Gender-based and Emotional Appeals: The effect of candidate gender on political rhetoric in campaign advertisements

COMM450: Communication Ethics

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Abstract:

Despite increasing research surrounding emotional appeals in politics, few studies seek to understand how male vs. female candidates use emotional and gendered appeals differently in their own campaign advertisements. With more and more female politicians entering office every year, it's important to understand their political rhetoric. Studying advertisements directly and analyzing them for emotional appeals and gender-based appeals is necessary to fill this gap. The present study utilizes research from political rhetoric and gender psychology to conduct a content analysis on 36 televised campaign advertisements from the 2020 election cycle. The results demonstrate that male and female candidates don't meet the expectations of what existing research would suggest regarding their political rhetoric. In fact, male and female candidates take quite similar approaches to their advertisements. Implications for further research on voter and politician behavior is discussed.

Democracy lies on the expectation of an informed public. Voters are expected to have an accurate, extensive understanding of the candidates for whom they vote. A main strategy candidates use to disseminate their version of this understanding is through political advertising. When turning on the television around election season, voters are almost guaranteed to eventually be met with a political candidate gracing their screen in a mediated advertisement. Interestingly, political advertisements enjoy full protection under the First Amendment and are widely excluded from regulatory surveillance, especially regarding their content (Tinkham, 1994). Without regulatory guidelines, voters must rely on their own rationale and ethical standards to gauge the effectiveness and legitimacy of political ads. One of the most common strategies of political advertisements, which is often the subject of controversial debate, is the use of emotional appeals.

Emotional appeals are defined as appeals that intend to elicit a certain emotional response (Brader, 2005). In political ads today, it is common to see a candidate invoking compassion or

happiness with loving images of their family holding hands in a meadow or invoking fear through ominous threats and warnings about their opponent's policies and how it will ruin constituents' lives. These emotional appeals have dominated logical appeals in their presence in political television ads since their inception (Brader, 2005). Brader finds that emotional appeals are absent from less than one percent of ads and weakly present in only a quarter of all ads (2005). Scholars argue that these kinds of appeals attempt to circumvent the human mind and reason in order to elicit non reflective or unconscious responses (Johannesen, 2008). The full intent of democracy demands that voters have an ability to rationalize and weigh a candidate in their entirety. These types of advertisements can trigger strong emotions rather than rational, thoughtful reflection. Emotional appeals are more powerful and enduring than other types of appeals, and hence more likely to dominate the rhetorical landscape (Jerit, 2004). Philosopher Eric Hoffer claims the effectiveness of a message is judged "by how thoroughly it insulates the individual from his self and the world as it is" (1958). Emotional appeals are designed to circumvent the individual's rational thought and ability to make decisions by evoking emotion much stronger than rationality. It insulates from all other thought and context. As Hoffer says, the most effective leader "must know how to kindle and fan an extravagant hope" (1958). In increasingly partisan times, the intensity of these polarizing emotions can pull people even further apart (Landreville, 2019). Despite all of this extremity, emotional appeals continue to become more and more common in political advertising (Brader, 2006). Thus, these appeals are increasingly studied in political ethics and rhetoric. A majority of the research that exists focuses on the voter emotions rather than candidate emotions within their advertisements (Jones, 2013).

Another factor that is rapidly increasing in politics is the presence of women. Women are underrepresented at all levels of elected office (they hold 1 in 5 seats), but numbers are rising

with every given year (Bauer, 2015). Given the mere fact that females are underrepresented in politics, it follows that there is also significantly less research on female politicians. As women are increasingly seen in the political sphere, more research is necessary surrounding their rhetoric and political tendencies. Existing literature on female rhetoric establishes that females feel and express emotions more deeply and frequently than men (Kemp, 2013). Research has shown that women employ language to make connections and create intimacies, whereas men use language to assert independence and status (Brunel, 2000).

These stereotypes align with the hypothesis that female candidates' advertising would include more emotional appeals rather than rational, while male candidates' advertising would be associated with less emotional and more rational appeals. In addition, women are also expected to focus on more 'soft' or 'feminine' issues such as education, family, welfare, the environment, and healthcare while men are seen to be more competent at 'hard' issues such as the economy, trade, foreign policy, and military (Lee, 2014).

The dissonance arises when one realizes that not every individual adheres to the stereotypes of their own gender. The double bind theory states that aggressive, assertive females are seen as unfeminine, yet more traditionally feminine women are deemed ineffective for office (Vedantum). 'Hard' issues are often viewed as more essential for government leaders than 'soft' issues. Some research argues that women are better off running "as women" and playing to the female stereotypes, while other research argues that women should focus on traditionally male issues to earn their spot on the ticket (Herrnson, 2003, Lammers, 2009).

Combining research from political rhetoric and gender psychology would suggest that male and. female candidates would take very different approaches to their advertisements. Females are expected to use more emotions, demonstrate warmth, and care more about "soft"

issues. Males are expected to use more rationale, demonstrate aggression, and care more about "hard" issues. There is extreme dissonance in the existing literature regarding how women should campaign and adhere (or not adhere) to their gender norms. Political advertisements are one of the only opportunities candidates have to maintain complete control over how they wish to present themselves to voters. In this study, the intersection between gender and emotional appeals in political advertisements is explored. A unique dataset is used to analyze the presence of emotional appeals amongst candidates of different genders and how these appeals may change when the race is single-gendered vs. cross-sex. It also analyzes whether candidates are more likely to address issues that traditionally align with their own gender. As women are increasingly taking on roles in politics, studying the gender differences or similarities in political rhetoric will help both male and female candidates navigate the political landscape and pave the way for further fruitful exploration.

Review of Literature

Emotional Appeals in Campaign Advertising

Understanding how emotions affect our ability to rationalize is paramount in decision-making - especially concerning the selection of our government leaders. Communication Professor Franklyn Haiman's degree of rationality and political perspective is based on the enhancement of the human capacity to reason logically. He deems this ability a "prime necessity for the adequate functioning of our political system" (Johannesen, 2008). Democracy relies on this ability to reason logically. Haiman also states that the majority of emotional appeals in persuasion are designed to circumvent this rational thought. Emotional appeals are used strategically by candidates in their campaign advertising (Lipsitz, 2018). The purpose of campaign advertising

ranges from raising awareness about the election to increasing voter knowledge of the candidate to fostering voter participation (Ridout, 2011). Along with these factors, campaign advertising is granted significance through its persuasive power. Emotional appeals allow candidates to focus their rhetoric on shared values and meanings to mobilize their party and supporters. At the same time, it works to attract the eyes of undecided voters (Jerit, 2004).

