Inside a general election campaign:
Gender treatment in communications strategy of a female candidate for governor

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Abstract

For decades, researchers studied the communications strategies of political candidates and, specifically, how women candidates manage their campaign communications relative to gender, with feminine approaches believed to impair their chances for success. This study applied framing theory and Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse (Functional Theory) to analyze political communications in the 2022 general election campaign for Kansas governor between incumbent Democrat Laura Kelly and Republican Derek Schmidt and how their campaign communications reflected feminine and masculine traits and issues. Findings indicate that Kelly used a mix of feminine and masculine traits to maximize her campaign communications to voters; and her opponent regularly issued attacks in an effort to undermine Kelly's traits and issue positions considered by voters as critical for executive leadership.

The study undertook two approaches to gathering materials for research. First, a quantitative content analysis was conducted to assess the presence of gendered issues and traits in general election campaign communications of tweets, TV ads, and debate statements of Kelly. Then Schmidt's communications using the same platforms were examined for presence of acclaims, attacks, and defenses, with particular attention to Schmidt's attacks of Kelly's traits and issues relative to gender. Similar treatment occurred for TV ads sponsored by major political parties and leading political action committees in support of the candidates. Materials collected for these analyses were from the general election campaign in Kansas, beginning in early August and ending on election day, November 8, 2022.

Second, qualitative research was conducted involving interviews during the general election campaign with the governor and during and after the campaign with Kelly's campaign staff. While the election was ongoing and the outcome of the election was yet unknown,

interviews with the candidate explored how she viewed gendered issues and traits, as well as treatment of her by her opponent. From these contacts and interviews, the author witnessed the campaign execute on communications strategies in response to the polling environment and to attacks made by Kelly's opponent. Findings could recommend communications strategies useful in future female versus male political matchups.

The current research contributes to Functional Theory as it used the model for examining gendered treatment of attacks against a female candidate in a state governor's race. The research contributes to framing theory by examining how candidates applied gendered treatment in political communications across multiple platforms, specifically in a female-male gubernatorial matchup. Finally, the findings contribute to the literature that describes gendered traits in communications.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Acknowledgements

Dedication

For the women who run for public office and improve this country's future that is our children's, may their service and sacrifices inspire others to run and serve.

For the women and girls denied education by the oppressors who govern their countries, may they find a way to prevail in their pursuit of knowledge.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In a year in which the national leader of the Democratic party suffered one of the lowest mid-term approval ratings in history, Americans in 2022 sensed their country was headed in the wrong direction and inflationary pressures weighed down anyone struggling with choices between putting food on the table or fuel in the car. In the very heart of the country, a female Democratic governor endeavored to hold the governor's office. In a state with few hills, she faced an uphill climb against an opponent with statewide campaign credentials and a record of handily winning an electorate having over 40% more registered Republicans than registered Democrats (Election Statistics Data, 2022).

The moment in U.S. history was significant for the grave issues faced by citizens: lingering effects of COVID, inflation-spiked prices, a critical shortage of workers, a reversal of the constitutional right to abortion, and a tug-of-war over social issues. For a gubernatorial candidate running as an incumbent, a multitude of problems and issues played out in the background. These topics influenced the communications environment and were subject to attacks leveled by an opponent.

Campaign Climate

The race for governor in Kansas was like no other gubernatorial race in the nation in 2022. Kelly was called "one of the most endangered governors in the Democratic party" (Camera, 2022) and "the only Democratic governor seeking reelection in a state [former President Donald] Trump won in 2020" (Glueck, 2022, para. 3). History did not appear to be on the side of Laura Kelly's reelection. While "throughout modern Kansas history, Republicans and Democrats have regularly traded control of the governor's office" (Shorman & Bernard, 2022a,

para. 22), more than 50 years had transpired since the last incumbent governor won reelection in Kansas when his party also controlled the White House.

Something unexpected occurred, however, in the summer of 2022 that set the stage for a possible reversal of that trend. On June 24, the U.S. Supreme court overturned *Roe v. Wade* which for decades had guaranteed a constitutional right to abortion. On the August 2 primary ballot in Kansas, a Republican-backed measure proposed eliminating the state's constitutional right to an abortion. In response, more Kansas voters turned out for the primary election than expected, with women constituting 56% of total ballots cast—exceeding the 2018 general election women's turnout of 52.5% of overall ballots (TargetSmart, 2022).

Polling that previously favored the likely Republican candidate in the race for governor shifted enough by the primary date of August 2 to put candidates Kelly and Schmidt in a dead heat, according to polling data, with each having a 50-50 shot of prevailing (FiveThirtyEight, 2022). For its gubernatorial face-off between Kelly and Schmidt, Kansas was declared a state having a "consequential midterm race" (Todd et al., 2022).

