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The Impact of Negative Political Advertisements: Perceptions and Realities

By

Amber R. Dickinson

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Political Science and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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The Impact of Negative Political Advertisements: Perceptions and Realities

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## **Abstract**

Past research on negative political advertisements has focused primarily on how these ads impact voter turnout, voter evaluations of candidates, and the democratic process as a whole. This research attempts to expand the body of knowledge by examining the phenomenon of negative political advertising using a mixed-methods approach. By examining 2002 and 2004 Congressional candidates' negative ad content, this research seeks to determine if a candidate's gender impacts message content. Findings indicate that a candidate's gender does indeed impact the type of content found in a negative advertisement. Next, an experiment was created to determine if the gender of a candidate impacts the viewer's perception of negativity in the ad. Significant findings indicate that gender of a political candidate does alter a viewer's perception of negativity. Finally, professional campaign consultants were asked to respond to a series of questions in an attempt to gain a practical understanding of negativity in political advertising. A comparison between consultants' responses and academicians' research was completed, finding that in most cases these groups agree on the impacts of negative advertisements. However, a key gender gap finding indicates one major exception to the general consensus. The significant findings in this research expand our understanding of negative political advertising, and contribute to the field of political science.

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## Preface

In the immortal words of the 1979 English New Wave one-hit wonder band The Buggles, “video killed the radio star.” The emergence of television as the prime method of communication between political candidates and the voters they are attempting to reach has diminished the role of other forms of campaign communication. Significant time and money is dedicated to the strategic planning and implementation of television advertisements, and it is rare to see a congressional level race engage in a campaign without employing the use of advertisements. Television advertisements are commonplace in the American political process, and as such it is crucial to understand the impacts of these ads.

Political campaign advertisements have a tremendous impact on election outcomes in American congressional races today. No serious candidate for congressional office would consider running a campaign that did not employ the use of television advertising as a campaign tactic. Political advertisements get information about a candidate to the general public in an efficient and effective manner. The average congressional district has nearly 640,000 people within its boundaries, and congressional candidates are charged with the task of reaching them all. Candidates do not have the resources to personally contact every voter in a district, and political ads facilitate communication that would otherwise be extremely difficult. Any candidate with the hopes of becoming a member of the United States Congress must launch a televised ad campaign.

Advertisements take many shapes and forms, ranging from biographical accounts of a person’s life story, a critique of an opposing candidate’s policy position, to the exposure of a shameful scandal. There are three common types of campaign advertisements. The first promotes

candidate accomplishments. The second type of ad, known as a contrast advertisement, is used to compare the attributes of two or more candidates. Finally, there are negative, or attack ads, created to damage the opposition. Negative advertisements are used to highlight detrimental characteristics of the opposing candidate, expose scandals, and in the case of incumbents to draw attention to a flawed voting record. All of these ads are common, and all are used according to the needs of the individual campaign. While these varying types of ads are frequently utilized, negative ads are becoming increasingly popular with every election cycle.

Previously, scholars have presented information indicating negative advertisements put forth information in an exciting and dramatic way. The public finds this manner of presentation appealing. Evidence suggests there is more factual information in a negative ad than in any other type of political advertisement, and the information presented in a negative ad is more memorable than any other type of ad. Debates regarding the memorability of the ads are common, and there has been a great deal of research regarding whether or not negative ads mobilize or demobilize the electorate. According to past research, we are able to understand negative advertising impacts on cognition, the information value and quality of negative ads, and the persuasive impacts of these advertisements. What we do not yet understand is how the content of a message is chosen, whether candidate gender influences message perception, and how practitioners view negative political advertising. Our understanding of negative political advertisements stems entirely from academic research. Thoughts on negative ads from the perspective of those directly involved in the political process has been neglected in the field of political science. This research aims to fill these holes in negative political advertising research through a mixed-methods examination.



### ***Purpose of the Research***

The purpose of this research is to answer questions about negative political advertising that have to date been sparingly addressed in Political Science research. Using three different types of methodological perspectives I examine negative advertisements in-depth. Through the mixed-methods approach, the phenomenon of negative advertisements is examined from the point of view of the candidate sponsoring the ad, the voter viewing the ad, and the political consultant crafting the advertisement. The varying methodological approaches and perspectives will offer a more complete view of negative political advertisements.

Following a review of the literature in chapter one, chapter two seeks to determine if the content of negative political advertisements is impacted by the gender of the candidate sponsoring the ad. Voters have the propensity to stereotype male and female candidates as more able to handle certain issues, and as having different personal characteristics. For example, male candidates are thought of as better equipped to handle economic issues, and are considered to be tougher than female candidates. Female candidates are viewed as more capable of handling education issues, and as more compassionate than male candidates. The existence of these pre-existing notions held by voters may prompt male and female congressional candidates to craft advertising messages that combat those stereotypes. Based on previous research indicating that male and female candidates respond to gender stereotypes, it is hypothesized that female candidates are more likely than male candidates to attack on policy-based issues. Using data from the 20002 and 2004 Congressional Elections Wisconsin Ads database, conclusions are drawn regarding whether gender impacts the type of content found within a negative political advertisement.

The goal of the research found in chapter three is to determine if a candidate's gender impacts a viewer's perception of message negativity in a political campaign advertisement. Voters possess the belief that male and female candidates have different strengths and capabilities, and are therefore better suited to handle certain issues. For example, female candidates are seen as capable of dealing with health care issues, while male candidates are viewed as more apt to deal with defense issues. Since individuals have varying opinions on the abilities and personalities of male and female candidates, it stands to reason that these individuals will find different meanings in messages sponsored by male and female candidates. Therefore, I hypothesize that viewers will perceive a message in a televised political advertisement to be more negative when it is presented by a female candidate than when presented by a male candidate. An experiment was conducted in which an advertisement was created and filmed once with a male candidate and once with a female candidate. All aspects of the advertisement were held constant except for the gender of the candidate. That ad was then shown to different groups, and a survey was administered to test whether the gender of the candidate impacted message perception. The data from that survey was analyzed to determine the validity of the hypothesis.

The fourth chapter focuses on the examination of negative advertisements from a practical perspective. Professional political campaign consultants are largely responsible for the types of negative advertisements seen during a typical election cycle, and therefore their insight on these ads is extremely important. Many researchers have written about the presence, impact, and contributions these consultants have on the political process; however we are lacking the viewpoint of the consultants actively involved in elections. In an attempt to bridge the gap between the theoretical and practical perspectives on negative advertisements, open-ended

surveys were sent to professional campaign consultants across the United States. The responses to those surveys were examined, and comparisons were made between the scholarly body of research regarding the impact of negative political advertising, and the consultants' thoughts on the same subject. This chapter provides interesting qualitative data on the discrepancies and similarities of viewpoints, and provides insight into the gender gap phenomenon from a consultant's perspective.

The entirety of this project is thus devoted to the examination of a common yet relatively unknown phenomenon of negative campaign advertising. Though much has been researched and written on negative advertisements and their impact, much more needs to be accomplished. I hope the following research can add to our understanding of this most important form of political communication. By conducting a data analysis to determine if negative advertisements are impacted by the gender of the candidate sponsoring the ad, launching an experiment to gauge whether candidate gender impacts viewer perception of message negativity, and gathering qualitative data from campaign consultants across America I hope to contribute to existing scholarly research in the field.

## **Chapter One**

### **Review of the Literature**

Decades of research has been devoted to better understanding the impact of political communication on the electoral process. All of this work is challenged by the fact that communication in the political arena is ever-changing. The primary method of communication has evolved through the years, and will continue to change with the technological upgrades in society. It is abundantly clear that political advertising, specifically television advertising, has a definite impact on the political process. As the preferred method of communication, research must adapt to keep up with the changes in communication styles. This chapter is devoted to examining the current trend in political communication: televised political advertisements.

#### ***General Advertising***

Each year individual businesses across America spend millions of dollars on televised advertising. The goal of these advertising efforts is to shape perceptions, dispel negative opinions, and engender positive attitudes about a product (Chen and Leu 2011). Advertisements are created in an attempt to influence consumer preferences in three ways. By providing information about a good, influencing the opinion of consumers, and transforming a previously held negative notion about an item (Mehta, Chen, and Narasimhan 2008, Aaker and Stayman 1990, Deighton 1988, Batra and Ray 1986, Bucklin 1961). In some instances, evidence suggests that negative information about a product can increase sales if previous awareness of the product was low (Berger, Sorenson, and Rasmussen 2010). This general idea of the function of

advertising can be extended to include political advertising. Many of the goals candidates and consultants attempt to achieve through advertising are done so by adopting the general ad strategies mentioned above. It is true that advertising has the ability to shape our opinions about products and brand names (Chen and Lau 2011, Mehta, Chen, and Narasimhan 2008). It is also true that advertising has the ability to mold our viewpoints regarding those we select to lead our country.

### ***Media Effects Theory***

In 1960, Klapper deemed the media to be agents of reinforcement. The function of media, according to Klapper, is to solidify information we already possess. The information presented by the media is rarely something new to us. People naturally formulate opinions about issues, including issues they have little to no experience with (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). The media are not solely responsible for disseminating information to the general public. Instead the media possess qualities that reinforce information that already exists, shape information we already have, determine what information we will think about during a given time, and occasionally change our ideas about information (Kinder 2003). The media's ability to frame issues, set the agenda, and prime our beliefs is powerful and has the potential to impact us daily (Kinder 2003, Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

There is nevertheless great debate regarding the amount of power the media have to impact our attitudes and beliefs, with some believing the media has a tremendous impact and some believing the contrary (Neuman and Guggenheim 2011; Graber 2006; Kinder 2003; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Klapper 1960; Laswell 1930). Minimal effects theory suggests only a small fraction of voters will actually change their opinion based on

media's information, whereas theories such as the hypodermic effects theory suggest persuasive effects of the media will be palpable as long as the message reaches its target (Nueman and Guggenheim 2011; Klapper 1960; Laswell 1930). Others, such as Bennett and Iyengar suggest due to the considerable expansion of media outlets it is mandatory to re-evaluate the impacts of the media (2008).

### ***Political Campaign Advertising***

In order to achieve electoral success candidates must effectively communicate with voters to prove they are the best choice to represent a district's needs (Druckman, Kifer, Parkin 2009). Candidates running for Congressional office seek to earn support from voters by sending their message with the hopes of projecting an image or an issue stance the public will find pleasing (Franz 2011; Druckman, Kifer, Parkin 2009). In order to accomplish these electoral goals, candidates craft communication strategies to gain the votes necessary for victory (Druckman, Kifer, Parkin 2009; Haynes, Flowers, Gurian 2002; Scammell 1998). One of the most common methods of communication in a campaign is the use of television advertisements (Franz 2011; West, 2010; Stevens 2005, Yoon, Pinkleton, and Ko, 2005; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987).

In 2002, 22% of House candidates' overall campaign budget was spent on broadcast media time slot purchases (Strattman 2009; Herrnson 2004). It is estimated that around 10% of those same candidates' overall budgets were devoted to cable media buys (Strattman 2009). Since 2002 candidates have increased the amount of financial resources and attention devoted to televised advertising, thereby establishing dependence on this form of campaign communication (Franz 2011, Granato and Wong 2004). The use of television as a means of communication

affords the candidate the opportunity to reach a broad portion of their voting constituency in a manner most efficient for the campaign.

The time constraints of a campaign do not allow a candidate to personally contact every single voter (Franz 2011, West 2010, Stevens 2010). Through television advertisements, candidates are able to reach a larger segment of the population they would otherwise not be able to contact if the candidate depended primarily on face-to-face contact with voters. According to the 2000 Census data the average population of a Congressional district is around 646,952 people (census.gov). Due to the fact that districts are so large, and contacting voters is so vital, candidates must use television as a solution to their communication needs. The timing of campaign communication is also important, given that most voters pay attention to a political race only a few short weeks prior to Election Day (Kahn and Kenney 1999). Televised advertisements can be strategically administered to air throughout the district at a time when most voters are likely to pay attention (West 2010, Stevens 2005, Kahn and Kenney 1999). It is crucial for a candidate to employ a strategy that gets a message to voters in a timely manner, and television advertising allows this monumental task to be accomplished.

### ***Cost and Frequency of Use***

Airing advertisements on television is expensive, but the cost of an advertising strategy is justified if the candidate's electoral goals are met (Franz, et. al, 2008). According to the Center for Responsive Politics, during the 2010 election cycle money spent by outside groups on political advertisements reached over 87.5 million dollars (2011). The Wesleyan Media Project reported that individuals running for House and Senate in 2010 spent an accumulated total of 219

million dollars on televised advertising (2011). Clearly these campaigns and those in support of the campaign efforts have deemed advertising a credible method of communication to the point of spending over 300 million dollars on advertising. It is unlikely that campaign consultants and candidates would continue spending massive amounts of campaign resources on a tool that is ineffective. The overall opinion of consultants and strategists appears to reflect the opinion that the cost of a televised advertisement is justified and well-worth the benefits.

### *Effectiveness of Televised Advertisements*

In today's media-dependent society campaigns are increasing their use of television advertisements as a means of communication (West, 2010; Stevens, 2005). The political knowledge citizens possess often stems from the messages and images seen and heard on television (Ridout, Shah, Goldsetin, Franz 2004). Candidates are wise to capitalize on America's dependence on television for information, especially in a time when newspaper subscriptions are down and targeted mail is often ignored (Franz 2011). Campaign strategists are charged with the task of making the public's dependence on television work to the advantage of the campaign. Television is central to most campaign success, and it is this notion that makes it increasingly important to better understand how candidates use advertisements throughout the course of a campaign. Reaching the public with a message will hold weight if the public sees and hears the message and is responsive to the information presented.

