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Visual Framing: Study of Face-ism from the Websites of the 108<sup>th</sup> United States  
Congress

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Communication  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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by  
Beth J. Anderson  
December 2003

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Dr. John King, Chair  
Dr. Jack Mooney  
Dr. Janet Neal

Keywords: Framing, Face-ism, Website, Congress, Gender, Politics

## ABSTRACT

### Visual Framing: A Study of Face-ism from the Websites of the 108th United States Congress

By

Beth J. Anderson

Websites are being used by increasing numbers to target a market with a message unfiltered by the media. This content analysis examined the website front-screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> United States Congress to determine if the photographic images displayed reinforced the media's stereotypical frame of female politicians. A total of 3,892 photographic images were captured from 540 websites and coded using the face-ism index. Overall, the results supported the face-ism theory. Images of females were cropped lower on their bodies than images of males. The face-ism effect was not supported until the number of people in the photograph numbered six or more. Results revealed that photographic images of female representatives and senators were cropped no differently than their male peers. The research indicated females in Congress are successful in framing their own image, but future website designs can portray a positive frame for all females presented on Congressional websites.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

The Internet continues to be a growing source of information for most of the world's population. The creators of web-based information resources have found they can target specific demographics with tailored messages. The Internet is used by a variety of resources to convey a message that is different from the mainstream media. This study examines how the Internet is used to convey an image and message free from an established media frame.

In framing theory, frames exist in everything we do, say, write, and observe. An area in which framing has long established roots is in politics. Many types of frames are observed in the political arena, such as; 1) Washington outsider, 2) status quo challengers, 3) women as change agents, and 4) political insiders, just to name a few.<sup>1</sup> A negative frame that exists in politics is the gender frame as it relates to women.

The stereotypical media frame for women has been by-passed through the use of controlled media sources such as televised advertising, print ads, and websites. Political candidates and elected officials use these sources to convey a message that supports the image of a good leader. Researchers have documented many traits associated with a good leader including intelligence, character, and self-confidence.<sup>2</sup>

An important component of any message is visual images such as photographs. Photographic images can reinforce or contradict a written message. Archer et al. developed a face-ism index which can be used to measure photographic images. The

face-ism index measures the prominence of the face in a photograph. Face-ism theory states the more prominent the face in the photograph the higher ratings the subject receives on intelligence and ambition. The more prominent the body in the photograph the qualities assigned are more non-intellectual such as attractiveness or emotion.<sup>3</sup> In relation to face-ism theory, the mainstream media has been found to present photographic images of males cropped to focus on their faces and to present photographic images of females cropped to focus on their bodies.<sup>4</sup>

This content analysis study focused specifically on how members of the 108<sup>th</sup> United States Congress may use their own websites to present an image that is different from the way the mainstream media presents women in politics. The study will examine photographic images of males and females on the front-screen of each member's website and measure each image displayed using the face-ism index. Based on the results of the study, it can be determined if members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress are perpetuating a stereotypical frame of women through the choice of how photographic images are visually framed on their own websites.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Female candidates for the United States Congress have found both success and defeat over the past decade. Today, 62 women are serving in the U.S. House of Representatives<sup>5</sup> and 14 women are in the U.S. Senate.<sup>6</sup> Even with these growing numbers, in the 2002 election, only 25% of female candidates won a seat in the U.S. Senate.<sup>7</sup> In past communication studies, researchers have found that female office holders and female candidates face viability issues due to gender stereotyping, or framing by voters and media sources.<sup>8</sup>

#### Framing Theory

As a mass communication theory, “framing” can be utilized to expand our knowledge about diversity-related variables. Lasorsa describes diversity-related variables to include race, ethnicity, and gender. Lasorsa also offers one definition of media framing as when “the media choose one of a few possible alternative ways to present a story, and that the way they frame the story can affect the audience by leading it to think a certain way about the issue.”<sup>9</sup>

Another definition of framing offered by Jensen states “frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”<sup>10</sup> Jensen further expands the definition by

examining key words as they relate to framing. Frames organize information by bringing some type of order to masses of information. Frames are culturally shared and are given meaning by the culture in which they are formed. Frames are persistent and endure over time. Finally, frames offer structure to the social world. The frame “imposes a pattern on the social world, a pattern constituted by any number of symbolic devices.”<sup>11</sup>

Building on Jensen’s definition that frames are cultural and not cognitive, Hertog and McLeod identified three power sources for frames:

1. Frames have “symbolic power with which members of a society can identify. Readily recognizable are ideals, stories, definitions, myths, morals, metaphors, and narratives that are embedded within the fabric of the culture.”<sup>12</sup>
2. Frames carry “excess meaning”. By mentioning one type of narrative, metaphor or myth an array of related ideas, history, policy choices, heroes, and villains may be activated.<sup>13</sup>
3. Frames must have “widespread recognition among members of a society or culture. Communication is dependent upon shared meaning among members of the culture. The stability of the frame is crucial because if a frame changed quickly, then the shared meaning would be lost.”<sup>14</sup>

Frames are found not only in political rhetoric or news coverage, but also in entertainment programming, conversation, interoffice memos, advertising, popular music, and even architecture.<sup>15</sup>

The frame of an idea presented provides meaning for the audience and once in place, has permanent disposition of a social or mental variety. The permanency of framing is important in communication theory due to the source of the frame and how

the source frames the idea. This source will become a key influencer on “how” an audience or the general public perceives an issue or a person.<sup>16</sup>

### Visual Framing

Many concepts fit under framing of news stories, including “plot lines and characters, color and tone of coverage, focus and parameters of media attention, place on the media agenda, depth and sophistication of coverage and messages carried by the media.”<sup>17</sup> “Tone of coverage” is one concept that can be examined to understand how media can create bias within their coverage. News media bias can occur in the form of editorial, language, attribution, graphic and contextual bias.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, researchers have found graphic bias is created through the use of photographs and other visuals. Past research indicates, if the visual message and contextual message are inconsistent, audiences will favor the non-verbal (photographs) over the verbal message.<sup>19</sup>

Research has found that visual framing is less obtrusive than verbal framing.<sup>20</sup> Messaris and Abraham examined the framing of African-Americans in the news. The researchers concluded that the visual framing used may convey meanings that would be more controversial if conveyed through words.<sup>21</sup> These findings were also found in a study by Jewitt in which an analysis of sexual health leaflets and posters available to young men in a clinical setting was completed. The images in the materials reinforced stereotyped forms of masculinity, which had they been put into words, would have been rejected by most health professionals. The leaflets and posters were rejected by the clinic’s patients.<sup>22</sup>

Another reason visual framing is less obtrusive than verbal framing is found in the “indexicality” of images. C.S. Pierce coined the term “indexicality” to single out photographs from other types of images. Because a photograph;

is in a sense an automatic product of the effects on lenses and film, the connection between photographs and reality has certain authenticity that human made pictures can never have. This true-to-life quality of photographs, their ability to bypass human agency in certain respects, is the basis on which Pierce called ‘indices’ (i.e. direct pointers, as opposed to constructed representations of reality). Because of their indexicality, photographs come with an implicit guarantee of being closer to the truth than other forms of communication are. Consequently, the use of photographic media in the framing process could diminish the likelihood that viewers would question what they see.<sup>23</sup>

The authors continue to discuss how viewers’ perceptions can be shaped due to their total belief in the connection between photographs and reality. There are various photographic practices that can mislead a viewer such as unacknowledged staging of images appearing in the news or the unacknowledged alteration of images by computer manipulation or other means.<sup>24</sup>

With regard to framing, the photographic practice of selection has many more far reaching implications, such as choosing one view instead of another when making the photograph, how to crop or edit the resulting photograph, or choosing to display one image out of many that were taken at the same place and time. Selection is an inevitable part of producing and displaying a photograph for public viewing. Therefore, selection has special relevance for the process of visual framing.<sup>25</sup>

## Face-ism

Facial prominence or “face-ism” relates to visual framing as part of the selection process. Face-ism is defined as “the relative prominence of the face in a photograph, drawing or other depiction of a person.”<sup>26</sup>

Archer et al. conducted five studies on the facial prominence in depictions of men and women. Study One focused on American photographs from periodicals. The face-ism index was used to code 1,750 published photographs from at least twelve issues of five American periodicals; *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Ms.*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The Santa Cruz Sentinel*. The issues were from the same time period and all photographs were coded using the same eligibility rules.

