Pennsylvania Women's Campaign Communication: A Content Analysis of Brochures from 1996 State Assembly Races[1]

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This paper examines campaign communication of women who ran for the Pennsylvania State Assembly in 1996. The statements made in their campaign brochures were content analyzed to see if messages in this medium were similar to those identified in the literature about female candidates' television advertising. Specifically the issues, traits, and attacks mentioned in the brochures were examined. Differences between incumbents and challengers, winners and losers, and Democrats, Republicans, and Independents were also examined.

As elections have become more candidate-centered, campaign advertising has grown in importance. The messages in advertisements have become highly scrutinized by political scientists, journalists, and consultants. Specifically, attention to the similarities and differences between how female and male candidates promote themselves has contributed to addressing the question of why there continues to be a relatively small number of women in elected office.

Attention to women's political advertising has focused primarily on the television advertisements of those running for Congress and Governor (Debelko & Herrnson, 1997; Johnston & White, 1994; Kahn, 1993; Kahn, 1994; Proctor et al., 1994). However, the most impressive gains made by women in politics have been at the lower levels of government; female membership in state legislatures tripled from 1974 to 1994 (Rule, 1996). Since the lack of women "in the pipeline" is a key explanation for women's underrepresentation (Duerst-Lahti, 1998), it is important to examine advertising in campaigns for an important political entry point — the state legislature (Ford & Dolan, 1996).

Focusing on state legislative races requires examining forms of political advertising appropriate to this level of campaign. Theodore Sheckels (1994, 324) reminds political communication scholars not to be "mesmerized by television, especially when dealing with non-national campaigns." However, despite brochures being a common campaign communication device in local races (Grey, 1994), they have generally gone ignored. Only Paul Raymond (1987) has systematically examined brochures, and his analysis does not consider the candidates' gender. Therefore, there is much to be learned about the messages in female candidates' political brochures.

There are reasons to suspect that women's communication for lower level offices might differ from their advertisements for higher offices. Leonard Williams (1998) warns scholars not to assume that women's advertising will be the same regardless of the office sought. After all, voters' willingness to support female candidates varies by office (Dolan, 1997) and their expectations for candidates differ by government position (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). In an effort to give the voters what they want, women seeking higher offices might emphasize different issues and qualifications than those running for lower level offices. To discuss differences between the content of state-level brochures and that of television advertising for national offices and governorships, we need to review the findings of research on women's campaign communication.

Studies repeatedly reveal that women's television campaign advertisements discuss issues more than candidate traits (Johnston & White, 1994; Kahn, 1994; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Kahn & Gordon, 1997; Raymond, 1987). They also discuss "female issues" more than other issues (Kahn, 1993; Kahn & Gordon, 1997; Witt et al., 1994), although Kahn (1994) shows gubernatorial candidates as an exception to this. "Female issues" are those issues for which "women are seen as superior" (Kahn, 1994, 166) and are operationally defined as education, environment, health care, family issues, and social welfare.

Attacks on opponents are infrequent in women's television campaign advertising (Johnston & White, 1994; Kahn & Gordon, 1997) perhaps due to the reluctance to appear "unladylike" (Witt et al., 1994). However, Leonard Williams (1994) found that about one-third of the female senatorial candidates whose ads he studied attacked their opponents. When women do explicitly critique their opponents, the focus is more likely to be on issues rather than candidate qualifications or traits (Benze & Declercq, 1985b; Johnston & White, 1994; Kahn, 1993; Kahn & Gordon, 1997).

In terms of the character traits that women candidates promote, the literature is mixed. Early research of women campaigning for the House, Senate, and statewide offices indicates that women conform to feminine traits stereotypically by promoting warmth and compassion more than toughness (Benze & Declercq, 1985a). Williams (1994, 1998) confirmed that female Senate candidates stressed feminine traits (especially empathy) more than other traits. However, the extensive work of Kim Fridkin Kahn (1993; 1994; Kahn & Gordon, 1997) clearly points in the other direction. This work illustrates that women seeking seats in the U.S. Senate and governorships spend more time challenging feminine stereotypes than reinforcing them. They emphasize traits like leadership and experience rather than honesty, compassion, warmth, trustworthiness, and empathy. The level of office could make a difference since "typical feminine traits are considered more suitable for lower or non-elective levels

of office" (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993, 504).