Research suggests campaign advertising impacts voters, and therefore televised advertisements play an important role in the process of campaign communication (Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson 2004). As indicated by past research, not only are Americans depending on



television for their political information, but they are retaining the information they receive from television (Franz and Ridout 2007). This is why so many candidates look to television advertisements as key to their campaign strategy. The decision to use televised advertisements, and the way those ads are used, differs depending on the need of each individualized campaign. Depending on the size of the district, or the candidate's level of name recognition, ads may be one of the most important aspects of the campaign (Yoon, Pinkleton, and Ko, 2005). The campaign activities a candidate engages in are magnified by television, and therefore become more useful and effective as more voters are exposed to a candidate's message and actions (Granato and Wong, 2004). Exposure to campaign messages helps voters make decisions, and candidates who choose to send a message through televised media have more opportunity to have their message heard.

Political advertisements often garner the attention of televised media outlets, thereby increasing the public's exposure to a campaign message. For example, in 1964 President Johnson aired his famous "Daisy Girl" ad depicting a nuclear explosion and the seriousness of voting in the upcoming election. The advertisement was aired only once, but the re-airing of the advertisement through news broadcasts increased the effectiveness of the advertisement (Ridout and Smith 2008). Ridout and Smith (2008) claim news outlets re-airing campaign advertisements is a regular occurrence, and a negative ad is more likely to earn media attention which reinforces the campaign message with voters. The more exposure citizens have to the message, the greater the impact of the advertisement.

### *Types of Televised Advertisements*

Television ads are prevalent in the electoral process and are central to most campaign success (Granato and Wong, 2004). It is important to differentiate between the three most common types of advertisements: promotion ads, contrast ads, and negative ads. Promotion ads are designed to endorse a candidate by presenting biographical information of the person or describing the candidate's position on an issue. Contrast ads highlight the differences between two or more candidates running in an election. Finally, negative ads are designed to attack the opposing candidate (Yoon, Pinkleton, and Ko 2005; Jasobson 2004). Negative advertisements serve as the primary focus of this research.

A negative advertisement is one that serves to attack the opponent, or to “criticize, discredit, or belittle” the opposition (Ansolabehere, et. al, 1994, 829). The use of negative advertising continues to increase, and is an important part of the political campaign process (Yoon, Pinkleton and Ko, 2005). Negative campaign advertisements attract media and citizen attention and “conventional wisdom about negative political advertising” is that it works (Lau, Sigleman, Rovner 2007, p.1176; Pinkleton, Um, Austin 2002). It is not mandatory that candidates create and air negative ads about the opposition and not all candidates choose this advertising option (Goldstein and Freedman, 2002). Part of determining a campaign strategy involves deciding when it is strategically sound to use negative advertisements. Incorporating a negative advertisement into a campaign requires a strategist to understand the expected benefits and potential pitfalls of utilizing this type of advertising.

### *Negative Advertisements as a Campaign Tool*

Critics of negative advertisements argue these types of advertisements are detrimental to the American political process (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, and Valentino, 1994). The critics believe negative ads turn voters off and sour them to the electoral process as a whole (Ansolabehere and Kinder, 1995). According to these researchers negative advertisements deter people from the political process and encourage voters to stay home on Election Day. Negative advertisements are blamed for low political participation, overall disillusionment with the electoral process, and a rise in public cynicism towards government (Buchanan 1991, Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995, West 2005). These scholars suggest that negative advertisements are a detriment to the political process, and explain the lack of participation evident in America today.

In reality, the opposite appears to be true and claims regarding the detrimental impacts of negative advertisements are not conclusively supported by empirical evidence (Jackson, Mondak, Huckfeldt 2009; Lau and Sigelman 2007). Instead, Geer (2006) believes negative advertisements enhance the democratic process by informing the general public and presenting information about voters' issues and concerns. Negative advertisements potentially raise personal incentives for voters as they bring to light issues that may motivate people to vote for or against a candidate (Martin, 2004; Wattenberg and Briens, 1999). In spite of research to the contrary, it is empirically supported that negative political advertisements actually mobilize the public and have increased levels of voter turnout (Brooks and Geer 2007, Wattenburg 2002, Lau and Pomper 2001, Kahn and Kenney 1999). Additionally, the quantity of information in negative advertisements is often higher than any other type of political advertisement, and voters are more likely to accurately recall the information presented in negative ads than any other type of advertisements (Stevens, 2005). These qualities make using negative advertising a popular tactic

among candidates, as these ads are full of useful information that is readily retained by the electorate (Franz, 2011, Franz, et. al 2005). In sum, the positive qualities of negative advertisements make them attractive options for candidates and consultants in an election cycle.

Negative advertisements are extremely well-liked by candidates and political strategists because of the fact that the ads are memorable and effective (Goldstein and Freedman, 2002). It is estimated that in some campaigns “up to half of political campaign advertising budgets are devoted to negative advertising” (Yoon, Pinkelton, and Ko 2005, 96). The popularity of negative advertisements directly contradicts the notion that negative ads are a tool the electorate finds distasteful. In other words, if these ads hurt a candidate’s chance of electoral success, this strategy would cease to exist. A political strategist is not likely to continually put significant financial resources into a strategy proven to be ineffective and harmful to a campaign (Franz 2011). Negative advertisements provide the opportunity for political candidates to present the public with a critique of the opponent in an exciting and dramatic way. The dramatic dynamic of the negative advertisements command the public’s attention and is considered to be more interesting than a benign advertisement (Kahn and Kenney, 1999). Negative information grabs the public’s attention and the process of paying attention to negativity appears to be automatic, quick, and effortless (Martin, 2004). All of these positive attributes of negative campaign advertisements make them a logical choice when attempting to win a campaign.

A negative advertisement sparks excitement and interest, and entices the viewer to pay attention to the ad. The attention these advertisements receive is an appealing option for candidates who must maximize the impacts of their budgets through creating memorable and effective ads. Negative ads have qualities that provide benefits to those who use them correctly; and therefore, a decline in negative advertising is highly unlikely any time soon (Geer, 2006).

The emergence and popularity of negative political advertisements has its place within the campaign process, and is used by a wide-variety of candidates. The prevalence of this type of advertisement must be examined, understood, and added to the body of existing knowledge the field of Political Science has regarding campaign communication.

### *Issue Stereotypes and Gender Effects*

Issues often serve to cue voters when they form opinions about male and female candidates (McDermott, 1997). In other words, certain issues may be used by voters to make a vote choice similar to the way voters “use party identification and other voting cues” (Hernnson, Lay and Stokes 2003, 245). The public has a tendency to assign gender to specific issues. This association of issues and gender stems from the idea that men and women focus on different topics both as members of the electorate and as politicians (McDermott, 1997). Male candidates are more likely to be considered strong when it comes to issues like the economy, foreign policy, and the military (Schaffner, 2005). On the other hand, female candidates’ strengths are often linked to compassion issues, including topics like health care and education (Kahn, 1993). If a voter values male over female issues, it is likely that voter will possess an inherent preference to vote for a male candidate, or vice versa (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). Male and female candidates react accordingly, and these stereotypical ideas may influence what men and women candidates stress in their campaigns for political office (Kahn, 1993). In an attempt to combat existing voter stereotypes male candidates may attempt to convey messages about their desire to better the education system, and female candidates may try to prove they are dedicated to issues of homeland security. In an attempt to gain the support of voters who have an intrinsic preference

for male or female issues, candidates are likely to craft campaign messages with gender stereotypes in mind.

Due to the stereotypical classification of male and female issues, candidates for office might on occasion feel the need to overcompensate for existing gender stereotypes (Schaffer 2005). For example, in an attempt to appeal to the base of voters that prefer male issues female candidates may feel it is necessary to campaign on more traditionally masculine issues (Dolan, 2005). Male candidates, when running against female candidates, may find it necessary to focus on issues usually associated with female candidates (Dolan 2005). Men and women cannot ignore voters of the opposite gender and candidates believe that in order to win they must appear competent when discussing certain gendered issues (Sanbonmatsu 2002). However, it may be a mistake to concentrate on issues associated with female candidates, because displaying an understanding of, and running on female issues, does not appear to be particularly advantageous to candidates running for office (Huddy and Terkildson, 1993). Female issues are considered to be weaker than male issues, and not favorably associated with obtaining a position in higher office (Sanbonmatsu 2002). Voter stereotypes are particularly influential to the message a candidate puts forward, and these stereotypes may ultimately affect the type of campaign message a candidate chooses to present in an advertisement.

### ***Campaign Similarities and Gender***

Despite the issue stereotypes assigned to men and women by voters, Dabelko and Hernnson (1997) argue men and women tend to run very similar campaigns. Previous research suggests that male and female candidates generally create similar overall campaign strategies

(Herrnson, Lay and Stokes 2003). Although gender can impact stereotypes of candidates, the strategic moves implemented by campaigns do not depend primarily on the gender of the candidate. Male and female candidates raise similar amounts of money, and both hire professional campaign staff to create strategy and manage the campaign (Herrnson, Lay and Stokes 2003). Men and women running for office spend almost equal portions of money on “radio, literature, direct mail, and most other kinds of communication” (Dabelko and Herrnson 1997, 124). This indicates that not only are the amount of available resources attainable regardless of gender, but that men and women are communicating with voters the same way. Gender does not affect the way money is spent getting the message out, or how a candidate chooses to run a campaign. Gender may, however, influence the campaign message.

### ***Negative Political Advertising and Gender***

As previously mentioned, negative political advertisements are an increasingly popular tool in the world of political campaigns. Not only do they serve as a way for the public to gather information on the candidates, but they also serve as an important weapon in a candidate’s arsenal (Herrnson and Lucas, 2006). Men and women both employ negative ads when campaigning and women “use similar amounts of negative advertising as male candidates” (Herrnson and Lucas 2006, 71).

Past evidence suggests that male and female candidates run campaigns similarly, including the implementation of negative advertisements when creating an advertising strategy (Dabelko and Herrnson 1997). Acknowledging that both men and women use negative advertising during their campaign for office, it is important to uncover whether male and female

candidates' advertisements incorporate the same issues and messages. Previous research suggests men and women focus on different issues, and this would likely include negative advertisement message content.

Indeed, while men and women run similar campaigns, they tend to focus on different issues within their platforms (Dabelko and Herrnson, 1997). This potentially indicates that while all other aspects of the campaigns are similar; fundraising ability, campaign tactics, and success rates, the actual content of the negative advertisement could be different. Men and women may use different issues and approaches to tear down their opponent. Furthermore, to refute existing stereotypes, candidates may focus on different issues in negative advertisement content (Dolan 2005; Sanbonmatsu 2002; McDermott 1997). While gender does not affect the use of negative advertisements, it may influence the content found within those advertisements.

There are basic gender differences between candidates regarding how they feel about the type of content found in negative advertisements. Female candidates state they feel that it is not always "appropriate to raise scandals related to" youthful indiscretions, and claim they are not inclined to use this type of attack during a campaign cycle. (Herrnson and Lucas 2006, 81). Women running for office state they believe attacking a man's personal issues to be somewhat distasteful, and voice the opinion that they are not inclined to use this type of attack during a campaign cycle (Herrnson and Lucas 2006). Research does not show whether female candidates adhere to their stated beliefs on negative advertising techniques when actually launching a negative attack.

Male candidates running for elected office state they feel it is perfectly acceptable to "adopt more general appeals that include" attacks on an individual's personality traits (Kahn



1993, 492). Men appear to be more aggressive during a negative ad campaign, and may be inclined to attack an opponent more frequently on a personal basis than a female candidate. Therefore, based on the gender of the candidate sponsoring the ad, there appears to be a difference between the general attitudes towards personal and policy focused attacks. Men may be more inclined to attack on a personal basis because the general public tends to feel it is more acceptable for a male candidate to attack on a personal level (Kahn 1993). Female candidates will stick to policy issues in their attack ads due partly because they do not feel it is appropriate.

Women who run for office may have another, more specific reason for avoiding a personal attack on an opponent. Female candidates attempt to appear tough when running a campaign in order to combat certain preconceived notions, and often feel they must appear to voters as being capable of serving in office (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). One way of doing this would be to avoid getting personal and maintain the position of discussing only the issues. Some voters hold the opinion that male candidates are more “knowledgeable than women”, and this fact motivates women to “demonstrate their competence in campaign appeals” (Kahn 1993, 492). This preconceived notion that women are less suitable for office may put pressure upon female candidates to prove they are anything but unqualified. Female candidates strive to prove to voters that they are competent candidates for political office, and may do this by avoiding a personal attack on an opponent. Overcoming stereotypical ideas of a female candidate may be achieved in part through construction of advertisements that run contrary to the stereotypical notions.

The perceived emotional qualities of a candidate may also be a factor in whether or not a personal attack is employed. Women are viewed as being more emotional than men, which has not yet proven to be a desirable trait in a political candidate (Sapiro and Walsh 2002). Candidates for office who appear more resilient and less emotional are more attractive to voters, and

therefore female candidates will not benefit from being perceived as more emotional than male candidates (Schaffner 2005). One way for women to establish themselves as a professional and capable candidate is by sticking primarily to the issues, and avoiding a personal attack on a male opponent. This strategy allows women to appear as feasible candidates who are capable of adequately serving their constituency without being overly emotional, but at the same time still equips the female candidate with the powerful tool of a negative advertisement. While past research has focused on gender impacts on voters, this research examines gender impacts on campaign messages in negative advertisements from the perspective of the candidate. This research also seeks to examine the phenomenon of negative political advertising from the perspective of consultants, so as to offer a different viewpoint on this type of ad.

