender and ads' emotional content on recall of candidates' family.

\[ F(1, 74) = 16.80, p < .01. \] The tone of ads also had an effect, \[ F(2, 148) = 3.32, p < .04. \] Neutral ads prompted greater issue recall than positive ads, with attack ads generating the lowest levels of issue recall.

A significant gender by tone interaction revealed no difference in issue recall by tone for men's ads, but significant differences among women's ads, with neutral commercials generating the highest levels of issue recall, then positive ads, and then negative ads, \[ F(2, 148) = 4.12, p < .02 \] (see Figure 4).

TOTAL RECALL

Given the complex patterns of results, it seemed important to form a composite index of total recall by summing across categories and assess the impact of gender and tone. The only significant effect was a gender by tone interaction, \[ F(2, 148) = 5.27, p < .01. \] It is diagrammed in Figure 5.

Positive ads produced no significant difference in recall levels for men or women. Neutral ads strongly benefited women candidates, however. Men were significantly better recalled than women when they were attacking and women were targets of the attack.
Cognitive and Affective Responses

Affective responses were expected to be schema-driven to the extent that H6 predicts an intensification in the emotional impact of attack ads when directed by men candidates against women. Expressions of neutral feelings did not vary significantly by treatment condition. Positive feeling statements were not influenced by candidate gender, but they were affected by the tone of commercials, $F = (2, 148) = 7.90, p < .01$. In particular, expressions of positive feelings were significantly reduced in response to negative commercials ($M = .06$) as opposed to positive commercials, $M = 1.08$, $t(74) = 3.42$, $p < .01$, or neutral commercials, $M = .96$, $t(74) = 4.17$, $p < .01$. Most important, expressions of negative reaction varied as expected. A main effect of gender revealed that subjects voiced more negative reactions in response to men's ads than to women's, $F(1, 74) = 7.40, p < .01$. Overall, negative expressions were, of course, significantly more plentiful in response to negative ads, $F(2, 148) = 10.48$, $p < .01$. Finally, a significant gender by tone interaction demonstrated that subjects expressed more negativity in response to men's
attacks on women, $F(2, 148) = 5.91, p < .01$ (see Figure 6). H6 was thus supported.

The pattern is somewhat attenuated when we turn to cognitive responses. H7 predicts a critical response from viewers to men candidates attacking women opponents that will be reflected in evaluative thoughts. There was a significant main effect of Message Tone, with negative ads prompting more commercial discounting (thoughts critical of the ads) than neutral or positive ads, $F(2, 148) = 5.57, p < .01$. Counter arguments (thoughts critical of the candidate) were significantly more plentiful in response to men candidates than women candidates, however, $F(1, 74) = 9.34, p < .01$. No other effects relating to unfavorable thoughts attained significance.

Instances of commercial bolstering (favorable thoughts about the commercials themselves) were significantly reduced in response to negative ads when compared to neutral and positive ads, $F(2, 148) = 4.00, p < .02$. Negative ads also produced fewer support arguments (favorable thoughts about advertised candidates) than neutral or positive ads, $F(2, 148) = 4.69, p < .01$. Overall, women candidates elicited more support arguments than men candidates, $F(1, 74) = 4.89, p < .03$. Interactions between gender and tone were nonsig-
significant for commercial bolstering and support arguments, providing no support for H7.

Discussion

This research demonstrated that political commercials are processed differently, depending on the gender of the advertised candidate. Moreover, the differences in what is recalled from the ad and in the nature of the thoughts and feelings elicited by the ad in large part fulfill predictions from gender schema theory. People tend to recall information consistent with a political gender schema more than they recall inconsistent information—to the extent that the traditional male candidate is more accurately associated with the platform in his ad than the nontraditional female candidate is associated with hers, for example. Where support for theory-driven hypotheses was qualified, it suggests the need to extend gender schema theory in the context of communication to take into account the fact that Message Tone in itself—whether positive, negative, or neutral—may be more or less consistent with the given gender schema.
Ad Tone and Schema-Consistent Information

One of the most controversial issues in political communication concerns the effectiveness of attack commercials. As hypothesized, candidate gender was a factor that influenced the impact of attack ads. The male gender schema in our culture includes acts of aggression and, indeed, recall of men’s attacks on women significantly exceeded recall of women’s attacks on men. When men attacked women, viewers’ protocols also expressed more negative emotions.