This article examines whether these characteristics found in television advertising of women running for high-level offices, such as governor and Senator, were also found in brochure advertising of women seeking state-level congressional seats. It does so by examining brochures used by women running for the Pennsylvania State Assembly in 1996. Pennsylvania is an interesting, but not necessarily representative, place to start exploring this question since it has a reputation for being "inhospitable toward women candidates" (Witt et al., 1994, 5) despite the number of women in the Pennsylvania State Assembly doubling (to 12%) in the past two decades (Rule, 1996). If the findings from the research on women candidates' television advertising hold true for brochures at the State Assembly level, then the brochures should:

1) contain more issue appeals than candidate traits ;

2) emphasize certain issues (those identified as "female issues") over other issues;

3) infrequently attack opponents;

4) emphasize feminine candidate traits more than masculine traits.

Data and Coding

Letters asking for copies of campaign brochures were sent to 55 candidates running for representative in the General Assembly of Pennsylvania in 1996 who had female names.[2] A follow-up letter was sent to those who did not send brochures. Of the 55 candidates contacted, 29 (53%) responded to the letter, with 21 (38%) sending brochures. The other eight indicated that they had not used brochures.[3] Of the 21 who sent brochures: eleven won their elections, ten lost them; 12 were Democrats, six were Republicans, and three were Independents; eleven were challengers and ten were incumbents.[4] Of those who sent brochures, all of

Table 1
Relationship between Party and Election Outcome

Party	Loser	Winner
Democrat	50% (6)	50% (6)
Republican	17% (1)	83% (5)
Independent	100% (3)	0% (0)

NOTE: Cell sizes are too small for reliable statistical calculations.

the incumbents won their elections and only one challenger, a Democrat, won hers.[5] Table 1 illustrates the relationship between party and election outcome.

Although brochures varied in length, style, professionalism, and breadth, they were standard introductory brochures, which focused on general appeals introducing the candidate to the general voters, rather than targeting messages for specific audiences, like partisans or the elderly. The brochures seemed designed in part to increase name recognition since even the shortest brochures mentioned the candidatesí name more than once. The minimum number of times the candidatesí name appeared was three and the maximum was 18 with the average being eight.

One way that the brochures varied was in their use of photographs. One candidate did not use any photographs and another used 14. The average number of pictures used on a brochure was 2.3 and the mode was 1 (10 brochures had one picture). The most common use of photography was to include a single photo of the candidate (typically a formal face shot). Incumbents included photographs of themselves with children and senior citizens who were not members of their own families, whereas no challengers did. Six candidates included photographs of their family, but for only one candidate was this her sole photograph.

Thirteen of the candidates included some reference to themselves as a wife, a mother, and/or a daughter. Of these 13, ten emphasized this reference by either including a photograph of her family, making the reference in bold type or in color, or putting it at the top of her list of qualifications. The references to being a wife or mother were often explicitly linked to governing skills. For example, one candidate claimed in her list of "Reasons to Vote for _____" that "her husband was confined in a wheelchair for eight years, she understands the needs of the disabled." More Democrats than Republicans included references to their families. Incumbents and challengers were equally likely to do so.

The analysis that follows uses a content analysis of the brochures treating statements, sometimes referred to here as references or claims, as the unit of analysis. Statements were all sentences or sentence fragments that appeared on the brochure. All statements were coded by the author for "Topic:" Issues, candidate traits (characteristics of the candidate, such as honesty or strength), opponent attacks (any criticisms of the opponent whether by name or not),[6] group references (such as the candidate's identification with a party or interest group), candidate qualifications (credentials of the candidate, such as public service or motherhood), and other (a residual category for statements of the "Vote for Candidate _____" nature).

In addition, all issue references were coded for the specific subject discussed and recoded into "female issues," "male issues," and "other" using the definition of these which is common in the literature.[7] All refer-

ences to candidate traits were coded for the specific trait mentioned. These traits were recoded into "feminine traits," "masculine traits," and "other" generally using Williams' (1994) coding scheme. The background characteristics of the candidate whose brochures contained these statements were also coded. These characteristics were: party (Democrat, Republican, or Independent), election outcome (won or lost), and candidate status (incumbent or challenger).

Findings

The 21 brochures yielded 625 statements. The number for individual candidates varied greatly from six to 68. The average number of statements in a brochure was 12. The overall distribution of appeals is shown in the total column of Table 2. Clearly this medium allows ample room for candidates to offer multiple messages.