This climate served as a backdrop for a race in which Kelly maintained a mostly positive approach to her communications and one in which she regularly highlighted her accomplishments as governor and her bipartisan style. Schmidt regularly undertook negative attacks in his campaign communications aimed at his opponent and rarely offered specifics about his record as attorney general.

Added to this mix—and contributing considerably to the negative environment—were prominent TV ads aired by third parties. In particular, TV ads aired by the Kansas Values Institute served up negative perspectives of Schmidt and tied him to a former governor and conservative, Sam Brownback, who continued to have low approval ratings. TV ads aired by the

Republican Governors Association reinforced Schmidt's attacks of Kelly as a liberal who was out of step with Kansans.

Laura Kelly as Candidate

Unlike the recurring question that arose in the 2020 race for U.S. president in which women were collectively asked, as a gender, if they could prevail in a general election (Vitali, 2022), no question existed in the race between Laura Kelly and Derek Schmidt of "can a woman win." This woman—Laura Kelly, the state's 48th governor and third female in the role—already had prevailed in a general election for this seat, and was now defending the title. In 2018, Kansans elected Democrat Kelly in a red state against male Republican candidate Kris Kobach who "styled [himself] in Trump's anti-immigrant image" (Davis & Shear, p. 343). A conservative Republican, Kobach had won statewide twice. The matchup for governor in 2022 drew similar comparisons. Democrat Kelly found herself in a race against Schmidt, a male Republican candidate who voters had elected, and twice reelected, statewide and who had secured Trump's "Complete and Total Endorsement!" in the general election (Tidd, 2022).

Gender Considerations

Kelly and Schmidt each wore the mantle of their respective party's leadership in the state: Democrat Kelly as governor and Republican Schmidt as attorney general. Each had served their respective districts in the Kansas state senate. Each candidate often aligned with their respective parties on a host of issues important to Kansans. But a significant difference between the two candidates vying for governor was the matter of gender—how they used that difference to communicate with voters, and how, in turn, matters of gender were applied to judge their fitness to lead and serve as governor.

A focus of this study concerned candidates' campaign communications with voters and their treatment of traits and issues considered feminine and masculine. Much of the existing research on this topic that examined campaigns involving women was conducted looking back at elections that occurred years or decades in the past. The approach undertaken with the current study differed in that much of the data under study was observed and considered as the election period transpired. Also, interviews with the female candidate and her campaign staff occurred while the election was ongoing and the outcome of the election was yet unknown.

Another aspect of past research is that often the data collected and combined for study was secured from multiple races and drawn from across several years in order to generalize and identify patterns of communications. The downside with that approach is the variety of unknown variables that influenced outcomes of the campaigns. Those studies often did not account for the environment in which the elections were conducted. For instance, of those campaigns studied, how much campaign experience did female candidates bring to the races relative to their male opponents? How strongly did the female candidates poll against their male opponents at the start of the election?

In the current research, arguably, both candidates under study entered the race with very similar campaign experiences having both won and served statewide in Kansas. The first day after the primary they entered the race equal in the polls. Those circumstances may be as close as a political scientist can get to producing a controlled environment for studying a campaign of gender influences. That is why the focus of this research on a single general election campaign for governor between a seemingly well-matched female and male candidate offered an unusual opportunity for study. With some of the typically uncontrolled variables somewhat accounted for

and understood, results from this study suggested communications strategies relative to gendered traits and issues that could benefit prospective female candidates.

The literature review describes historic difficulties for women related to public life that translate to problems in running for office. It explores the literature on the research of women candidates' campaign communications, and it reviews the defining gender traits and issues considered more likely to be associated with women or with men.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Research on political campaigns through a lens of gender in female versus male candidate matchups has been a topic of study since the 1980s (Bystrom, 2019; Winfrey & Schnoebelen, 2019). At that time, prevalent feminine traits of women were described as those tending toward compassion, whereas masculine traits that described men tended toward strength. On the issue front, it was common for women to concern themselves with topics such as health care and education, while men focused on economic-related issues (Bystrom, 2019). These concepts of feminine and masculine roles and traits were derived from traditional roles in society tied to "biological and evolutionary roles of women as denizens of the home and men as hunters outside the home" (Bauer, 2013, p. 27).

Jamieson (1995) described the problematic double bind in which expectations of femininity for women's success in traditional roles run counter to expected traits needed for succeeding in public life. In the femininity/competence bind, Jamieson explained, "by requiring both femininity and competence of women in the public sphere, and then defining femininity in a way that excludes competence, the bind creates unrealizable expectations" (p. 18). In another example, what might be called forceful for a man, might be termed strident and undesirable if a women spoke in the same manner (Blankenship & Robson, 1995).