### ***Definition of Consultants***

A political consultant is defined by Sabato as being a campaign professional whose job it is to provide advice and services such as polling, media creation, and fundraising services to candidates and campaigns (1981). A political campaign consultant is an individual who makes a living by professionally running a candidate's campaign (Dulio 2004; Watson and Campbell 2003). Furthermore, campaign consultants are considered to be at the professional level when they "engage in consulting" on a "full-time basis", and handle "more than one campaign per election cycle" (Medvic 2001, 17). Professional political consultants are more likely than not to have political experience whether it is as a campaign manager, political staffer, or some other type of government employee (Kolodny and Logan 1998). The expertise and knowledge that

comes from having worked in politics, paired with the “deep-seated habit of strategic thinking”, results in a person compelled to win elections for a living (Burton and Shea 2003, 32).

There is much argument over the popularity and effectiveness of political campaign consultants. Some believe the American public finds the practice of using consultants distasteful, as some feel consultants weaken the two party system America (Dulio 2004). Conversely, others find that consultants provide refreshing ways to run campaigns and help stimulate interest in the political process (Panagopoulos and Thurber 2003, Lathrop 2003). Regardless of whether or not consultants are popular with voters, it is clear they do exist and contribute to the political campaign process. As such, it is important to gain a better understanding of the contributions consultants make to the political process.

The United States is home to the most professionalized campaigns in the world, and most candidates who are serious about running for office choose to hire professional campaign consultants (Dulio 2004; Jacobson 2004; Waston and Campbell 2003; Thurber 1998). While hiring a campaign consultant offers no guarantee for electoral success, a candidate would be remiss to embark upon a campaign without the help of a professional consultant (Dulio 2004). Strategic advice and tailored services are provided to candidates when the use of a consultant is engaged, and these services are critical to the successful execution of a campaign (Dulio 2004). Consultants have an impact on political campaigns and evidence suggests candidates benefit from using consultants (Watson and Campbell 2003, Medvic 2001, 1998). Therefore, it is important to understand motivations and ideas consultants have about negative political advertising.

## History of Consultants

*“More and more-over seek out and discover men in every district, make acquaintance with them, solicit them, make them promises, take care that they canvass for you in their neighborhoods and become as it were candidates for themselves in your own city”*

*-Quintas Cicero*

The concept of political consulting may be traced back to ancient Greece “where Quintas Tullius Cicero” offered up the above stated political advice to his brother (Watson and Campbell 2003, 17). Campaign consultants worked with Federalists and Anti-Federalists to gain support or opposition for the Constitution (Dulio 2003). Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln all had friends and associates who frequently provided political advice (Burton and Shea 2003). Professional campaign consultants are not a new invention, they simply were not as ubiquitous in the past as they are today. The use of political consultants has been on the rise in America since the appearance of the first established political consulting firm in the 1930’s when Clem Whitaker and Leone Smith Baxter begin their consulting firm Campaigns, Inc. (Panagopoulos 2006, Watson and Campbell 2003). Since then, the industry has seen tremendous and consistent growth. In 1967 the American Association of Political consultants was formed, and since then political consultants have been prominent figures in American political campaigns (DeVries 1989, Medvic 2001).

The shift from party-centered elections to candidate-centered electoral contests played a significant role in the advancement of consulting (Watson and Campbell 2003). The dependence on consultants stems from the inability of the parties to accommodate individual candidates in the current candidate-centered electoral climate (Panagopoulos 2006; Kolodny and Logan 1998). Parties were unable to provide candidates with “specific information and persuasive techniques

candidates need for victory” which forced candidates to find outside sources capable of handling campaign needs (Kolodny 2000, 116). The deterioration of the parties as campaign organizations left candidates with no choice but to seek out the assistance they needed through outside sources (Burton and Shea 2003). In the past consultants worked in the shadows, whereas now they are often at the forefront of the campaign.

Political consultants have gone from being a behind-the-scenes figure, to a recognizable face of a campaign. In some instances, campaign consultants have morphed into political “stars” with appearances on television shows and publishing best-selling novels (Medvic 2001, 67). For example, the 1992 film *The War Room* is a political documentary focusing on Bill Clinton’s presidential campaign efforts. The film focused more on the paid political consultants than on Clinton himself, which left Stephanopoulos, Carville, and Matalin recognizable political figures (Burton and Shea 2003; Medvic 2001). In 1994, Democratic hopefuls fought to gain the services of political consultant Robert Shrum, who served as Gore’s campaign consultant in 2000, due to his skills and reputation as an expert in the field (Burton and Shea 2003). Consultants have a solidified presence in American politics and it is therefore imperative that we gain a better understanding of their insight into negative political advertising.

### ***Types of Consultants***

Professional political campaign consultants are charged with the task of being “visual and rhetorical image specialists” who make a living “marketing attractive and viable candidates” (Panagopoulos 2006, 867). A consultant’s perspective on a campaign differs from that of a journalist or an academician, with the consultant’s main focus being centered on campaign

strategy (Burton and Shea 2003). Consultants are able to consider strategic campaign decisions and determine the potential outcomes of these decisions based on the knowledge they possess in their field (Burton and Shea 2003). Consultants can be categorized into groups depending on their area of expertise (Medvic 2001). These groups are classified by consulting function and are as follows: general, fundraising, vendor, and media.

### *General*

A general political consultant is a person who engages in day-to-day campaign activities such as handing out yard signs and bumper stickers, organizing volunteers, registering voters, scheduling events for the candidate, and other various campaign-related events (Herrnson, 2010; Medvic 2001). Generalists know something about every element of a campaign and give candidates advice on every aspect of their campaign (Medvic 2001; DeVries 1989). These types of consultants serve the campaign on a regular basis to develop message, theme, and overall campaign strategy (Dulio 2003). General consultants are considered to be experts in allocating resources in order to maximize a candidate's budget (Medvic 2001). There are fewer campaign generalists now than in the past because the field of campaign consulting is being taken over by specialists (Herrnson 2005). The sophisticated nature and technologically specific aspects of campaigns dictates that a consultant must have a certain type of knowledge that is highly specialized, an area in which general consultants require assistance (Dulio 2003). This demand for more specialized knowledge has resulted in the separation of consultants into several categories. Most frequently a campaign will employ the help of consultants specializing in fundraising, polling, vendors, and media.

## *Fundraising*

As previously mentioned, campaigns require a serious amount of money in order to function properly (Burton and Shea 2010; Nelson and Herrnson 2004). As such, the job of fundraiser is another extremely important role for the consultant. The rise of campaign cost is considerable and therefore fundraising has become a full-time job spanning beyond the capabilities of the general consultant. Generating letters to donors and potential donors, maintaining donor lists, placing fundraising calls, organizing fundraising events, and raising money via the Internet are all dimensions of fundraising that require full-time attention (Burton and Shea 2010; Herrnson 2005; Nelson and Herrnson 2004). Professional fundraisers must determine how much money is needed based on projections by the general consultant, and go forth with planned strategies to raise the money needed (Burton and Shea 2010). A fundraiser is indispensable to a campaign, and vital for campaign success.

## *Pollsters*

Pollsters are campaign consultants primarily responsible for conducting survey-based research yielding statistical data that provides important information to a campaign (Dulio 2003). Polls are imperative to campaign success, as they provide vital information such as the public's perception of candidate strengths and weaknesses, how likely it is the public will vote for a candidate or potential problems that may arise on the campaign trail (Medvic 2003). The results of polls are used by general and media consultants to refine a campaign message and to help determine how campaign resources would be best utilized (Herrnson 2005). Polls "take the pulse of the public" and help other consultants determine how to proceed with campaign affairs

(Medvic 2003, p. 34). A pollster deals in surveys and statistics, and provides a campaign with much needed insight into the opinions of voters.

### *Vendor*

Vendors are professional campaign consultants who provide valuable information to campaigns, but in a way that differs from pollsters (Watson and Campbell 2003). Vendors provide lists, or banks and voter files, of information the campaign is unable to gather and access on their own (Watson and Campbell 2003). The information a vendor provides are lists that include the contact information of registered voters within a district. Often times these lists may include voters' party identification, or information regarding past campaign donations (Burton and Shea 2010). Campaign organizations make use of these lists when sending out targeted mail pieces, making phone calls on behalf of a candidate, or when attempting to raise money. Using a vendor's services ensures a direct contact to voters in a candidate's state or district, and this contact may make a significant difference in the outcome of the campaign (Jacobson 2004). Lists provided by vendors are highly valued, as are the vendors charged with gathering and maintaining the information.

### *Media*

In 1956, Kelley claimed that as our communication methods became more sophisticated and technical, politicians would need the help of political consultants to navigate the difficult technical waters. In campaigns today a technical political consultant is one who deals primarily



in media consultation (Watson and Campbell 2003). Media consultants are tasked with developing a candidate's television persona by deciding what image a candidate should project in order to align with the designated campaign message (Burton and Shea 2010). These consultants are considered to be "artists using creativity and intuition" to appeal to voters (Herrnson 2005, p. 178). Media consultants create advertisements that align with a candidate's persona and campaign message in an attempt to shape public views on candidates and the issues (West 2005). In terms of this research, the main focus will be on media consultants.

Aside from being categorized according to specialization, professional consultants are also sorted based on the type of campaign they are most likely to run. Consultants may choose to focus on local, state, or federal elections. Most consultants have a tendency to run a combination of either local/state, or state and federal elections. Prior to the 1960's professional political consultants were only utilized by candidates engaged in U.S. Senate races, gubernatorial elections, or presidential races (DeVries 1989). However, professional campaign services are now used at all levels including state legislative races and local elections (Petracca 1989). Despite the common presence of consultants in the political process, not all share the same outlook of these campaign specialists.

### ***Views on Consultants***

#### *Ally View*

Those with an Ally View perspective believe consultants benefit American government by sparking citizen interest in the political process. These individuals believe consultants are not unaware of a party's mission and are known to work with members of the party they identify

with. From the ally view perception consultants appear to value the goals of a party because they have more than likely worked with that party in the past (Kolodny and Logan 1998). Over 50% of professional consultants claim to be motivated by their own personal ideology (Medvic 2003). From the ally view standpoint, consultants have a vested interest in the political process, and work to increase political awareness.

### *Adversarial View*

Those with an adversarial view of consultants take the stance that consultants do not compliment parties, and act primarily as an advertising agency that perceives the candidate as a product to be sold (Kolodny and Logan 1998). From the perspective of the adversarial view it is not uncommon for consultants to make decisions that may contradict the message of the party and confuse or disenchant voters. Furthermore, the adversarial view contends that consultants weaken the two party system as candidates are more prone to deal with consultants than parties (DeVries 1989). The use of consultants encourages candidate-centered elections, which drives individual candidates further away from political parties (Thurber 1998). As candidates become more capable of running successful elections, parties lose power and significance in the overall process. From the outlook of the adversarial viewpoint this is a detriment to the political process as a whole.

In reality consultants are not in opposition to political parties, and do not set out to work against party efforts. In fact, 52% of professional campaign consultants worked in party politics before becoming an independent consultant (Kolodny and Logan 1998). Those who did not work directly for a party worked in a capacity affiliated with the political process such as individual campaigns or government jobs (Kolodny and Logan 1998). Some professional consulting firms

make clear their political affiliation and will only work for candidates who align with their party leanings (Medvic 2003). Overall, campaign consultants are more likely to have political experience, and therefore understand the function and purpose of political parties (Kolodny and Logan 1998). A consultant's goal is to win an election for a candidate, not to interfere with the functions of political parties.

### ***Prior Consultant Research***

There is not a significant amount of research to reflect the impact, behavior, and influence of professional political campaign consultants (Panagopoulos 2006; Medvic and Lenart 1997). Past research acknowledges the existence of consultants and traces the history of the consulting business in America. There is a serious gap in the research from the perspective of the political consultant. Therefore, this manuscript offers insight into an under-researched area of an important aspect of campaign communication, and of the overall political process. This research sets out to examine aspects of negative political advertising that have previously been ignored or under-researched. Prior research focused on the impact of negative advertisements on the voter. This research attempts to consider negative advertisements from the perspective of the candidates and the consultants, in addition to the voters. It is this aspect of the research that renders it unique. Additionally, this research looks at the phenomenon of negative advertising through a mixed-methods approach. By conducting an analysis of available data, creating and implementing an experiment, and conducting a rich qualitative examination this research attempts to present new insight into the world of negative political advertising.

## Chapter Two

### **Gender, Ads, and Stereotypes: Negative Advertisement Content of Congressional Candidates**

As part of an online question and answer segment sponsored by Wisconsin Public Television (2001), “The :30 Second Candidate”, Republican media consultant, Alex Castellanos, was asked to share why “good old fashion progressive, call it comparative, call it negative advertising is good for democracy”. The Cuban-born media strategist who helped structure and write the political advertising campaigns of Republican candidates running at all levels of government including both presidential hopefuls Bob Dole and later George H.W. Bush, supplied the following response:

“You want to make sure voters hear at least both sides and can make a choice. But more than that it's the most creative part of the process. It's what gives the most opportunity for change and growth. If you take all the negative aspects out of politics, if you take all the chaos out of politics, if you take all the divisiveness out of politics, what your left with is, is very bland, unimaginative oatmeal.”

The purpose of this chapter is to further our understanding of how the “oatmeal”, or negative political advertisements, are used in campaigns. More specifically I seek to determine whether gender stereotypes impact the content of negative political advertisements. Citizens see male and female candidates as possessing different characteristics, and I assume candidates respond accordingly when crafting political advertisements. Stereotypically female candidates are seen as more capable of handling compassion issues; conversely male candidates are often seen as better equipped to handle issues such as the economy and defense spending (Shaffner 2005, Kahn 1993). Therefore, women feel compelled to prove competency on certain policy issues to overcome stereotypical ideas. Considering these stereotypes I expect female candidates

to be more likely to launch a policy-based attack, while male candidates may be more apt to attack on personal issues. Support for the hypothesis is evident in 2002 competitive races and 2002 Senate races.