Of the 1,750 eligible photographs, 1,058 (60.5%) were of men and the photographs were more commonly found in articles and stories than in advertisements. In the photographs examined, the photographs were found to represent men with their faces and women with their bodies.<sup>27</sup> In addition, photographs that appeared in newspapers and articles emphasized faces more than those accompanying advertising. When tested for gender and publication variables, the face-ism effect is larger for newspapers than magazines and the effect varies in some publications based on whether the photograph appears with a story or an advertisement.

Study Two by Archer et al. examined photographs from thirteen cross-national publications. Using the same eligibility rules as Study One, more than 3,500 pictures were coded from eleven other nations. Women were outnumbered by men four to one in these photographs. The results indicated that face-ism plays a consistent role in the

depiction of male and females across cultures.<sup>28</sup> Studies One and Two related specifically to photographs.

Archer et al. conducted Study Five to discover the effects of face-ism. The method used to conduct the study involved the manipulation of face-ism in a person-perception task. The degree of face-ism in the depiction of a person was varied experimentally to see if changes in facial prominence would affect attributions about the depicted person.<sup>29</sup>

Sixty college students were asked to rate photographs of people in two booklets. The two test booklets contained photographs of the same twelve people (six women and six men) and each person only appeared once in each booklet. In one booklet, the person appeared in a “high” face-ism condition and in the other booklet, the same person appeared in a “low” face-ism condition. Both photographs were printed from the same negative so the only difference in the photos was the degree of relative prominence of the subject.<sup>30</sup>

The Archer study found photographs that were higher in facial prominence received higher ratings on intelligence, ambition and physical appearance. In addition, when the degree of facial prominence was experimentally manipulated, it affected the qualities assigned to the subject and the subject was perceived more favorably when the face was more prominent than when it was not. Qualities that were assigned to men focused on intellect, personality, and character. However, women were assigned qualities characterized in more nonintellectual terms such as weight, physique, attractiveness, or emotion.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion, the authors’ stated:

Face-ism may be of continuing importance if it contributes to and

perpetuates stereotyped conceptions of what is important about men and women. In particular, because this difference in facial prominence appears to slight the intellectual qualities of women, its persistence and effects may be both noteworthy and problematic. These differences also maybe of some practical concern in the communications media, in which representatives of men and women seem certain to contribute generic images about sex difference. Although previously unrecognized unexamined, differential facial prominence seems to constitute a major difference in the way these images of men and women are constructed.<sup>32</sup>

### Face-ism and Diversity Variables

Past research has examined the relationship between face-ism and diversity variables such as gender, ethnicity, and race. King conducted a study that examined photographic images on the front screens of *Fortune 500* company websites in the United States. The study sought to determine the frequency in which males and females appeared on the front-screens of the company's website and the ethnicity of the images.

From the front-screens of the *Fortune 500* companies, 705 photographic images were coded for gender and race. The results indicated the dominance of male images found in the mainstream media was not reflected in the websites of the *Fortune 500* companies. In fact, photographic images of women overall were just as frequent as photographic images of men.<sup>33</sup>

In a follow-up study, King examined how images of women and men and people of different ethnicity were presented on websites of *Fortune 500* companies using the face-ism index. The author stated “just as media managers control the content of media products through a gate-keeping process, company website managers make decisions, deliberately or not, about what kinds of people to include and how to crop images.”<sup>34</sup>

From the front screens of the websites of the *Fortune 500* companies, 887 human images were coded for gender, ethnicity, and the face-ism index. The results, as they related to gender and the face-ism index, indicated women were cropped to focus on the face. As face-ism relates to gender, mediated images of women tend to be cropped to focus on the body, and images of men tend to be cropped to focus on the face.<sup>35</sup> The study concluded that *Fortune 500* companies were far ahead of the mainstream media in their presentation of women on the company websites.<sup>36</sup>

King expanded research on face-ism theory by conducting a content analysis of eighty-four online daily Latin American newspapers from seventeen nations. The sample of 1,704 human images was drawn from the online newspapers during the week of September 18, 2000. Results showed that males dominated the published images and the male images were cropped to emphasize their faces. Whereas, women's images were cropped to emphasize their bodies. The study concluded that the face-ism effect is active in media across cultures.<sup>37</sup>

The face-ism theory states that images of men will be cropped to emphasize the face and images of women will be cropped to focus on the body.<sup>38</sup> However, study of the mixed-gender race in the 1984 U.S. presidential and vice-presidential campaign found the opposite to be true. The study by Sparks and Fehlner sought to predict a relationship between occupation and facial prominence. The race featured candidates of both genders and the study proposed the female candidates' photographic image would be cropped to focus on her body as compared to the male candidates' image which would be cropped to focus on the face. The sample of 124 photographs of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates was taken from twenty-two consecutive weekly issues of *Time* and *Newsweek*. The photographs met criteria established in earlier studies and were

coded using the face-ism index. The face-ism index for the female candidate was compared to the index for the male candidates and the results indicated no difference in the facial prominence of the candidates. The first major party female candidate for vice-president of the United States, Geraldine Ferraro, had the same level of facial prominence in photographs as her male opponent, Vice President George Herbert Walker Bush. The researchers concluded that due to Ferraro's special status as the first female to run for the vice-presidency, journalists may have been more conscious regarding her portrayal in the media.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, five male photos and five female photos were randomly selected from each issue of the magazines included in the candidates' analysis. The samples of 292 photos were coded for the face-ism index. Also, the photos were coded for occupations. Overall, the males were cropped to focus on their faces and females were cropped to focus on their bodies. However, when the data were broken down by occupation, the highest reoccurring position among males and females was government official and journalist. Photos of males and females in these positions showed no significant difference in relation to the face-ism index. But when photographs of males and females in the entertainment industry were coded for facial prominence, males were cropped to emphasize their faces while females were cropped to emphasize their bodies.

The authors concluded that "differences in face-ism constitute only one way that males and females might be represented differently in mass media...The subtle cues of visual representation continue to be of importance to understanding our images of gender."<sup>40</sup>

## Gender Stereotyping of Women in Politics

A Kahn and Goldenberg study examined if the manner in which the news media covered male and female candidates had any influence on the success of female candidates. The data were drawn from a content analysis of newspaper coverage of twenty-six U.S. Senate races in 1984 and 1986. The races were divided into seven categories and were further divided based on competitiveness. The newspapers with the largest circulation in each state were examined from September 1 through the day after the election. Any item located anywhere in the newspaper that mentioned either candidate was coded.