Analysis of viewers’ evaluative thoughts revealed fewer favorable thoughts about both the ad and the advertised candidate in response to negative commercials, as opposed to neutral commercials. Also, there were fewer criticisms and more supportive thoughts of women as opposed to men candidates. Nevertheless, men’s attacks on women were not specific targets of criticism. Rather, evaluative thoughts tended to favor women in general. Despite the general fear that women candidates may meet with prejudice, this finding is not totally inconsistent with previous research. Kahn (1994b) found that women tended to be exceptionally successful gubernatorial candidates. She reasoned that the office of state governor is more domestic than senator, for example, and therefore more consistent with the female gender schema than many other political offices. Because our stimuli consisted of gubernatorial ads, findings that women generated more total recall than men and also more issue recall can be interpreted in the light of her comments. Although women candidates in this study were still perceived very much as women, information about them in the context of a political message was nevertheless being more actively processed than information about men candidates. Another insight is provided by Miller et al.’s (1986) assessment of the candidate schema. To the extent that a man candidate is processed as “just another politician,” that is, possessing low personal integrity, rather than as a man per se, it is not surprising that women candidates, who are processed primarily as women, would generate more favorable evaluative thoughts.

An interesting question arises as a result of using authentic political commercials. The hypothesized main effects for family and campaign recall were qualified by a gender by tone interaction. In response to positive commercials, family recall was particularly enhanced for women candidates, and campaign recall was enhanced for men candidates. The use of warm-hearted tone tends to increase recall when compared with a neutral appeal (Thorson & Friestad, 1989). A theoretically consistent explanation for our findings considers the extent of gender schematic processing in the viewer and suggests that familial interactions are perceived as more moving when
they involve women candidates, and solicitous interactions with constituents are more moving when they involve men candidates. An alternative explanation turns on the executional strategy employed in creating the ad. It is possible that either candidates themselves or the producers of commercials use a different kind of interaction to generate a positive tone for women as opposed to men candidates.

In our views, both explanations play their part. Although the public has responded well to product ads that give center stage to empathic father-son interactions, for example, voters may not find a similar emphasis in political commercials suitable. The “father schema” is likely to be more consistent with the emotional sensitivity depicted in some product ads than the candidate schema would be. Thus breaking away from conventional gender roles in depictions that demonstrate not professionalism but emotional outlay (caring in men and aggression in women, for instance) can appear risky to candidates and producers.

Directions for Future Research

One of the theoretical extensions not explored in this study concerns individual differences that may mitigate or enhance gender schematic processing. Earlier work on gender schema theory makes a distinction between sex-typed and non-sex-typed. Sex-typed refers to individuals high in femininity or high in masculinity; non-sex-typed individuals have equal levels of both. Although sex typing is not a necessary prerequisite to organizing information by gender (Noseworthy & Lott, 1984), it can exacerbate or reduce the tendency. Sex-typed individuals, for example, engage spontaneously in gender schematic processing to the greatest extent; non-sex-typed individuals tend to be less gender schematic (e.g., Bem, 1981; Deaux & Major, 1977; Lippa, 1977; Taylor & Falcon, 1982). Although they are theoretically of interest, the relevance of these distinctions to advertising is not clear. Advertisers only take into account those individual differences that enable them to target their market with greater precision. They seek a match, for example, between their target market and the profiles of audiences that media can provide, which renders demographic information in particular very valuable. In the specific context of political advertising, it seems neither feasible nor of practical use to be able to describe a candidate’s district as Y% sex-typed and Z% non-sex-typed. Unless advertisers incorporate an individual difference into their strategy, advertising researchers may feel unjustified investigating the effects of the strategy.