While past research quotes female candidates as saying they are not in favor of using personal information in negative advertisements, existing research in this field fails to empirically support or disprove these stated opinions (Herrnson and Lucas 2006). This research seeks to better understand the negative campaigning strategies used by female candidates running for Congress and examines the 2002 and 2004 Congressional elections. Furthermore, this research seeks to identify whether the gender of a candidate impacts the message content of a negative political advertisement. If the statements made by female candidates ring true, then female candidates are more likely to use policy based attacks than personal attacks within their negative advertisements. I ask the question, are female candidates more likely than male candidates to attack their political opponents on policy issues compared to personal issues? Considering the statements of both male and female candidates I constructed the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis: female candidates are more likely to attack their opponents on policy issues, while male candidates are more likely to attack their opponents on personal issues.*

### ***Data/Methods***

In order to test this hypothesis, I examined data compiled by the Wisconsin Advertising Project (WiscAds), which analyzes campaign advertisements for House and Senate races in the nation's 100 largest media markets. I examined data from the 2002 and 2004 Congressional elections. The advertisements were coded for content and still shots of the advertisement were constructed, including a complete transcript of all audio and a still capture of every fourth second

of video (Goldstein and Rivlin 2005). Advertisements were differentiated as those which aim to promote a candidate, attack the opposition, or distinguish the contrasting qualities between the candidates. Advertisements that promote a candidate are defined as those consisting of messages that encourage name recognition, reinforce the good character or policy stances of a candidate, and introduce the public to a candidate in a positive way (Jacobson 2004). Ads that are negative, or intended to attack the opposition, consist of messages that attempt to shed light on the opposition’s past indiscretions, point out policy flaws, and generally paint a negative portrait of the opposition (Yoon, Pinkleton and Ko 2005). Ads intending to promote a candidate were coded as “1”, and ads attacking a candidate were coded as “2”. For the purposes of this study, I focus on these negatively coded advertisements.

**Table 2.1: Tone in 2002 and 2004 Congressional Races**

	2002	2004
<b>HOUSE</b>		
<i>Attack</i>	26%	36%
<i>Contrast</i>	16%	21%
<i>Promote</i>	58%	43%
Total Spots	297,205	240,246
<b>SENATE</b>		
<i>Attack</i>	31%	25%
<i>Contrast</i>	17%	26%
<i>Promote</i>	52%	49%
Total Spots	271,074	240,593

Note: Table consists of television advertisements sponsored by candidates, political parties, and interest groups in both House and Senate races in 2002 and 2004.

In addition to the type of advertisement used in a campaign, the ads were coded for a wide range of campaign themes and issues. This coding provides opportunity to designate the

dependent variable and determine if there is a propensity for women and men to run using specific content such as personal and policy issues. By identifying the different issues and coding them accordingly, it is possible to determine if gender plays a role in influencing and shaping the content of negative advertisements. Personal issues were coded as 1 and include negative advertisements where the candidate attacks their opponent based on his personal characterizations (Goldstein and Rivlin 2005). Policy issues were coded as 0. An advertisement from Chris Chocola's campaign helps to illustrate what is meant as a negative advertisement. The advertisement begins by identifying Chocola's opponent, Jill Long Thompson, and immediately aligning her with Hilary Clinton. The ad states verbatim,

*“As the Congresswoman from Ft. Wayne, Jill Long Thompson co-sponsored Hilary's plan to raise your taxes by billions”.*

The advertisement appears to be an attack on Thompson's policy stance on taxes, but it is clear the attack is personal when the ad continues by stating:

*“What's worse is the House Ethics Committee found Jill wrote 21 bad checks in the House bank scandal. The Journal Gazette called the bad checks “interest free loans” and said they're an “abuse of power” and a “question of character”... bad checks is a question of character”.*

Various policy related topics considered include health care, abortion, taxes, and military spending or defense stance amongst others (Goldstein and Rivlin 2005). An advertisement from Jean Carnahan's campaign provides an example of policy related attacks. The advertisement states the problem and addresses the past policy indiscretions of the incumbent, Jim Talent, as follows:

*“We absolutely need to provide good quality prescription drugs to our seniors. “ [Announcer]: Just a minute, Jim. Should we believe your ads or your record? In Congress, Talent voted against a guaranteed Medicare prescription drug benefit. Check his record. And he voted to cut Medicare by more than \$270 billion dollars to give tax breaks to millionaires. So, Jim Talent can keep talking but his record is clear, he voted to cut Medicare and is against prescription drug benefits for seniors.”*

These are just two examples of the various personal and policy attacks launched during the 2002 election cycle. However, they are clear indications of the differences between a personal and policy related attack. Personal attacks focus on the indiscretions of the individual that involve questions of their character when dealing with issues that are not necessarily legislative in nature. Policy attacks focus primarily on the opposition’s stance on an issue, past votes made, or campaign platform. While both personal and policy issues focus primarily on choices made by the opposition, they look at two different aspects of the opposition’s life, and attack the opposition in an entirely different fashion.

In addition to the favored candidate’s partisanship (Democrats coded as 0 and Republicans coded as 1 by the Wisconsin Advertising Project) I coded for several additional controls. First I added controls for the electoral context including dichotomous variables if the contested seat is open, coded as 1, or closed, coded as 0 and the incumbency status of the favored candidate, 0 if not the incumbent and 1 for the incumbent. I also added a control for the overall competitiveness of the race as measured by the total amount of advertisements shown within a particular advertising market. I ranked the markets in terms of the total amount of general election advertisements run and classified the top twenty markets as competitive, coded as 1, and the bottom eighty markets as non-competitive, coded as 0 (See Appendix for list). Election year was coded as 0 for 2002, and 1 for 2004. Lastly, as I am primarily focused on gender differences



in negative campaigning strategies, it is important to provide a control for the state-level gender context. As more female candidates run for, and win, elected office people may be accustomed to seeing women as legitimate office holders. This would decrease the propensity for female candidates to adapt their message to stereotypical classifications discussed in Chapter 1. Therefore I include a control for the percentage of women elected in the state legislature for the state in which the election resides (Women's Legislative Network 2005). Next, I use these variables to estimate a logistic regression model to better understand the relationship between gender and negative campaign tactics.

## ***Results***

Table 2.2 indicates that in 2002 and 2004 there is no difference in the negative advertisement content of male and female candidates running for office. However, in those years incumbency has an impact on the content of a negative political advertisement. Incumbents appear to be more likely to attack an opponent on personal issues in the 2002 and 2004 election cycles. Incumbents traditionally have a high re-election rate, and this may allow them to feel secure enough in their electoral chances to attack an opponent using personal issues. Incumbents typically have more money to spend, which may afford them the opportunity to employ several advertising strategies that non-incumbents cannot afford. Incumbents may be able to launch several different advertisements with a variety of messages, whereas challengers may be forced to choose the type of ad that will garner the most votes. Finally, incumbents may be forced to attack the opposition on personal issues since the opposing candidate may have no political record to criticize.

Party also significantly impacts the type of attack a candidate chooses for their advertisement. According to Table 2.2, Democrats are less likely to go personal during an election cycle. It could be that there are qualities that Republicans possess that make them more likely to attack on personal issues. Republicans may not feel as compelled to defend stereotypes, or may feel more comfortable personally attacking the opposition.

**Table 2.2: Congressional Candidates' Choice of Negative Advertisement: Personal vs. Policy**

Coefficients	Combined
Candidate Gender (Female=1)	-0.21 (0.22)
Incumbency	0.32** (0.20)
Open Seat	0.29 (0.24)
% Women Legislature	0.00 (0.01)
Competitiveness	-0.05 (0.19)
Democrat	-0.26** (0.18)
Election Year	0.58* (0.19)
Office: House or Senate	-0.01 (0.19)
Intercept	-1.56* (0.58)
R Squared	19.22
N	783

Note: Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficients are estimated for both chambers of Congress while combining the 2002/2004 data. Dependent variable is a measure for tactics within negative advertising, personal attack is coded as 1 and policy is coded as 0. Standard errors are located within parenthesis. “\*” indicates statistical significance at p<0.01 level, “\*\*” indicates statistical significance at p<.10 level, and “\*\*\*” indicates statistical significance at p<.20.

As indicated in Table 2.3, the level of competitiveness in a race impacts the type of attack found within a negative advertisement. It is evident that in the 2002 and 2004 election cycles a gender gap occurred and support for the hypothesis is found. In competitive races female candidates pulled away from using personal attacks, while male candidates increased their use of personal attacks. This phenomenon does not appear when examining non-competitive races. There is something about a competitive race that causes male and female candidates to focus on different types of attacks when going negative. It could be that the theory about female candidates responding to voter stereotypes is accurate. Female candidates may stick to policy issues, especially in competitive races where exposure increases, in an attempt to appear more capable of serving in higher office. Male candidates in competitive races may feel less pressure to stick to policy issues because voters typically assume male candidates are inherently more suited to hold political office.

There are several other variables of significance found when examining Congressional candidates' choice to use personal or policy attacks within their negative advertisements. Incumbency, party, and office being sought all impact a candidate's choice of attack. Incumbents are more likely to attack on personal issues in competitive races, but are less likely to attack on personal issues in non-competitive races. In addition to the reasons why incumbents may choose this tactic stated above, incumbents do not need to spend an overwhelming amount of resources on advertisements in races that are not competitive. Therefore, instead of attacking a challenger that does not have much hope of unseating the incumbent, the incumbent will save his or her resources.

In addition to gender and incumbency, being a Democrat impacts the type of attack used in a competitive race, but has no significance in a non-competitive race. Democrats are less likely

to go personal in a competitive race. It may be that Democrats and Republicans have different outlooks on personal attacks, with Republicans feeling more inclined to launch personal attacks.

Finally, the level of office a candidate is seeking impacts the choice to use personal or policy-based attacks. Candidates running for Senate are more likely to attack an opponent on personal issues. This is true for both competitive and non-competitive races.

**Table 2.3: Congressional Candidates' Choice of Negative Advertisement:  
By Level of Competitiveness**

Coefficients	Competitive	Non-Competitive
Candidate Gender	-0.65** (0.41)	-0.18 (0.27)
Incumbency	0.51** (0.32)	0.22 (0.27)
Open Seat	-0.27 (0.47)	0.44** (0.30)
% Women Legislature	0.02 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)
Democrat	-0.60* (0.31)	-0.05 (0.23)
Election Year	0.81* (0.32)	0.41* (0.24)
Office (House or Senate)	0.39 (0.32)	-0.26 (0.25)
Intercept	-2.85* (1.01)	-0.75 (0.73)
R Squared	21.87	5.85
N	333	450

Note: Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficients are estimated for both chambers of Congress while combining the 2002/2004 data. Dependent variable is a measure for tactics within negative advertising, personal attack is coded as 1 and policy is coded as 0. Standard errors are located within parenthesis. Competitiveness of the races is coded as 0, and non-competitiveness is coded as 1. “\*” indicates statistical significance at p<0.01 level, “\*\*” indicates statistical significance at p<.10 level, and “\*\*\*” indicates statistical significance at p<.20.

When separating the election cycles by year and examining the level of competitiveness in the races there is further evidence of a gender gap, as evident in Table 2.4. In 2002, female candidates in competitive races were less likely than male candidates to attack on personal issues. Party is also significant in 2002. Democrat candidates avoided attacking an opponent on a personal basis, however, in non-competitive races in 2002 Republicans and Democrats behave similarly in regards to using personal attacks. Both refrain from going personal in a negative advertisement when the race is not competitive. This could indicate that attacking a candidate on personal issues is a tactic used only when races become competitive. Perhaps attacking in non-competitive races is a turn-off for voters, and a poor strategic choice for the campaign.

What is also interesting is that the data indicates in the event of an open seat, candidates will attack on personal issues. Open-seat elections may be more competitive than races involving an incumbent, and we know candidates to attack more on personal issues in competitive races. Perhaps candidates choose to run policy-based attacks when facing an incumbent because that incumbent has a legislative record. The legislative record may provide ammunition for the attack a candidate needs to be victorious in an election. Candidates' willingness to go personal in an open-seat election could occur because opposing candidates are not being evaluated against an elected official.

The gender gap found in the 2002 election cycle was not found in 2004, as displayed in Table 2.5. There are less competitive races in 2004 than 2002 which could explain the lack of significance. As reflected in the table, the sign is in the right direction and consistent with the 2002 findings, however that is not enough to claim significance. Perhaps if there were more cases of competitive races in 2004 significance could be found.

**Table 2.4: 2002 Congressional Candidates' Choice of Negative Advertisement:  
By Level of Competitiveness**

Coefficients	Competitive	Non-Competitive	2002
Gender	-1.30* (0.78)	-0.29 (0.46)	-0.59** (0.37)
Incumbency	0.13 (0.41)	0.42 (0.49)	0.34 (0.30)
Open Seat	0.73** (0.55)	0.68** (0.46)	0.73* (0.34)
% Women Legislature	-0.00 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.01 (0.02)
Democrat	-0.53** (0.39)	-0.36 (0.39)	-0.49* (0.27)
Office	0.73* (0.39)	-0.19 (0.41)	0.30 (0.28)
Intercept	-3.24* (1.28)	-1.55 (1.38)	-2.41* (0.97)
R Squared	15.07	6.36	17.26
N	240	190	430

Note: Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficients are estimated for both chambers of Congress in the 2002 election cycle. Dependent variable is a measure for tactics within negative advertising, personal attack is coded as 1 and policy is coded as 0. Standard errors are located within parenthesis. Competitiveness of the races is coded as 0, and non-competitiveness is coded as 1. "\*" indicates statistical significance at p<0.01 level, "\*\*" indicates statistical significance at p<.10 level, and "\*\*\*" indicates statistical significance at p<.20.