The research found the media emphasize three coverage areas in mixed gender election campaigns: 1) issues, 2) candidate viability (“horse race”), and 3) candidates’ traits.<sup>41</sup> As for the quantity of media coverage, female candidates generally receive less news coverage than their male opponents. The focus of the news coverage females receive is on their viability (probability of winning) and not their issue positions. Additionally, the focus on the female candidate’s viability tends to produce negative coverage for females as compared to their male opponents.<sup>42</sup> The study examined the content of the horserace coverage; each article on viability was rated on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 being a ‘sure loser’ to 4 being a “likely winner”. Male candidates are seen as competitive while female candidates are labeled somewhat less competitive. This difference in viability assessments for male and female candidates may be a reflection of status difference for both genders. Because women are often considered noncompetitive by the media, the media’s portrayal of the “horserace frame” with mixed gender races may lead voters to develop more negative evaluations of female candidates.<sup>43</sup>

The consequences of the media's focus on candidates' traits can affect female candidates' ability to be elected to political office. Kahn and Goldenberg examined the data for evidence that the coverage of candidate's traits is more prevalent for female candidates than male candidates. "Male qualities" or traits are usually defined as independent, objective, competitive, strong leader, insensitive, aggressive, unemotional, ambitious, and tough.<sup>44</sup> "Female qualities" or traits are seen as dependent, non-competitive, passive, gentle, emotional, weak leader, and compassionate.<sup>45</sup> The study found trait coverage was no different for male and female candidates. The percentage of articles in which traits were discussed was the same for males as females. However, the substance did vary and the substance was gender stereotyped.<sup>46</sup>

A study by Huddy and Terkildsen confirmed and expanded past research studies that found voters unwilling to support a female presidential or vice-presidential candidate. The study tested the hypothesis that masculine traits and competence in the areas of "male" policy expertise are considered more suitable for higher national and executive office. Two hundred ninety-seven undergraduates participated in the study during the fall of 1990. The first objective of the study was to analyze the perceived requirements of different types and levels of office. Two scales were developed to rate a good politician on personality traits. The first scale, called an instrumentality scale, measured masculine traits such as; assertive, coarse, tough, aggressive, stern, masculine, active, rational, and self-confident. The warmth and expressiveness scale was designed to measure feminine traits such as; warm, gentle, feminine, sensitive, emotional, talkative, and cautious. The participants then rated the degree to which a good president and member of Congress or good mayor and local council member possessed these

personality traits. Results showed all four kinds of politicians were seen as more masculine than feminine.<sup>47</sup>

Next the study participants were asked to rank (on a scale of 1 to 10) policy areas that a good politician at different office levels would likely confront. The issue areas included typical “male” areas such as the military and economics and typical “female” areas such as assisting the aged and poor. Results showed good politicians would most likely face military and economic issues and were least likely to face issues related to the welfare of children, problems of the aged and poor, and child-care.

Voters viewed female candidates as less competent than males to handle the military, wars, and the economy but were not influenced by the female candidates’ perceived competence on the arts, education, and health.<sup>48</sup> The study concludes a bias does exist against candidates who lack masculine traits. Thus, in order to win elections, female candidates have to communicate and convince voters that they do possess masculine traits and are competent on “male” policy issues. But this becomes difficult when the media perpetuate gender stereotyping by portraying male and female candidates differently.<sup>49</sup>

Political campaigns use many venues to communicate with constituents and potential voters. Two forms of communication used can be identified as uncontrolled and controlled media. The goal of uncontrolled media is to communicate information about the candidate to the mass media and specialized media. The decision makers within the mass media are the targets for uncontrolled media and they make the decisions on what information will be used in their outlets. In addition, the media outlets not only decide how the information will be used but how it will be framed. The traditional methods used to communicate candidate news to the media include; news releases, feature stories,

captioned photographs or photo opportunities, and news conferences. These standard formats are called uncontrolled media because the issuing organization loses control of these materials once they are released to the media outlets.<sup>50</sup>

Controlled media involves communication that is paid for by the candidate or candidate's campaign or party. The wording of the material, its format, and its placement in the media are all controlled by the candidate. The formats for controlled media are extensive and include;

brochures, newsletters, and reports; audiovisual materials such as films, slide shows and PowerPoint; and interpersonal communication such as speeches, meetings and interviews. Also included in controlled media are institutional advertising aimed at enhancing the client's image; advocacy advertising that communicates the client's stand on a controversial issue; and other forms of non-product advertising. Increasingly indispensable are the ubiquitous Web pages and Web sites, which contain large amounts of information about the client.<sup>51</sup>

One venue of controlled media open to most political candidates to reach potential voters is through their campaign messages via advertising. Kahn investigated the campaign messages of male and female candidates to discover if they adopted different media appeals. An advertisement is an important indicator of the message a candidate wants potential voters to know without the filter of the media.<sup>52</sup> The study examined the difference between paid and unpaid (controlled and uncontrolled) media for mixed gender races in the 1984 and 1986 U.S. Senate campaigns. The sample of political commercials was obtained for ten of the sixteen female candidates for a total of eighty-one spot ads. The sample of twenty-eight male candidates and 324 corresponding political commercials were obtained by stratifying the population of male Senate candidates by status (incumbent, challenger, open-race candidate) and strength of candidacy based on *Congressional Quarterly* pre-election assessments. Also, the study

included a content analysis of newspaper coverage of the male and female candidates for U.S. Senate. Due to the addition of newspaper analysis, the study could examine the relationship between the candidates' own message and the messages communicated by the press. By comparing newspaper (uncontrolled media) and televised political advertisements (controlled media), the study could examine how the candidates' messages differed and if the media emphasized the same message for male and female candidates.

Results of the study found female candidates discuss issues more than male candidates, and women spend more time talking about social issues and social policy such as education and healthcare. Conversely, men focus on taxes and the federal budget in their campaign messages. The issue agendas discussed in the campaign messages corresponds to the candidates' gender stereotypical strengths.<sup>53</sup>

The substance of the political commercials indicated that candidates emphasize their own strengths or discuss their opponent's weaknesses. The candidate-oriented ads are seen as positive and the opponent-oriented ads are viewed as negative or attack ads. In this study, challengers and women were more likely to use opponent-oriented ads.<sup>54</sup>

Kahn further investigated whether the campaign agenda set forth by the candidates in their advertising was reflected by the media coverage. "Although male and female candidates stress distinct agendas in their campaign ads, news coverage of their campaigns did not reflect these differences."<sup>55</sup> Women stress leadership and competence in their ad campaigns, perhaps as a way of revising voter's image of the "typical" woman candidate. However, media coverage ignored the campaign emphasis by female candidates and chose to describe them in stereotypical terms.<sup>56</sup>

A more recent study by Robertson, Froemling, Wells, and McCraw analyzed gender in candidate's televised campaign advertising to find if there was a difference in; issues discussed by female and male candidates, a difference in the amount, focus, and style of negative commercials used by female and male candidates and is there a difference in rhetorical styles used by female and male candidate.

The study examined advertisements from six mixed-gendered senatorial and six mixed-gendered gubernatorial 1996 races. The sample of 124 spots was obtained from the University of Oklahoma Political Communication Center. The content analysis of the televised commercials used a coding schema formulated to gather demographic, content of the ad, and the production techniques used in the televised spots.<sup>57</sup>

The results of this study indicated female candidates were more likely to discuss tax issues than male candidates, while females still maintained a focus on children's issues and education. Also, male candidates stressed welfare reform issues more than female candidates. Moreover, female candidates were more likely to use negative advertising than male candidates, usually to attack incumbents.<sup>58</sup>

Also, males and females continue to exhibit differences in their types of campaign appeals. To address the viability issue against incumbents, female candidates increased their use of credibility appeals as compared to male candidates' use of logical and performance-oriented appeals.<sup>59</sup>

In a more recent study by Robertson, Conley, Szymcaymysks, and Thompson reviewing the 2000 U.S. Senatorial and Gubernatorial elections, the results showed several striking changes from earlier studies. The researcher argued that women running for political office face not only institutional barriers but media-generated ones as well. The content analysis study examined the newspaper coverage for seven mixed gender

races from the 2000 U.S. Senatorial races and five mixed-gender races from the 2000 Gubernatorial races. In each state, the newspapers with the largest circulation were identified by the Audit Bureau of Circulation. From the twelve newspapers selected, a sample of 578 articles mentioning either candidate was analyzed from September 1 until November 6. Coding instruments were developed to code the newspapers and the following information was recorded for each article: name, gender, publication date, page number, paragraph length, and whether or not the article discussed the candidate's debate. Categories were developed to identify characteristics and the representation of each candidate. The categories included character, credibility, candidate viability, candidate gender, children and marital status, and slant of coverage. Finally, a category was created that listed issues associated with the candidate: the economy, a women's right to choose, the environment, poverty, gun control, healthcare, government ethics, education, crime, youth violence, and defense.