A feminine style described as present in women's political discourse in governance—and also suggested as likely generalizable to campaigns—consists of five characteristics: viewing power in office as a means for getting things done and sharing power with others; respecting inclusivity and relationships; addressing policy from a holistic perspective; viewing politics and public policy through the lens of their own personal lives; and advancing public policy issues relevant to women (Blankenship & Robson, 1995).

Unfortunately, voters do not perceive women as having the characteristics "most valued in political leaders such as experience and knowledge" (Bauer, 2017, p. 279), and research continues to suggest that men persist in harboring an image of women as less capable relative to traits important for succeeding in traditionally male domains (Hentschel et al., 2019). Mendoza and DiMaria (2019) elaborated on existing research that suggested women are penalized in male-dominated disciplines with an outcome of receiving less support due to "a poor perceived prototypical fit between their gender and the job" (p. 2). Overcoming these stereotypes through which voters still judge candidates and which reinforce the double bind for female candidates, "must be negotiated through communication" (Winfrey & Schnoebelen, 2019, p. 129).

Gendered Traits and Issues

As applied to traits and issues, the terms feminine and masculine are considered "the social construction of gender rather than mere biological difference" (Blankenship & Robson, 1995, p. 356). Further, gender stereotypes can be thought of, generally, as what men are like and what women are like (Hentschel et al., 2019), and they "distinguish the appropriate roles and behaviors for women *relative* to men" (Bauer, 2013, p. 27).

Bauer (2013) defines gender stereotypes as having attributes that are either agentic or communal, with "agentic" describing traditionally masculine qualities and "communal" describing traditionally feminine qualities. Additional descriptors of feminine stereotypes or traits include those "promoting compromise and smooth interpersonal relationships" (Schneider et al., 2016, p. 526). Hentschel et al. (2019) offer agentic features as "assertiveness, independence, instrumental competence, [and] leadership competence" (p. 1) that describe attributes including ambitious, competent, competitive, logical, and strong. They offer communal stereotypes as "concern for others, sociability, and emotional sensitivity" (p. 1) that describe

attributes including communicative, likable, sympathetic, and understanding. Their comprehensive list of 46 agentic (masculine) traits and 28 communal (feminine) traits were derived from past research on the topic. The trait of honesty, not listed by Hentschel et al. (2019), appeared in other literature as another feminine quality (Bauer & Santia, 2022; Bystrom, 2019).

Research also applies gender to issues commonly addressed in campaigns. Examples of issues considered feminine include: education, poverty, equality, and LGBTQ issues (Dubosar, 2022). Also included as feminine are reproductive health care, issues addressing sexual harassment (Bauer, 2013), seniors, environment, drug use, women's issues (Banwart & McKinney, 2005), family (Schneider, 2014), child care (Dolan, 2008), and general children's issues and welfare (Bauer & Santia, 2022). Examples of issues considered masculine include budget, economy, crime, military, government distrust (Dubosar, 2022), taxes, and immigration (Banwart & McKinney, 2005).

Bystrom (2019) offers that compiled research over the past 35 years, which included TV ads from female versus male matchups for governor, for congress, and for president, show that candidates cross domains considered both feminine and masculine in an attempt to convey their strengths most relevant for the office. Even though women run and govern in a manner more consistent with goals that are communally oriented rather than ambition-driven (Schneider et al., 2016), advice offered to women includes to promote competence on those issues that matter most to voters and to display masculine stereotypes as needed.

Research over time with political communication as the focus—including campaign ads and debates—suggest more gender blurring, and that both men and women candidates may adapt their gender strategy (Winfrey & Schnoebelen, 2019). While feminine style develops from the

experiences of women, aspects of the feminine style are used by men in political discourse (Blankenship & Robson, 1995), and it is not unusual for both men and women to employ masculine traits as needed when communicating (Bystrom, 2019).

Schneider (2014) suggested in her study that women candidates were more likely to cultivate issues and traits that are feminine, but male candidates used a mix of feminine and masculine strategies and traits, possibly because "male candidates simply have more options available to them, because they are not subject to the idea of the double bind" (p. 283).