The use of emotion has been ethically questioned for its ability to overpower all other types of appeals. Emotions, on their most basic level, invoke physiological responses which allow organisms to adapt to their environments. Highly emotional content elicits cardiac-somatic responses and dispositions for the body to take action (Wang, 2017). Certain emotional cognitive responses may unconsciously circumvent ethical evaluations and logical thought in political advertisements (Tinkham, 1994). Emotional appeals influence cognitive processing and decision-making which explains why they are the most commonly used, and effective, appeals in politics (Tedesco). This unconscious drive completely overpowers the slower, more methodical process of rational thought and reflection. Voters can be brought to assumptions or ideas without truly evaluating them for legitimacy beyond the poignant emotion it evoked.

Politicians can utilize emotional appeals to stimulate or activate certain traits in voters that work to the candidate's advantage. Appealing to specific traits or issues can influence the public's attitude by activating a certain emotion (Richey, 2012). Emotion and feelings create and construct meaning in politics where action is "rationalized rather than rationally decided" (Serazio, 2017). One might argue that only those who are uneducated and uninformed in politics would succumb to the persuasive powers of emotional appeals. However, research has shown that it is actually the most politically-engaged and active citizens who are most mobilized and affected by such appeals (Jones, 2013). Notably, research has shown that emotional responses to

candidates in ads were strong predictors of candidate evaluations on election day (Serazio, 2017). Emotional appeals in political ads have the potential to shape the narrative and trajectory of elections if they are poignant enough to create an unconscious, emotional response within the voter.

Types of Emotions

Often in existing research, when political advertisements are characterized by their content they are divided into positive or negative ads (Brader, 2005). Typically positive ads are defined as ads that focus on the supported candidate's strengths and ideas while negative ads highlight the controversy or weaknesses of the opposing candidate (Wang, 2017). However, this division only scratches the surface of the thematic content of political advertisements. Many ads start out positive and then end with an ominous threat or warning or start out negative depicting the opponent and ending positive with the supported candidate saving the day. A prominent example is Lyndon B. Johnson's famous *Daisy Girl* ad which progressed from a happy little girl in a meadow to the threat of nuclear war. Studying specific emotions allows for much further understanding and implications for advertisements such as those.

Different emotional appeals should all have different emotional effects on voters. For example, some studies have suggested that enthusiasm appeals lead to increased support while fear ads lead to vigilance and changed opinions (Ridout, 2011). The intention of an ad can be determined by its emotional appeal usage. Typically, ads that are coded as fear or anger have been shown in research to all be about attacking the opponent (Borah, 2016). Research shows much dispute over whether negative emotions like fear and anger are consistently effective or not. Some studies indicate that these appeals can mobilize campaigns while others argue the negativity backlashes and transfers onto the message sender (Walter, 2019). In other studies, it

was found that ads which evoked strong positive emotional responses predicted an intention to vote for that candidate (Siebt, 2019). It is important to note that candidates choose to air certain appeals to certain emotions at certain times (Brader, 2005). For example, candidates will likely avoid overly happy ads during periods of social unrest. If a market boom occurs, an incumbent will likely appeal to the hope and enthusiasm of this period of time. Not all emotional appeals can be intended for the same audiences and voter groups. Different appeals work on different people and an understanding of various voter groups is necessary to employ these appeals effectively. A big categorizing trait for different emotional appeals are the appeals that are traditionally intended for males vs. the appeals that are traditionally intended for females.

Gender Stereotypes

Stereotypes and heuristics are often employed in judgments of political advertisements, and gender stereotypes are no exception. In fact, gender is one of the most salient means of categorizing people and often one of the first things that people are judged by (Lammers, 2009). While this exists in everyday life, it also exists in political communications and advertisements. Unfortunately, the gender stereotypes that are typically associated with females do not align with the typical expectations of political leaders (Bauer, 2015). Males and females often don't have the same beliefs or attitudes across situations. Research shows that many attitudinal differences and roles in society are manifestations of gender (Kemp, 2013).

Women are often categorized as much more emotional than their counterparts. They are expected to demonstrate warmth and empathy and demonstrate nurturing and sensitivity in their rhetoric. Meanwhile, men are expected to be much more aggressive and assertive with their emotional expression (Chingching, 2004, Hitchon 1997). Literature shows that the public has an expectation that political candidates be outspoken, decisive, and aggressive- aligning much more

with male stereotypes than female (Bauer, 2015). This expectation could explain obvious statistics regarding the lack of female representation in politics. Despite the fact that the number of female candidates running for office in the United States has been increasing for decades, women hold fewer than one in five congressional seats while also composing a majority of the U.S. population (Ono, 2019). Studies show that when women are depicted in stereotypical female roles, voters perceive them as less able to meet the demands of public office (Bauer, 2015).

Interestingly, when participants are not given sufficient information, they tend to turn to gender schema to make judgments. Gender schema is defined as, "the mental representation of the category of traits, attitudes, and behaviors that are traditionally associated with men or women" (Chingching, 2004). This is especially relevant when one considers the previous literature which identifies how often emotional appeals take the place of actual information and reason. Thus, when an advertisement is purely emotional, it is likely that the voter will rely on their gender expectations and beliefs to fill in the blanks for what the candidate believes.

This creates a conflict regarding how women should employ their appeals in political advertising. On the one hand, reflecting traditional norms of femininity activates stereotypes and unfavorable views of the candidates' competency (Bauer, 2015). Yet on the other hand, playing against type and adhering to more aggressive or fear appeals can deem the candidate "unfeminine" and "unfit" (Ridout, 2011). In recent years, female candidates have employed "gender-bending" rhetoric which involves taking counterstereotypical approaches to their advertisements to assert their spot in a male-dominated playing field (Kam, 2017).