The study discovered female candidates were the dominant focus of most newspaper articles. With regards to the candidate's viability, the study found no significant difference between candidates and that women were treated more favorably than men. Yet, the female candidate's children, marital status, and mention of the candidate's gender occurred more often for the female candidates than for male candidates. Also, it was found that candidate's appearance is linked to females and females are linked to honesty more than male candidates.<sup>60</sup>

Robertson et al concluded that journalists now consider female candidates just as viable as men candidates. The media mention female candidates' positions on issues more often than male candidates. But the media still distinguish between male and female candidates by mentioning candidates' gender, children, and marital status more

often for women. The media continue to reinforce some stereotypical images of women candidates by mentioning female candidates' appearance more than male candidates'.<sup>61</sup>

Concluding their research, the authors stated, "The media as an obstacle in female campaigns is lessening to a great degree."<sup>62</sup>

### Websites

An emerging tool used by candidates and elected officials to by-pass traditional media are their own websites. At the end of 2000, about half of Americans had Internet access, compared to 40% a year earlier and 23% two years earlier.<sup>63</sup> During the 1996 U.S. presidential campaign, 35 million people used the Internet to keep abreast of campaign issues. By the 2000 campaign, more than 144 million Americans could view candidates' websites from their homes.<sup>64</sup>

A study by Niven and Zilber investigated the use of websites by members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The research examined whether female members of the U.S. House of Representatives' self-presentation on the web contributes to the stereotypical image of women representatives held by the media and voters.

The websites were examined for the portrayal of three themes: 1) women representatives portray themselves as outsiders in the legislative process, 2) women representatives portray themselves as more family-oriented, and 3) women representatives focus on "women's issues" more than men representatives.<sup>65</sup>

The content analysis examined 388 House websites (47 women and 341 men members) between June and September 1998. The study sought to document what issues members presented as priorities, what legislative accomplishments were highlighted,

what groups the members were a part of, how members depicted their backgrounds and personal accomplishments, and how the members presented their experience in Washington. All specific material was read within each site and all mentions of issues, space dedicated to each issue, membership in groups, Washington accomplishments, and presentations of the members' background and legislative experiences were recorded by two coders. To identify themes, key phrases were determined for coding purposes.

The research results indicated women did not present themselves as outsiders to the Washington process. Instead, women emphasized how they are an integral part of the legislative process and how they can get things done in Washington, D.C. In reference to being family-oriented, women presented less detail about their families than did men. Women dedicated more space on their websites than men to present qualifications that have some relevance to the job (education and previous experience). Finally, on women's issues, women's websites do mention their record on women's issues (84%) more than men (63%) and their affiliation to a women's group (70%) more than men (3%). Also, women dedicated more space on their websites to "compassion" issues such as poverty and human rights than men. In addition, women see their top accomplishment as economic development whereas men see taxes and budget as their top accomplishment.<sup>66</sup>

The study concluded that mainstream media "nurture stereotypical images of women and the images are not a product of reality or information presented by women."<sup>67</sup> Also, the manner in which reporters cover Congress is to "categorize members based on issues and that journalists may work with a gendered frame to simplify, prioritize and structure information covering women and men in public life.

Women do not perpetuate the image and the fault may be found in practices and enduring perspectives of media organizations and their members.”<sup>68</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### Introduction

The literature review has discussed the challenges faced by female candidates as they pursue elected office. The mediated images of female candidates and elected officials has improved over the last decade, but the literature review showed that media continue to present females in stereotypical frames which has been found to perpetuate the voter's stereotypical frame of female candidates and elected officials. Female candidates and elected officials have attempted to circumvent media's influence of their public image by communicating directly with their constituents via controlled media such as televised advertising, print ads, and their own websites. Using these forms of communication, female candidates and elected officials have been able to present a contextual message that is reflective of their own agenda and accomplishments. However, the problem of gender stereotyping still exists in the media and the question can be asked are female candidates and elected officials reinforcing this frame through photographic images presented on their websites?

#### Research Questions

Based on previous research, the following research questions were formulated for this study:

Research Question 1: Do photographic images of males or females appear more frequently on the website front screens for the members of congress?

Research Question 2: How do male and female members of Congress present their images of males and females on their own websites? Does the image presented perpetuate a stereotypical gender role for males and females?

Research Question 3: How do male and female members of Congress present their own images on their websites? Does the image presented perpetuate a stereotypical gender role for males and females?

### Exploratory Research Questions

Exploratory research questions formulated for this study:

Exploratory Research Question 1: Does political party affiliation affect the manner in which a member of Congress presents his/her image on his/her own website?

Exploratory Research Question 2: Is there a difference in how Members of the House of Representatives and Senators present their images on their own websites?

### Hypotheses

With the independent variables of gender, and elected office held (U.S. Representative or Senator) and the dependent variable of the face-ism index, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

Hypothesis 1: Photographic images of males will appear more frequently on the website front screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress than photographic images of females.

Hypothesis 2: Images of females will be cropped lower on their bodies on the website front screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress than images of males.

Hypothesis 3: Images of female members of The House of Representatives will be cropped no differently on their bodies on their own website front screens than images of male members of The House of Representatives on their own website front screens.

Hypothesis 4: Images of female members of The United States Senate will be cropped no differently on their bodies on their own website front screens than images of male members of The United States Senate on their own website front screens.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Past political communication studies have predominately analyzed gender representation in print and electronic media. However, the website front screens for members of the U.S. Congress have not been studied extensively in relation to gender presentation and visual framing. The methods chapter details the data collection and procedures for the study.

#### Research Design

The focus of this study was a content analysis of the websites of the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States. The instrument used to collect the census for the websites of the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress of the United States was the House of Representatives' website, <http://www.house.gov><sup>69</sup> and the United States Senate's website, <http://www.senate.gov><sup>70</sup>.

The front screens of the websites for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> United States Congress were analyzed. Previous research supports limiting the study to the front screen of the websites due to feasibility. In addition, studies have shown the front screen of a website does provide the first impression that web users will encounter when they enter the website.<sup>71</sup> The unit of analysis was each individual photographic image of a human form. Only human forms in photographs were coded. When more than one image of a human form appeared in a photograph, each image was coded individually. The analysis did not include drawings, cartoons, illustrations, or advertisements. The independent

variables identified were gender, elected office held, and political party affiliation, and the dependent variable identified was a modification of the Face-ism Index, which is explained later in the paper.

The websites for every member of Congress were coded for reference, 1 through 540. The unit of analysis was analyzed for gender. The following scale was created for coding purposes:

0=Female

1=Male

9=Cannot Tell/No Human Image/No Website

The unit of analysis was analyzed for political office held. The following scale was created for coding purposes:

1=Representative

2=Senator

3=Other

9=Cannot Tell/No Human Image/No Website

The unit of analysis was analyzed using a modification of the Face-ism Index<sup>72</sup>. A numeric value was assigned to represent how each photographic image was cropped. The following modified Face-ism Index was used during this study:

1=The photo is cropped to reveal the face/head/eyes (no shoulders showing)

2=The photo is cropped to reveal the head and shoulders (tops of shoulders only)

3=The photo is cropped to reveal the upper chest (mid-line on the chest and up)

4=The photo is cropped to reveal the lower chest/waist (midline on the chest down to the beltline, just above hips)

5=The photo is cropped to reveal the hips/buttocks (hips down to and including the knee)

6=The photo is cropped to reveal the legs below knees/feet

9=Cannot Tell/No Human Image/No Website

Finally, each photograph on the front screen of the websites was coded for the number of individual photographic images of a human form as a control variable. The number of images in a photograph may be a variable which will influence outcomes in the face-ism theory.