Similar to television advertising of other female candidates, there were more references to issues than other types of appeals. Issue claims (234) made up 37% of all statements. Qualifications were the second most fre-

Table 2
Type of Appeal by Incumbency Status

Type	Challenger	Incumbent	Total
Issues	29% (85)	42% (142)	234
Qualification	47% (85)	21% (69)	208
Traits	16% (85)	23% (78)	124
Attack	2% (85)	0%	7
Groups	4% (85)	10% (32)	45
Other	1% (85)	1% (4)	7
Total	293	332	625

Chi Square 66.8; Cramer's V = .32; Significant at .001 level
When the small cells are eliminated by omitting "Attack" and "Other:"
Chi Square 54.3; Cramer's V = .30; Significant at .001 level

quent type of reference with 208 (33% of the total). There were 124 references to character traits (20% of the total) and 45 group references (7% of the total). Also similar to television advertising was the lack of attacks on opponents. These were very rare (only seven, or 1%). The average number of appeals per candidate was: 11.1 for issues, 9.9 for qualifications, 5.9 for traits, 2.1 for groups, and .3 for attacks.

Table 2 also demonstrates the mix of statement types used by challengers and incumbents. These two groups differed significantly in the types of appeals they used. Incumbents were more likely to use issue appeals, character traits, and group appeals than challengers were. Challengers were more likely to discuss their qualifications and to attack their opponents than incumbents were. This could be because challengers lack the legitimacy that is inherent in the incumbency status of their opponents and therefore need to explicitly assert it. Since incumbency and winning strongly co-varied (with one exception, a Democratic challenger

Table 3
Type of Appeal by Party

Type	Democrat	Republican	Independent	Total
Issues	29% (108)	53% (96)	45% (30)	234
Qualification	40% (152)	15% (27)	43% (29)	208
Traits	19% (70)	27% (49)	8% (5)	124
Attack	2% (7)	0%	0%	7
Groups	9% (33)	5% (9)	5% (3)	45
Other	2% (7)	0%	0%	7
Total	377	181	67	625

Chi Square 78.2; Cramer's V = .25; Significant at .001 level
When the small cells are eliminated by omitting "Attack" and "Other:"
Chi Square 58.9; Cramer's V = .22; Significant at .001 level
When the small cells are eliminated by omitting "Attack," "Other," and Independent:"
Chi Square 50.1; Cramer's V = .30; Significant at .001 level

who won), the observed differences between incumbents and challengers were also true when winners were compared to losers.[8] Republicans were more likely to make references to issues and character traits, while Democrats were more likely to discuss their qualifications, attack opponents, and make group references (see Table 3).

Issues—Table 4 illustrates the distribution of issue positions taken in the brochures.[9] The most frequent was education with 38 mentions (18% of the total number of issue references). The second most frequent was taxes (29 mentions, 14%), then health care (19 mentions, 9%), and crime (18 mentions, 9%). These specific issues were grouped according to whether or not they fit the definition of "female issues" broadly defined in the literature as issues that have a nurturing aspect to them (including health care, education, welfare, children, environment, etc.) or "male issues" (including jobs, economy, taxes, agriculture, crime, and foreign af-

Table 4
Type of Issue Statements

	Number	Percentage
"Female" Issues		
Education	38	18%
Health Care	19	9%
Welfare	16	8%
Environment	8	4%
Children's issues	6	3%
Women's rights	3	1%
Other	5	2%
Total	95	45%
"Male" Issues		
Taxes	29	14%
Crime	18	9%
Jobs	12	6%
Economics	11	5%
Transportation	8	4%
Farming	4	2%
Other	5	2%
Total	87	42%
Other		
Government Organization	20	10%
Worker comp./min. wage	8	4%
Other	1	1%
Total	29	15%

fairs). There were slightly more references to "female issues" (95 or 45%) than "male" (87 or 42%). Although the difference between the two was not large (48% "male" compared to 52% "female" when "other issues" were omitted), it is in the direction identified by the television advertising literature (Kahn, 1993; Kahn & Gordon, 1997).

There were no significant differences in terms of the types of issues used ("women's" or "men's") when challengers were compared to incumbents, winners were compared to losers, and Democrats, Republicans, and Independents were compared to each other.[10] The only significant difference appears between Democratic winners and losers. Democratic winners were more likely to discuss "female issues" than "male issues" (see Table 5). This finding might demonstrate the benefit that Democratic women have of playing to an agenda both in keeping with their gender stereotypes and, to some extent, assumptions about their party.