Male vs. Female Issues

In order to gain wide public support, candidates need to appeal to both genders in some way. Women are the largest undecided voter bloc and turn out in higher numbers than men (Belkin, 2012, Redondo, 2017). Appealing to this coveted group requires different appeals and attention to issues. As much as the genders are different in their roles as candidates, they are also different in how they respond to certain advertisements as voters. Female voters have been proven to be more likely to vote for the candidate who is perceived as more "kind and gentle" in their political advertisements (Herrnson, 2013). In contrast, men have been proven to be much more likely to be mobilized by negative or aggressive ads compared to women (Brooks, 2010). However, when judging presidential candidates, men and women alike tend to focus on more stereotypical male issues while ignoring stereotypical female issues (Lammers, 2009). These 'male' or 'hard' issues include the economy, defense, and foreign policy. Males are consistently viewed as more competent to handle these kinds of issues than females, and voters reflect that in their preferences (Lee, 2014).

Most of the literature suggests that candidates are better off sticking to their gender stereotypes in their political advertisements. Female candidates increase favorable evaluations when they show more femine traits and focus on 'soft' issues in their advertisements. Similarly, male candidates are rewarded by maintaining more masculine traits and focusing on 'hard' issues (Lee, 2014). Female candidates have been proven to be more socially desirable when their political advertisements are noticeably crafted for women (Hitchon, 1997). Conversely, female candidates often have a fear of going negative and being aggressive in their campaigns due to feminine expectations and double bind theory (Chingching, 2004).

Some candidates do attempt to combine the stereotypes from each gender in their campaigns. For example, George Bush, Jr. branded himself as a "caring conservative" in his

2000 campaign messages which appealed to both typical world-views (Brunel, 2000). Candidates of both genders often opt to exhibit their personal lives and images of family to satisfy any potential female voters (Redondo, 2017). However, there is not much literature on the effects of female candidates combining female and male appeals in their advertisements.

Cross-sex Communication

Studies in interpersonal communication have revealed that female relationships value communication and emotion, while male relationships engage in far less verbal emotional disclosure. Research shows that both women and men say they receive greater emotional support from female friends than male friends (Wood, 2020). While the political atmosphere is nothing like casual conversations with a friend, it is interesting to note how this gender difference translates into mediated advertisements in an election. Most of the research regarding interaction between candidates exists surrounding unmediated content such as debates. In political debates, men are found to typically be much more negative than women (Maeier, 2018). Research has concluded that female candidates affect political communication by influencing the male's communication. Males and females both do not refrain from attacking their opponent regardless of their gender, but political communication has proven to be more civil when one candidate is a female (Maier, 2018). There is not much existing literature on if or how this translates to attacks and appeals in mediated political advertisements.

Significance of the Televised Ad and Current Media Implications

Today's media atmosphere reveals the importance of the televised political advertisement. Inarguably, there is a rise in social media content and ads surrounding political campaigns (Borah, 2016). However, televised ads are still emphatically important and central to a campaign. That's why candidates continue to spend large portions of their campaign budgets on them.

Televised ads provide a unique opportunity for candidates to present themselves directly to voters that cannot be replicated in social media or news media. It is important to note that these televised ads are often regurgitated onto social media sites to expand audience reach.

The news media encourages and rewards the aforementioned emotional appeals. Research has shown that when candidates make a greater use of emotional appeals, they receive greater news coverage. In fact, the use of emotional appeals trumps all other drivers of media coverage (Maeier, 2020). This preference is consistent with the media's sensationalist flair for the dramatic in recent news reporting (Jerit, 2014). Interestingly, news stories also tend to reflect gender-based assumptions (Chingching, 2004). Similarly to the gender-schema theory, when other information is not available, the media will fill in the blanks with expectations of gender stereotypes. In other words, if candidates don't take a stance, the media will likely assume what their gender is stereotyped to believe. Political advertising fulfills the need for the candidate to present themselves how they want to be presented and control the interaction with the voter (Holtz-Bacha, 1994). It is necessary for voters and candidates alike to receive a message directly from the intent of the candidate. Political ads are the place where candidates can impose the mediated message and image they intend directly to voters and media.

Critique of Literature

Clearly, existing research on this topic remains disputed and conflicting in their implications. This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature and reveal the emotional choices of the candidates themselves rather than voters' emotional reactions. By focusing on the existence, or lack thereof, of emotional or gender-based appeals in political advertisements, this study intends to reveal more about the candidate's approach. It focuses on mediated televised political communication as opposed to traditional research in debates or news media. This study also examines one-sex as

well as cross-sex political races to see how the presence of each gender impacts the tone of the election.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The research above provides many indications about gendered political advertising. It suggests that women are more emotional while men are more rational, that men's emotions are more negative and aggressive while women's are more positive and compassionate, and that women will more often appeal to "female issues" while men will more often appeal to "male issues." Based on this above discussion, this study seeks to answer the following research questions.

RQ1: Which gender utilizes more emotional appeals in their political advertisements?

The above research hypothesizes that females will utilize more emotional appeals in their political advertisements due to their higher level of emotionality.

RQ2: What types of emotion are most commonly used by each gender?

The above research hypothesizes that females will utilize more positive and compassionate emotions while males will utilize more negative and aggressive emotions.

RQ3: Do candidates appeal more to voters of their own gender or the opposite gender?

The above research hypothesizes that candidates will play to their role and appeal more to their own gender through their emotional usage and issue identification.

RQ4: Does a cross-sex race affect any of these tendencies?

The above research hypothesizes that the presence of a female candidate will lessen the negative, aggressive attacks towards opponents in political advertisements.

RQ5: Does an all female race appeal to male issues? (and vice versa)

There is a lack of literature on all-female races, but the author hypothesizes that due to the importance of male issues, female candidates will include them in their political advertisements.

Methodology

This study utilizes a unique dataset that showcases the differences and similarities between the appeals within political races of all genders. Through a content analysis, political advertisements were coded for aspects such as their emotional appeals, rational appeals, types of emotions, and male vs. female appeals. This process was completed for three types of races: male vs. male, male vs. female, and female vs. female political candidates. A content analysis approach allows for clear, quantitative data for each research question.