### Coders

To confirm the reliability of the established coding procedure, an intercoder reliability test was conducted prior to the implementation of the study. Based on a percentage agreement, two independent coders were assessed on each variable analyzed. Drawing from twenty samples, the coders analyzed all human photographic images and attained the following percentages:

1. Gender, 100 percent agreement
2. Political Party Affiliation, 100 percent agreement
3. Elected Office Held, 100 percent agreement Modified Body Index Scale, 95 percent agreement

Due to the large sample size of 3,892, the overall significance level was established at less than .01 with a confidence level of 95 percent.

### Data Collection Procedure

The front pages for each House of Representatives' website were collected by accessing the listing of House Members' website addresses at <http://clerk.house.gov/members/olmbr.php>.<sup>73</sup> By choosing each representative's name, the user was linked with the front screen of the representative's website. The front pages for each senator's website were collected by accessing the listing of senator's website addresses at <http://senate.gov/senators/home.mht>.<sup>74</sup> By choosing each senator's name, the user was linked with the front screen of the senator's website. If the link could not be established, the site was located through the search engine Google, <http://www.google.com><sup>75</sup> and Alta Vista, <http://www.altavista.com><sup>76</sup>. The front screen of each website was saved to a computer zip disk using Microsoft Explorer under the command structure "File/Save As", then selecting web archive.mht file.

### Data Analysis Procedure

The captured information from the websites was analyzed. The front screen of each representative and senator was examined for individual human photographic images and the images were coded using the established coding system. Following the completion of the coding process, the information collected was analyzed using the computer software, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The SPSS computer software computed the nominal data for frequency counts and the chi-square cross-tabulations.

## Threats to Validity and Limitations

The method used to analyze the data was a content analysis of the website front screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress. A “content analysis” is defined as a systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics. Content analysis is a widely accepted research method in mass communications research and is being used with increasing frequency by a growing array of researchers. From 1971 to 1995, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* has increased its publication of content analysis studies from 6.3 percent to 34.8 percent making this journal one of the primary outlets for content analysis of mass media.<sup>77</sup> In addition, the method of content analysis is more frequently taught at universities. By the mid-1980s, no less than 84 percent of master’s-level research methods courses in journalism included coverage of content analysis.<sup>78</sup> Each photographic image was analyzed and measured using the modified Face-ism Index. A limitation of the study was that the method eliminated any subjective evaluation by the coders. However, the purpose of this study was to use a purely objective measurement of visual framing. The purpose was achieved through the implementation of the face-ism index as the measurement tool for the content analysis. As stated above, the method of content analysis is widely accepted and this study contributes to the body of research devoted to the content analysis research method.

An additional limitation of content analysis is evident when questions arise concerning why certain images were chosen for the website. Specific information regarding the choice of content for the website can only be answered through personal interviews with employees charged with the responsibility for its development. The

interview process would add a qualitative dimension to this study but is not necessary for the quantitative focus of the research presented in this study.

Finally, the data collected for the content analysis were collected during a specific time period. Due to the nature of websites, the content can be changed quickly and on a very regular basis. The content of the websites has most likely changed since this study was conducted.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

The following chapter presents the results from the content analysis of the website front-screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> United States Congress. Frequency tables on variables studied can be found in Appendix A.

#### Hypothesis One

Hypothesis One stated that photographic images of males will appear more frequently on the website fronts screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress than photographic images of females. Hypothesis One was supported with the results from the frequency analysis. The results revealed that the photographic images of females comprised 684 images or 24.4 percent of the total images on the website front screens. The photographic images of males comprised 2,124 images or 75.6 percent of the total images.

#### Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis Two predicted images of females would be cropped lower on their bodies on the website front screens of the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress than images of males. As shown in Table 1, statistically significant results from the investigation indicated female images were cropped lower on their bodies than male images.

Table 1  
Gender and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation

	Face/Head Eyes (1)	Head/Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks/ Knees (5)	Legs/Feet (6)
Female	23 (3.4%)	53 (7.7%)	177 (25.9%)	167 (24.4%)	117 <b>(17.1%)</b>	147 <b>(21.5%)</b>
Male	115 <b>(5.4%)</b>	165 <b>(7.8%)</b>	606 <b>(28.5%)</b>	595 <b>(28.0%)</b>	323 (15.2%)	320 (15.1%)
Total	138 (4.9%)	218 (7.8%)	783 (27.9%)	762 (27.1%)	440 (15.7%)	467 (16.6%)

Note: N=2808;  $\chi^2=22.24$ ;  $df=5$ ;  $p<.001$

The sample size was reduced by removing data related to images which could not be identified as male or female. The gender information was an independent variable that had to be specified in the study to ensure an accurate measurement.

The male images were cropped at the face, head, and eyes category 5.4 percent whereas female images were cropped in the category 3.4 percent. In the head and shoulders category, 7.7 percent of the female images were cropped in this category compared to 7.8 percent of male images. In the next category, upper chest, 25.9 percent of female images were cropped in this category and 28.5 percent of male images were represented here. The study found 24.4 percent of female images were cropped in the lower chest, waist category as compared to 28.0 percent of male images. Female images were cropped at the hips, buttocks, and knees category 17.1 percent whereas male images were cropped 15.2 percent. In the final category, legs and feet, female images were cropped in this category 21.5 percent and male images represented 15.1 percent.

The cross-tabulation results showed a trend as predicted in several categories. Overall, females were cropped lower on their bodies than males.

### Hypothesis Three

Hypothesis Three predicted images of female members of the U.S. House of Representatives would be cropped no differently on their bodies on their own website front screens than images of male members of the U.S. House of Representatives on their own website front screens. Table 2 shows the differences were not statistically significant and Hypothesis Three was supported. Only images of U.S. Representatives were examined for this hypothesis. The images not coded as U.S. Representatives were removed from this sample because the hypothesis specifically refers to U.S. Representatives.

Table 2  
Representatives and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation

	Face/Head/ Eyes (1)	Head/Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks/ Knees (5)	Legs/Feet (6)
Female	1 (.8%)	10 <b>(7.9%)</b>	50 <b>(39.7%)</b>	35 (27.8%)	17 (13.5%)	13 <b>(10.3%)</b>
Male	8 <b>(1.1%)</b>	55 (7.6%)	266 (36.8%)	223 <b>(30.9%)</b>	109 <b>(15.1%)</b>	61 (8.4%)
Total	9 (1.1%)	65 (7.7%)	316 (37.3%)	258 (30.4%)	126 (14.9%)	61 (8.4%)

Note: N=848;  $\chi^2=1.302$ ;  $df=5$ ;  $p=ns$

In the category for face, head, and eyes, 0.8 percent of female representatives' images were cropped here as compared to 1.1 percent of male representatives' images. In the next category, head and shoulders, 7.9 percent of female representatives' images were cropped here and 7.6 percent of male representatives' images fell into this category. Followed by the upper chest category, 39.7 percent of female representatives' images were cropped here and 36.8 percent of male representatives' images appeared in this category. In the lower chest and waist, female representatives' images accounted for 27.8

percent as compared to 30.9 percent of male representatives' images. The study found 13.5 percent of female representatives' images were cropped in the hips, buttocks and knees category where 15.1 percent of male representatives' images were found here. In the final category, legs and feet, 10.3 percent of female representatives' images appeared here compared to 8.4 percent of male representatives' images.