To defeat Schmidt and to negotiate lingering effects of a double bind, the challenge for Kelly was to deliver in her communications those benefits derived from feminine traits, such as likability and collaboration. Kelly also needed to lean into masculine issues and traits sufficient to communicate her experience, leadership abilities, and competence as an executive—qualities considered important for the office. Ultimately, in the Kansas race for governor, communications strategies to maximize certain traits and issues would influence who would prevail to lead the governor's office for the next four years. How those traits and issues were framed could prove critical for the election's outcome.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

In the context of political campaigns, frames used by candidates are critical for influencing voters and the outcome of elections. Candidates for public office work to convince voters why they are best suited for the office in terms of the qualities they bring to the role and their perspectives on issues that matter most to their would-be constituency. Their campaign communications are key for framing their strengths, not only to voters, but also to the media

who, in turn, message to voters through news coverage regarding characterizations of candidates' qualifications, traits, and positions on public policy.

"Framing constitutes one of the most important concepts in the study of public opinion" (Druckman, 2001, p. 1041), with a framing effect occurring when a speaker's emphasis on relevant matters results in people forming their opinions based on that emphasis. Framing theory concerns putting forward aspects of a story in a manner that highlight those features and causes them to seem important in the minds of the audience (Entman, 1993), and "it is through framing that political actors shape the texts that influence or prime the agendas and considerations that people think about" (Entman, 2007, p. 165). Media communication in some cases, merely repeat frames of prevailing voices with little added treatment or influence from journalists (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). In these cases, the originator of communications—the candidates—become quite important.

Gamson et al. (1992) referred to how "sponsors of different frames monitor media discourse to see how well it tells the story they want told, and they measure their success or failure accordingly" (p. 385). This description aligns closely to the process that occurs during elections, is advised by polling, and is ultimately tested on election day.

Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse

Studying discourse apparent in campaign messaging helps explain candidates' strategies for influencing voters. Particularly pertinent to political communications, the Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourse (Functional Theory) was applied to the 1996 presidential campaign as a new methodology for examining strategic campaign messaging (Brooks, 1999). Since then, Functional Theory has been applied to all types of political messaging, including

debates (Benoit et al., 2007; Benoit & Henson, 2009; Benoit & Rill, 2013), TV ads; (Airne & Benoit, 2005), and more recently, to campaign tweets (Stein & Benoit, 2021).

Functional Theory "investigates both the functions (acclaims, attacks, defenses) and topics (policy, character) of political campaign messages" (Benoit et al., 2007, p. 77). The theory posits that political campaign functions are relevant for developing voter preferences and are used to enhance voters' perceptions of a candidate (via acclaims), lessen an opponent's desirability (via attacks), or refute and minimize perceived downsides of a candidate (via defenses). Topics (policy and character) as advanced by Functional Theory, for purposes of this study, aligned with issues and traits previously described. Candidate messaging of topics/policy (issues) are important for understanding what positions a successful candidate will support in office; and topics/character (traits) are important for understanding the type of leader that candidate could become if elected to office.

Research of the 2002 mixed-gender general election campaign for Kansas governor between Kathleen Sebelius and her male opponent assessed the most prevalent issues, character traits, and attacks employed by both candidates in that campaign's TV ads (Bystrom et al., 2004). Lacking from the published research, however, was how the traits and issues that were referenced in those attacks were specifically gendered. Because stereotypes of a female candidate may be most consequential when stereotypes are highlighted by an opponent, this research sought to understand the extent of that strategy in the Kelly-Schmidt race.

Understanding how Kelly navigated traits and issues in her campaign communications, and how she came under attack from her opponent, prompts the following questions for research.

Research Questions

RQ1: In Kelly's campaign communications, are feminine traits or masculine traits more prevalent for promoting her candidacy?

RQ2a: Are feminine or masculine issues more prevalent in Kelly's campaign communications?

RQ2b: Which issues are most prevalent in Kelly's campaign communications?

RQ3: Do Schmidt's campaign communications contain more acclaims, attacks, or defenses?

RQ4: Of Schmidt's campaign attacks on Kelly, what traits—feminine or masculine—are more frequent in his attacks?

RQ5a: Of Schmidt's campaign attacks on Kelly, what issues—feminine or masculine—do his attacks target?

RQ5b: Which issues are most prevalent in Schmidt's campaign attacks on Kelly?

RQ6: How did Kelly and her campaign treat the issue of abortion in gendered terms in a divisive election year?

RQ7: What strategy was employed for Kelly's campaign communications regarding gendered trait and issue treatment?

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Research Methods, Population, and Data Collection

Quantitative Analysis

This study's quantitative content analysis assessed the presence of frames relative to gendered traits and issues in campaign communications of Kansas gubernatorial candidates, Laura Kelly and Derek Schmidt. Campaign communications that constituted the sample population included the candidates' campaign tweets; TV ads from the two candidates and prominent third parties; and candidates' debate statements. Materials collected for analysis were produced or aired during the general election, a period between August 3 (the first day after the primary election), and November 8, 2022 (the date of the general election).