Coding

For the purpose of this study, emotional appeals are defined using Brader's definition which states, "'any communication that is intended to elicit an emotional response from some or all who receive it'' (2006). These appeals will be recognizable by their intentional design to invoke a particular feeling. Brader's collection of most common emotions in political advertisements are fear, anger, disgust, pride, enthusiasm or hope, sadness or disappointment, compassion or sympathy, and amusement (2006). The study codes for all of these emotions in its analysis of the advertisements.

Rational appeals are defined as utilizing other approaches such as evidence, source credibility, candidate qualifications, and political endorsement (Brader, 2006). This definition comes from his prior research studies. The researcher also added policy statements. Both emotional and rational appeals can exist in a singular ad in multiple instances and will be coded as such.

Ads were also coded on whether they appeal to more traditionally female or traditionally male issues. These can also be divided into either 'soft' or 'hard' issues (Lee, 2014).

Traditionally female issues include the environment, childcare, concerns of the elderly or ethnic minorities, welfare, healthcare, education, and family. Traditionally male issues include national defense, crime, the economy, agriculture, foreign policy, and taxes (Lee, 2014, Lammers, 2009). Similar to the emotional appeals, these traditionally male or female issues could appear multiple times or not at all within advertisements.

Each advertisement was coded on several dimensions. Coders categorized the ads for emotional appeals, rational appeals, specific types of emotion, male issues, and female issues. The categories were prompted with questions like, "Was the sponsor of this ad attempting to elicit ____?" which were scored as either present or not present. Coders accessed the post on a Google Drive with all of the advertisements on it, organized by each individual race. The full coding sheet can be viewed as an appendix to this study.

Intercoder Reliability

Two coders were trained to use the coding sheet and access the advertisements. One coder was female and one was male to avoid any gender biases. Intercoder reliability was calculated using percent agreement, and the average score was .88 for all measures.

Advertisements

The utilized advertisements were obtained from official campaign YouTube pages or directly from campaign offices. In total, 36 ads were analyzed. Researchers drew from 2 campaigns of male vs. male, 2 campaigns of male vs. female, and 2 campaigns of female vs. female. Each candidate was coded for 3 political advertisements. The campaigns drew from varied levels of government, and each of the campaigns was chosen from ballotpedia.com. The chosen campaigns were determined to be competitive races with sufficient budgets for television advertisements. All of the advertisements and campaigns are from the most recent November

2020 election season. The particular advertisements included aired anywhere from the time of campaign announcement to election day. The advertisements included were all televised and lasted between 30 seconds to 1 minute.

The following races and their advertisements were included in the content analysis:

Female vs. Female:

- Stephanie Bice vs. Kendra Horn - U.S. Senate Oklahoma
- Ashley Hinson vs. Abby Finkenauer - U.S. House Iowa District 1

Male vs. Female:

- Mitch McConnell vs. Amy McGrath - U.S. Senate Kentucky
- Nicole Galloway vs. Mike Parson - Governor of Missouri

Male vs. Male:

- Jim Hagedorn vs. Dan Feehan - U.S. House Minnesota District 1
- Donald Trump vs. Joe Biden - President of the United States

Results

The 36 advertisements were coded for their emotional appeals, rational appeals, male issues, and female issues. Once coded, the quantitative data was organized into means of analysis. For the purposes of the results, every time a certain emotion or instance was marked by the coders it is counted as an "instance." Each ad could have as many or as little instances as the coder recognized. The results report on the amount of instances of each variable as well as whether the ads included any presence of certain variables or not. RQ1 and 2 focus on the emotional appeals.

RQ1: Which gender utilizes more emotional appeals in their political advertisements?

A1: Both genders had virtually the same amount of ads with emotional appeals, but male candidates had slightly more instances throughout.

The first variable was emotional and rational appeals. Overall, there were 25 individual instances of emotional appeals in the 18 female candidate advertisements and 36 instances of emotional appeals in the 18 male candidate advertisements. Male candidates had slightly more emotional instances than female candidates, while rational instances were more similar. There were 8 instances of rational appeals in the female candidate advertisements and 10 instances of rational appeals in the male candidate advertisements.

Figure 1 demonstrates the levels of emotional and rational appeals for all candidate types.