The data from the cross-tabulation are mixed. Even though female representatives were cropped higher on their bodies than male representatives in two categories, head and shoulders, and upper chest and male representatives were cropped lower on their bodies in two categories, lower chest and waist and hips, buttocks, and knees than female representatives, the statistics did not show any differences. Therefore, Hypothesis Three was supported.

#### Hypothesis Four

Hypothesis Four predicted images of female members of the United States Senate will be cropped no differently on their bodies on their own website front screens than images of male members of the United States Senate on their own website front screens. Table 3 shows the results of a cross-tabulation between male senators and female senators indicated there was not a significant difference and Hypothesis Four was supported. Only images of U.S. Senators were examined for this hypothesis. The images not coded as U.S. Senators were removed from this sample because the hypothesis was predicting a relationship between male and female senators.

**Table 3**  
**Senator and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation**

	Face/Head/ Eyes (1)	Head/ Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks / Knees (5)	Legs/ Feet (6)
Female	0	5 (17.9%)	13 <b>(46.4%)</b>	8 <b>(28.8%)</b>	1 (3.6%)	1 (3.6%)
Male	1 <b>(.6%)</b>	32 <b>(19.5%)</b>	65 (39.6%)	45 (27.4%)	7 <b>(4.3%)</b>	14 <b>(8.5%)</b>
Total	1 (.5%)	37 (19.3%)	78 (40.6%)	53 (27.6%)	8 (4.2%)	14 (8.5%)

Note: N=192;  $\chi^2=1.270$ ; df=5; p=ns

Within the face, head, and eyes category, 0.6 percent of male senators' images were cropped at this level, however there were no female senators' images cropped in this category. The results for the next category, head and shoulders showed 17.9 percent of female senators' images were cropped at this level compared to 19.5 percent of the male senators' images. The next category, upper chest, revealed 46.4 percent of female senators' images were cropped at this level whereas 39.6 percent of male senators' images were cropped here. Followed by the lower chest and waist category, female senators' images were cropped at this level 28.8 percent of the time and male senators' images were cropped here 27.4 percent. The study found 3.6 percent of female senators' images were cropped at the hips, buttocks, and knees as compared to male senators' images who accounted for 4.3 percent of the category. In the final category, legs and feet, 3.6 percent of female senators' images appeared here and 8.5 percent of male senators' images were cropped at this level.

The results of this cross-tabulation are mixed. In the categories aimed toward the upper body, more male senators' images accounted for cropping at the face, head, and eyes and the head and shoulders, whereas female senators' images dominated the category of upper chest cropping. Conversely, categories aimed toward the lower body

found male senators' images outpaced female senators' images in the categories of hips, buttocks, and knees and legs and feet. More female senators were cropped at the lower chest and waist than male senators. The largest percentage of male and female senators' images were cropped at the upper chest. However, the differences are not statistically significant and the images of female and males senators are cropped no differently on their website.

### Exploratory Research

The literature review did not provide a foundation to predict directional relationships between several variables therefore, exploratory research was conducted to determine if political affiliation affected how a representative or a senator presented his/her image on his/her website. Also, exploratory research was conducted to determine if representatives and senators differed in the presentation of their images on their own websites.

### Exploratory Research Question One

Exploratory Research Question One asked does political party affiliation affect the manner in which a member of congress presents his/her image on his/her website. As illustrated in Table 4, the statistical analysis showed no significant difference between Democrats and Republicans. The images that could not be identified as part of a political party were removed from the sample.

Table 4

Democrats and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation

	Face/Head/ Eyes (1)	Head/Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks/ Knees (5)	Legs/Feet (5)
Female	0	11 <b>(11.7%)</b>	44 <b>(46.8%)</b>	26 (27.7%)	8 (8.5%)	5 (5.3%)
Male	4 <b>(1.0%)</b>	38 (9.8%)	159 (40.9%)	115 <b>(29.6%)</b>	46 <b>(11.8%)</b>	27 <b>(6.9%)</b>
Total	4 (.8%)	49 (10.1%)	203 (42.0%)	141 (29.2%)	54 (11.2%)	27 (6.9%)

Note: N=483;  $\chi^2=3.018$ ; df=5; p=ns

The male Democrats' images were cropped at the face, head, and eyes 1.0 percent and no female Democrats' images were cropped in this category. In the head and shoulders category, female Democrats' images were cropped here 11.7 percent while male Democrats' images were cropped here 9.8 percent. The majority of Democrats accounted for the upper chest category, female Democrats' images were cropped 46.8 percent and male Democrats' images were cropped 40.9 percent. Within the lower chest and waist category, female Democrats' images were cropped 27.7 percent at this level compared to 29.6 percent of male Democrats' images. In the next category, hips, buttocks, and knees, 8.5 percent of female Democrats' images were cropped here and 11.8 percent of male Democrats' images. In the final category, legs and feet, female Democrats' images accounted for 5.3 percent as compared to 6.9 percent for male Democrats' images.

The data for Democrats trended contrary to the face-ism theory. The images of female democrats were cropped higher on their bodies compared to male democrats, who tended to be cropped lower on their bodies.

As shown in table 5, the cross-tabulation for Republicans showed even less statistical significance than Democrats.

**Table 5**  
**Republicans and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation**

	Face/Head/ Eyes (1)	Head/Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks/ Knees (5)	Legs/Feet (6)
Female	1 <b>(1.6%)</b>	4 (6.3%)	22 <b>(34.9%)</b>	17 (27.0%)	10 <b>(15.9%)</b>	9 <b>(14.3%)</b>
Male	7 (1.3%)	49 <b>(9.4%)</b>	176 (33.9%)	164 <b>(31.6%)</b>	77 (14.8%)	46 (8.9%)
Total	8 (1.4%)	53 (9.1%)	198 (34.0%)	181 (31.1%)	87 (14.9%)	55 (9.5%)

Note: N=582;  $\chi^2=2.803$ ; df=5; p=ns

The eyes, head, and face category resulted in 1.6 percent of Republican females' images being cropped here and 1.3 percent of Republican males' images being cropped here. Next, 6.3 percent of Republican females' images were cropped at the head and shoulders where as 9.4 percent of male Republicans' images were cropped here. In the following category, upper chest, 34.9 percent of Republican females' images were cropped here compared to 33.9 percent of Republican males' images. In the lower chest and waist category, 27.0 percent of female Republicans' images were cropped here and 31.6 percent of male Republicans' images completed the category. The study found 15.9 percent of Republican females' images were cropped at the hips, buttocks, and knees compared to 14.8 percent of Republican males' images. In the final category, 14.3 percent of female Republicans' images were cropped at this level and 8.9 percent of male Republicans' images were cropped at this level.

The Republican results were mixed without a definite relationship established between variables. The data for Republicans did not indicate a trend for either males or females in relation to how they present themselves on their website.

## Exploratory Research Question Two

Exploratory Research Question Two asks is there a difference in how members of The U.S. House of Representatives and members of The U.S. Senate present their images on their own websites. The sample size was reduced by removing data related to images that could not be identified as a representative or senator. As seen in Table 6, statistically significant results from the study indicated images of U.S. Senators were cropped higher on their bodies than images of U.S. Representatives. The face-ism effect was supported and was found to be more prevalent on websites of representatives than senators. Therefore, the images senators display of themselves on their own websites focus on the face, whereas the images representatives display of themselves on their own websites focus on the body.