Opponent Critiques—The infrequency of opponent critiques (7, only 1% of all references) conform to the literature, which indicates that women

Table 5
Relationship between Election Income and
Type of Issues Discussed among Democrats

	Election Outcome	
Type of Issue	Loser	Winner
"Female"	39% (14)	61% (30)
"Male"	61% (22)	39% (19)

Cramer's V=.22
Significant at .05 level

do not frequently attack (Johnston & White, 1994; Kahn & Gordon, 1997). Even when the brochures, rather than claims within them, were used as the unit of analysis, the frequency of attacks (present in 3 out of 21 brochures or one-seventh) falls short of Williams' (1994, 1998) one-third.

All of the attacks coded here were made by Democratic challengers who lost. Two of these candidates did not name their opponents. One of these two simply implied that there was something wrong with the incumbent by saying that people should vote for someone who is "Caring . . . for a change." The other noted that she was the "only candidate in the _____ district with a deep business background." A third candidate reprinted a local newspaper article in her brochure, which contained five attacks on her opponent. On the surface, using a newspaper article to

introduce opponent criticism is in keeping with advice that candidates can avoid backlash by having others launch attacks. A closer look at this brochure indicates that the advice was not taken since the article reproduced includes comments made by the candidate criticizing her opponent (for policy positions and his support for his own pay raise). Overall, the minimal number of references to opponents was predictable given the television advertising research, but the nature of the criticisms were not since they went beyond issue critiques. The small number of candidates who made these critiques and the unsuccessfulness of their campaigns should curtail any sweeping interpretation of what this says about office-level differences in negative campaigning.

Traits—Character traits were coded into 14 different categories.[11] The most common of these categories was "hardworking," which included 27 references (22%). The second most frequent category was "caring" (20, 16%). When incumbents and challengers were compared, differences of five percent or greater existed for four traits. A larger percentage of challengers' claims were about their strength (11% vs. 4% for incumbents) and expertise (11% vs. 6% for incumbents), while incumbents more frequently mentioned their activeness (9% vs. 4% for challengers) and caring (19% vs. 11% for challengers). The gap for mentioning caring was even larger for winners and losers (20% of winners' traits fell into the "caring" category compared to 10% for losers). No losers included claims of independence whereas 6% of the winners' traits claimed fell in this category.

When the traits promoted by candidates of different parties were compared, Independents differed from members of the major parties. Only three of the 14 traits were claimed by Independents: expertise (60%), honesty (20%), and hard work (20%). Independents discussed their expertise much more than others since these claims made up only 6% of those offered by Democrats and Republicans. Republicans and Democrats differed by more than 5% in the following categories: leadership (with Democrats mentioning this more often, 17% to 8%), activity (with Republicans mentioning this more often, 14% to 3%), caring (comprising 20% for Republicans and only 14% for Democrats), and hard work (with Democrats claiming this quality in 29% of their traits mentioned compared to 12% for Republicans). To some extent these messages seem to be contradicting negative party stereotypes (such as Republicans being uncaring).

Traits were recoded into categories used by Williams (1994) in his study of female Senate candidates' television advertising. These categories included: compassion, empathy, integrity, activity, strength, knowledge, and a residual group. Williams argued that compassion and empathy were the feminine traits; strength, activity, and knowledge were the masculine ones; and integrity was neither. Since all of the traits categorized

Table 6
Type of Trait Appeal

	Number	Percentage	
"Feminine Traits"			
Compassion	20	16%	Includes: caring
Empathy	6	5%	Includes: cooperative, open to learn, outsider
Integrity	12	10%	Includes: honesty
	38	31%	
"Masculine Traits"			
Activity	40	32%	Includes: hard work, effectiveness, excitement
Strength	29	23%	Includes: independent, strong, leader
Knowledge	10	8%	Includes: expertness
	79	63%	
"Other"			
Other	7	6%	Includes: thrifty, hopeful, proud

here as integrity were about honesty, a characteristic identified by Kahn (1993; 1994) as fitting feminine candidate stereotypes, it will be coded as such here. Table 6 demonstrates the prevalence of each type of trait. Even counting the integrity category as feminine, masculine traits appeared more than twice as often as feminine traits (64% compared to 31%). These results contrast sharply with Williams' results that showed 62% of the traits claimed by women Senators in their television advertisements were feminine compared to 27% that were masculine. These findings are much more consistent with the findings of Kahn (1994, 108) which were that 81% of the traits claimed by gubernatorial candidates and 78% of those claimed by Senate candidates were masculine.[12] The results fail to confirm the expectation that women competing for lower level offices would be more likely to emphasize feminine traits and instead reinforce the idea that women advertise against type in order to conform to masculine stereotypes of leadership. This conformity appears "across-the-board," as there were no significant differences in the frequency of claiming "female" versus "male" traits when candidates from different parties, with different election outcomes, and different status — incumbents or challengers — were compared.[13]