Tweets were collected manually during the campaign from the candidates' campaign Twitter accounts @LauraKellyKS (Kelly, n.d.) and @DerekSchmidtKS (Schmidt, n.d.). In consultation with the Kelly campaign (Communications director, personal communication, September 27, 2022), a decision was made not to collect Facebook or Instagram posts for evaluation, given that the Kelly campaign dedicated its social media focus primarily to Twitter. According to Parmelee, (2014), Twitter is the go-to for political news, with Facebook being less meaningful for political communications. Further, Stein and Benoit (2021) offer that Trump's heavy reliance in 2016 on Twitter launched that medium to its prominence as a campaign communications tool. For this study, the number of tweets evaluated totaled 638 of which 274 were Kelly's tweets and 364 were Schmidt's. The unit of analysis was the tweet. Tweets eliminated from consideration were retweets, duplicates, and generic fundraising or voting appeals. Additionally, endorsements were not considered unless the candidate added, embellished, or repeated language in their own tweet. In tweets, coders did not take into

consideration any links, images, or retweeted language. Coder analysis was limited to candidates' language only.

TV ads produced from the general election for each candidate were examined, as were ads produced by prominent supporting organizations airing ads on their behalf: the Republican Governors Association (RGA) in support of Schmidt, and the Kansas Values Institute (KVI) in support of Kelly. TV ads produced and aired by other political action committees with minimal expenditures in the race were eliminated from study. TV ads were secured online from Washburn University's collected Kansas political ads (Kansas Institute for Politics). A total of 44 TV ads were evaluated reflecting 23 ads supporting Kelly (including 13 from KVI) and 21 ads supporting Schmidt (including 10 from RGA). Of these, two ads dated August 1 (one from KVI and one from RGA) were included in the general election evaluation. The unit of analysis was the TV ad.

Debates evaluated for quantitative content analysis were held on September 10 at the Kansas State Fair in Hutchinson and on October 5 at a debate organized by the Johnson County Bar Association in Overland Park. Video recordings of these debates were secured online from Washburn University's collected Kansas candidate debates (Kansas Institute for Politics) and were transcribed by the author. For the two debates, a debate statement was considered each candidate's opening statement, response to a question, rebuttal, and closing statement. The unit of analysis was the debate statement. A total of 110 debate statements were evaluated, 54 of which were Kelly's, and 56 of which were Schmidt's.

Qualitative Analysis

Besides quantitative content analysis, qualitative feedback was obtained that resulted from two in-person interviews conducted with Laura Kelly in Topeka, Kansas, during the

general election (September 29 and October 11), a telephone interview with Kelly's pollster (October 17) and subsequent email communications, and five interviews with Kelly's campaign staff that occurred during the general election, and two that occurred after November 8. In these interviews, the author secured feedback that included the candidate's intended or passive use of gendered traits and issues, strategies concerning campaign issues, and perspectives on the opponent's campaign communications. Responses from interviews were evaluated and included in the discussion and conclusion sections for providing insight and context to Kelly's campaign strategies.

Variables Operationalized

RQ1, RQ2a, and RQ2b Variables

The independent variable for RQ1, RQ2a, and RQ2b was each TV ad, tweet, and debate statement under study from the Kelly campaign and each TV ad of the Kansas Values Institute (KVI) aired on her behalf. The dependent variable for RQ1 was any trait perceived as masculine or feminine apparent in the campaign communication that described Kelly's character. The dependent variable for RQ2a and RQ2b was any campaign issue named in the communication under review.

To address RQ1, traits were coded as feminine or masculine based on communal and agentic descriptors provided in psychology research by Hentschel et al. (2019, Appendix, p. 19). Communal terms were considered those that aligned more with feminine traits; and agentic terms were considered those that aligned more with masculine traits. Examples of attributes consistent with feminine traits included collaborative, likable, modest, sincere, and understanding. Attributes consistent with masculine traits included analytical, competent, competitive, firm, decisive, and direct. Through inductive analysis of Kelly and Schmidt communications,

additional terms outside of Hentschel et al. (2019) included honesty as a feminine descriptor, and determined, experienced, and qualified as agentic descriptors.

To address RQ2a, issue keywords searched in Kelly and Schmidt communications were derived from gendered political issues discussed in multiple scholarly articles. For the purposes of this study, issues expressed as feminine were: abortion, children/families, diversity/race, drug addiction/mental health, education, health/healthcare/Medicaid, LGBTQ/transgender, poverty, seniors/Medicare/Social Security, water/environment/climate, and women's rights. Issues expressed as masculine were: agriculture, business/industry/economy (including inflation), crime, death penalty, energy, government distrust, guns/Second Amendment, highways/transportation/infrastructure, housing, illegal drugs, immigration/border, jobs/labor/ workforce, taxes/budgets (including deficits), unemployment, and veterans/military/first responders. In referenced literature, housing and unemployment were classified in different sources as masculine or feminine. In this study, the terms were coded according to their application. For instance, unemployment and housing as economic indicators were typically masculine; but if they referred to personal experiences or family impact, they were coded as feminine.

