

2016

# Gender framing in political advertising during the 2014 United States senate election in North Carolina, Louisiana, Iowa and Kentucky

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**Gender framing in political advertising  
during the 2014 United States senate election  
in North Carolina, Louisiana, Iowa and Kentucky**

by

**Yiting Huang**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Journalism and Mass Communication

Program of Study Committee:

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2016

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation to my committee chair, Professor Raluca Cozma, who is intelligent and genuine in conducting research and teaching: she inspired me with her professional knowledge and supported me with her enthusiasm. Without her guidance, patience and persistent help, this thesis would not be possible.

I would like to thank my committee members, Drs. Kelly Winfrey and Tessa Ditonto, who kindly shared their experiences and thoughts about political campaigns with me, persistently encouraging me with my research.

In addition, I would also like to thank all the Greenlee School faculty, staff, colleagues, as well as my family and friends, for their kindness and help during my study at Iowa State University.

**ABSTRACT**

There is an increasing tendency for political candidates to frame their campaign advertising more negatively when mentioning their opponents rather than talk positively about themselves. However, some gender differences are likely to influence the amount of negative content in one's advertising. In addition, gender stereotypes are considered as a disadvantage factor for women in campaigns, while some scholars suggest that stereotypes might help to build the reputation of women. As a result, this study examined the 2014 election for U.S. senate in North Carolina, Iowa, Kentucky and Louisiana because these four states were rated as top four states in terms of spending on negative political ads that included a woman and a man candidate (Chris, 2014). Content analysis is used to examine differences in stimuli used in the negative political ads in the 2014 midterm race for U.S. senate. This comparative analysis reveals more similarities than differences between the two gender groups in terms of framing, and male candidate ads (and especially ads sponsored by Super PACs for male candidates) were found to be more negative than female candidate ads.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Women candidates are becoming more and more common in elections, and the number of political advertising made by or for them has increased in recent years. In 2013, there were 102 women, including 20 in the Senate and 82 in the House, who served in the 113th Congress (Center for American Women and Politics, 2014). Since political advertising is becoming an increasingly popular way for candidates to advance their platforms or attack their opponents in elections or other political events, political advertising, as other ads, has saturated our lives and appeared in both traditional media and new media, especially in election years. In addition, the public has considered political advertising as an important source to get information about both politics and politicians (Iyengar & Prior, 1999). Therefore, political advertising presents an intense competition for candidates to win voters.

Historically speaking, female politicians were far less represented in high political positions than male candidates. For example, there were only two women to win among the 25 women candidates running for the U.S. Senate between 1984 and 1990 (Kahn, 1993). Several scholars summarized reasons for women candidates' failure in elections. Alexander and Andersen (1993) suggested that incumbency might be one possible reason, as male incumbents were more favored than female challengers by the public. Dolan (2004) indicated that there was a strong influence on public's evaluation of candidates from the information about a candidate's party affiliation. Among those reasons, however, gender stereotypes are the most frequently cited contribution to this result. Herrnson, Lay and



Stokes (2003) found that gender stereotypes worked to set up liability such as “gender-congruent” traits or issues (compassion issues, traditional values and traditional women’s issues). Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid, and Robertson (2004) found viewers of advertising also perceived the candidates’ gender differently, which led to public bias against female candidates. Although Kaid, Fernandes and Painter (2011) suggested that the effects of existing stereotypes were not large and led to little persuasion, the effect should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, recent elections brought about a couple of shifts in the way both candidates and the public view female candidates. Candidates increasingly focused on “femininity” to benefit themselves in the election. Shames (2003) summarized that the reason for candidates’ increasing use of stereotypically feminine traits (such as thoughtfulness, empathy, vulnerable, intuition, beauty and patience) was because it could bring them, regardless of gender, higher favorability in the polls.

Content is also one important factor when we analyze political advertising in each election year. Political advertising can focus on positive traits of the sponsoring candidate and help voters build positive evaluation of him/her, or, on the contrary, attack the opponent with accusations of misdeeds or negative framed information (Pinkleton, Um & Austin, 2002). Interestingly, scholarship suggests that political advertising, especially video ads, is more likely to contain negative expressions. According to Fridkin, Kenney and Woodall (2009), political advertising with negative content is far more prevalent than ads with positive content in modern campaigns. During the 2006 campaign, Republicans invested \$87.5 million while Democrats spent \$72.6 million to attack candidates (Fridkin, Kenney & Woodall, 2009). Research indicates that these ads actually do have persuasive effects on the audience (Perloff & Kinsey, 1992). In the 2014 elections, which this study

focused on, congressional campaigns spent \$337 million on airing 728,000 ads (Wesleyan Media Project, 2014). Likewise, in 2016, the two parties spent 132 millions in negative advertising so far, and the presidential primaries aren't over as of the writing of this thesis (Corasaniti & Haberman, 2016).

A series of previous studies focused on the evaluation of the whole election (Iyengar & Prior, 1999; Hayes & Lawless, 2015; Campbell et al., 2015), on the comparison of the two parties' success in the 2012 and 2014 elections (Campbell, 2014), or on the comparison of incumbents to challengers (Shames, 2003; La Raja & Raymond, 2014; Mackay, 2014). Some studies looked at gender, especially in gubernatorial (Serini, Powers & Johnson, 1998; Devitt, 2002), House (Koch, 2002), and presidential primary elections (Bystrom & Brown, 2008). Gender was rarely the focus, probably because of the limited number of campaigns in which both genders were involved. However, the 2014 midterm election featured more campaigns between male and female candidates. The number of female senators is now 20, which is the highest in history; the number of women serving in the House is at a record number of 84. This is the first time that women serving in congress are over 100 (Alana, 2014). Therefore, this study of the 2014 midterm election can offer a more precise pattern of how male and female candidates frame themselves differently by gender in political ads. In other words, the participation in congressional elections of both men (Thom Tillis, Bill Cassidy, Bruce Braley and Mitch McConnell) and women (Kay Hagan, Mary Landrieu, Joni Ernst and Alison Grimes) in 2014 provides a great opportunity to further discuss gender differences in advertising framing and content evaluation. The 2014 congressional elections included 11 races (9 general elections and 2 special elections) in which men ran against women: Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Montana,

New Hampshire, North Carolina, Oregon, Georgia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and South Carolina (Electoral-vote, 2014). While previous studies have focused on toss-up states (Brooks, 2006), this study selected the states of North Carolina, Louisiana, Iowa and Kentucky for analysis because these four were rated by Slate as the top four states in spending money on negative political ads and they included a male and a female candidate (Chris, 2014).

This study aims to explore four main problems: 1. Whether women framed their ads using stereotypically feminine traits, issues, and visual elements; 2. Whether women's ads were different from men's; 3. Whether ads framed by women were more negative in content than men's; and 4. Whether Super PACs sponsored different types of ads for male and female candidates in the 2014 midterm election.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Brief History of Political Advertising

Political advertising is a kind of publicity that candidates release through television, radio, newspapers, billboards and the Internet in order to sell themselves and their agendas or cast doubt on opponents, as long as the candidates are willing to pay for the delivery. In other words, political advertising became the main vehicle for candidates to disseminate personal information in political campaigns since the Eisenhower campaign first aired an advertisement during the 1952 general election (Kaid, Fernandes & Painter, 2011). Since then, candidates have increasingly relied on political advertising for their effectiveness in communicating directly with the voters (Kaid, Postelnicu, Landreville, Yun, & LeGrange, 2007). In their study of 13 presidential elections, Johnston and Kaid (2002) found that “issue discussion” and “image construction” were two main functions that political ads enabled candidates to define or redefine their public image and provided a platform for them to explain campaign issues. Specifically, political advertising was effective in expressing “candidate-issue stands,” stressing on vital issues of the campaign, and altering attitudes and emotions of the public to value the candidates (Valentino, Hutchings & Williams, 2004).

With the increasingly fierce competition of political advertising, political campaigns and sponsors seek to find new carriers for these ads other than the traditional ones such as television. Candidates shifted to put their ads on Web sites since the late 1990s (Klotz, 1997). As it is common nowadays to see political ads on the Internet, a lot of

political ads are attached to websites such as YouTube, although television is still one of the fiercest competing markets.