**Table 2.5: 2004 Congressional Candidates' Choice of Negative Advertisement:  
By Level of Competitiveness**

Coefficients	Competitive	Non-Competitive	2004
Gender	-0.59 (0.71)	-0.11 (0.35)	0.06 (0.28)
Incumbency	1.26* (0.72)	0.15 (0.34)	0.44** (0.29)
Open Seat	-1.07 (0.89)	0.22 (0.43)	-0.20 (0.37)
% Women Legislature	0.03 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)
Democrat	-0.49 (0.56)	0.17 (0.30)	-0.02 (0.26)
Office	-0.55 (0.61)	-0.06 (0.35)	-0.28 (0.29)
Intercept	-0.08 (1.87)	-0.51 (0.89)	-0.37 (0.77)
R Squared	11.78	1.93	5.13
N	93	260	353

Note: Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficients are estimated for both chambers of Congress in the 2004 election cycle. Dependent variable is a measure for tactics within negative advertising, personal attack is coded as 1 and policy is coded as 0. Standard errors are located within parenthesis. Competitiveness of the races is coded as 0, and non-competitiveness is coded as 1. "\*" indicates statistical significance at p<0.01 level, "\*\*\*" indicates statistical significance at p<.10 level, and "\*\*" indicates statistical significance at p<.20.

After breaking down the election cycles by year and by level of office the candidate was vying for it is evident there is no gender gap for 2002 House candidates, as displayed in Table 2.6. However, female candidates running for Senate in 2002 are less likely to attack on personal issues, thereby supporting the hypothesis. When examining the 2004 election cycle (Table 2.7) there is clearly no evidence of a gender gap in either the House or the Senate races. What could explain the gender gap found in the 2002 races for Senate? Perhaps there were more female candidates facing incumbents, or engaged in more competitive races than in 2004. The increased amount of female candidates could have caused the gender gap to be more visible in 2002 than in 2004. 2002 was a mid-term election year, which stands to reason there would be less voter attention and turnout in the electoral contests. Furthermore, people voting in the mid-term elections were more likely very interested in politics and knowledgeable about political topics. Perhaps female candidates knew voters in the midterm elections would be more politically informed, and felt more compelled to appear as serious politicians. According to the literature on stereotypes, these female candidates may have been sticking to policy-based attacks to appear more viable to voters naturally inclined to find female candidates less qualified. Whatever the explanation may be, it is clear there is a gender gap in the 2002 Senate races, but not in 2004.



**Table 2.6: 2002 Congressional Candidates' Choice of Negative Advertisement  
Personal v. Policy**

Coefficients	House	Senate
Gender	-0.36 (0.43)	-1.35* (0.82)
Incumbency	0.05 (0.40)	0.80** (0.50)
Open Seat	0.64** (0.42)	1.14* (0.62)
% Women Legislature	0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)
Competitiveness	0.20 (0.33)	-0.83* (0.49)
Democrat	-0.30 (0.34)	-0.87* (0.48)
Intercept	-1.50* (0.60)	-1.92* (1.00)
R Squared	5.30	18.03
N	256	174

Note: Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficients are estimated for both chambers of Congress in the 2002 election cycle. Dependent variable is a measure for tactics within negative advertising, personal attack is coded as 1 and policy is coded as 0. Standard errors are located within parenthesis. Competitiveness of the races is coded as 0, and non-competitiveness is coded as 1. “\*” indicates statistical significance at p<0.01 level, “\*\*” indicates statistical significance at p<.10 level, and “\*\*\*” indicates statistical significance at p<.20.

**Table 2.7: 2004 Congressional Candidates' Choice of Negative Advertisement**

Coefficients	House	Senate
Gender	-0.14 (0.35)	0.03 (0.64)
Incumbency	0.24 (0.33)	1.28* (0.66)
Open Seat	-0.28 (0.38)	Missing
% Women Legislature	0.01 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.03)
Competitiveness	0.16 (0.33)	1.07** (0.68)
Democrat	-0.41 (0.33)	0.75** (0.56)
Intercept	-1.09* (0.54)	-0.95** (0.59)
R Squared	3.76	7.55
N	252	101

Note: Estimates from logistic regression. Coefficients are estimated for both chambers of Congress in the 2002 election cycle. Dependent variable is a measure for tactics within negative advertising, personal attack is coded as 1 and policy is coded as 0. Standard errors are located within parenthesis. Competitiveness of the races is coded as 0, and non-competitiveness is coded as 1. "\*" indicates statistical significance at p<0.01 level, "\*\*" indicates statistical significance at p<.10 level, and "\*\*\*" indicates statistical significance at p<.20.

Overall, there is evidence to support the hypothesis that female candidates are more likely to attack on policy issues than male candidates. In the event of competitive races, particularly in 2002, and in the case of women running for Senate in 2002 we see that female candidates are less likely to attack on personal issues than male candidates. At this point explanations for the lack of significance in non-competitive races and certain House and Senate races are purely speculative. Further research must be done to pinpoint the exact reasoning behind these findings.

### *Discussion*

Each election has the potential to vary substantially depending on who enters the race. Every election cycle will produce new challengers who may opt to attack an incumbent. The content of these messages will differ among election cycles and this could explain the discrepancies found among the 2002 and 2004 election cycles. Perhaps the explanation is this: female candidates are just now making their mark in politics and starting to win office more than ever before. Women have faced significant challenges to win a position within the political process, and perhaps female candidates feel compelled to stick to attacks that may be viewed by voters as more fact-based in order to appear more qualified for office. Whatever the reasoning, it is clear a gender gap does exist and we must discover why this happens.

A possible explanation for the lack of consistent gender disparities in negative advertisements could be that gender-based stereotypes are not as present as once believed. As we witness an increasing number of women running for political office and winning, it may be that gender stereotypes are not as present in the public's perception as they once were. If these stereotypes do continue to exist they may be exaggerated by the media (Dolan 2005). Media

attention to the importance of gender in political campaigns may produce the appearance of stereotypical notions that are actually dwindling in the minds of citizens. A potential explanation for the lack of a gender gap in some of the findings may be a result of more widespread acceptance of females as elected officials. As more females run for office and secure spots in Congress, the more likely it is that people will accept female candidates as viable office holders. Candidates may not feel it is necessary to overcompensate for stereotypes that may no longer exist in society.

The similarities in all the elections studied outside of competitive races and the 2002 Senate contests could also be attributed to the possibility that media consultants are responsible for shaping televised campaign messages. These consultants are responsible for influencing the direction and tone of the advertisements (Panagopoulos 2006). Perhaps consultants, and not candidates, controlled the message of a campaign ad, and therefore the candidate's perspective was not included in the creation of the advertisement. Consultants generating advertising message content may have a different goal in mind than that of the candidate, and therefore produce an overall different ad message devoid of reactions to stereotypes. Further consideration of the consultant's role in negative advertising message content may be found in the next chapter.

A final possible explanation could be that candidates act rationally and simply respond to the opinions and attitudes of the voters in their district. Candidates first and foremost desire re-election and in order to attain that goal they must appease voters by understanding what issues voters value most (Jacobson, 2004). A candidate who understands the desires of the voting public is then wise to focus on those issues as opposed to reacting to possible stereotypes. The 2002 competitive races and 2002 Senate results may very well be indicative of candidates who

are focused on what the public wants from a political leader, and are responding with policy-based advertisements.

### ***Future Research***

Considering these findings and possible explanations, I suggest future researchers advance the study of gender and negative advertising techniques by examining more elections. As I showed through the exploration of two Congressional election years, it is possible for behavior and advertising techniques to be consistent with gender stereotypes. Through investigating more elections, patterns could be established to explain what leads candidates to follow stereotypical behavior or what leads them to run advertisements that do not fall into stereotypes.

Additionally, research should be done to examine if candidates attack other candidates differently because of that opposing candidate's gender. For example, does a male candidate attack another male differently than he attacks a female? Does a female attack a female the same way she would attack a male? Answers to these questions would offer more in-depth insight into the candidate's choice for method of attack, as well as into the gender gap phenomena.

As the significant findings in competitive races and the 2002 Senate elections indicates, this study finds that in some election contests male and female candidates run different types of negative advertisements. According to this research, a gender gap still exists. Further examination of the negative political ad content of male and female candidates in other election years may or may not help to reinforce the finding that men and women run different campaigns in regards to negative ad content under certain circumstances. This research is a valuable

extension to prior studies that have found similarities and differences between male and female campaigns, and overall this study builds on the body of research about negative political advertising.

## Chapter 3

### Gender Goggles: Perceived Negativity in Campaign Advertisements

Political campaign advertisements are vital to campaigns, and negative advertisements are an increasingly popular campaign tool. Male and female candidates attempt to win elections by tearing down opponents through the use of negative campaign advertisements. What is unclear is whether viewers perceive the message a candidate presents to be more or less negative based on the gender of the candidate sponsoring the ad. An experimental study was conducted to determine if a candidate's gender impacts a viewer's perception of negativity. A political advertisement was written and filmed once with a male candidate, and once with a female candidate. This ad was then shown to separate groups who were then asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the treatment they were exposed to. The findings are significant, and gender does appear to impact a viewer's perception of message negativity.

Prior research has been conducted to test whether listeners hearing a radio campaign advertisement evaluated male and female candidates differently. This research found that people did not evaluate the candidates differently based on gender (Dinzes, 1994). However, the message was an advertisement promoting a candidate that did not include any negativity in the content of the message. By adding a negative element to the message, and showing people the images of a female or male candidate, a different response could be triggered. A visual image has the power to provoke emotions and may produce a more passionate response than an audio message (Huddy and Gunnthorsdottir 2000). Furthermore, a negative message will incite a stronger response than a benign message such as the ones that were presented in past research (Pinkleton 1997). The combination of a visual image and negative content should incite a

response contradictory to what has previously been found. This research seeks to extend previous research on candidate communication and viewer perceptions by examining televised negative political campaign advertisements.

As stated in Chapter 1, past research indicates that male and female candidates are stereotyped by people as having different strengths and weaknesses (Fridkin, Kenney, and Woodall, 2009: 56; Sonbanmatsu, 2002; Fridkin and Kenney 1999; Dolan, 1998). Female candidates are not seen as possessing the kind of expertise necessary to be an effective officeholder, and are seen as being more emotional than male candidates (Kahn 1993; Huddy and Capelos 2002; Sonbanmatsu, 2002). The perception of being emotional includes sensitivity to issues, a willingness to cry or become upset in public, and being more likely to express displeasure in outbursts. Because people stereotype female candidates in this manner, it stands to reason that people will perceive a negative message presented by a woman differently than a negative message presented by a man. Viewers will perceive a message in a televised political advertisement to be more negative when it is presented by a female candidate than when it is presented by a male candidate. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis: Viewers will perceive a message in a televised political advertisement to be more negative when it is presented by a female candidate than when it is presented by a male candidate.*

### ***Data/Methods***

In order to test the hypothesis, an experiment was created that exposed subjects to a negative campaign advertisement highlighting either a male or a female candidate as the main subject of the advertisement. The benefit of an experiment comes from the freedom one has in controlling for outside forces that could harm the validity of the study. In order to best explain



whether the gender of a candidate impacts the viewer's perception of negativity, an experiment was designed to control for outside forces such as ad quality or candidate appearance that could sway a voter's opinion. The creation of the advertisement allowed for the ability to ensure that male and female treatments shown to individuals would be as identical as possible. A political advertisement was written and professionally filmed by an advertising agency once with a male candidate and once with a female candidate. The advertisement script for the female candidate is as follows:

*"I'm Liz Davis and I've been getting to know my opponent Robert Jones. He claims he's a different kind of politician, but check his record: in 2010 he voted to increase his own salary by 25%. He claims to be in support of campaign finance reform, but has been fined over \$10,000 by the Federal Election Commission for campaign violations. He has one of the worst attendance records in Congress, missing 95 votes last year. Maybe you should get to know Robert Jones too. After all he's just a typical politician."*

When filming the ad with the male candidate the names were changed to Will Davis and Linda Jones. Names were chosen by locating the third most common male and female first names, and the fourth and sixth most common last names (namestatistic.com). The first and second most common surnames were not used to avoid sounding too generic and therefore less believable.

The dialogue in the advertisement was constructed to contain a negative message, but consideration was given to the level of negativity in the ad. While the message of the advertisement must be negative in order to accurately test the hypothesis, the message should not be too harsh or negative in order to avoid a backlash effect. Some research suggests that an extremely negative message may cause voters to negatively react to the negativity and not the actual content of the advertisement (Pinkleton, 1997). The literature suggests if respondents

exposed to the advertisement found the negative message to be too negative it is possible that the blatant and offensive negativity would cause viewers to disengage completely (Ansolabehere and Kinder 1995; Ansolabehere, Iyengar, Valentino 1994). By creating a more moderate negative message it should emphasize the differences in perception of negativity based on the gender of the candidate.

The “record” created for the candidates Robert Jones and Linda Jones was written to avoid issues with partisan attachments. For example, issues such as abortion or taxes may alienate viewers or trigger biases held by viewers. Furthermore, these individuals might have been inclined to assess negativity based on partisan assumptions instead of being influenced by the gender of the candidate. For example, a Democrat viewing the stimuli may have been more likely to respond negatively to the message if it there were a Pro-Life theme in the message (Bartels 2002). Therefore, it was necessary to use issues in the advertisement that could not automatically be linked to a political party.