**Table 6**  
Representatives, Senators and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation

	Face/Head/ Eyes (1)	Head/ Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks/ Knees (5)	Legs/ Feet (6)
Representative	9 <b>(1.1%)</b>	65 (7.7%)	316 (37.3%)	258 <b>(30.4%)</b>	126 <b>(14.9%)</b>	74 <b>(8.7%)</b>
Senator	1 (.5%)	37 <b>(19.3%)</b>	78 <b>(40.6%)</b>	53 (27.6%)	8 (4.2%)	15 (7.8%)
Total	10 (1.0%)	102 (9.8%)	394 (37.9%)	311 (29.9%)	134 (12.9%)	89 (8.6%)

Note: N=1041;  $\chi^2=15.801$ ; df=5;  $p<.001$

Representatives' images were cropped at the face, head, and eyes category 1.1 percent whereas senators' images were cropped in the category 0.5 percent. In the head and shoulders category, 7.7 percent of representatives' images were cropped in this category compared to 19.3 percent of senators' images. In the next category, upper chest, 37.3 percent of representatives' images were cropped in this category and 40.6 percent of

senators' images were represented here. The study found 30.4 percent of representatives' images were cropped in the lower chest and waist category as compared to 27.6 percent of senators' images. Representatives' images were cropped at the hips, buttocks, and knees category 14.9 percent whereas senators' images were cropped 4.2 percent. In the final category, legs and feet, representatives' images were cropped in this category 8.7 percent and senators' images were represented 7.8 percent in this category.

### Additional Cross-tabulations

The study also examined how human images were portrayed on the front screens of the websites if political affiliation or elected office could not be determined. Table 7 shows that statistically significant results indicated there was a relationship between male and female images on the websites which were not been linked to political affiliation or elected office and the face-ism index. Because this sample excluded elected officials, the images examined were not controlled images.

Table 7  
No Political Affiliation and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation

	Face/Head/Eyes (1)	Head/ Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks/ Knees (5)	Legs/ Feet (6)
Female	22 (4.2%)	38 <b>(7.2%)</b>	111 (21.1%)	124 (23.5%)	99 <b>(18.8%)</b>	133 <b>(25.2%)</b>
Male	104 <b>(8.6%)</b>	78 (6.4%)	270 <b>(22.3%)</b>	314 <b>(25.9%)</b>	200 (16.5%)	246 (20.3%)
Total	126 (7.2%)	116 (6.7%)	381 (21.9%)	438 (25.2%)	299 (17.2%)	379 (21.8%)

Note: N=1739;  $\chi^2=16.472$ ;  $df=5$ ;  $p<.01$

The percentage breakdowns for the two independent variables are very similar. Images that could not be linked to a political affiliation, in the face, head, eyes category,

females' images were cropped here 4.2 percent and males' images were cropped 8.6 percent. Next, in the head and shoulders category, 7.2 percent of females' images were cropped here compared to 6.4 percent of males' images. In the following category, upper chest, 21.1 percent of females' images were cropped here and 22.3 percent of males' images were cropped here. The lower chest and waist category was comprised of 23.5 percent females' images and 25.9 percent of males' images cropped here. In the hips, buttocks, and knees category, 18.8 percent was made up of females' images cropped here and 16.5 percent of males' images. Rounding out the data, the legs and feet category revealed 25.2 percent of the females' images were cropped here and 20.3 percent of the males' images.

The data for images that could not be linked to elected office as compared to images not linked to a political affiliation generated very similar percentages. Table 8 illustrates that the face-ism effect was supported in this sample.

**Table 8**  
**No Elected Office and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation**

	Face/Head/ Eyes (1)	Head/Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks/ Knees (5)	Legs/Feet (6)
Female	22 (4.2%)	38 <b>(7.2%)</b>	111 (21.1%)	124 (23.5%)	99 <b>(18.8%)</b>	133 <b>(25.2%)</b>
Male	103 <b>(8.5%)</b>	78 (6.5%)	265 <b>(22.0%)</b>	314 <b>(26.1%)</b>	200 (16.6%)	245 (20.3%)
Total	125 (7.2%)	116 (6.7%)	376 (21.7%)	438 (25.3%)	299 (17.3%)	378 (21.8%)

Note: N=1732;  $\chi^2= 16.146$ ;  $df=5$ ;  $p<.01$

In the category face, head, and eyes, 4.2 percent were images of females and 8.5 percent were images of males. In the next category, head and shoulders, 7.2 percent were images of females and 6.5 percent were images of males. The following category, upper chest, showed 21.1 percent to be images of females and 22.0 percent to be images of

males. Next was the lower chest and waist, which was composed of 23.5 percent images of females and 26.1 percent images of males. In hips, buttocks, and knees, 18.8 percent were females and 16.6 percent were males. In the final category, legs and feet, 25.2 percent were images of females and 20.3 percent were images of males.

The results from this calculation reveal a similar trend identified in Hypothesis Two. In Hypothesis Two, females were found to be cropped lower on the body than males. The images in this sample are most likely individuals on the website front screens that are not the representative or the senator and therefore, their image is not categorized as controlled media.

#### Possible Influential Control Variable

Originally, the number of people in the photograph was measured as a control variable. To determine the influence of the control variable, the research addressed when the number of people in a photograph became significant. In Table 9, the cross-tabulation revealed a statistically significant relationship exists between gender and the face-ism index when the number of people in the photograph is six or more. When five or fewer are in the photograph, the relationship between gender and the face-ism index was not statistically significant. The number of people in the photograph is a strong influencing factor when testing for the face-ism effect.

Table 9

People in Photo(6 or more) and Face-ism Index Cross-tabulation

	Face/Head /Eyes (1)	Head/Shoulders (2)	Upper Chest (3)	Lower Chest/Waist (4)	Hips/Buttocks/ Knees (5)	Legs/Feet (6)
Female	5 (1.3%)	36 <b>(9.6%)</b>	114 (30.5%)	100 <b>(26.7%)</b>	67 <b>(17.9%)</b>	52 <b>(13.9%)</b>
Male	54 <b>(3.9%)</b>	123 (9.0%)	458 <b>(33.4%)</b>	413 (30.1%)	191 (13.9%)	134 (9.8%)
Total	59 (3.4%)	159 (9.1%)	572 (32.7%)	513 (29.4%)	258 (14.8%)	186 (10.6%)

Note: N=1747;  $\chi^2=15.801$ ; df=5;  $p<.01$

The category of face, head, and eyes showed 1.3 percent were images of females and 3.9 percent were images of males. Next, head and shoulders category contained 9.6 percent images of females and 9.0 percent images of males. The following category, upper chest, had 30.5 percent images of females compared to 33.4 percent images of males. In the lower chest and waist category, 26.7 percent images of females were cropped here and 30.1 percent images of males were here. Next, hips, buttocks, and knees had 17.9 percent images of females and 13.9 percent images of males. Finally, legs and feet category had 13.9 percent images of females and 9.8 percent images of males.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss major findings, present conclusions and recommendations from the results of the content analysis of the website front-screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> United States Congress.

#### Survey of Major Findings

Hypothesis One predicted photographic images of males would appear more frequently on the website front screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress than photographic images of females. Images of men did appear on the website front screens three times more often than images of females. Webmasters should strive to design elected officials' websites to be reflective of the general population.

Hypothesis Two predicted images of females would be cropped lower on their bodies on the website front-screens of the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress than images of males. The study confirmed female images were cropped lower on their bodies than male images. The results supported the foundation of the face-ism theory which states female images will be cropped to emphasize their bodies as compared to male images which will be cropped to emphasize their faces. The visual framing and cropping of females to place emphasis on the body perpetuates the stereotypical image of females.