For addressing RQ2b—which issues were most prevalent in Kelly's campaign communications—top feminine and masculine issues named by Kelly across platforms were compiled and ranked.

For identifying issues in campaign communications, coders identified manifest content, or those issues that typically were overtly expressed or indicated based on a description. For traits, coders identified manifest content—for example, when terms such as leadership or collaborative were named—as well as latent content, which required coders to infer a trait based

on the language's phrasing (Benoit, 2011). An illustration of latent content is found in a Kelly tweet of November 6 in which she states: "When we finally expand Medicaid—when not if— we'll expand access to affordable healthcare for 150,000 hard-working Kansans." This language was coded for latent content of the masculine trait "firm." The tweet also displayed a manifest feminine issue coded as health/healthcare/Medicaid.

RQ3 Variables

For RQ3, Schmidt's campaign messages were evaluated for presence of a campaign function: an attack, an acclaim, or a defense, as defined by Benoit (2007). The independent variable was each tweet, TV ad, and debate statement under study from the Schmidt campaign— as well as each Republican Governors Association (RGA) general election TV ad. The dependent variable was an attack on Kelly or her campaign, an attack not directed at Kelly, a Schmidt acclaim, or Schmidt defense. It was possible that a single communication under study could contain more than one function, for example, both an attack and an acclaim.

What was important for this research was how the communication was categorized by function: did the tweet, TV ad, or debate statement contain an acclaim, an attack, and/or a defense? If so, it was counted in that category. From that exercise, communications that attacked Kelly could then be isolated and evaluated for presence of traits or issues. It may be noted that the coding scheme established by Benoit (2007) reduced the content of TV ads and debate statements into units to establish "a more precise picture of the degree to which a political spot is positive, negative, or defensive" (p. 249). For purposes of this study, the author did not pursue the degree of negativity of a campaign message, but more specifically, the traits and issues attacked and how they were gendered. Finally, communications bearing acclaims, attacks, and

defenses were each considered in proportion to all coded Schmidt communications featuring these approaches.

RQ4, RQ5a, and RQ5b Variables

For evaluating whether Schmidt's attacks more commonly undermined Kelly using feminine or masculine traits (RQ4) and issues (RQ5a), the independent variable was each tweet, TV ad, and debate statement under study from the Schmidt campaign, as well as each RGA TV ad aired on his behalf. The dependent variable was any trait or issue that Schmidt referenced in those communications when a Schmidt attack of Kelly was apparent. For RQ5b—which issues were most prevalent in Schmidt' attacks—the independent variable was each Schmidt tweet, each Schmidt and RGA TV ad, and each Schmidt debate statement. The dependent variable was any issue named in attacks upon Kelly.

RQ6 Focus

For evaluating Kelly's treatment of the issue of abortion, qualitative analysis focused on recurring themes from interview statements of Kelly and her campaign staff, as well as in Kelly's tweets, TV ads, and debate statements.

RQ7 Focus

For evaluating the strategy for Kelly's campaign communications regarding gendered trait and issue treatment, qualitative analysis focused on themes in Kelly's interviews.

Coding Process

Codebooks were created to guide coders in recording the presence of gendered traits and issues in collected communications. One codebook contained protocols for recording traits and issues present in communications of TV ads, tweets, and debate statements of Kelly (Appendix A). Another codebook contained protocols for recording functions—acclaims, attacks, and

defenses—made by Schmidt, as well as gendered treatment of traits and issues present in his attacks on Kelly (Appendix B). Traits were largely borrowed from the existing feminine and masculine attributes listed in the appendix of Hentschel et al. (2019), and the list was expanded or narrowed based on observations within the communications under study. Issues were derived from sources including past campaign research and issues referenced in the Kelly-Schmidt race.

Once all campaign communications were collected and organized, two coders (one of which was the author) undertook a period of training and test coding through which the coders reviewed and amended definitions, refined categories, and revised codebooks. For intercoder reliability, the two coders independently coded 40 tweets from the primary election campaigns using 20 tweets of each candidate's campaign Twitter account from July 2022. From that exercise, additional clarifications were made to the codebook, and additional test coding of alternative primary tweets was performed. Analysis was completed for sampling of Kelly and Schmidt tweets, and tests were conducted to control for agreement by chance using Cohen's kappa. Results returned agreement of .88 for issues and .75 for traits. Agreement of .78 was returned for coding of Schmidt acclaims, attacks, and defenses.