In order to ensure the reactions garnered by the advertisement could actually be attributed to gender and not to additional stimuli, a bare set was used and no music was incorporated into the advertisement. Past research suggests visual images and music stir emotions and responses in viewers, therefore music is absent from the ads to avoid a music-driven response (Huddy and Gunnthorsdottir 2000). The choice to use a plain backdrop was intentional and was chosen to ensure the differences found in survey responses were attributed solely to the candidate and the script of the advertisement. The risk of creating a sterile and potentially unrealistic ad was overshadowed by the desire to control for variables that could trigger a response, such as images or music.

The actors used in the advertisements were selected because of their physical similarities and mannerisms (photos available in the Appendix). The actors in the ads are in fact real-life brother and sister. They both share significant physical similarities such as hair and eye color, comparable facial shapes and structures, and similar vocal qualities. The actors were directed to offer line deliveries that were as identical as possible to ensure differences in viewers' attitudes about the candidates could not be attributed to different emotional responses stemming from the delivery of the lines in the script.

Because the advertisements were authentic and respondents held no pre-conceived notions about the candidates in the ads, there was no need to ask attitudes prior to treatment. Respondents were asked opinion questions regarding who they believed would best represent their interests: a male or a female candidate, and if they felt a male or female candidate would do a better job of dealing with homeland security and education issues. By asking these questions it would be possible to gauge whether a respondent was naturally inclined to favor a male or a female candidate. In addition, the use of a pre-test was eliminated so as not to prime respondents with gender-specific questions before exposing them to the treatment. For example, if a respondent was asked prior to seeing a campaign ad if they felt a male or female candidate could best represent their interests it is possible that those questions would have influenced their thoughts on the male or female candidate in the video. In an attempt to avoid priming gender stereotypes and triggering stereotypes that are known to exist, a decision was made to eliminate a pre-test.

Participants in this study were exposed to either the male or female treatment and then asked to respond to a series of survey questions. A copy of the full survey instrument is available in the Appendix. Questions ranged from basic demographic questions and political knowledge

and interest questions, to questions specifically pertaining to the treatment. After having correctly identified the intent of the ad (to promote, attack, or compare), survey respondents were asked to identify on a scale of 1-7, with one being very negative and 7 being very positive, if they felt the message of the advertisement was positive or negative. This negativity scale allows for measure of the dependent variable in this study.

Control variables such as party affiliation were coded as 1 for Democrats and 0 for those who identified otherwise. Respondents were asked to identify how often they watched news on television on a 1-7 scale, with the numbers corresponding to the number of days a week the news was viewed. The respondents' gender was coded as 0 for males and 1 for females. The experimental treatment was coded as 0 for male candidate and 1 for female candidate.

The survey was administered to 285 undergraduate students at a public university in the Midwest. Participants were enrolled primarily in lower division American Government courses and were offered no compensation for their participation. Care was taken to ensure that students had not previously been exposed to a discussion regarding media effects, nor had the students done coursework or been presented with lectures regarding campaigns and elections. The sample produced an equal number of male and female subjects, and all individuals participating in this research were of legal voting age. There was almost an equal number of male and female respondents, however there was an overwhelmingly large response from individuals who self-identified with the Republican Party. As indicated in Table 2.1, 49% of respondents self-identified as Republicans. Additionally, the subjects were all undergraduate students who do not watch the news often. However, because the goal of this study is to determine if people's perception of a message is impacted by a candidate's gender, it does not necessarily matter if a person is interested in politics or current events.

**Table 3.1: Survey Respondent Demographics**

Demographics	Percentage
Gender	
Male	51%
Female	49%
Party	
Republican	49%
Democrat	20%
Independent	11%
Something Else	4%
Don't Know	16%
News Watching Per Week	
0 days	6%
1 day	38%
2 days	13%
3 days	14%
4 days	10%
5 days	8%
6 days	3%
7 days	8%

*Out of 285 respondents made up of undergraduate students enrolled in an American Government course at a public university in the Midwest.*

***Findings***

Upon analyzing the data, support for the hypothesis is found. The data reflects the gender of the candidate in a campaign advertisement does appear to impact the viewer's perception of negativity, as seen in Table 3.2. A gender gap is evident with female viewers perceiving more negativity in the advertisements than male viewers. Male and female viewers differ on their perceptions of negativity, with male viewers being more positive than female viewers. This finding could be attributed to a number of things. First, research suggests that candidate attractiveness and likeability impacts an individual's evaluation of that candidate. It could be that male viewers found the candidates more attractive or likeable than the female viewers. Secondly, the male viewers may have found the candidates more relatable than the female viewers, which

could impact how negative a viewer perceives a message to be. Lastly, perhaps female viewers are more critical of candidates running for political office than male viewers. Females are participating in politics more frequently than in the past. Perhaps women are taking their relatively new role in the political process seriously, and are therefore evaluating candidates differently than males.

The results of this study also indicate that the treatment is significant. The female candidate in the treatment is seen by the viewers as more negative than the male candidate. As previously stated, the candidates had similar physical appearances, wore the same colors and type of clothing, were on the same set under the same lighting, and were instructed to deliver the identical message similarly. There were absolutely no differences in the advertisements, aside from the gender of the candidates. Therefore, this would indicate that the viewers, both male and female, were impacted by the gender of the candidate delivering the message. As stated in Chapter 1, research indicates that people hold stereotypical notions about what issues male and female candidates are suited to handle well. Perhaps people are also naturally inclined to see a female candidate as inherently more negative than a male candidate. The findings of this research seem to indicate they do.

Table 3.2 also indicates that Democrat viewers perceive less negativity in the advertisements than viewers with other party affiliations. Perhaps Democrats are more idealistic than others about the political process, and do not perceive messages as negatively as members of other parties. Democrats may possess qualities that naturally lead them to be less cynical, which would cause them to see less negativity in the advertisements.

**Table 3.2: Impact of Candidate Gender on Viewers' Perceptions of Message Negativity**

Coefficients	Combined
Party	0.003* (0.002)
Attention to News	-0.03 (0.03)
Gender	-0.49* (0.14)
Treatment	-0.27* (0.14)
Intercept	2.74* (0.15)
R Squared	5.82
N	285

Note: Coefficients are estimated for both male and female treatment exposure using OLS. Dependent variable is a measure for level of message negativity as perceived by the viewer, coded on a 1-7 scale with 1 being most negative. Standard errors are located within parenthesis. “\*” indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.01$  level, “\*\*” indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.10$  level, and “\*\*\*” indicates statistical significance at  $p < 0.20$  level.

When examining the treatment effects by gender the treatment impacts male and female viewers differently, therefore supporting the hypothesis. Female viewers are more likely than male viewers to perceive female candidates as more negative (Table 3.3). This gender gap disappears when examining the male treatment. Could it be that females are simply more critical of other females, or could it be that male viewers are more resistant to report finding the female candidate’s message more negative than the male message? Perhaps male viewers felt it necessary to give what they thought was a more socially desirable answer. The treatment and survey was presented to them by a female researcher, and it is possible that male respondents did

not want to appear insensitive by claiming to perceive more negativity in the female candidate’s message.

Table 3.3 also indicates that when a female candidate is present in the advertisement, party affiliation is significant and Democrats perceive less negativity in the ads than members of other parties. Perhaps members of other parties viewing the ads could have assumed the female candidate was a Democrat, and therefore saw the ad as more negative than Democrat viewers. It could be that Democrat viewers liked the female candidate more, or found her more relatable, and therefore were less likely to see the message as being negative. Perhaps Democrats were in favor of the female candidate because, as past research suggests, the female candidate was seen as being capable to handle traditionally Democrats issues such as health care and welfare. The idea that female candidates are seen as able to deal with these issues could have led Democrats to feel more favorably towards the female in the ad, and therefore perceived less negativity.

**Table 3.3 Treatment Effects by Gender of Viewer**

Coefficients	Female	Male
Party	0.004** (0.002)	0.00 (0.00)
News	0.00 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)
Treatment	-0.33* (0.17)	-0.24 (0.21)
Intercept	2.18* (0.17)	2.79* (0.21)
R Squared	1.78	1.23
N	140	145

Note: Coefficients are estimated for both male and female treatment exposure using OLS. Dependent variable is a measure for level of message negativity as perceived by the viewer, coded on a 1-7 scale with 1 being most negative. Standard errors are located within parenthesis. “\*” indicates statistical significance at p <0.01 level, “\*\*” indicates statistical significance at p <0.10 level, and “\*\*\*” indicates statistical significance at p <0.20 level.



## ***Discussion***

By conducting an experiment in which negative advertisements were written and filmed once with a male candidate and once with a female candidate, precise conclusions may be drawn about the relationship between candidate gender and the impact on a viewer's perception of negativity. Survey data indicates four very important findings: female viewers perceive more negativity than male viewers, all viewers found the treatment with the female candidate more negative, Democrats perceive less negativity, and female viewers find female candidates more negative than male viewers. As noted in Chapter 1, people have different perceptions about male and female candidates. It stands to reason that people would perceive differences in the level of negativity found in the messages of male and female candidates. Exactly why viewers find female candidates more negative is yet to be determined.

## ***Future Research***

It would be worthwhile to administer this experiment to a larger, more diverse sample population to see if any differences are found in the results. By increasing the sample population to include more Democrats, more racial diversity, and individuals not on a college campus, it may be possible to draw more conclusions about this phenomenon. Conversely, it would be interesting to see if expanding the diversity of the survey did not change the results of this study.

Future research should be done to see what factors may impact a viewer's perception of negativity or candidate favorability. For example, replicating this experiment and replacing male and female candidates with a black and white candidate may help us to determine if race impacts a viewer's perception of negativity. Increasing the level of negativity in the ad message, and incorporating music and different background settings may also yield different results.

Launching the experiment in a different area of the country would provide for a regional

comparison of data. Consideration should also be given to the idea that perhaps viewers' perceptions of negativity will vary if a female candidate is attacking another female candidate. There is much work to be done to determine how viewers are impacted by negative political campaign advertisements so prevalent in our electoral process.

These findings have added to the existing research regarding the relationship between negative advertisements and citizens by proving there is a significant gender gap in viewer's perceptions of negativity in political advertisements. Furthermore, this research has found that Democrats perceive less negativity than people affiliated with other parties, and that female viewers see female candidates as being more negative than male viewers. Previous research has attempted to draw connections between negative advertisements and citizens based on advertisements that have aired during actual election cycles. The problem with this type of research is that it is unable to really determine what element of the negative advertisement is having an impact on the viewer. What is unique about this study is the experimental nature which allowed for a more precise examination of the impact candidate gender has on viewer's perceptions of negativity. As such, this information is an extremely valuable addition to the body of negative advertising information.

## Chapter 4

### **Theory vs. Practice: Discrepancies and Similarities between Campaign Consultants' and Academicians' Views on Negative Political Advertising**

When asked to comment on negative political advertisements, one professional political consultant made the following comment:

*“It is also one of the reasons why many good and qualified people would never run for office. They just don’t need the grief.”*

Much of the past research on negative political advertising focuses on whether advertisements impact the political process, especially their effects on citizens' attitudes and behaviors. Academicians have been engaged in this debate for many years, and while it is informative and interesting it is not conclusive. Whether or not ads have a positive or negative impact is yet to be definitively determined. Yet what is clear is that these types of advertisements do exist and, as stated in Chapter 1, are being used more frequently in every election cycle. Some candidates are subjecting themselves to “the grief” and therefore, it is important to understand as much as we can about negative political advertisements. In an attempt to expand our understanding of negative ads, we must gather information from those who have a direct impact on the type of advertisements the public are exposed to; professional political consultants. In order to draw more conclusions about negative political advertisements, political consultants across America were asked to provide valuable insight into negative political advertisements. Those responses were compared to the research done by academicians to determine the discrepancies and similarities between campaign consultants' and academicians' views on

negative political advertisements. In some instances these groups agree, but on occasion they hold very different ideas regarding negative ads.

### **Data/Methods**

In order to identify the discrepancies and similarities between consultants' and academicians' viewpoints, a seven question-open ended survey was sent to 100 campaign consultants across the United States. Consultants were located by utilizing a database provided by *Campaigns and Elections Magazine* (now *Politics*), and from dmoz.org which is an open directory project in partnership with AOL search. Emails were sent to campaign consultants informing them of the research project, and inviting them to participate. The survey response rate was a little over 20%, for a total of 22 completed surveys.

Consultants were asked to provide demographic information such as what level of election the firm focuses on (state, federal, local, or a combination), what region the firm most frequently represents, and if they are a Republican or Democrat consulting firm. Consultants were then asked to answer questions regarding negative political advertisements. For example, consultants were asked to explain under what conditions negative advertisements are effective, and whether negative advertisements are as effective for female candidates as they are for male candidates. Furthermore, consultants were asked their thoughts on whether negative ads are a way to manipulate voters who do not have much knowledge of, or interest in politics. Finally, consultants were inquired if campaign resources were better spent on negative campaign advertisements or positive campaign advertisements. Consultants were prompted with "explain" and "why" to expand on their answers. A full copy of the survey instrument is located in the Appendix.

### *Consultant Demographics*

The sample yielded a variety of consultants, all of whom regularly use televised political advertisements as a part of their campaign strategies. Exhibited in Table 4.1, there was an even split between consultants who considered themselves working for a Republican firm and those who considered themselves a Democrat consulting firm. There was an array of consultants from across the country, with all four regions represented. 82% of the responses were submitted by male consultants. Overall, there is a healthy mix of the level of race consultants work on, the region they most frequently represent, and the self-professed political affiliation by consultants responding to the survey.

**Table 4.1: Consultant Demographics**

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>N</b>
<i>Level of Race</i>		
Local	9%	2
State	32%	7
Federal	14%	3
Combination	45%	10
<i>Region</i>		
East	23%	5
Midwest	13%	3
South	32%	7
West	32%	7
<i>Party Affiliation of Firm</i>		
Republican	36%	8
Democrat	41%	9
Independent	9%	2
Bi-Partisan	5%	1
Non-Partisan	9%	2
<i>Gender of Consultant</i>		
Male	82%	18
Female	18%	4

Note: Demographics from survey responses of 22 campaign consultants nationwide.