Hypothesis Three predicted images of female members of the U.S. House of Representatives would be cropped no differently on their bodies on their own websites front-screens than images of male members of the U.S. House of Representatives on their own website front-screens. The findings did support the hypothesis. Female representatives presented their own photographic image in the same manner associated with their male peers. The female representatives' photographic images were cropped to place emphasis on the upper part of the body. By cropping the photo in this manner, female representatives communicate character traits such as intelligence, ambition, and strong leadership skills that are traditionally perceived as male traits which are desirable in a leader.

Hypothesis Four predicted images of female members of the United States Senate would be cropped no differently on their bodies on their own website front screens than images of male members of the United States Senate on their own website front screen. Once again, the hypothesis was supported. The female senators' photographic images were cropped to portray the senator within the categories which place emphasis on the upper part of the body. Based on past research, the visual framing and cropping of a photographic image in this manner portrays the individual with traditional male characteristics.

Exploratory Research Question One asked if political party affiliation affected the manner in which a member of Congress presented his/her image on his/her own website? The study found there was no relationship between the political party and image presented on the elected official's website.

Exploratory Research Question Two asked if there was a difference in how members of The U.S. House of Representatives and members of The U.S. Senate present

their images on their own websites. The results indicated U.S. Senators were cropped higher on their bodies than U.S. Representatives. Based on the face-ism theory, senators are doing a better job perpetuating an image of a strong, intelligent leader than representatives.<sup>79</sup>

The study also examined photographic images that were not linked to an elected office or political affiliation. The results of this analysis supported the face-ism theory because female images were cropped lower on their bodies as compared to male images which were cropped higher on their bodies. Most likely the images in this sample were individuals on the website front-screens that were not the representatives or the senators. Individuals who were not the senator or representative did not have any control over their own images presented on the website. The webmaster who is selecting the photographs may not be striving to present a controlled image of females and males on the website except for the image of the representative or senator. As seen in past research, the webmaster may be contributing to stereotypical images of females by the simple act of selection and cropping of displayed photographs.<sup>80</sup> However, a content analysis alone cannot determine the reason why photographs are cropped and displayed on the website without further interviews with the webmaster.

The research addressed when the number of people in the photograph became significant. The results indicated a relationship exists between gender and the face-ism index when the number of people in the photograph is six or more. When the number of people in the photograph is five or fewer, a relationship between gender and the face-ism effect is not significant. In this study, more than 50 percent of the photographs had five or fewer people pictured and 32.0 percent of the total number of photographs only had one or two human images portrayed. The number of people in the photograph has shown

to be a strong influencing factor in the study. However, the factor may be unrelated to the face-ism effect. For example, the wide-cropping of the photo may have been to capture an action related to an event such as the digging of a hole for a groundbreaking ceremony. In addition, a wide-crop a photo of six or more may have been needed to capture all the people to be pictured. The study did not set limits regarding why to whole body should be captured in the photograph.

Overall, the website front-screens for the members of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress depicted images of females in a stereotypical manner. Upon further investigation, it was discovered the images of the female representatives and senators were displayed in a non-stereotypical manner. The images that the female representatives and senators presented on their websites strive to overcome the stereotypical image of the female politician in the mainstream media. However, the image of other females on their websites does not overcome but may reinforce the stereotypical frame for women.

### Recommendations

It appears as if female senators and representatives of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress have presented a controlled media image on their own websites to bypass traditional mainstream media. The manner in which the webmaster selects, crops, and frames the photographic image of the female representative and senator may send a specific message to the representative or senator's constituency. The webmasters can also portray other females on the website in the same manner as the elected officials consciously choosing photographic images to be cropped and displayed in the same manner as males on the website.

The findings of this research could benefit media scholars, media practitioners, educators, political consultants, candidates for elected office, and elected office holders. Media scholars could replicate the study to expand research findings related to how females are depicted on congressional websites with each new Congress. Media practitioners could use this information when designing any type of controlled media especially websites. Educators would benefit from this research by using the information to teach communication and marketing majors about the visual framing process and gender representation. Political consultants, candidates for elected office, and elected office holders can benefit from findings on how to present a photographic image which communicates a message to voters and does not reinforce the stereotypical frame for female politicians.

The ability to frame the image of a female candidate and elected office holder directly to the voting public without the filter of the media may have helped level the playing field more for females in the political arena. By using other media venues to communicate to the voting public, female politicians are making progress in altering their traditional media frame.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>4</sup> Archer et al, p. 732.

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<sup>14</sup> Hertog and McLeod, p. 143

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- <sup>23</sup> Messaris and Abraham, p.217.
- <sup>24</sup> Messaris and Abraham, p.218.
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- <sup>28</sup> Archer et al, p. 729.
- <sup>29</sup> Archer et al, p. 731.
- <sup>30</sup> Archer et al, p. 731.
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<sup>45</sup> Kahn and Goldenburg, p. 195.

<sup>46</sup> Kahn and Goldenburg, p. 195.

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<sup>59</sup> Robertson et al, p. 340-341.

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## APPENDIX

### Frequency Tables

The frequency tables for this study are listed below. The sample for the face-ism index was reduced by removing the category of no pictures, cannot code for the face-ism index. The images were removed to ensure the data were an accurate measure of where the images were cropped on the body.

Table 10  
Statistics

	Gender	Office Held	Political Affiliation	Body Index	Number in Photo
N Valid	2802	2808	2808	2808	2808

Table 11  
Frequency Table, Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	684	24.4	24.4	24.4
Male	2124	75.6	75.6	100.0
Total	2808	100.0	100.0	

Table 12  
Frequency Table, Office Held

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Representative	848	30.2	30.2	30.2
Senator	192	6.8	6.8	37.0
Other	36	1.3	1.3	38.3
No Picture/Can't Tell	1732	61.7	61.7	100.0
Total	2808	100.0	100.0	

Table 13  
 Frequency Table, Political Affiliation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Democrat	483	17.2	17.2	17.2
Republican	582	20.7	20.7	37.9
Independent	4	.1	.1	38.1
No Picture/Can't Tell	1739	61.9	61.9	100.0
Total	2808	100.0	100.0	

Table 14  
 Frequency Table, Face-ism Index

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Face/Head/Eyes	138	4.9	4.9	4.9
Head/Shoulders	218	7.8	7.8	12.7
Upper Chest	783	27.9	27.9	40.6
Lower Chest/Waist	762	27.1	27.1	67.7
Hips/Buttocks/Knees	440	15.7	15.7	83.4
Legs/Feet	467	16.6	16.6	100.0
Total	2808	100.0	100.0	

Table 15

Frequency Table, Number in Photo

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	608	21.7	21.7	21.7
2	286	10.2	10.2	31.8
3	280	10.0	10.0	41.8
4	175	6.2	6.2	48.0
5	187	6.7	6.7	54.7
6	211	7.5	7.5	62.2
7	156	5.6	5.6	67.8
8	136	4.8	4.8	72.6
9	83	3.0	3.0	75.6
10	129	4.6	4.6	80.2
11	160	5.7	5.7	85.9
12	29	1.0	1.0	86.9
13	45	1.6	1.6	88.5
14	41	1.5	1.5	90.0
15	47	1.7	1.7	91.6
16	22	.8	.8	92.4
17	26	.9	.9	93.3
18	48	1.7	1.7	95.0
19	30	1.1	1.1	96.1
20	25	.9	.9	97.0
21	18	.6	.6	97.6
22	12	.4	.4	98.1
23	1	.0	.0	98.1
24	2	.1	.1	98.2
25	11	.4	.4	98.6
30	5	.2	.2	98.8
32	3	.1	.1	98.9
35	14	.5	.5	99.4
37	12	.4	.4	99.8
38	6	.2	.2	100.0
Total	2808	100.0	100.0	

## VITA

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