## **2.2 Framing Theory in Advertising**

Framing is a widely used theory in political-related communication contexts, including news, political campaigns and political advertising. As defined by Entman (1993), framing entails choosing and emphasizing a corner of reality to elaborate on the whole, advancing a way to define problems, interpret causes, and propose solutions (Entman, 1993). However, framing can be problematic to the public if it contains information manipulation, card stacking, and misleading emphasis on certain aspects at the expense of others. Lau and Redlawsk (2001) suggested that framing was always related to information manipulation and attitude bias. People's attitude toward a certain event can be affected by both media frames and individual frames (Scheufele, 1999). Media framing refers to the interpretation, conclusion and essence of an unfolding event provided by other people, organization or government through media (Gamson, & Modigliani, 1989). Individual framing is about personal interpretation of the delivered information, affected by personal original knowledge, ideas and stereotypes (Entman, 1993). This study will focus on political advertising framing, studying how political candidates frame themselves or his/her opponents to influence audiences' attitudes.

The combination of framing and political communication is universal in political campaigns. Gamson (1992) indicated that social elites, news outlets, and political organizations employ framing to affect people's attitude and perception on issues by

emphasizing favored or beneficial aspects of issues. The power of framing in political campaign lies in the effectiveness of opinion change in viewers (Iyengar, 1994).

Appropriate frames when presenting issues or traits used in political advertising can both benefit candidates and attack opponents. On the one hand, political candidates use advertising as an influential framing method, both in highlighting their personal characteristics and political positions (Schenck-Hamlin, Procter & Rumsey, 2000). Lee and Chang (2010) suggested that framing is an effective way to advance candidates' personal image and political agenda. For example, President George W. Bush's framed the "War on Iraq" by using the phrase of "for the sake of homeland" and mentioning Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to stimulate emotional responses from the public (Lee & Chang, 2010). On the other hand, framing can also create negative interpretation of opponents' personal image. Schenck-Hamlin, Procter and Rumsey (2000) explained the effectiveness of framing in manipulating public opinion by raising an example of an attack ad on Michael Dukakis in 1988. The advertisement was about Willie Horton, who had a weekend furlough in prison after he murdered somebody in Massachusetts when Dukakis was the governor of Massachusetts.

As a result, framing can help candidates improve favorability ratings to the detriment of their opponent's reputation. In order to further understand how framing works in political advertising, it's important to analyze what kind of frames candidates employ most to support themselves and attack the others.

## **2.3 Gender-based Stereotypes in Political Advertising**

### **2.3.1 Masculinity and femininity**

With the increasing number of women politicians running for high positions in political elections, campaign differences between men and women have become the focus of several studies of political advertising. The discussion about the differences between male and female candidates' campaign related to party affiliation, the framing of gender-based stereotypes, the usage of femininity and so on (Dolan, 2010; Shame 2003).

In some studies, party affiliation was considered as an important factor to affect candidates' campaign strategies. Republicans are perceived to be good at crime issues and tax issues while Democrats are considered to deal well with education-related issues (Iyengar & Simon, 2000). Moreover, Democratic candidates are believed to be more responsible by Democrats, and Republican candidates are also believed to be more responsible by Republicans (Iyengar & Simon, 2000). Sanbonmatsu and Dolan (2009) suggested that women candidates from Republican Party are less likely to be supported by voters than from Democratic Party. Since Republicans are traditionally considered doing well on more masculine policies, female Republican candidates sometimes experience a harder time than female Democratic candidates (Dolan, 2010). But party affiliation is not the main concern of this study; thereby more elaboration will be placed on gender-based stereotypes.

Research on political advertising has examined public perceptions and expectations of male and female candidates. Expectations for candidates of different genders tend to be different, which is congruent with gender stereotypes. When discussing gender-based stereotypes in the tactics used by women, "masculinity" and "femininity" are two main

concepts used frequently. Shames (2003) argues that society relates masculinity with power, leadership, and ambition, whereas it associates femininity with sympathy, cultivation, and family roles, including caring for the old and children. However, there are cultural stereotypes for running the government, relating leadership directly to masculine traits, which is credited for causing most of electoral failures for women candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Based on the role congruity theory of prejudice, the contradiction between gender roles and leader roles of female candidates produced two types of prejudices (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Eagly and Karau (2002) suggested that female candidates are perceived less qualified as *potential* leaders than men candidates; women candidates are less likely to be evaluated as eligible leaders as men candidates, because women are perceived less qualified in leadership and lacking the ability to be independent and helpful. Therefore, female candidates used to have a hard time to win over male candidates.

In addition to perceptions, previous research has examined how the candidates' advertising has reflected those expectations. In order to win over male candidates, female candidates face the problem of applying the image of "masculinity" in political campaigns. Since women candidates own the gender-based stereotypes of feminine, women tend to struggle to include evidence in their advertising to prove that they are as strong, educated, intelligent and aggressive as their male opponents (Shames, 2003). Women candidates' use of stereotypically masculine issues was because those female candidates tried to encourage electorates to focus on them as a normal person equal to a male rather than on stereotypes (Kahn & Gordon, 1997). For example, Shames (2003) found that women were likely to use



a strategy called “honorary men,” which is a way for women candidates to improve their image of “as good as a man” in political advertising.

However, some scholars held the idea that stereotypes are not always detrimental to women politicians. Huddy and Capelos (2002) argued that some gender-related issues were potentially beneficial to women candidates and they also proved that stereotypes do not actually affect the election outcome. Issues that can benefit women include childcare, poverty, education, health care, women’s issues, and the environment (Dolan, 2004).

### **2.3.2 Issues, traits, and visual elements**

One of the most discussed topics in campaign strategies is whether political candidates employ more issues or traits. Most of political advertising, regardless of its medium of delivery, is dominated by issues instead of traits (Kaid, 2004). To be precisely, 60% of the political advertising in presidential general elections between 1952 and 1996 focused on issues (Kaid & Johnston, 2001). Kaid (2004) indicated that there appears no significant difference between men candidates and women candidates in employing issues and traits before 1996. However, with the increasing number of women candidates participating in political campaigns, the strategies of employing issues and traits changed between gender groups.

The gender-based stereotypes may affect male and female candidates in selecting issues (Kahn, 1993). Previous research indicated that men and women put emphasis on different issues, as female candidates were expected to deal well on social care and family, while men were expected to perform better in military, economic and labor issues (Alexander & Andersen, 1993). Bystrom and Kaid (2002) found that women candidates focused more on feminine issues such as healthcare and education in 1998. Walsh, Strach

and Hennings (2009) found that men candidates focused more on issues such as foreign policy, whereas women candidates were more likely to focus on abortion and health issues in the 2002 House race.

However, other studies suggested that the difference in choosing issues between male and female candidates is decreasing. Both men candidates and women candidates focused on stereotypically feminine issues such as healthcare and youth violence in elections from 1990 to 2002 (Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid & Robertson, 2004) as well as stereotypically masculine issues such as military and economy (Kaid, 2004). Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) suggested that the difference in emphasizing specific issues (education) is caused by whether the ad is delivered by party/interest group or the candidates themselves, but not caused by gender. In the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama were similar in delivering ads on the four top issues (healthcare, economy, the Iraq War and energy dependence), but differed a little in order (Bystrom & Brown, 2008). However, Clinton and Obama were significantly different from previous women candidates in attributing traits: Clinton focused more on her political experience and her ability in leadership compared to Obama (Bystrom & Brown, 2008).