Including TV ads from KVI and RGA, all primary election TV ads ($n = 14$) for the two candidates were coded and tested for intercoder reliability. Cohen's kappa returned agreement of 1.0 for issues and .75 for traits. For acclaims, attacks, and defenses apparent in the Schmidt/RGA ads, of which there were only four, coders arrived at 75% agreement. No primary debate samples were available for testing, so for testing intercoder reliability of debates, the author coded 50% of Kelly and Schmidt statements from the state fair debate transcript and compared results to those of the second coder. Of these statements, Cohen's kappa returned agreement of .77 for issues and

1.0 for traits. Cohen's kappa returned agreement of .83 for Schmidt acclaims, attacks, and defenses.

Coding Examples

Among the communications evaluated, tweets provided succinct illustrations for use of traits and issues by the candidates. As examples, in an October 10 tweet, Kelly described her interest in working with others, a feminine trait. The issue concerned children, an issue considered feminine (see Figure 3.1). A featured Schmidt tweet dated August 23 attacks Kelly on the issue of services to children and on the masculine trait of leadership (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.1.

Kelly Tweet Coded as Trait of Collaboration and Issue of Children

Figure 3.2.

Schmidt Tweet Attack on Trait of Leadership and Issue of Children

Tweets were coded as attacks on feminine traits when language, used by Schmidt in multiple tweets, suggested Kelly looked the other way and played politics, or offered no apologies, for example, to Kansas parents for the school lockdowns and their impacts. Such language attacked feminine traits described as understanding, sympathetic, or compassionate. An example of such a Schmidt tweet dated September 7 was coded as an attack on a feminine trait. It was also coded for an attack on Kelly regarding the issue of education, as well as a Schmidt acclaim in which he stated his intention never to lock students out of schools (see Figure 3.3).

Whereas a tweet was short and likely to contain only one or few references to issues and traits (if one was apparent), TV ads and debate statements often had references to multiple traits and issues. It was incumbent upon the coders to be aware of that likelihood and to code accordingly.

Figure 3.3.

Schmidt Tweet Acclaim and Attacks on Compassion and Education

Interviews

Interviews with Kelly were conducted in person by the author in Topeka, Kansas, on September 29, and October 11. Telephone interviews with campaign staff (with either the campaign director or the communications director) were conducted during the general election campaign on August 15, September 12 and 27, October 10 and 24, and after the campaign on November 17 and 18. An interview with the campaign's polling firm was conducted by telephone on October 17 and a subsequent exchange of emails occurred. For interviews with the campaign staff and pollster, typed notes were taken of discussions. Campaign staff also provided the author internal campaign materials including memos, polling data, and talking points used by the campaign in its communications strategy.

Appendix C provides a narrative capturing the most relevant content of interviews and feedback secured from discussions with Kelly, as well as her campaign staff and pollster. Perspectives include to what extent traits and issues were employed in Kelly's campaign communications and the candidate's perspectives on attacks made by her opponent. This information was useful for better understanding the campaign communications evaluated for the quantitative analysis of this research, and lent additional insight and context to the overall body of research.

Chapter 4 - Findings

Kelly Traits and Issues

The first research question (RQ1a) sought to determine whether feminine traits or masculine traits were more prevalent for promoting Kelly's candidacy. Among a total of 280 coded traits in Kelly's communications, the overall use of masculine traits ($n = 150$, 53.6%) exceeded use of feminine traits ($n = 130$, 46.4%). Among tweets, more masculine traits ($n = 107$; 51.9%) were apparent than feminine traits ($n = 99$; 48.1%). Also, among debate statements, masculine traits prevailed ($n = 37$; 64.9%) over feminine ones ($n = 20$; 35.1%). TV ads for Kelly, however, contained fewer masculine attributes ($n = 6$; 35.3%) compared to feminine attributes ($n = 11$; 64.9%). Even with these differences, a chi-square test did not reach statistical significance at $p < .05$ in the relationship among the platforms relative to use of Kelly's traits ($X^2(2, 280) = 5.45, p = .066$). However, these results are significant at $p < .10$, and these findings (summarized in Table 4.1) suggest the relationships are meaningful and worth examining further.

Table 4.1.