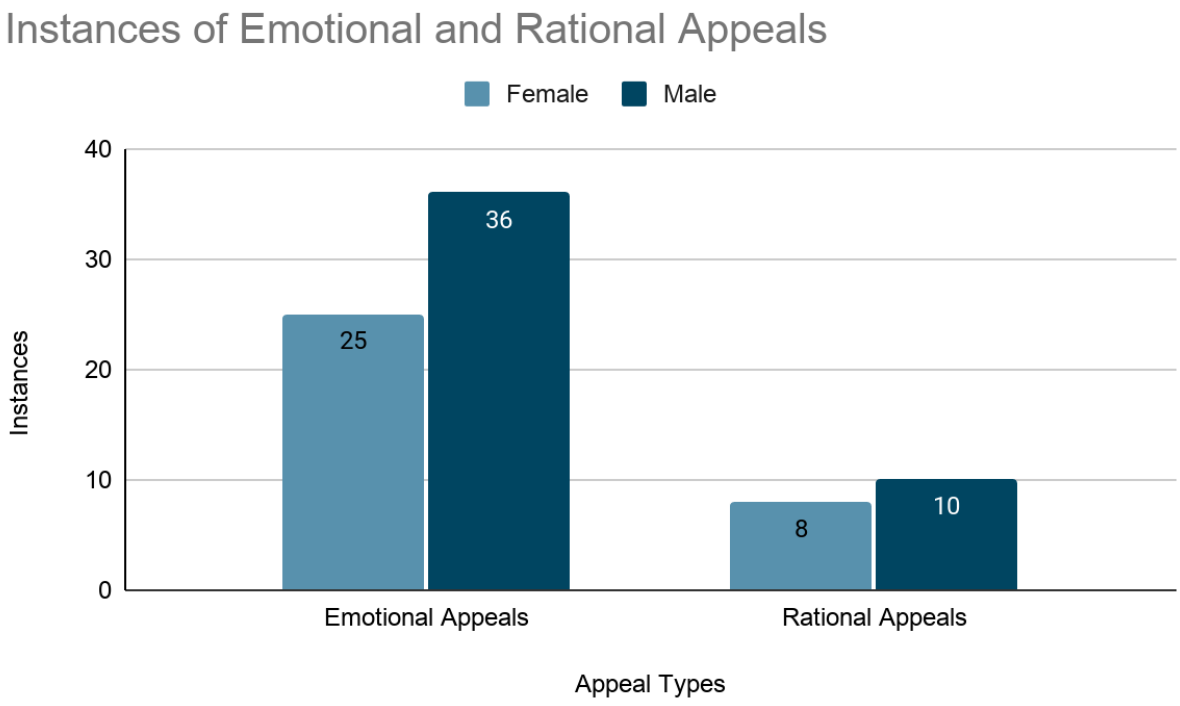


Figure 1. Instances of Emotional and Rational Appeals

In female advertisements, 16 of the 18 ads coded included at least one emotional appeal. In male advertisements, 17 of the 18 ads included at least one emotional appeal. Therefore, all but two ads had an emotional appeal present. In female advertisements, 8 of the 18 ads included an

instance of rational appeal. In male advertisements, 7 of the 18 ads included an instance of rational appeal. Therefore, less than half of the ads had a rational appeal present. Overall, emotional appeals had many more occurrences than rational appeals did.

Figure 2 demonstrates the overall ratio of emotional to rational appeals for all advertisements coded.

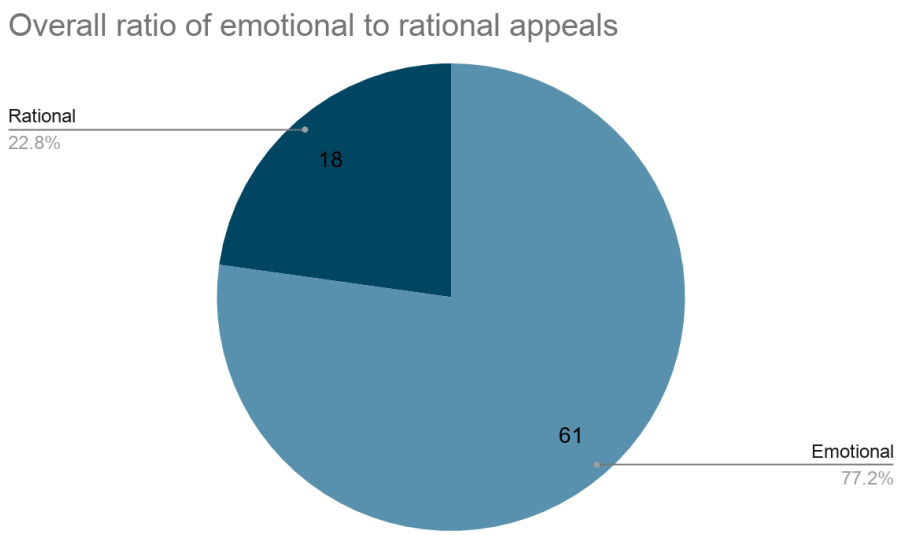


Figure 2. Overall ratio of Emotional to Rational Appeals

RQ2: What types of emotion are most commonly used by each gender?

A2: Genders were fairly equal in terms of negative vs. positive emotions. Female's top emotions were compassion, fear, and pride. Male's top emotions were pride, disgust, and fear.

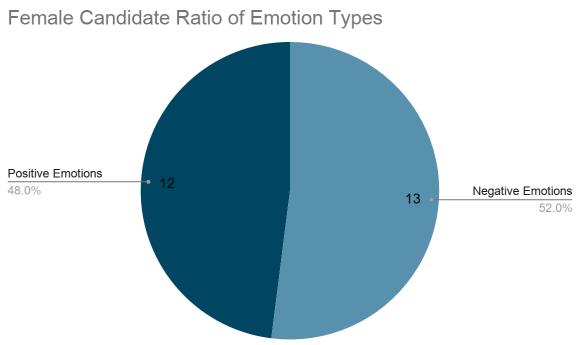
The next variable was specific emotion types within the appeals. Of the female candidates' 25 emotional appeals, 12 were positive emotions and 13 were negative emotions. The most commonly used were fear and compassion/sympathy (both at 28%) and pride (12%). **Table 1** shows the frequency of all emotion types. Of the male candidates' 36 emotional appeals, 19 were

positive emotions and 17 were negative emotions. The most commonly used were pride (19%), disgust (17%), and fear (14%).

The comparisons of positive to negative emotions can be viewed in **Figure 3.**

Table 1: Emotional Appeal Types

Emotion	Female Candidate	Male Candidate
Fear	28%	14%
Disgust	8%	17%
Anger	8%	11%
Pride	12%	19%
Enthusiasm/hope	4%	11%
Sadness/disappointment	8%	6%
Compassion/sympathy	28%	14%
Amusement	4%	5%



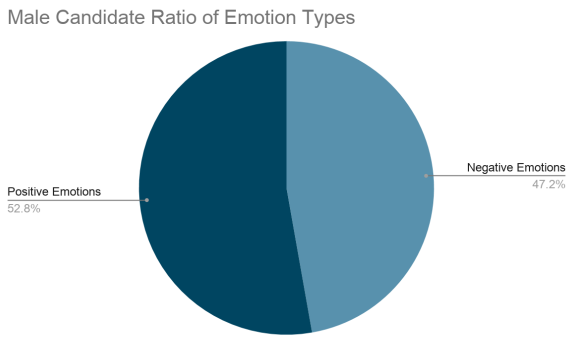


Figure 3. Female Ratio vs. Male Ratio of Emotion Types

RQ3: Do candidates appeal more to voters of their own gender or the opposite gender?

A3: Both genders demonstrated more attention to traditional issues of their own gender.

Advertisements were also coded on whether they addressed male or female issues.

Female candidates were found to have 8 instances of addressing male issues and 16 instances of addressing female issues. The top female issues were family (33%) and healthcare (21%). The top male issues were economy (17%) and crime (13%). Out of their 18 advertisements, 9 had instances of appealing to male issues and 13 had instances of appealing to female issues (recall that individual advertisements can be coded for both issue types).

Male candidates were found to have 11 instances of addressing male issues and 9 instances of addressing female issues. The top female issues were family (30%) and healthcare (10%). The top male issues were economy (30%) and agriculture (10%). Out of their 18 advertisements, 9 had instances of appealing to male issues and 9 had instances of appealing to female issues.