Building on this scholarship, this study will analyze if female candidates and male candidates were similar in their choice of issues for their ads in the 2014 congressional election. Thus, the first hypothesis predicts the following:

H1: There will be no difference in use of stereotypically feminine issues between *female candidates (Kay Hagan, Mary Landrieu, Joni Ernst and Alison Grimes) and male candidates (Thom Tillis, Bill Cassidy, Bruce Braley and Mitch McConnell).*

Researchers also did not reach a consensus on how male and female candidates make use of traits in their campaigns. Hayes (2010) found that ads focusing on traits are more effective in attracting those less politically inattentive voters. Feminine traits can benefit both male and female by presenting them as caring and understanding (Shame, 2003). In addition, both male and female candidates focus on feminine traits such as honesty and understanding; masculine traits such as aggressiveness and strength (Bystrom & Kaid, 2002). However, sometimes, ads containing personal traits can be harmful and disadvantage women candidates in establishing their qualifications because media coverage of elections that contain women tend to focus more on traits at the expense of issues (Dunaway, Lawrence, Rose & Weber, 2013). That's because content about traits may shift the focus from substantive qualifications to some minor qualification (Dunaway, Lawrence, Rose & Weber, 2013). Furthermore, women candidates tend to criticize less their opponents' characteristics but are more likely to attack them on the issues (Kahn, 1993). Walsh, Strach and Hennings (2009) found that man candidates were more likely to emphasize traits such as candidates' background (political record), while women candidates focused more on presenting their caring nature.

On the contrary, Bystrom and Brown (2008) suggested that unlike in their selection of issues, male and female candidates may not employ traits that match gender-based stereotypes. Female candidates are more likely to portray themselves as aggressive, independent and resolute, while male candidates tend to mention their political experience (Bystrom & Brown, 2008). In the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries, Hillary Clinton's campaign downplayed her sexuality and family role by deemphasizing her roles as wife and mother (McGinley, 2009). However, Barack Obama made more use of

stereotypically feminine traits such as calling for change, cooperation, integrity and hopefulness (Bystrom & Brown, 2008). In addition, Obama used logical appeals more often than Clinton did (Bystrom & Brown, 2008).

Based on this scholarship, this study will analyze the extent to which female candidates used stereotypically feminine traits in the 2014 congressional election compared to their male opponents. Thus, the second hypothesis predicts the following:

*H2: Female candidates (Kay Hagan, Mary Landrieu, Joni Ernst and Alison Grimes) are less likely to focus on stereotypically feminine traits than male candidates (Thom Tillis, Bill Cassidy, Bruce Braley and Mitch McConnell).*

The visual elements in the ads delivered by male and female candidates have also been the focus of research on framing of political advertising. Previous studies have found that female candidates are more likely to dress formally rather than casually, and smile more frequently than male candidates (Kaid, 2004; Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid & Robertson, 2004). Female candidates preferred not only business suits but also “feminized” formal suits such as sweaters and skirts (Johnston & White, 1994). Bystrom and Kaid (2002) found that female candidates are more likely to have eye contact with people and smile more often. In the 2008 Democratic nomination election, Clinton used smiles in her facial expression more often than Obama, which is similar with other women candidates (Bystrom & Brown, 2008). However, Obama included more gestures in his ads to express a caring and understanding nature, which is different from other male candidates (Bystrom & Brown, 2008).

Building on previous scholarship, this study will analyze the extent to which female candidates used stereotypically feminine visual elements in the 2014 congressional election compared to their male opponents. Thus, the hypothesis predicts the following:

H3: *Female candidates (Kay Hagan, Mary Landrieu, Joni Ernst and Alison Grimes) are more likely to focus on stereotypically feminine visual images than male candidates (Thom Tillis, Bill Cassidy, Bruce Braley and Mitch McConnell).*

## **2.4 Gender and Negative Advertising**

Negative advertising has received more and more attention due to its increasingly large amount in recent years. From 1952, negative ads became an important part in political campaigns (Kaid & Johnston, 2001). In the 1988 Presidential election, negative advertising became one of the most discussed aspects of the contest (Hill, 1989). In the presidential races from 1952 and 1956, the percentage of negative ads was merely 38% (Kaid, 2004). However, in the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections, the proportion of negative ads exceeded the amount of positive ads in both Democratic Party and Republican Party (Kaid, 2004).

Negative political advertising in recent years is basically opponent-focused, rather than candidate-focused (Kaid, 2000). Opponent-focused negative advertising has been proved to lower the audience's evaluation of the targeted candidate (Perloff & Kinsey, 1992). Fernandes (2013) found evidence that the campaigns of John McCain and Barack Obama aired more than 150,000 negative political spots altogether within three months in the 2008 presidential campaign. In addition, Fowler (2010) also provided evidence that the midterm elections in 2010 were the most negative in election history to date: 56% of the

ads from Republicans (including party, candidate and interest group ads) were about attacking their opponents, while 49.9% of the Democrats' ads talked negatively about the other side. Likewise, in the 2014 midterm elections, only 30% of Republicans' ads (including candidate, coordinate, group and party) were not negative, and 22.6% of Democrats' ads were positive-focused ads (Wesleyan Media Project, 2014).

Some researchers suggested that the wide use of negative advertising is owing to the different status of candidates. Herrnson (2004) indicated that since incumbents have an advantage in the competition, challengers use negative ads more frequently than incumbents so that they can attract voters' attention more. Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy (1990) drew a similar conclusion that challengers are more likely to deliver negative ads in their campaign than incumbents. In open-seat races, the campaigns are also very negative because both candidates use a large amount of attack ads in their campaign so that they can win more attention over their opponents (Herrnson & Lucas, 2006).

However, scholars have still not reached a consensus on why candidates seem to be more active in creating negative advertising attacking their opponents instead of producing positive advertising about themselves. Some scholars evaluate this problem from the audience side. Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (1989) suggested that negative ads are more informative and influential to the audience than the positive ones. Kahn and Kenney (2000) indicated that negative campaigns provided more motivation to the audience to participate in voting. Newhagen and Reeves (1991) held the idea that the possibility and frequency of information recollection is specifically higher after watching negative ads.

In addition, whether the women or men candidates employed more negative advertising also would affect their personal evaluation. Miller and Burgoon (1979) suggested that based on the stereotypes of different genders, male and female candidates are expected to frame their ads differently, and a negative effect is possible if the expectations are not met. Female politicians are generally perceived as honest and passionate so that they are expected to produce less negative advertising against their opponents (Herrnson & Lucas, 2006). Therefore, women are expected to air less negative advertising in order to maintain a positive image among the public. However, some researchers indicated that gender-based stereotypes may not be a concern for women candidates anymore. Gordon, Shafie and Crigler (2003) found that women candidates actually employ similar proportions of negative ads and benefit themselves in the competition. In Hillary Clinton's campaign for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination, she delivered less negative opponent-focused ads than Barack Obama, ending up being defeated by the male candidate (Bystrom & Brown, 2008).

Since scholarship is still inconclusive about women's propensity to use negative advertising, this study will make an effort to examine whether female candidates generally used more or less negative advertising than male candidates within the 2014 election. The following research question is formulated:

*RQ1: Did women (Kay Hagan, Mary Landrieu, Joni Ernst and Alison Grimes) deliver more negative advertisement on their opponents than men (Thom Tillis, Bill Cassidy, Bruce Braley and Mitch McConnell) in the 2014 midterm race for U.S. Senate?*

In order to establish candidates' personal qualifications and win over their opponents, candidates tend to emphasize specific traits and issues in their negative ads.

Negative ads do not always result in backlash effects on candidates. Overall, issue-oriented and factual attack ads are more favored by candidates than traits-oriented attack ads, and only 4% of ads contained negative traits while 16% of ads contained negative issues in elections from 1960 to 2000 (Geer, 2008). Roddy and Garramone (1988) also suggested that candidates are more likely to attack opponents on issues rather than traits. Geer (2008) indicated that challengers are more likely to attack incumbents on issues because incumbents already have experience in office. In addition, attacking opponents on their image or character is more likely to have negative effects on the candidates themselves than attacking the opponents' political issues (Pfau and Burgoon, 1989).

Gender-based stereotypes held by audiences also have different effects on male and female candidates delivering negative ads on issues and traits. Especially, female candidates are less likely to attack their opponents personally but are more willing to criticize them on the issues because women are expected to be compassionate and honest (Kahn, 1993). Also, as more women than men are challengers, they have been found to air more negative ads than men, and their evaluations by voters are not depressed because of it (Fridkin, Kenney, & Woodall, 2009).