Despite these limitations, two promising avenues relating to individual differences open up for future research. First, it is possible that gender
schematicity varies with other individual differences of more direct interest to advertisers. Because our culture’s insistence on the importance of gender renders its network of associations an active schema, the cultural sensitivity of the individual may be more broadly identifiable than by gender schematicity alone. For example, sex typing may be closely tied to traditional lifestyles and, by extension, behaviors of direct interest to advertisers, such as exposure to media vehicles that embrace traditional values. Second, mass communication researchers could adopt a different but equally valid vantage point. Future studies could investigate the relationship between gender schema and differential levels of vulnerability to persuasion by different types of gender-relevant mass media messages, perhaps including advertising. The social implications of these latter studies may more than compensate for what they lack in managerial validity.

Given the strategic and economic importance of television advertising in political campaigns, one of the objectives of this study was to investigate gender schematic processing of television commercials specifically, as opposed to other forms of promotion. Using aired commercials increased the external validity of the research, but multiple candidates of each gender were required to reduce the impact of each ad’s idiosyncratic content. We were able to match ads according to the presence of broad types of content (e.g., issue, family) but could not equate them in other than broad terms. Future research should replicate and extend our findings with artificial stimuli. It is beyond the resources of many researchers to create professional quality commercials for a male and female candidate that would depict candidates in identical campaign-style interactions to support the claim that the ads only differed by gender of candidate. Reverting to print media, however, would simplify stimuli creation enormously. Just as Kahn’s (1992) extension of Kahn and Goldenberg’s (1991) research featured manufactured news stories, theoretical issues emerging from this study could be explored using fabricated direct mail promotions for candidates.

Homogenous samples tend to be preferred in theory-driven, experimental research (Calder, Philips, & Tybowe, 1983). Despite good reasons for this preference in general and the use of student subjects in groundbreaking past studies of gender stereotyping of political candidates (e.g., Sapiro, 1981-1982), it is important to note that the contents of students’ gender and candidate schemata may differ to some extent from that of other members of the population, reducing the generalizability of our results. In addition, different ad scenarios may be required to produce different tones of message for other segments of the population. It would be valuable to replicate and extend our findings with samples drawn from the general population, perhaps embedding experimental manipulations in telephone surveys akin to
the telemarketing of candidates that forms an increasing important part of election campaigns.

Conclusion

Gender issues in communication have long been of concern to researchers, as to society. Nevertheless, productive empirical research has been hampered by a lack of applicable psychological theory. This study makes a significant contribution by applying a theory specifically developed to examine gender issues, Bem's (1981) gender schema theory, to the urgent question of voter response to women political candidates. Findings are consistent with the conceptualization that a male politician tends to be categorized as an instance of the subtype candidate, and his image may even suffer from the lack of integrity associated with the candidate schema. We inferred from past research that, to the extent that a subtype for women candidates exists, it bears strong resemblance to the broader stereotype of woman, and our pattern of findings supports that inference. As expected, viewers' recall of advertising messages showed schema-consistent effects. Moreover, it became apparent that, in a communication context, the theory needs to be extended to take into account that characteristics of the message other than content—here, message tone—may have gender consistent or inconsistent properties.

Appendix

Outline of Political Ads for a Woman and a Man Candidate Competing for the Office of Governor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Gender</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Candidate surrounded by children and adults outdoors discusses the impact she had on education for the differently abled</td>
<td>Candidate walking outside with elderly constituents who testify to his effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Voice-over describes candidate's record on issues synchronized to frames of candidate with constituents</td>
<td>Two constituents depicted with candidate; the constituent voice-over describes candidate's record on issues synchronized to frames of candidate with constituents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Candidate expresses what a governor should stand for and that opponent is unsuitable</td>
<td>Voice-over tells opponent not to throw stones while living in a glass house</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes

1. Inconsistent findings concern propositions from the hierarchy model that basic-level categories (subtypes) elicit more associations than superordinate-level categories and that basic-level categories involve minimal overlap (Deaux et al., 1985; Eckes, 1994).

2. One of the reviewers queried the lack of symmetry between H6 and H7. Attack ads are defined in this study as ads where the candidate attacks an opponent using a specifically negative message tone. Thus, although attack ads can be expected to produce both negative and positive thoughts (e.g., "it was a disgusting ad" or "it was a clever ad"), they are expected to elicit only negative feelings (e.g., "I found it scary" but not "it made me feel warm").

References


Hitchon, Chang • Gender Schema Effects