Figure 4 demonstrates the amount of instances of each issue according to candidate gender.

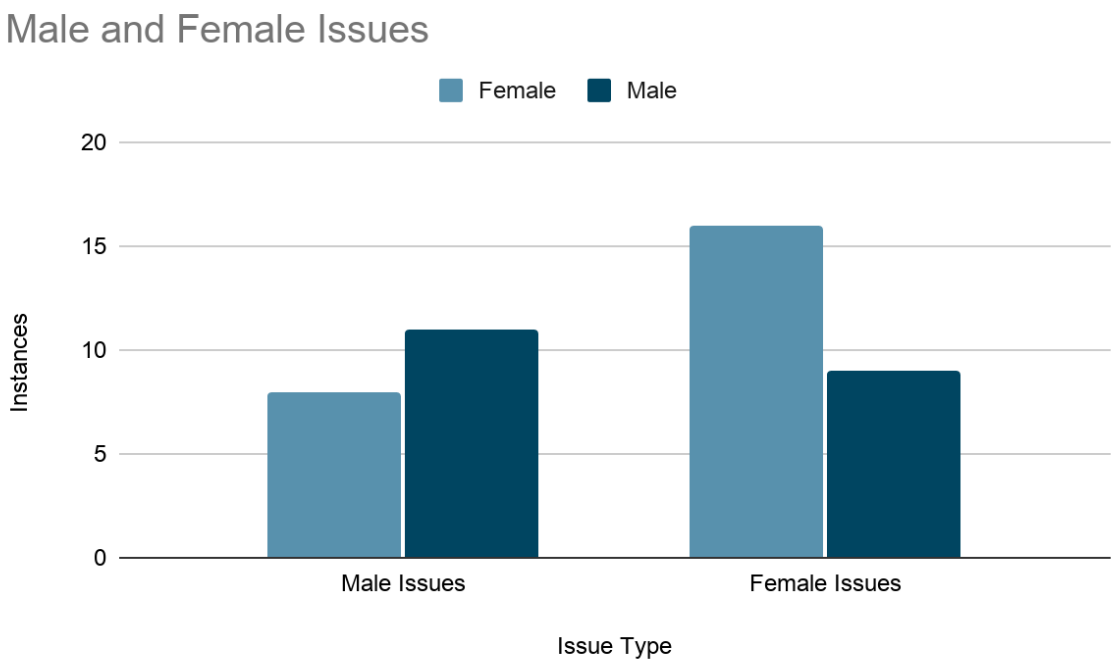


Figure 4. Male vs. Female Issue Instances

RQ4: Does a cross-sex race affect any of these tendencies?

A4: Not much difference in emotional vs. rational appeals and male vs. female issues, but a higher ratio of negative emotions than the overall average.

In terms of the cross-sex races, there was not much of a difference found compared to the overall results. The female vs. female races had 17 emotional appeals and 5 rational appeals. The cross-sex races had 18 emotional appeals and 6 rational appeals. The male vs. male races had 26 emotional appeals and 7 rational appeals. Overall, the ratio for all ads, emotional to rational, was 61:18.

Figure 5 compares the ratios of rational to emotional appeals in first the female vs. female race, then the male vs. female race, and then the male vs. male race.