Given that previous gender comparative research (Kahn, 1993; Dunaway, Lawrence, Rose & Weber, 2013, Walsh, Strach & Hennings, 2009) on the use of issues and traits in negative ads is limited in scope, the following research questions are formulated about the 2014 midterm races:

RQ2a: *Do negative ads delivered by women (Kay Hagan, Mary Landrieu, Joni Ernst and Alison Grimes) focus more on issues or traits?*



RQ2b: *Do negative ads delivered by men (Thom Tillis, Bill Cassidy, Bruce Braley and Mitch McConnell) focus more on issues or traits?*

## **2.5 Gender and Super PACs**

In 2014, the number of super PACs reached 1,360, which together raised a total of \$696,011,919 and spent \$345,117,042 for both liberal and conservative parties (Center for Responsive Politics, 2015). According to data from the Center for Responsive Politics (2015), the top PACs are the Senate Majority PAC (which spent \$46,651,418 for the Democratic Party), the House Majority PAC (spent \$29,422,890 for the Democratic Party), the Freedom Partners Action Fund (spent \$23,410,113 for the Republican Party), the Ending Spending Action Fund (spent \$22,585,431 for the Republican Party) and American Crossroads (spent \$21,860,037 for the Republican Party). Over time, candidates will rely more and more on Super PACs or other outside groups to support their election bids (La Raja & Raymond, 2014). In the study of La Raja and Raymond (2014), Super PACs were found to bring up a lot of benefits for the party and the candidates by increasing party leadership and enhancing the structure of the party. In addition, some Super PACs have connection with parties. For example, Senate Majority PAC, the major player in 2014, was originally supported by the Democratic Party when it was still a very small organization in 2011 (La Raja & Raymond, 2014).

Studies have showed that candidate-sponsored negative ads in general elections may have negative effects on voters when including attack information on opponents (Perloff & Kinsey, 1992), however the negative influence on viewers could be ineffective and misleading. Backlash effects can also be a hidden danger for candidates themselves.

To avoid negative effects on candidates themselves, a large number of negative advertisements with negative information in the 2012 election were mainly delivered by Super PACs (Painter, 2014).

However, there is not sufficient research about whether Super PACs supporting women candidates or Super PACs supporting men deliver more negative political ads. The following research question asks:

*RQ3: In the 2014 midterm race for U.S. Senate, did Super PACs supporting women candidates (Kay Hagan, Mary Landrieu, Joni Ernst and Alison Grimes) or Super PACs supporting men (Thom Tillis, Bill Cassidy, Bruce Braley and Mitch McConnell) deliver more negative political ads?*

Overall, this study sets out to examine how ads delivered by and for women differed from ads produced by and for men in four 2014 congressional races that included candidates of both genders. Given the recent surges in both women's political representation and in overall negativity in political advertising, it is important to understand how female candidates overcome historical challenges, emphasize or downplay gender traits and stereotypes, and navigate increasingly more competitive campaigns. Given the increasing reliance on super PACs by candidates, it is also essential to clarify how super PACs contribute to their campaigns by supporting the candidates and their platforms or by attacking their opponents in races between different genders. The findings will also help make predictions about what we might expect from the 2016 senatorial contests, where 34 seats are up for reelection, three incumbents are women, and more women candidates are likely to be nominated by both parties.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### 3.1 Purpose and Research Method

For this study, content analysis is used to determine how candidates frame their opponents and themselves through negative frames and gender-based stereotype frames within political advertising in the 2014 Senate election. “Content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables” (Wimmer & Dominick 2013).” Therefore, this method can be suitable in analyzing the patterns of how men and women candidates frame both their opponents and themselves in campaign advertising. Many previous studies that examined political ads (Hayes & Lawless, 2015; Sapiro, Walsh, Strach & Hennings, 2009; Dolan, 2004) have used content analysis to study framing and negativity.

#### 3.2 Sample

The chosen samples are from North Carolina, Louisiana, Iowa and Kentucky, which are considered as the top four states spending money on negative ads containing both men and women candidates (Chris, 2014). The data were collected through the home pages (listed in APPENDIX C) for each of the eight candidates (*Kay Hagan, Joni Ernst, Alison Grimes, Mary Landrieu, Thom Tillis, Bruce Braley, Mitch McConnell and Bill Cassidy*) on their YouTube websites, each candidate’s personal web pages (e.g. “Home - Joni Ernst for Iowa”, “Home - Bruce Braley for Iowa”, etc.), and the outside sponsors ads for each of the candidates on YouTube. This study focused only on web ads. The total

number of ads collected is 253, among which 40 are from North Carolina, 62 are from Iowa, 82 are from Kentucky and 69 are from Louisiana. Among these ads, 150 ads are candidate-sponsored and 143 ads are PAC-sponsored. Super PACS include Priorities For Iowa, Freedom Partners Action Fund, Senate Majority PAC, We are Kentucky, Patriot Majority USA, Kentuckians for Strong Leadership, American Crossroads, and American Rising PAC. PACs include U.S Chamber of Commerce, Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce, Reclaim America PAC, The League of Conservation Voters, NARAL Pro-Choice America, Madison Project, and Women Speak Out PAC (listed in APPENDIX D). The ads were collected during October 2014 to April 2015.

Each candidate's (*Kay Hagan, Joni Ernst, Alison Grimes, Mary Landrieu, Thom Tillis, Bruce Braley, Mitch McConnell and Bill Cassidy*) personal/campaign web pages are chosen because they are the official website for the eight candidates to run their campaign, which should be the very first source for campaign advertising. The eight candidates' homepage on YouTube are chosen because it can help supplement the video sources from the official website and help arrange these ads in time order. The outsider sponsors ads are also included in the study because sponsors' ads are a large part in political campaigns to support or oppose a certain candidate or the political party. These ads are also found in these outsider sponsors' YouTube channel.

In order to analyze the political advertising from the four states, each ad was coded to determine the nature of sentence, whether it is positive or negative, or whether it contains gender-based stereotypes. The facial expression and body action were recorded from each video, which helped determine the use of masculinity and femininity.

Furthermore, each video was downloaded in order to save the message for offline coding and prevent the ads from being deleted after the election.

### 3.3 Variables

In order to thoroughly analyze the congressional campaign in 2014, videos produced by or on behalf of the eight candidates (*Kay Hagan, Joni Ernst, Alison Grimes, Mary Landrieu, Thom Tillis, Bruce Braley, Mitch McConnell and Bill Cassidy*) were all collected from the websites listed above. For each hypothesis and research question, there is one dependent variable and one independent variable.

For H1, the independent variable is the gender of the candidates who ran for the 2014 senate election, and the dependent variable is the amount of stereotypically feminine issues in their campaign advertising. To measure H1, two sub-variables are created: stereotypically feminine issues and stereotypically masculine issues.

For H2, the independent variable is the gender of the candidates who ran for the 2014 senate election, and the dependent variable is the amount of stereotypically feminine traits in their campaign advertising. To measure H1, two sub-variables are created: stereotypically feminine traits and stereotypically masculine traits.

For H3, the independent variable is the gender of the candidates who ran for the 2014 senate election, and the dependent variable is the amount of stereotypically feminine visual elements in their campaign advertising. To measure H1, two sub-variables are created: stereotypically feminine visual elements and stereotypically masculine visual elements.

For RQ1, the independent variable is candidates' gender, and the dependent variable is the amount of negative ads candidates delivered. To measure Q1, two sub-variables are created: negative message toward opponents and positive message about oneself.

For RQ2a, the independent variable is women candidates, and the dependent variable is what traits female candidates use more often. To measure RQ2a, two sub-variables are created: issues and traits.

For RQ2b, the independent variable is men candidates, and the dependent variable is what traits male candidates use more often. To measure RQ2b, two sub-variables are created: issues and traits.

For RQ3, the independent variable is super PACs supporting women vs. men candidates, and the dependent variable is the amount of negative ads super PACs aired. To measure RQ3, two sub-variables are created, negative message toward opponent candidates and positive message about the candidates they sponsored.

The coding sheet (Appendix B) is developed according to these variables. Some part of the coding sheet was adapted from Banwart, Winfrey and Schnoebelen (2009).