Conclusions

Campaign brochures of women running for the Pennsylvania State

Assembly in 1996 conveyed messages that in many ways were similar to those found in television campaign advertising for higher offices. They promoted issues more than other appeals, rarely critiqued their opponents, and focused slightly more on "female issues." However, more traits claimed were masculine lending support to Kahn's work (1993; 1994) rather than the work of others (Benze & Declercq, 1985a; Williams, 1994).

The great range of appeals used in the brochures demonstrates how this form of campaign communication gives candidates an opportunity to take positions on many issues and demonstrate both masculine and feminine traits. Candidates do not seem to treat campaigning through brochures as a zero-sum game, thus forcing them to choose between appeals. In this way, brochures are a very different form of communication than television ads, which are much more expensive and brief. The scarcity of television ad time provides less flexibility for making multiple appeals. In these brochures, rather than choose between appeals (feminine or masculine, this kind of issue or that kind, issues or not), candidates make variety of claims. Nevertheless, for the most part the emphasis in women's ads follows that of television advertising: emphasis on issues, few opponent attacks, and more masculine traits than feminine.

Notes

1. The author would like to thank Martha Bailey, Kathy Dolan, James Hoefler, Stephanie Slocum-Shaffer, and the reviewers for their suggestions. She would also like to express appreciation to Vickie Kuhn for her invaluable help acquiring the brochures and to the women candidates who provided them. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Southwestern Political Science Association Meeting in March 1998.

2. The names and addresses were obtained from the "Official Results for the 1996 General Election" issued by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Commissions, Elections, and Legislation. Only individuals with clearly identifiable female names were sent letters. Those with androgynous names (such as Pat, Chris, and Tracy) were not contacted, even though women were among this group.

3. It is likely that some of the women who did not reply did not issue brochures due to a lack of resources or a lack of competition. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to consider the response rate 38%.

4. Of the 55 candidates with female names who were running, 25 won. Thirty were Democrats, 21 were Republicans, and four were Independents; therefore, Republican candidates were underrepresented in the sample.

5. This means that 100% of the references made by "losers" were made by challengers and 92% of the comments made by "winners" were made by incumbents.

6. These included references for voters to "make a change."

7. It is important to note that the theoretical justification for this dichotomy is underdeveloped despite its frequent usage. In fact, the continued assumption that traits and issues are gendered might reinforce unfounded stereotypes. This article does not address or rectify this potential problem since the focus on comparing State Assembly brochures to the literature on television advertising necessitates use of the same concepts and definitions.

8. The relationship between appeal types and winner/loser is Chi square 53.3; Cramer's V= .29; Significant at .001 level. When "attack" and "other" were omitted, the relationship is Chi Square 41; Cramer's V = .26; Significant at .001 level.

9. Of the 234 issue statements, 23 could not be coded because they were too vague.

10. Even when the "neither" category was excluded from the analysis, these differences remained insignificant. When Democrats and Republicans were compared and Independents were excluded, there was still no significant difference.

11. These were: independent, strong (or aggressive, fighter, tough, courageous, assertive), leader (or experienced, proven, respected), knowledgeable (or intelligent, expert, know how, informed, thoughtful, well traveled), active (or involved, outspoken, tireless, feisty, energetic), caring (or empathetic, listens, concerned, accessible, works for you, responsive, or can be counted on), outsider/new, honest (or trustworthy, reliable, keeps promises, integrity, principled, ethical, or responsible), cooperative/coalition builder, learns (or open-minded, nonideological), excited (or eager, spirited, enthusiastic), effective/gets results, hardworking (or industrious, committed, studies), and other (hopeful, thrifty, organized, proud, or ready).

12. We need to recognize that Kahn did not have a neutral category. When references coded as "other" are omitted from the brochures calculation, 68% of the traits claimed were "masculine."

13. Nor were there significant differences when "other" traits were excluded from the analysis and when Independent candidates were omitted.

14. Nor were there significant differences when "other" traits were excluded from the analysis and when Independent candidates were omitted.

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