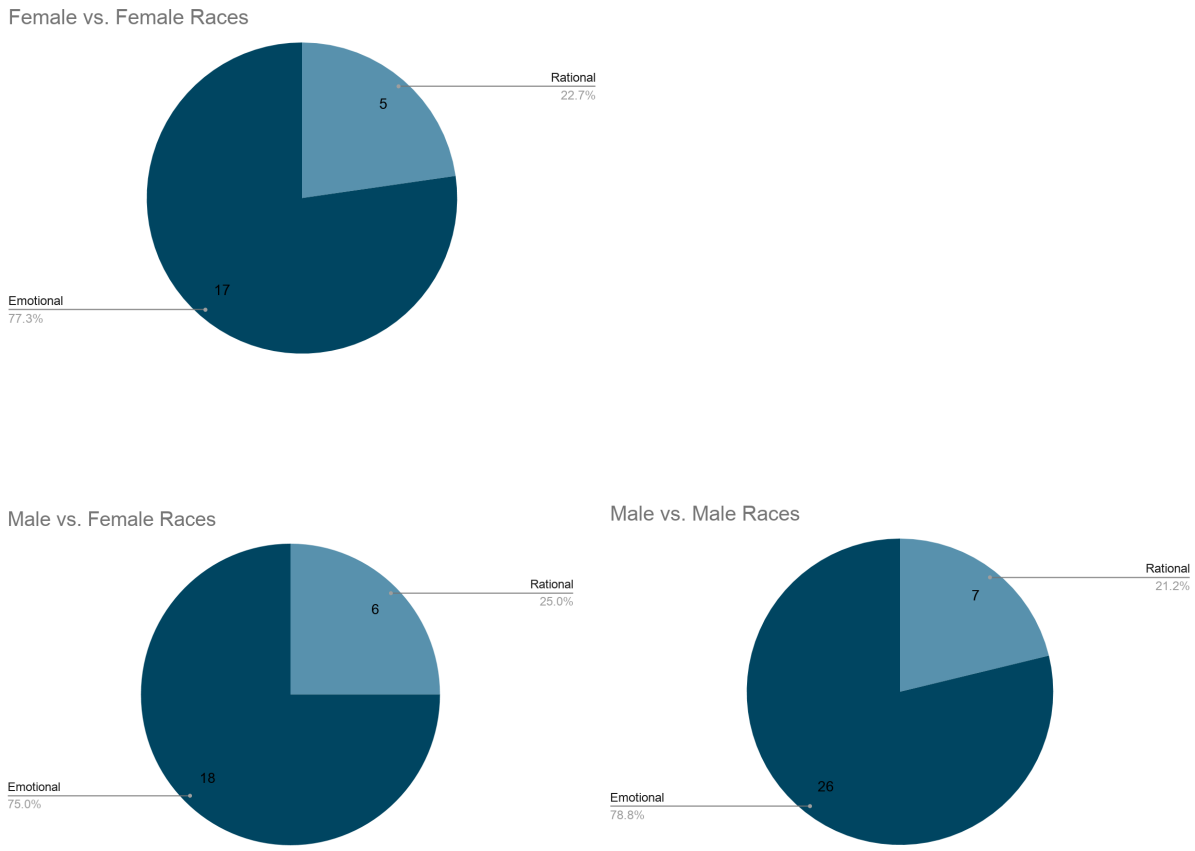


Figure 5. Emotional to Rational Ratio in Each Race Type

In the cross-sex race, female candidates had 4 instances of female issues and 2 instances of male issues compared to a 16:8 ratio across all races. Male candidates had 2 instances of female issues and 1 instance of male issues compared to a 9:11 ratio overall. These cross-sex races did show a higher ratio of negative to positive emotions than the other races. Of the female candidates in the cross-sex races, 6 of the 8 emotional appeals were negative. Of the male candidates, 6 of the 10 emotional appeals were negative.

Figure 6 shows this ratio.

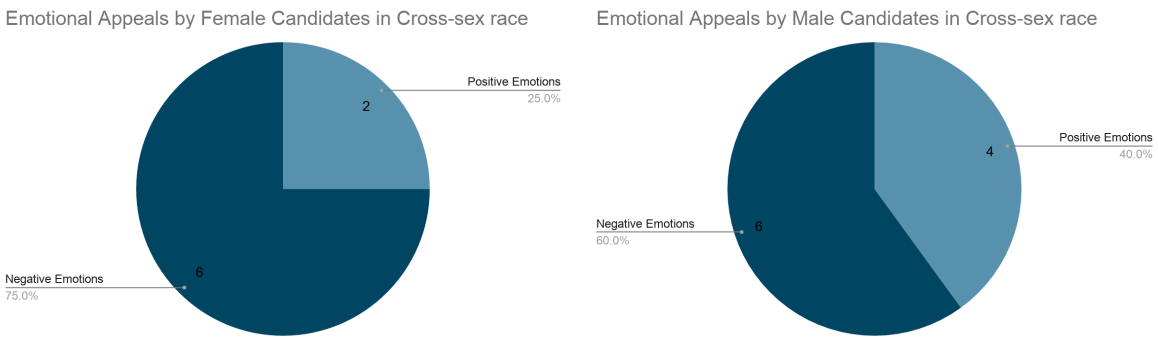


Figure 6: Cross-sex race emotional appeal types

RQ5: Does an all female race appeal to male issues? (and vice versa)

A5: All-female and all-male races included a significant number of appeals to the opposite gender.

The 2 races which were all female had 6 instances of addressing male issues. This 6 is out of 8 total appeals to male issues by all the female candidates. The 2 races which were all male had 7 instances of addressing female issues. This is 7 out of 9 total appeals to female issues by all the male candidates. Therefore, even an all female race includes a significant number of appeals to male issues and vice versa with an all male race.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how male and female political candidates used emotional and gendered appeals in their campaign advertisements. Psychology suggests that, in general, females are more emotional and positive while males are more rational and negative, and that females care about different issues than men do. This study sought to understand if these tendencies carry over into politicians and their campaign rhetoric. Emotional appeals in politics are nothing new, and they have been heavily studied in existing research. However, not much research has examined the gender differences in emotional appeals and how the genders

approach campaign strategies. To understand these campaign strategies, it was necessary to examine both emotional appeals and male vs. female issues.

The findings from the content analysis show that overall there is no massive difference between the rhetoric of male and female campaigns. Male candidates had 36 individual instances of emotional appeals and female candidates had 25 individual instances. These findings answer ***RQ1: Which gender utilizes more emotional appeals in their political advertisements?*** with males having more instances of emotional appeals, despite psychology suggesting females would be more emotional. However, looking at the advertisements as a whole, 16 of the 18 female ads included at least one emotional appeal and 17 of the 18 male ads included at least one emotional appeal. This shows that overall nearly all advertisements used emotional appeals, but males had a couple more instances within individual ads. The research discussed earlier suggested that females feel and express emotions more deeply and frequently than men (Kemp, 2013). The results here suggest that men and women are equally likely to employ emotion as a rhetorical strategy. Interestingly, the individual race which had the most emotional appeals overall was the all-male presidential race. In total, 58 of the ads included an emotional appeal, while only 3 were absent of one. However, only 40 of the ads included a rational appeal, while 21 were absent of one. The instances of rational appeals were also quite similar with females at 8 and males at 10. Rational appeals played a concerningly small role in the majority of the advertisements. By design, emotional appeals operate to trigger a strong, unconscious response that circumvents rational, logical thought. This is where ethical implications arise and question whether it is fair to appeal to voters in a primarily emotional way. Clearly, in this study, emotional appeals were highly favored over rational appeals regardless of gender. The concern arises when these appeals are present absent of any accompanying rational appeal. Democracy operates best with an

informed, thoughtful public. Rational strategies encourage this sort of logical reasoning for the voter. The study also suggests that perhaps just because women are considered more emotional than men in everyday life, maybe they aren't in their political lives.

RQ2: What types of emotion are most commonly used by each gender?

Research suggested that women would utilize more positive, compassionate emotions while men would utilize more negative, aggressive emotions. In the present study, 48% of female's emotional appeals were positive and 52% were negative. Nearly identically, 53% of male's emotional appeals were positive and 47% were negative. Clearly, there was no tendency for male or female candidates to use different emotion types. The top female emotions were fear, compassion/sympathy, and pride. The top male emotions were pride, disgust, and fear. The literature review discussed how females are expected to demonstrate warmth and sensitivity in their rhetoric while men are expected to be much more aggressive and assertive with their emotions (Chingching, 2004). It also showed that voters expect their political candidates to be aggressive and decisive, aligning with the male stereotype (Bauer, 2015). Female candidates did have almost double the amount of compassion/sympathy appeals than men did. This reflects the expectation of women to demonstrate more warmth. However, when it came to the negative emotions, there was not a significant difference. The ads included plenty of aggressive, attacking advertisements from both genders. Invoking fear especially was a primary emotion across the board. It is worth considering whether voters should approach female candidates with the same emotional expectations as they do male candidates.