### **3.4 Operationalization of Variables**

#### **3.4.1 Stereotypically feminine and masculine issues**

Literature on gender-based stereotypes tends to categorize social care and education as feminine issues (Bystrom & Brown, 2008; Alexander & Andersen, 1993) while categorizing military, economics and labor issues as masculine issues (Kaid, 2004; Alexander & Andersen, 1993). For example, "Iowa veterans need someone to stand up for

them ” and “I know what it takes to bring good jobs to Kentucky” should be coded as masculine issues; “A bill was proposed to lower student loan rates” and “\$700 billion cuts to Medicare” should be coded as feminine issues.

### **3.4.2 Stereotypically feminine and masculine traits**

Candidates’ background and qualification was categorized as masculine traits because it displays candidates-centered nature (Wattenberg, 1991). The voting record and absent rate is the main concern when coding this variable. Candidates’ ethics and moral characteristics was categorized as feminine traits (Bystrom & Brown, 2008). For example, “Bruce Braley has a 95% voting record in Congress” and “Mary Landrieu votes with Obama 97% of the time” should be coded as masculine traits; “Bruce Braley look down on Iowa farmers” should be coded as feminine traits.

### **3.4.3 Stereotypically feminine and masculine visual elements**

Previous studies categorized dressing casually, smiling and touching, hugging and shaking hands as feminine visual elements; categorized dressing formally, less smiling and less touching, less hugging and less touching/hugging/shaking hands as masculine visual elements (Shame, 2003; Kaid, 2004; Bystrom & Brown, 2008).

### **3.4.4 Negative messages targeting opponents**

In both candidate-funded ads and PAC-sponsored ads, if negative sentences in one ad are in the majority, the advertisement will be categorized as negative message toward opponents. For example: “Joni Ernst missed 36% of votes for Iowa Senate,” “Don’t believe Kay Hagan,” “Thom Tills stopped equal pay bill for women,” “If Mitch can work to create jobs for China, why can’t he create jobs back home,” “Bruce Braley looks down on farmers,” and so on.

### **3.4.5 Positive messages about oneself**

Similar to the negative message toward opponents, in both candidate-funded ads and sponsored ads, if the positive sentences are in the majority in one ad, the ad will be categorized as positive message about oneself. For example, “Bill Cassidy: Americans need these jobs, Louisianans need these jobs, let’s get Washington out of the wig, ” “She never looks down on farmers because Ernst is true Iowa”, “Braley has stood strong for Iowa veterans”, “...motivated me to become a lawyer and fight for people” and so on.

### **3.5 Inter-coder Reliability**

The coded sample for inter-coder reliability is 38, which is 15% of the full sample (253). When randomly selecting the sample, Research Randomizer was used to generate 38 unique numbers. ReCal2 0.1 is used in the reliability calculation process.

Two independent coders were involved in the coding process, the author and one Chinese PHD student from Hospitality. Since the second coder did not have much experience with political advertising, the author trained her about some basic concepts such as masculine, feminine, super PACs and so on. The two coded twice because the Krippendorff's Alpha coefficients for the first round were not all higher than .75. After further discussion about the variables, all of the Krippendorff's Alpha coefficients in the second round were higher than .81. The Krippendorff's Alphas for the 20 variables were: 1 for Ad Number, 1 for Ad Length, 1 for Who Delivered the Ad, 1 for Gender, .87 for Appeal, .92 for Military, .80 for Economics, .88 for Labor, .89 for Social issue, .84 for Education.84 for Family, .87 for Working Performance, .95 for Wear, .82 for Facial



Expression, .84 for Body Touch / Hand shaking, .84 for Walk with People, .83 for Talk with People, .92 for Attacking Ethics/morals decline, .87 for Tone.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This thesis set out to examine differences in frames used in campaign ads of women candidates versus ads of men candidates, either sponsored by the candidates themselves or by super PACs, in four mixed-gender senatorial races in 2014 that spent most on negative advertising.

To test the hypothesis and answer the research questions, cross tabulations were employed to analyze differences by gender and by sponsor in use of feminine traits and issues. Furthermore, independent-samples t-tests and one-way Anova were used to analyze differences in ad negativity by gender and by sponsor, respectively.

#### 4.1 Gender-based Stereotypes

On feminine issues, previous research indicated that women candidates focus more on stereotypically masculine issues and traits than male candidates in order to be treated the same as men (Kahn & Gordon, 1997; Shame, 2003). The hypothesis 1 predicted that women candidates and men candidates are similar in employing stereotypically feminine issues. In the sample, the number of candidate-sponsored ads was 150, which accounts for 59.3% of the whole sample. To test H1, a cross-tabulation was conducted to compare the amount of ads men candidates and women candidates issued employing feminine issues and masculine traits. The crosstab (Table 1) found that women candidates (23%) are significantly more likely than men (7.9%) to mention female gender ( $p < .01$ ).

**Table 1**

Difference in issues and traits by gender between male and female candidates.

Cross-tabulation

	<u>Women Candidates</u>	<u>Men candidates</u>	<u>Chi-square</u>
Female Gender Mention	23.0	7.9	.01**
Emotional Appeal	27.0	23.7	.638
<i>Issues</i>			
Military	29.7	18.4	.105
Economics	39.2	25.0	.063
Labor Issues	36.5	34.2	.771
Social Care	47.3	51.3	.623
Education	24.3	5.3	.001***
<i>Traits</i>			
Ethics/ Moral Decline	1.3	0.0	0.322
Background and Qualifications	33.8	46.1	.125
<i>Visual elements</i>			
Formal Apparel	31.1	9.2	.002**
Smiling	35.1	25.0	.335
Shaking Hands	20.3	23.7	.614
Walking with People	16.2	14.5	.767
Talking with People	23.0	26.3	.635
	N=74	N=76	

•“Masculine Issues” include military, economics and labor issues; “Feminine Issues” include social care and education; “Masculine Traits” include background and qualification; “Feminine Traits” include ethics and moral decline; “Feminine visual elements” include smiling, shaking hands, walking with people, talking with people.

•\* P< .05 \*\*P< .01 \*\*\*P< .001

Furthermore, there is a significant relationship between women candidates and education issues. The crosstab test found that ads delivered by women candidates (24.3%) focus significantly more on education than ads delivered by men candidates (5.3%) ( $p < .001$ ). However, the analysis did not show any significance on women focusing on

masculine issues. For H1, women candidates were more likely to employ feminine issues than men candidates, so H1 is partially rejected (since no differences were found between the two genders except on the focus on education issues).

Previous research suggested that female candidates downplay their feminine role and use less feminine traits (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; McGinley, 2009). The hypothesis 2 predicted that women focus less on feminine traits than men candidates. The crosstabulation analysis found that neither male candidates (0%) nor female candidates (1.3%) mention ethics and moral traits in their ads. Although male candidates (46.1%) focused more on background and qualifications than female candidates (33.8%), the crosstab analysis did not show any significant difference between them (Table 1). Therefore, H2 is not supported.

In hypothesis 3, women candidates are predicted to use more feminine visual elements than male candidates. The crosstab analysis showed that the relationship between women and formal apparel is statistically significant. In Table 1, women candidates are more likely to dress formally (31.1%) compared to men candidates (9.2%) ( $p < .01$ ). On other visual elements, either feminine or masculine, analysis found no significant differences in ads delivery between men candidates and women candidates (Table 1). Therefore, H3 was rejected because women candidates employ fewer feminine visual elements than male candidates.

#### **4.2 Negativity of Ads Sponsored by Candidates**

Political ads are an important source for candidates to present themselves and attack their opponents. As indicated in the literature review, negative ads can leave a

stronger impression on voters and decrease opponents' credibility (Kahn, 1993). However, backlash effect can be a concern for candidates (Painter, 2014), preventing them from delivering too many negative ads.

Research question 1 asked about the difference in the negativity of ads delivered by women candidates compared to men candidates. By doing a crosstab analysis, Table 2 showed that the amount of negative ads (32.4% and 27.6%) delivered by both women candidates and men candidates themselves is lower than the proportion of positive ads (48.6% and 38.2%), which indicates that candidates are less likely to create negative ads by themselves. Although women candidates (32.4%) seem to deliver more negative ads than men candidates (27.6%), men candidates (34.2%) are more likely to deliver far more combined ads than women candidates (18.9%). The value of Chi-square is 43.697 ( $p < .001$ ), which indicates a strong relationship between candidates' gender and ads' negativity.