## *Survey Responses*

### *Negative Advertisement Effectiveness*

Past academic research on political advertising states that negative advertising depresses voter turnout, and that voters find these types of ads distasteful (Lau et al. 1999, Ansolabehere and Kinder 1995, Ansolabehere, Iyengar, and Valentino, 1994). Academicians have discovered that negative advertisements actually deter individuals from the political process and sour voters on elections. From the perspective of some researchers, negative political advertisements are a problem to democratic processes and undermine citizen engagement in political affairs. However, professional political consultants do not appear to agree with these viewpoints. In fact, several consultants stated that negative advertisements are “always” effective and they “work in any scenario”. If they weren’t, according to consultants, “you wouldn’t see as many as you see”.

When specifically asked “under what conditions are negative political advertisements effective”, over ¼ of the consultants said that negative ads are most effective when they are true. Negative ads are effective when they are “fair and factually accurate in highlighting an issue or a character flaw that voters need to know”, according to one consultant. Another consultant shared the following example:

*“For instance, a Sheriff in a neighboring county was driving intoxicated in his Sherriff’s vehicle and hit a parked car with a mother and child inside. The facts are indisputable. I will certainly use this against him.”*

Another consultant shared a story describing how they had attacked an incumbent by highlighting the incumbent’s voting record in Congress. By showing voters that the incumbent had the second worst voting record in Congress, the ad was very effective and impacted the voters without souring them to the election. Perhaps advertisements that are negative in nature

are considered more tolerable by the viewing public if they are producing factual information about the candidate being attacked. As stated in Chapter 1, negative advertisements contain more factual information than any other type of political ad. By using factual information to create negative advertisements, consultants are presenting valuable information to the public that is negative, but educational and highly effective. Academic research supports the idea that truth in negative advertisements is a condition by which these ads are more effective. One study found that viewers tend to be more accepting of an attack if complimented by evidence supporting the attack (Kahn and Geer 1994).

23% of the consultants surveyed stated negative ads are most effective when they are used to show differences between candidates running for office. For example,

*“The high cost of television advertising requires that ads highlight contrasts. So-called negative ads usually focus on contrasts between the candidates, and thus are more often used by voters to make voting decisions.”*

A consultant explains when the ad displays “the contrast with the other candidate”, and that contrast “is clear on that issue”, an ad will be more effective. A negative attack focused on the differences between candidates is an effective way of going negative in a campaign, and avoiding backlash from voters.

One respondent stated that a negative advertisement must be relevant and fair, otherwise the ad will “blow up in your face”, rendering the advertisement ineffective. This supports past academic research that finds a backlash effect for negative advertisements that are perceived as too negative (Kahn 1999, Pinkleton 1997). Consultants and academicians appear to agree that negative advertisements are effective when the level of negativity is not too extreme. Negative

advertisements focusing on personal attacks may then cross the line that separates acceptable and unacceptable negative ads.

Furthermore, it appears that consultants and academicians agree that negative advertisements focusing on personal issues are not effective. One consultant said “if the ad is a gratuitous personal attack, it usually backfires”. Another stated that “personal, mean-spirited” ads may deter voters from choosing the candidate sponsoring that negative ad. Kahn and Geer empirically support this viewpoint, as they found advertisements criticizing a candidate on personal issues made voters see the attacker as more negative than the candidate being attacked (1994). In sum, according to consultants and academics, negative advertisements are effective campaign tools as long as there is no over-the-top personal attack within the ad.

Credibility of the speaker, relevance of the topic, and tone of the advertisement contribute to the effectiveness of a negative political advertisement, according to consultants. One consultant offered a good explanation of an attack that lacks credibility by referencing the Clinton impeachment hearings. The Republican Party claimed, “...Clinton was a serial rapist”. This attack lacked credibility, and therefore was rendered ineffective. Kahn and Geer’s theory on negative advertisements support the claims that negative ads are effective when information is supported, rather than when it appears fictitious (1994). These researchers found that viewers have more patience for negative advertisements if the ads focus on a specific issue and provide information to support that issue. The Republican Party had no evidence to support the claim about Clinton, and therefore the attack lacked credibility and had little impact. The importance of the credibility of an attack is supported by consultants and academicians alike.



Negative advertisements are also effective if the race is close, or the candidate is behind in the election. One consultant stated that “if one’s candidate is behind and there is a good “shot” to take- it has to be taken”. Another said negative ads are most effective:

*“When an individual is either in a very close race or the individual is the underdog. Bringing the negative out about their opponent, can lower their opponent’s positive points in any polling.”*

Most of the research done on negative advertising has focused on the effects these ads have on viewers exposed to them. There is less attention paid to a candidate’s motivation to use negative ads in their campaign. However, Skaperdas and Grofman (1995) found candidates will go negative if their polling numbers indicate they are behind in the race. Therefore, it can be concluded that within the limited body of research on decisions to go negative, there is support for the consultant’s stance that a close race or an underdog situation renders negative ads more effective.

Finally, several consultants claim that negative advertisements are most effective when used to keep voter turnout low. One consultant claims that “if you are the incumbent” negative advertisements may be used to depress turnout. This consultant’s view aligns with previous research claiming that negative advertisements do work to depress turnout in an election (Ansolabehere and Kinder 1995). However, consideration must be given to whether intentionally going negative to depress turnout is the same thing as negative ads causing people not to vote. In essence, the choice to go negative in order to depress turnout would still imply that negative advertisements are effective.. By intentionally depressing turnout the advertisement is effectively impacting the race the way the consultant intends it to.

**Table 4.2: Negative Advertisement Effectiveness for Female and Male and Candidates**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>N</b>
No Difference	41%	9
Depends	27%	6
Yes	27%	6
Alternative Explanation	5%	1

Note: Responses to the question “Are negative ads as effective for female candidates as they are for male candidates” from 22 consultant surveys.

When asked “are negative ads as effective for female candidates as they are for male candidates”, 27% of respondents said yes and none of the consultants said no. What is interesting is that 41% of the respondents said there was “no difference” between male and female candidates, as displayed in Table 4.2. In other words, consultants found negative advertisements to be just as effective for female candidates as they are for male candidates. These consultants could have responded with “yes” to convey their response, but instead chose to use the words “no difference” even though that language was not offered as a prompt in the question. One candidate offered up the following response:

*“There is truly sexism in politics, but Hillary never seemed to pay a penalty for attacking Obama on TV any more so than any other candidate did.”*

Over 1/4 of respondents said “it depends” when asked if negative ads are as effective for female candidates as they are for male candidates. Most of the respondents went on to explain that the type of information makes a difference. This leads to a very interesting finding. While

41% of consultants state there is “no difference” between male and female candidates, 45% of consultants take the time to highlight disadvantages for both male and female candidates who choose to use negative political advertisements. While consultants were asked to explain their response to the question regarding effectiveness and gender, they were never specifically asked to highlight the differences between the candidates. This was something almost half of all respondents chose to do on their own.

When addressing the disadvantages of being a female candidate and using negative advertisements, one consultant stated:

*“There is no doubt that the double standard still exists for women. Too negative-people think women are “shrill” [or worse].”*

Another said:

*“If a female candidate runs an ad that is too sharp, or is considered a personal attack, she will be thought of as a bitch.”*

When providing examples of disadvantages male candidates experience when using negative advertisements, a consultant said the following:

*“The penalty is attacking a female candidate, since they can claim you’re being sexist by attacking them”*

Another said:

*“Men have to be more careful when “attacking” a female candidate b/c the male candidate is more likely to be viewed as a bully by the voters. A female candidate doesn’t have to deal with that perception as much.”*

The consultants also highlighted advantages the candidates may experience based on their gender. Female candidates appear to benefit from using negative advertisements because they are seen as being more credible than men in terms of honesty and are seen as having more sympathy for certain issues, according to the consultant responses. These attributes will cause voters to accept the negative message more readily than if the candidate was male. None of the consultants identified specific advantages for male candidates. It would appear that male candidates are positioned to experience serious disadvantages in campaigns when using negative political advertising, particularly when the opponent is female. However, male candidates are not identified by consultants as possessing any inherent gender-based advantages associated with negative advertising. Even though consultants identify advantages and disadvantages encountered by male and female candidates using negative ads, they do not acknowledge a gender gap in overall negative advertisement effectiveness, as evidenced in the following comment:

*“There is no longer any difference between women and men candidates and their use of negative ads or their effectiveness. This has been the case for a long time.”*

Consultants do not identify a gender gap in the level of effectiveness of negative advertisements, yet academicians do. Research has been presented suggesting that male and female candidates focus on different issues in their negative advertisements, which may impact the level of effectiveness of the advertisement (Kahn 1993). As noted in Chapter 1, voters hold stereotypes about the capabilities of male and female candidates. As a result of these stereotypes, male and female candidates may alter the content of their negative advertisement to combat these stereotypes. Claims have been made in the literature that female candidates will run

advertisements that focus on male issues such as war or the economy, whereas male candidates focus on female issues like health care and the economy (Dolan 2005). If voters are more inclined to support male issues, they will be less likely to support a female candidate, and vice versa (Sanbonmatsu 1995). These empirical findings contradict the information presented by professional consultants. While the research states there is a clear gender gap, consultants by and large claim “it does not matter whether the candidate is male or female”. One consultant goes on to explain that gender bears no significance on politics, and has not since “1992 when a number of women were elected”. Therefore, we can conclude overall there are discrepancies between the viewpoints of consultants and academicians in regards to the effectiveness of negative political advertising and gender.

*Voter Manipulation*

**Table 4.3: Are Negative Advertisements a Way to Manipulate Voters?**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>N</b>
Yes	27%	6
No	18%	4
Alternative Answer	55%	12

Note: Responses from 22 surveys administered to professional political consultants nationwide.

Political consultants were asked if they believe negative political advertisements are a way to manipulate voters who do not have much knowledge of, or interest in, politics. As indicated in Table 4.3, 27% of respondents said yes, and 18% of respondents said no. Two respondents offered the responses of “probably not” and “voters can be manipulated”, which

were not included in the count of yes or no answers. The following are a sample of comments from consultants who answered yes to this question:

*“Yes. Negative ads are a way to depress turnout. They weigh on people who, in turn, decide that voting is “just a waste of time- it’s all just mud-slinging, etc... Yep- we in the biz all understand why they are done.”*

*“Absolutely and it also explains the frequency of the ads. If people hear it enough times they begin to believe it even if it is not true.”*

*“...for those uninformed voters, who have little time to review the records of the candidates, much of the negative information can sway their opinions.”*

*“Yes. They have become a form of entertainment.”*

The remaining 55% of respondents supplied alternative answers to this question. Many of the remaining respondents preferred the term educate, inform, or persuade as opposed to manipulate. Once those consultants re-defined the question they offered very rich and detailed information about the impact ads have on voters. Consultants offered many justifications for using negative political advertisements such as: effectiveness of ads, communicating with voters, and maximizing the campaign budget. Several consultants explained that most informed voters know what they want as “reflected in such things as party registration”. According to consultants, these voters are not likely to be manipulated or persuaded by the information presented, whereas swing voters or uneducated voters may be impacted by the information presented in the ads.

What seemed most evident in many of these responses was that many of the consultants seem to genuinely believe they have a duty to present the negative information they find to voters. Academic research on negative political advertisements tends to paint a very cynical picture in regards to the motivations to go negative. Tearing down the opponent in order to win the election, or mudslinging are common themes in theoretical negative ad research (Kahn 1999,

Pinkelton 1997). Nowhere does the academic research suggest negative advertisements are created in order to legitimately inform voters. The responses to this question offer alternative explanations to why negative ads are made. The consultants were not asked to discuss why they produce negative ads, but they did provide the following information:

*“It’s a way to communicate relevant information to voters they may not have had otherwise.”*

*“Negative ads are a way to tell voters something about your opponent that your opponent will not share. For example, if someone is cutting Medicaid or killing the Dept. of Education those facts are germane. It’s important that voters know such.”*

*“The press, for a myriad of reasons, no longer probes into the backgrounds and voting records of most candidates, certainly not those who are running for anything less than Governor or Senator, and negative ads can be a very useful way of helping voters see both candidates in full, and discern an explicit contrast.”*

How do the consultant responses to the manipulation question line up with academicians’ research? The answer to this question is difficult to determine. Most of the research on negative political advertising examines the impact the ads have on the voter. Some of the research determines how candidates decide to go negative, and even less research is devoted to whether male and female candidates run different types of negative political advertising. However, there is no empirical evidence to determine whether or not negative ads are created specifically to manipulate voters. As a result of this gap in the research, it is not possible at this time to determine if consultants and academicians draw similar conclusions about whether negative advertisements are a way to manipulate voters.

### *Best Use of Campaign Resources*

When consultants were asked whether they thought campaign resources are better spent on negative campaign advertisements or positive campaign advertisements, 36% of consultants answered “it depends”. Consultants also indicated the best use of resources is to run contrast advertisements, or use both positive and negative advertisements in an election cycle. Table 4.4 indicates that consultants are not overwhelmingly likely to identify either negative or positive advertisements as being the best use of campaign resources. What is more likely, is that consultants believe the individual situation of each campaign dictates what type of advertisement is the best use of campaign resources, as evidenced in the following response:

*“The real answer is you do what you have to do, and nothing else.”*

Academic research does not make claims regarding what is the best use of campaign resources in regards to the type of advertisement. Most research discussing campaign resources simply reports the type of activities money is spent on. For example, researchers provide information reporting that over 20% of campaign budgets are spent on political advertising (Strattman 2009, Herrnson 2004). While there is research discussing whether or not negative ads mobilize more or less than positive ads, such research does not make claims regarding which is a better use of campaign resources (Goldstein 2004, Iyenger 2000, Wattenberg 1999). Therefore, firm conclusions cannot be



drawn determining if consultants and academicians agree or disagree about what is the best use of campaign resources.