RQ3: Do candidates appeal more to voters of their own gender or the opposite gender?

The literature here was also conflicted. Some research argued women should run "as women" and focus on female issues while other research argued that women should focus on male issues

to earn their spot (Herrnson, 2003, Lammers, 2009). The present study found that female candidates had 8 instances of addressing male issues and 16 instances of addressing female issues. Male candidates had 11 instances of addressing male issues and 9 instances of addressing female issues. While both genders were more likely to address their own gender's issues, females had a slightly higher tendency to do so. This suggests that more women attempt to run "as women." There were only 5 advertisements sponsored by a female candidate that didn't address a traditionally female issue. Research suggests that 'hard/male' issues are often viewed by voters as more essential for government leaders than 'soft/female' issues. (Herrnson, 2003). Interestingly, neither gender showed much shying away from the female issues. Male candidates demonstrated only a small use of male issues over female issues. The near equity of issues addressed by male candidates suggests a possible increased voter interest in female issues.

RQ4: Does a cross-sex race affect any of these tendencies?

The cross-sex races didn't show a huge variance from the overall results. The ratio of emotional to rational appeals remained in the same ballpark across all the race types. The emotion types did demonstrate a slight difference. These cross-sex races showed higher ratio of negative to positive emotions than the other races. Of the female candidates, 6 of the 8 emotional appeals were negative, and of the male candidates, 6 of the 10 emotional appeals were negative. This ratio is a bit higher than the overall ratios of negative to positive emotions. This suggests that male vs. female races garner more attack ads and aggression than other races. This could be due to female candidates attempting to use more "male" strategies, like assertion and aggression, when faced with a male candidate. This supports the idea of females employing "gender-bending" rhetoric or taking counterstereotypical approaches to assert their spot in a male-dominated arena. This goes against the research hypotheses that the presence of female candidates would lessen any

negativity or aggression and increase civility. In terms of male vs. female issues, in cross-sex races, female candidates had 4 instances of female issues and 2 instances of male issues. Male candidates had 2 instances of female issues and 1 instance of male issues. While these numbers are lower, it is interesting to note that male candidates addressed more female issues than male. There is also a clear focus on emotional appeals over addressing actual issues in general amongst these races. This likely follows from the increased aggression and negativity of the ads.

RQ5: Does an all female race appeal to male issues? (and vice versa)

The literature suggested that all female races would still address male issues due to the importance of those issues for government leaders. Interestingly, a majority of the time females addressed male issues, it was in the all female races. Without the presence of a male candidate, these "hard" issues are still addressed and included in campaign advertisements. Similarly, a majority of the time males addressed female issues, it was in the all male races. This could suggest that politicians, and perhaps voters, have grown towards a more equal attitude towards the importance of male or female issues.

Conclusion

These television advertisements are one of the only opportunities candidates have to share their message and image with total control over how it's presented. There are decisions to be made as to whether to focus on more thoughtful, rational appeals or more instant, emotional appeals. These appeals play a big part in how voters form their opinions and eventually cast their ballots. There are also decisions regarding how one wants to adhere to their gender expectations or not. Overall, the present study suggests that male and female politicians are not as different as they might be expected in terms of their campaign advertisements. Almost all the hypotheses for each research question were suggested to be incorrect by the study findings. Significant differences

could not be found regarding emotion or even emotion types. Earlier, the double bind theory was discussed which states that aggressive, assertive females are seen as unfeminine, yet more traditionally feminine women are deemed ineffective for office (Vedantum). Female candidates appear to be taking both approaches equally instead of adhering to one stereotype. Male candidates as well are not afraid to demonstrate more "female" tendencies and issues in their campaigns. The present study also begins a conversation on whether a division of "male issues" vs "female issues" (or "hard" vs. "soft) is really appropriate or helpful for today's world. Regardless of gender, politicians demonstrated an interest in both types of issues across their advertisements. It's likely that voter preferences would reflect these interests. Perhaps, when it comes to politics, these candidates care more about how they come across as a government leader rather than a certain gender.

Limitations

These findings should be read with a certain amount of caution. There were a few limitations of the study which should be mentioned. Political parties were not taken into consideration, which could affect the issues and emotions which were addressed. It was also not considered whether candidates were incumbents or not. All of these factors have potential to affect emotion. This study was only performed on advertisements from the November 2020 election. Because this was in the midst of a pandemic, this could have affected certain issues such as healthcare or negative emotions like sadness in an unprecedented way. The current social trends of the election year always play a factor into general themes of political ads. Obviously, not all existing emotions or issues could be encompassed by this study. The emotions and issues included were supported by previous research surrounding political appeals. The interpretation of certain

emotions is also a subjective process that audiences could label differently. However the dual coder reliability coefficient of .88 suggested a common agreement.

Further Research

Because this is a content analysis of political rhetoric, the study cannot draw conclusions on voter reception. Further research could seek to understand which appeals are most effective in gaining (and retaining) voter support. It would also be worth studying the emotional behaviors of candidates while actually in office. Televised campaign advertisements are professionally made and edited to the candidate's satisfaction. While a candidate may wish to present themselves as one way in an ad, their actual behavior in office could prove to be very different. Examining politicians of different genders and how emotion operates in their work could prove worthwhile. In other words, the candidates' behavior in their political rhetoric does not necessarily reflect their behavior overall. Despite the limitations, this study sheds light on certain gender stereotypes and whether or not these stereotypes should be carried into politics. Emotional appeals will certainly remain central to political rhetoric, and it is imperative to democracy at large that voters understand how this operates within both male and female candidates.

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CODING SHEET APPENDIX

Emotional Appeals:
Was the sponsor of this ad attempting to elicit _____?
fear
disgust
anger
pride
enthusiasm/hope
sadness/disappointment
compassion/sympathy
amusement
other
Rational Appeals:
Did the sponsor of this ad utilize ____?
evidence (statistics, citations)
source credibility
candidate qualifications
political endorsement
policy statements
other
"Female" Issues
Did the sponsor of this ad address ____?
environment
childcare
concerns of the elderly
concerns of ethnic minorities
welfare
healthcare
education

showing family
other
"Male" Issues
Did the sponsor of this ad address ____?
national defense
crime
the economy
agriculture
foreign policy
taxes
other