**Table 2**  
Levels in negativity by gender  
Cross-tabulation

	<u>Women Candidates %</u>	<u>Men Candidates %</u>
Candidate Positive	48.6	38.2
Opponent negative	32.4	27.6
Combination	18.9	34.2
	N=74	N=76

•\*  $P < .05$  \*\* $P < .01$  \*\*\* $P < .001$   
N=253

Overall, for RQ1, men candidates are more negative than women candidates in 2014 Senate election because the sum of men candidates' negative ads and combined ads

(61.8%) is higher than the sum of women candidates' negative ads and combined ads (51.3%).

As has been mentioned earlier, candidates of different genders are expected to do well in different traits; for example, women are expected to do well on social issues owing to the stereotype of passion (Alexander & Andersen, 1993). The crosstab analysis found that women delivered a lot of negative ads on social care and education issues: 41.7% of the negative ads delivered by women candidates attack men candidates on bad social care ideas; 37.5% of the negative ads delivered by women candidates attack men candidates on poor education proposals and policies, however they are not statistically significant (Table 3). Since men are associated with the stereotype of powerful and strong, they are believed to do well on military issues (Alexander & Andersen, 1993). Compared to other issues, only 12.5 % of the negative ads delivered by women candidates mentioned military-related issues when attacking men candidates, the significance value of which is approximately close to 0.05 ( $p=0.053$ ).

In terms of traits, Table 3 indicates that 54.2% of the negative ads delivered by women candidates attack men candidates on background and qualifications, which is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). There seldom appeared an ad delivered by women candidates attacking male candidates on ethics or moral traits. 2.2% of the negative ads created by women candidates attack male opponents on their ethics and moral decline (e.g., Looks down on Iowa farmers), which is not significant in this study.

In Table 3, the crosstab analysis also found a strong association between candidates' shaking hands ( $p<0.01$ ), walking with people ( $p<0.01$ ) and talking with people ( $p<0.01$ )

and tone of the ads, indicating that female candidates focus significantly less on visual elements in negative ads.

**Table 3**

Different issues and traits in women's negative ads

Cross-tabulation

	<u>Candidate positive</u>	<u>Opponent negative</u>	<u>Combination</u>	<u>Chi- square</u>
<i>Issues</i>				
Social Care	52.8	41.7	42.9	.654
Education	13.9	37.5	28.6	.104
Economics	41.7	37.5	35.7	.908
Labor Issues	36.1	29.2	50.0	.436
Military	41.7	12.5	28.6	.053
<i>Traits</i>				
Background and Qualifications	22.2	54.2	28.6	.034*
Ethics/ Moral Decline	0.0	2.2	0.0	.309
<i>Visual Elements</i>				
Shaking Hands	36.1	0.0	14.3	.002**
Walking with People	22.2	4.2	21.4	.002**
Talking with People	30.6	4.2	35.7	.002**

•\* P< .05 \*\*P< .01 \*\*\*P< .001

N=253

For research question 2a, which examines the differences in the traits and issues women candidates focused on, crosstab analysis (Table 3) found that women candidates focus significantly more on mentioning background and qualification ( $p < .05$ ), which is a trait. Therefore, women candidates attacked opponents more on traits than issues in the Senate election in 2014.

RQ2b asked whether men candidates focus more on issues or traits. In terms of issues, 47.6% of the attack ads delivered by men candidates focus on education issues, while men candidates attacked less on economic issues (19%), social care (19%) and

military issues (14.3%). However, the crosstab analysis did not show any significance between men candidates with any of the issues (Table 4).

In Table 4, the crosstab analysis shows a strong association between background and qualification and negative ads of male candidates. 76.2% of the negative ads delivered by men candidates attacked women candidates' voting rating and absent rate ( $p < 0.001$ ). The crosstab analysis also found a strong association between candidates' visual elements such as shaking hands ( $p < 0.01$ ), walking with people ( $p < 0.01$ ) and talking with people ( $p < 0.01$ ) and tone of the ads. Virtually none of the men's attack ads included visual elements (Table 4).

**Table 4**

Different issues and traits in men's negative ads  
Cross-tabulation

	<u>Candidate positive</u>	<u>Opponent negative</u>	<u>Combination</u>	<u>Chi- square</u>
<i>Issues</i>				
Social Care	51.7	47.6	53.8	.912
Education	6.0	0.0	7.7	.443
Economics	20.7	19.0	34.6	.374
Labor Issues	44.8	19.0	34.6	.165
Military	24.1	14.3	15.4	.598
<i>Traits</i>				
Background and Qualifications	17.2	76.2	53.8	.000***
Ethics/ Moral Decline	0.0	0.0	0.0	
<i>Visual Elements</i>				
Shaking Hands	41.4	0.0	23.1	.003**
Walking with People	31.0	0.0	7.7	.004**
Talking with People	37.9	0.0	34.6	.005**

•\*  $P < .05$  \*\* $P < .01$  \*\*\* $P < .001$

N=253



Overall, research question 2b examines the differences in the traits and issues men candidates focused on, and crosstab analysis (Table 4) found that men candidates focus significantly more on mentioning background and qualification ( $p < .001$ ), which is a trait. Therefore, similar to women candidates, men candidates also attacked opponents more on traits (three thirds of ads) than issues in the Senate election in 2014, although almost half of their attack ads focused on social-care issues.

When comparing Table 3 and Table 4, the negative ads delivered by women candidates attack more on economic issues (37.5% vs. 19%), labor issues (29.2% vs. 19%) and education (37.5% vs. 0%) than men candidates. The negative ads delivered by men candidates attack more on military issues (14.3% vs. 12.5%), social care (47.6% vs. 41.7%) and background and qualifications (76.2% vs. 54.2%).

### **4.3 Negativity of Super PACs**

Research question 3 explores the negativity of the ads sponsored by super PACs supporting men and women. As shown in Table 5, super PACs supporting women candidates (61.7%) create far more positive ads than super PACs supporting men candidates (11.6%). On the contrary, super PACs supporting men candidates create more than twice the amount of negative ads attacking opponents than super PACs supporting women candidates.

As shown in Table 5, the crosstab analysis indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the four groups (men candidates, women candidates, super PACs supporting men candidates and super PACs supporting women candidates) in delivering negative ads.

**Table 5**  
Levels in negativity by gender and sponsor.  
Cross-tabulation

	<u>Women</u> Candidates %	<u>Men</u> Candidates %	<u>Super PAC</u> Supporting Women Candidates%	<u>Super PAC</u> Supporting Men Candidates%
Candidate positive	48.6	38.2	61.7	11.6
Opponent negative	32.4	27.6	31.7	69.8
Combination	18.9	34.2	6.7	18.6
	N=74	N=76	N=60	N=43

\*  $P < .05$  \*\* $P < .01$  \*\*\* $P < .001$

Super PACs supporting men candidates delivered significantly more negative ads than super PACs supporting women candidates ( $P < .001$ ). To be precisely, when adding negative ads and combined ads together, women candidates (51.3%), men candidates (61.8%), and super PACs supporting women candidates (38.4%) deliver less negative ads than super PACs supporting men candidates (88.4%). Among the four groups, super PACs supporting female candidates delivered the least negative ones. Overall, super PACs supporting men candidates is more negative than super PACs supporting women candidates.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study examines differences between men and women candidates in conducting campaign ads during the 2014 United States Senate election. By doing a content analysis of the ads delivered by or on behalf of eight candidates, four women and four men, from North Carolina, Louisiana, Iowa and Kentucky, the study explains how differently women candidates and men candidates made use of feminine traits and issues by examining the amount of masculine-related content and feminine-related content. This study then explored differences in ads negativity and issues and traits used in campaign ads from women candidates and men candidates by determining the tone and classifying the ads' content. The research design also examined the difference in negativity of super PACs supporting men candidates and women candidates by analyzing the tone in their ads.