**Table 4.4: Best Use of Campaign Resources**

<b>Type of Advertisement</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>N</b>
Negative Advertisement	9%	2
Positive Advertisement	18%	4
Both Negative and Positive Ads	14%	3
Contrast Advertisement	23%	5
It Depends	36%	8

Note: 22 Responses from a survey sent to professional consultants nationwide.

***Discussion***

Professional political consultants have a direct impact on the political process. As such, it is important to understand their perspective on negative political advertising. Furthermore, it is important to understand how their perspective compares to the research of academicians. This comparison has shown that consultants and academicians do not always agree. Academicians believe negative ads demobilize the public and harm the democratic process, whereas consultants believe negative ads are very effective under certain conditions. When examining more specific circumstances under which negative ads might be effective, there are similarities between practical and theoretical perspectives. Consultants and researchers agree there can be a backlash effect if negative ads focus on untrue information, personal attacks, or lack relevance and credibility.

Consultants and academics also agree that negative advertisements can be beneficial if the race is close or if they are used by an underdog.

Researchers claim there are gender differences in negative political advertising, however consultants do not come to the same conclusions. Consultants believe there are no longer gender differences in campaigns, although they are careful to highlight the instances that negative advertisements may be more or less advantageous to candidates depending on their gender. The discrepancies between the consultant opinions and the academic research could very well be attributed to the fact that most of the research done regarding the gender gap is somewhat dated. Female candidates are more prevalent in the political process today, and that may explain why consultants report there are no gender differences within negative advertisements, though the research says otherwise.

There are several questions left unanswered by this comparison. It is yet to be determined if consultants and academics agree that negative advertisements are used to manipulate voters or if negative advertisements are the best use of campaign resources. Conclusions cannot be drawn because there is a lack of empirical evidence with which to make the comparison. Perhaps this is due to the fact that an empirical test would be extremely difficult. More than likely a researcher would be reliant on testimony of candidates, consultants, or other campaign workers to self-identify manipulation in advertisements. It seems unlikely that a researcher would be able to draw a large enough sample of individuals willing to identify manipulation to make generalizable conclusions.

Most of the research regarding campaign consultants is a historical snapshot of political consultants in America. In order to gain a better understanding of negative political advertising we must conduct more research incorporating the consultant's role in

the process. This research is just the first step in filling the existing research gaps. Research must be done to empirically examine the relationship between consultants and negative political advertisements. My research offers a comparison between what consultants believe and what researchers study, which is a solid step towards a better understanding of political consultants and negative political advertisements. This research is valuable, as it provides information that has yet to be disclosed in the existing body of research regarding political campaign consultants.

## **Conclusion**

Political campaign advertising is an integral part of the political process. Rarely will one find a congressional level race that does not incorporate advertisements promoting a candidate or attacking the opposition. Negative advertising is becoming increasingly popular, and the use of these types of ads is on the rise. Therefore, it is extremely important that negative political advertisements, and their impacts, are understood from a variety of perspectives. While academic research has paid attention to certain aspects of negative advertising, there are still significant gaps in the research. Most of the previous negative advertising research focuses on the impact these advertisements have on the political process. The existing negative advertising research concentrates on voter participation, candidate evaluation, and the overall impacts these ads have on the democratic process. While the existing research is extremely important and insightful, it does leave something to be desired. This research looks at previously neglected factors and perspectives that influence the content of negative advertisements, pinpoints exact variables that influence voters' perceptions, and presents rare consultant insight into negative ads. Through a mixed-methods analysis, this research has made valuable contributions to the existing body of political science research by expanding the scope of negative advertising research and findings in the area.

### ***Summary of Findings***

Chapter two sought to determine if a candidate's gender impacted the content found within negative political advertisements. Theory states that voters hold stereotypes about male and female candidates. Males are seen as being more tough and capable of serving in office and

more knowledgeable about issues, like the economy and defense spending. Female candidates are considered to be more emotional and better-suited for lower office, such as school board. These stereotypical notions cause voters to support or reject candidates based not on their actual stances or capabilities, but based on the ideas voters think are true. As such, candidates may be inclined to attempt to separate themselves from these stereotypes. One way of doing this would be to craft advertisements with material proving the candidate does not fit the stereotypical mold.

Previous findings in negative advertising research have mainly focused on the impacts the ad has on the viewers, therefore focusing on the viewer's perspective of the ad. This research looks at the phenomenon of negative political advertising from a different perspective. Considering the past research on voter stereotypes of candidates, I hypothesized that female candidates are more likely to attack their opponents on policy issues, while male candidates are more likely to attack their opponents on personal issues. By focusing on the content of the advertisement I am attempting to determine what factors influence the creation of a negative ad from the perspective of the candidate. Using Wisconsin Ad data from 2002 and 2004 Congressional elections, support for the hypothesis is found. In competitive races, female candidates use less personal attacks than male candidates. Evidence of a gender gap was also found in 2002 Senate races. Female candidates running for Senate in 2002 were more likely than male candidates to use policy-based attacks. The significant findings in the chapter contribute to the existing body of research on political advertising by providing a fresh perspective, and by helping us to better understand what factors influence ad creation.

As previously stated, negative ad research focuses heavily on voter impact. Most of the research that has been done on negative political advertisements fails to make a distinction between the impacts male and female candidates' ads have on viewers. Previous research tells us

what affect negative ads have on voters, but it does not tell us if one candidate's ad has a different impact than another candidate's ad. In chapter three, evidence was found to support the hypothesis that viewers will perceive a message in a televised political advertisement to be more negative when it is presented by a female candidate than when it is presented by a male candidate. The findings indicate females perceive more negativity in general than males. Secondly, the findings show that the treatment had an impact on the viewer's perception of negativity. Viewers found the female treatment to be more negative than the male treatment. Finally, I found that female viewers perceive the female candidate to be more negative than male viewers. There is significant support for the hypothesis, and a clear gender gap exists. These findings offer valuable contributions to the existing body of research on the impacts of negative ads on voters. This research determines that a candidate's gender will alter a viewer's perception of the message being presented. As more and more female candidates run for political office it is vital that we understand how the public will perceive these candidates. This research has added to that understanding.

There is very little academic research regarding professional political consultants. The research that does exist primarily focuses on historical accounts of the evolution of the consultant's role in politics. The available consultant research overwhelmingly supports the fact that consultants are extremely influential, and explains that most congressional level races use professional consultants. However, this research does not examine the impacts consultants have on the process, and fails to identify consultant's perspectives on negative political advertising. Chapter four sets out to highlight the discrepancies and the similarities of professional political consultants' and academicians' views on negative political advertising

Academicians and professional consultants are valid experts in elections. As such, it is vital to understand the differences and similarities between their perspectives on negative political advertising. By doing so, we should gain a better understanding of how negative ads fit into the electoral process, and what impacts could be seen as a result of these ads. Chapter four provides unique insight into negative political advertisements by examining the questionnaire responses from professional political consultants nationwide. Consultants and academicians tend to agree on most aspects of negative advertising such as: potential backlash effects, the power of truth and credibility in negative ads, and depression of voter turnout. However, consultants and academicians do not agree on whether there is a gender gap in politics. Overall, consultants do not perceive a gender gap when asked if negative advertisements are as effective for female candidates as they are for males. While consultants do claim candidates see advantages and disadvantages in using negative ads based on the candidate's gender, overall they believe there is no longer a gender gap in the political process. Conversely, academic research reports there is a definite gender gap in the political process. This is an interesting, and important, discrepancy that should be researched further. The information provided in chapter four significantly deviates from previous historical accounts of political consultants. This chapter presents rich, qualitative data from political consultants that expands on previous negative political advertising research. These firsthand accounts are invaluable to the existing body of research.

While there is still much left to investigate regarding negative political advertising, this research has provided fresh insight from a variety of perspectives on the topic. Many significant and interesting findings have been offered, and many new questions have been posed as a result of this research. Looking at negative advertisements from the perspective of the candidate, the voter, and the consultant, has offered unique glimpses into the phenomenon of these types of ads.

By examining these different perspectives through a data analysis, an experiment, and a qualitative perspective, additions can be made to the existing body of political science research regarding negative political advertising. While there is still much work to be done, this information has helped fill some of the gaps in the existing research.



## Appendix

### Chapter 2:

#### Top Twenty Markets for General Election Advertising

2002		2004	
Market	Frequency	Market	Frequency
Boston	38,251	Tampa	37,252
Portland, ME	23,488	Albuquerque	32,484
Minneapolis	23,113	Denver	32,396
Greenville	22,814	Las Vegas	32,000
Davenport	22,736	Miami	31,703
Atlanta	22,680	Philadelphia	28,050
Denver	21,064	Orlando	27,860
New York	20,585	Milwaukee	27,445
Cedar Rapids	20,500	Cleveland	26,321
Albuquerque	19,795	Green Bay	26,253
El Paso	19,672	Jacksonville	25,375
Savannah	19,624	Colorado Springs	25,037
Des Moines	19,476	Portland, OR	24,902
Birmingham	19,211	Madison	24,330
Mobile	18,867	Toledo	23,748
Austin	18,768	Cincinnati	23,459
Little Rock	18,590	Pittsburgh	21,684
Waco	18,505	Charleston	21,478
Wilkes Barre	18,410	Columbus	21,433
Columbia	18,313	Wilkes Barre	20,736

Note: Media markets listed above indicate the 20 out of the 100 markets included in the study each year with the highest frequency of playing political advertisements. Frequency refers to the amount of political advertisements shown in each particular market.

**Chapter 3: Still shot of the male and female candidates used in the advertisements.**

**Male Candidate:**



**Female Candidate:**



### Chapter 3: Post-Experiment Survey Instrument

Thank you for participating in this study our firm is conducting about campaigns. Your information is vital to our study and your time is greatly appreciated.

Please read each question and clearly select the answer that best represents your response.

**All information is completely confidential and will not be used for any purposes outside of this study.** You are not required to participate in this study and you may withdraw at any time. Results of this study may be made available to you upon request.

1. Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

2. Please check one or more categories below to indicate what race you consider yourself to be.

- White
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- Asian
- Other

3. Aside from weddings and funerals, how often did you attend religious services during the past twelve months?

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Two or three times a month
- Once a month
- Several times
- Once or twice
- Never

4. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?

- Republican
- Democrat
- Independent
- Something else
- Don't know

5. How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?

- Extremely interested
- Very interested
- Moderately interested
- Slightly interested
- Not interested at all

6. What job or political office is held by Joe Biden?

- U.S. Secretary of Defense
- Vice President of the United States
- Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
- Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
- None of these
- Don't know

7. In general, who do you think would do a better job as a government official representing your interests: a man, a woman, or do you think the gender of your elected official makes no difference at all?

- a man
- a woman
- the gender of the elected official makes no difference

**The following questions are in regards to the campaign advertisement you just watched and are extremely important for the success of this study. Please take your time and answer carefully.**

8. We are interested in your general feelings toward the candidate depicted in the video. After viewing the video, do you feel favorable or unfavorable toward the candidate? (1=very unfavorable, 7=very favorable).

Please circle the number that reflects your feelings.

- 1 very unfavorable
- 2 unfavorable
- 3 slightly unfavorable
- 4 neither favorable or unfavorable
- 5 slightly favorable
- 6 favorable
- 7 very favorable

9. In your judgment is the primary purpose of this advertisement to promote the candidate appearing in the video, to attack another candidate, or to compare the candidates running for office?

- Promote
- Attack
- Compare
- Don't Know

10. In your opinion, do you feel the message of this advertisement was positive or negative (1= very negative, 7=very positive)?

Please circle the number that reflects your feelings.

- 1 very negative
- 2 negative
- 3 slightly negative
- 4 neither negative nor positive
- 5 slightly positive
- 6 positive
- 7 very positive

11. After viewing the video do you feel the message of the advertisement was focused more on policy issues or personal issues?

- Policy issues
- Personal issues
- Both policy and personal issues
- Neither
- Don't Know

12. When it comes to politics, do you consider yourself to be conservative or liberal (1= very liberal, 7= very conservative).

Please circle the number that reflects your feelings.

- 1 very liberal
- 2 liberal
- 3 slightly liberal
- 4 moderate
- 5 slightly conservative
- 6 conservative
- 7 very conservative

13. Which political party currently controls the United States House of Representatives?

- Democrats
- Republicans
- Don't Know

**Thinking about current issues in politics today, please answer the following questions.**

14. Who do you think is better suited to handle homeland security issues: a male or a female elected official?

- Male
- Female
- the gender of the elected official makes no difference

15. Who do you think is better suited to handle education issues: a male or a female elected official?

- Male
- Female
- the gender of the elected official makes no difference

16. During a typical week, how many days do you watch news on TV, not including sports?

Please circle the number that reflects your answer

- 1 day a week
- 2 days a week
- 3 days a week
- 4 days a week
- 5 days a week
- 6 days a week
- 7 days a week

**Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.**

## **Chapter 4: Consultant Survey**

1. Does your firm focus more on state or federal elections?
2. What region of the United States does your firm most frequently represent?
3. Would you consider your company to be a Republican or a Democrat campaign consulting firm?
4. Under what conditions are negative political advertisements effective?
5. Are negative ads as effective for female candidates as they are for male candidates?
6. Are negative political advertisements a way to manipulate voters who do not have much knowledge of, or interest in politics?
7. Do you think campaign resources are better spent on negative campaign advertisements or positive campaign advertisements?



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