The findings suggest that women candidates do focus more on gender differences or gender-related issues (e.g., I will go to Washington as a Mom; She cares about women getting equal pay; Protecting women's access to health care), which is consistent with previous research that women politicians think they have more advantages in mentioning gender when competing with men (Huddy & Capelos, 2002). Women candidates' propensity to focus more on feminine issues was also reflected in references to education issues because women delivered almost five times more education-related ads than men (e.g., My education there is made possible by federal assistance; It's nice to know that people like Mary Landrieu are willing to protect these federal grants.) However, women candidates were not proved to employ less feminine traits in 2014 Senate election.

The results also support previous findings of visual elements on women's preference to dress formally in order to win the same qualification as men (Bystrom, Banwart, Kaid & Robertson, 2004). Instead of dressing feminine, the current study found that, indeed, women always dress formally to help them look as strong as men. Besides mentioning gender and education issues, no other evidence was found that male and female candidates differ in mentions of other issues, traits and visual elements tested in this study but, overall, the analysis showed that women candidates focus more on feminine issues and masculine visual elements than men candidates.

The analysis found that men candidates produced more negative ads than women candidates. Women candidates are more positive, which is consistent with previous research that female politicians are expected not to deliver negative ads on their opponents (Herrnson & Lucas, 2006) due to the stereotype of honesty (e.g., "I know how to fight for those with no voice and when"; "I'm gonna keep the promise we made to protect social security and Medicare for every senior who depends on it"). Men candidates are more negative, and they tend to combine positive and negative information in one ad (e.g., "Three years after Barack Obama and liberal congress's false and bad health care in America...", "On Obamacare, Alison Grimes sides with Obama. Mitch McConnell's with Kentucky;" "You can conclude Senator Hagan is a bad person, and I am too. It's a shame... I think we need a Senator who votes conscience ahead of party, and taxpayers ahead of government... I'd be honored to have your support").

The findings indicated that both women and men candidates mention traits far more often than issues in negative ads compared to positive ads. In particular, attacking opponents' background and qualifications is the most popular technique used in negative

ads produced by both men and women candidates (e.g., “Voted for Obamacare”; “Low attendance”; “Bad working performance on Medicare, education, employment issues” and so on). The analysis showed no special focus on other tested issues (social care, education economic, labor issues and veterans) and traits (ethics/moral decline), neither from the negative ads by men candidates or by women candidates.

An important contribution of this study is brought by the findings on the ads sponsored by super PACs, as they have been neglected by previous research focusing on negative advertising. The study found that super PACs supporting men candidates are more negative than super PAC supporting women candidates (e.g., “What does Joni Ernst stand for?” “She’s proposing to privatize social security. Gambling our savings on the stock market”; “Should you have a right to make your own choices? Or should the politicians in Washington make those choices for you ... But Alison Grimes won’t protect your rights). According to previous research, backlash effects is a concern for candidates, prompting them to produce fewer negative ads by themselves so that super PACs may produce more attack ads on opponents (Painter, 2014). Interestingly, super PAC supporting women candidates are even more positive than women candidates themselves. The status of candidates might be a reason for why the overall ads produced by women candidates and super PACs supporting women candidates are more positive than the overall adds produced by men candidates and super PACs supporting men candidates. Iowa was running an open-seat race, Alison Grimes was a challenger, and Mary Landrieu and Kay Hagan were incumbents, tilting the balance in favor of incumbents for women. Herrnson (2004) suggested that incumbents are less likely than challengers to deliver negative advertising. Challengers originally are less advantaged in the election so they need more

attacking ads on the incumbents to highlight themselves (Herrnson, 2004). The difference in ideology of some PACs might be another reason. Americans for Prosperity and US Chamber of Commerce are two of the PACs that delivered the most amounts of negative ads, which are all conservative political advocacy groups. However, considering that previous research has found that women are not adversely affected by use of negative advertising, it is interesting that super PACs supporting women avoided using a higher proportion of attack ads. Further studies should look at party affiliation or ideology to tease out potential differences in use of negative campaigns.

Although the amount of ads delivered by super PACs did not exceed the number of candidate-sponsored ads in the sample, the findings suggest that the competition between super PACs should be limited in the future, given their negative nature. In the 2012 presidential election, super PACs could use unlimited amounts of money supporting or opposing candidates in delivering advertising (Dowling & Wichowsky, 2013), which turned the election into a competition of money. In addition, research shows that too much negativity in ads will lead people to lose trust in politics and participate less in elections. Perloff and Kinsey (1992) suggested that negative advertising could lead to distrust in politicians. Negative content can also increase cynicism (Schenck-Hamlin, Procter & Rumsey, 2000).

The study offers a rough pattern of the political campaigns employed by men and women in 2014 United States Senate election. Since the amount of women candidates are increasing in the political sphere, this study contributes updated knowledge to the area of Senate elections between men and women and gives insights on the trend and innovation of the political campaign between candidates of different genders. It also offers hints and

ideas for future candidates on their campaign strategies of political ads if they will compete with opponents of different gender. By checking the result of the 2014 Senate election, there is only 1 woman candidate (Joni Ernst) in Iowa State won over man candidate (Bruce Braley) among these four races, while the other three women candidates were all defeated by men candidates. Therefore, running positive campaigns and focusing on traits did not necessarily play a vital roll for women candidates in Senate election between different gender groups.

Overall, while male candidates ads (and especially ads sponsored by Super PACs) were found to be more negative than female candidate ads, this comparative analysis found more similarities than differences between the two gender groups in terms of framing, suggesting that perhaps women are increasingly more comfortable in their political ambitions, benefiting themselves by making use of both feminine trait and masculine traits, and see themselves (and are seen by men) as equal rivals. This study does not suggest that there appears little differences between two gender groups in running political campaign, however, gender differences play a less important role in candidates' campaign strategy than it used to.

There also exist some limitations in this study that can be improved in future research. First of all, the selected sample cannot be guaranteed to have exhausted all the ads delivered in the eight candidates' campaigns. The researcher may have missed some ads if they were not uploaded on candidates' or super PACs' YouTube channel or have been deleted before they could be downloaded for offline analysis. Secondly, the analysis did not take into account the party affiliation or the incumbent vs. challenger status of the candidates. Thirdly, the researcher assumed that states that delivered more negative ads are

representative in studying negativity of campaign ads between men and women candidates, which may not be the case. Finally, the study works only on political campaigns between men and women candidates, and future studies could broaden the research design to include political campaigns between women candidates because they may differ from campaigns between men and campaigns between men and women.



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## APPENDIX A

## 2014 UNITED STATES SENATE ELECTION ADS - CODE BOOK

1. *Coder Name*: Each coder will put their name in the coding sheet (0 for the author; 1 for the coder).
2. *Ad Number*: Each coder will put the number of each ad in the coding sheet.
3. *Who delivers/supports the ad*: woman candidate is coded as 1; man candidate is coded as 2; Super PAC supporting woman candidate is coded as 3; Super PAC supporting man candidate is coded as 4. Candidate-oriented ads usually include candidate's name at the end of the ads. For example, "Paid for by Braley for Iowa" should be coded as 2 = man candidate; "Paid for by Joni Ernst for U.S. Senate" should be coded as 1 = women candidate. Super PAC oriented ads usually include the organization name at the end of the ads. For example, "Paid for by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce" or "Paid for by Senate Majority PAC" should be coded as Super PAC supporting ad.
4. *The main tone of the Ad*. Coder should code 1 if the main tone of the ad is candidate positive; Coder should code 2 if the main tone of the ad is opponent negative; Coder should code 3 if the main tone contains both candidate positive and opponent negative content; Coder should code 4 if the main tone is neutral statement without any bias in favor of or against any candidates or issues.
5. *Gender related information*. Coder should code 1 = Present if there appears some gender related information. Coder should code 0 = Absent if there appears no gender related information. For example, "I will go to Washington as a Mom, a soldier..." "In Kentucky, women make 76 cents for every dollar a man makes."



6. *What is the dominant appeal in the ad?* Coder will put 1 if the ad uses emotional an appeal; Coder will put 2 if the ad is logical. Emotional ads are not about specific political events (how to do or what to do), but contain touching emotions and people-oriented information. For example, “On this anniversary of 9/11, I believe America should take pause and remember those that lost their lives on that tragic day,” “No matter who the president is, I won’t answer to them, I will answer to you.” Logical is an ad containing statements of fact on political events or evidence on opponents. For example, “It’s just another Obamacare lie...” “Bill Cassidy voted in Congress to raise retirement age to 70 and cut benefits.”
7. *Content mentioned in the ad:*
- 7.1 Coder will put 1 = Present if military related information is mentioned; Coder will put 0 = Absent if military related information is not mentioned. Military related information can relate to veterans, military expenditures, 9/11, army, etc.
- 7.2 Coder will put 1 = Present if economic related information is mentioned; Coder will put 0 = Absent if economic related information is not mentioned. Economic related information includes ads on taxes, income, budget, etc.
- 7.3 Coder will put 1 = Present if labor issues are mentioned; Coder will put 0 = Absent if labor issues are not mentioned. Labor issues include creating jobs.
- 7.4 Coder will put 1 = Present if social issues are mentioned; Coder will put 0 = Absent if social issues are not mentioned. Social issues include senior citizens, medical treatment, pollution, etc.
- 7.5 Coder will put 1 = Present if education related information is mentioned; Coder will put 0 = Absent if education related information is not mentioned. Education related information includes education fee, student loans, school standards, etc.
- 7.6 Coder will put 1 = Present if background and qualifications (voting rate and absent rate) are mentioned; Coder will put 0 = Absent if background and qualifications (voting rate and absent rate) are not mentioned.

8. *What did the candidate wear?* Coder should code 1 if the candidate wears formal clothes (suit and shirt with suit pants); Coder should code 2 if the candidate wears casual clothes (T-shirt, jacket and shirts with jeans); Coder should code 3 if no candidates appeared in the ad; Coder should code 4 if the ad is sponsored by the super PAC.
9. *Facial expression:* Coder should code 1 if the candidate's facial expression is mainly smiling: cheerful, happy look; Coder should code 2 if the candidate's facial expression is mainly attentive/serious: concerned; Coder should code 3 if the candidate's facial expression is frowning/glaring: angry; Coder should code 4 if no candidate appeared in the ad.
10. *Body gesture:* Coder should code 1 if the candidate shakes hands with people or has body touch with people; Coder should code 2 if the candidate walks along with people; Coder should code 3 if the candidate has a conversation with one or more people (the content of the conversation does not necessarily be shown in the ad); Coder should code 4 if no candidate appear in the ad.
11. *Attack on ethics/moral traits:* Coder should code 1 = Present if the content of ad related to attacking on candidates' ethics/moral traits (personal characteristic). For example, "Bruce Braley looks down on Iowa farmers"; Coder should code 0 = Absent if the ad did not contain content attacking on candidates' ethics/moral traits (personal characteristic).

## APPENDIX B

## 2014 UNITED STATES SENATE ELECTION ADS CODING SHEET

Q1 Coder Name

0

1

Q2 Ad Number

Q3 Who deliver/support the ad?

1. Woman candidate
2. Man candidate
3. Super PAC supporting woman candidate
4. Super PAC supporting man candidate

Q4 What is the main tone of the ad? (Banwart, Winfrey & Schnoebelen; Sheckels (Ed), 2009)

1. Candidate positive: a positive statement by candidate and/or surrogate/announcer about candidate's characteristics, qualifications, issue stands, or record.
2. Opponent negative: a negative statement by candidate and/or surrogate/announcer on characteristics, qualifications, issue stands, or record of opponent.
3. Combination
4. Neutral

Q5 Is there any gender related information mentioned?

0. Absent
1. Present

Q6 What is the dominant appeal in the ad?

1. Emotional
2. Logical

Q7 What kind of content had been mentioned in the ad? (0 = Absent; 1 = Present)

- 7.1. Military
- 7.2. Economics
- 7.3. Labor issues
- 7.4. Social issues
- 7.5. Education
- 7.6. Background and qualifications

Q8 What did the candidate wear?

1. Formal
2. Casual

3. N/A - No candidates show up/ Because the ad is sponsored by the super PAC  
Q9 Is the candidate usually (code for dominant expression) (Banwart, Winfrey & Schnoebelen; Sheckels (Ed), 2009)

1. Smiling: cheerful, happy look
2. Attentive/serious: concerned
3. Frowning/glaring: angry
4. N/A - No candidate present

Q10 What is the body gesture of the candidate?

1. Body touch / Hugs / Shakes hands
2. Walks with citizens
3. Talks to others
4. N/A - No candidate present

Q11 Does the ad attack on candidates' ethics/moral traits (personal characteristic)?

0. Absent
1. Present

APPENDIX C  
URLs OF THE CANDIDATES' WEBSITES

HOMEPAGE	
Joni Ernst	<a href="http://www.ernst.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/home">http://www.ernst.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/home</a>
Bruce Braley	<a href="http://vote.brucebraley.com">http://vote.brucebraley.com</a>
Alison Lundergan Grimes, Alison for Kentucky	<a href="http://alisonforkentucky.com/">http://alisonforkentucky.com/</a>
U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell	<a href="http://www.mcconnell.senate.gov/public/">http://www.mcconnell.senate.gov/public/</a>
Mary Landrieu	<a href="http://www.landrieu.senate.gov/?p=for...">http://www.landrieu.senate.gov/?p=for...</a>
US Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana: Home	<a href="http://www.cassidy.senate.gov/">http://www.cassidy.senate.gov/</a>
Kay Hagan	<a href="http://www.kayhagan.com/">http://www.kayhagan.com/</a>
Senator Thom Tillis	<a href="https://www.tillis.senate.gov/public/">https://www.tillis.senate.gov/public/</a>
YOUTUBE CHANNEL	
Joni Ernst	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCa6sZ2LvDjb6TAJVuI6HwRg">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCa6sZ2LvDjb6TAJVuI6HwRg</a>
Bruce Braley	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/BraleyforCongress">https://www.youtube.com/user/BraleyforCongress</a>
Alison for Kentucky	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/alisonforkentucky">https://www.youtube.com/user/alisonforkentucky</a>
Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/RepublicanLeader">https://www.youtube.com/user/RepublicanLeader</a>
Senator Landrieu	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/SenatorLandrieu">https://www.youtube.com/user/SenatorLandrieu</a>
Senator Bill Cassidy	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCEyGhUzxgkxFzWCY-rxz8g">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCEyGhUzxgkxFzWCY-rxz8g</a>
Kay Hagan	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/user/HaganForSenate">https://www.youtube.com/user/HaganForSenate</a>
Senator Thom Tillis	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUD9VGV4SSGWjGdbn37Ea2w">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUD9VGV4SSGWjGdbn37Ea2w</a>

Websites of Bruce Braley, Mary Landrieu, and Kay Hagan closed after the election ended.  
Last accessed on Dec. 2014.

APPENDIX D  
THE LIST OF PACs SPONSORING ADS

Joni Ernst	N=24	Americans For Prosperity (6) U.S. Chamber of Commerce (5) Priorities For Iowa (5) Freedom Partners Action Fund (3) Freedom Partners Chamber of Commerce (2) Reclaim America PAC (2) NRA Political Victory Fund (1)
Bruce Braley	N=7	Senate Majority PAC (3) The League of Conservation Voters (2) Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (1) NARAL Pro-Choice America (1)
Alison Grimes	N=16	We are Kentucky (6) Senate Majority PAC (5) Patriot Majority USA (2) Madison Project (2) NARAL Pro-Choice America (1)
Mitch McConnell	N=13	Kentuckians for Strong Leadership (6) U.S. Chamber of Commerce (4) Americans For Prosperity (2) American Crossroads (1)
Mary Landrieu	N=8	Senate Majority PAC (5) Patriot Majority USA (3)
Bill Cassidy	N=13	Americans For Prosperity (9) NRA Political Victory Fund (2) American Rising PAC (1) Women Speatout PAC (1)
Kay Hagan	N=12	Senate Majority PAC (6) Patriot Majority USA (3) Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (2) NARAL Pro-Choice America (1)
Thom Tillis	N=10	U.S. Chamber of Commerce (5) Americans For Prosperity (4) Women Speakout PAC (1)