Chi-Square Test for Kelly Traits, Feminine and Masculine, by Platform

Gender	Tweets		TV ads		Debate statements	
	n	column %	*n*	column %	*n*	column %
Feminine	99	48.1	11	64.7	20	35.1
Masculine	107	51.9	6	35.3	37	64.9
Total	206	100.0	17	100.0	57	100.0

Note. Coded traits ($n = 280$): feminine ($n = 130$; 46.4%); masculine ($n = 150$; 53.6%).
$X^2(2, 280) = 5.45, p = .066$

A difference of proportions test resulted in a statistically significant finding for Kelly's feminine and masculine traits among debate statements in the two-tailed test (z = -1.924, p = .054). Kelly's use of masculine traits in debate statements (n = 37) were 24.7% of evaluated communications, while less prominent were Kelly' use of feminine traits (n = 20) at 15.4% of all evaluated communications with feminine attributes. Difference of proportions tests did not result in statistically significant relationships for tweets (z = 0.912, p = .362) or TV ads (z = 1.559, p = .119). Here, Kelly's use of feminine traits in tweets (n = 99) were 76.2% of evaluated messages that used feminine traits, while her tweets that used masculine traits (n = 107) were 71.3% of messages coded for masculine traits. Kelly's application of feminine traits in TV ads (n = 11) were 8.5% of all Kelly's evaluated communications using feminine traits, while TV ads with masculine traits (n = 6) were only 4.0% of messages coded with masculine attributes. (See Table 4.2.)

Table 4.2.

Kelly Feminine and Masculine Traits: Difference of Proportions Tests

Gender	Tweets	TV ads	Debates	Total
	n (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)
Feminine	99 (76.2)	11 (8.5)	20 (15.4)	130 (100.0)
Masculine	107 (71.3)	6 (4.0)	37 (24.7)	150 (100.0)

Tweets (z = 0.912, p = .362); TV ads (z = 1.559, p = .119); debate statements (z = -1.924, p = .054).

The next research question asked if feminine or masculine issues were more apparent in Kelly's campaign communications (RQ2a). Descriptive analysis (Table 4.3) found that among 528 issue references in Kelly communications, masculine issues ($n = 303$; 57.4%) were more frequently referenced than feminine ones ($n = 225$; 42.6%). For this evaluation, however, masculine issues were more numerous in all platforms—tweets (masculine: $n = 174$ [57.2%] compared to feminine: $n = 130$ [42.8%]); TV ads (masculine: $n = 38$ [62.3%] compared to feminine: $n = 23$ [37.7%]); and debate statements (masculine: $n = 91$ [55.8%] compared to feminine: $n = 72$ [44.2%]). Still, a chi-square test did not indicate statistical significance in the relationship among the platforms relative to use of Kelly's masculine and feminine issues ($X^2(2, 528) = .77$, $p = .681$).

Table 4.3.

Chi-Square Test for Kelly Issues, Feminine and Masculine, by Platform

Gender	Tweets		TV ads		Debate statements	
	n	column %	n	column %	n	column %
Feminine	130	42.8	23	37.7	72	44.2
Masculine	174	57.2	38	62.3	91	55.8
Total	304	100.0	61	100.0	163	100.0

Note. Coded issues ($n = 528$): feminine ($n = 225$; 42.6%); masculine ($n = 303$; 57.4%).

$X^2(2, 528) = .77$, $p = .681$

Regarding the next research question (RQ2b), the analysis found that of Kelly's top five referenced feminine issues and masculine issues across all platforms, masculine issues ($n = 259$; 56.2%) outnumbered feminine issues ($n = 202$; 43.8%). Among masculine issues, the top five by rank were: business/industry/economy ($n = 89$; 34.4%); jobs/labor/workforce ($n = 58$; 22.4%); taxes/budgets ($n = 57$; 22.0%); highways/transportation/infrastructure ($n = 29$; 11.2%); and veterans/military/first responders ($n = 26$; 10.0%). Among feminine issues, the top five by rank were: education ($n = 78$; 38.6%); children/families ($n = 64$; 31.7%); health/healthcare/Medicaid ($n = 28$; 13.9%); drug addiction/mental health ($n = 17$; 8.4%); and women's rights ($n = 15$; 7.4%). (See Table 4.4.)

Table 4.4.

Kelly's Top Ranked Feminine and Masculine Issues, Platforms Combined

Rank	Top feminine issues			Top masculine issues		
		n	col. %		*n*	col. %
1	Education	78	38.6	Busin/industry/economy	89	34.4
2	Children/families	64	31.7	Jobs/labor/workforce	58	22.4
3	Health/healthcare/Medic	28	13.9	Taxes/budgets	57	22.0
4	Drug addiction/mntl hlth	17	8.4	Highways/transp/infrastr	29	11.2
5	Women's rights	15	7.4	Veterans/milit/first respond	26	10.0
Tot		202	100.0		259	100.0

Note. Among the 10 issues, feminine issues constituted 43.8% of references; masculine issues were 56.2% of references.

Results for difference of proportions tests also were not statistically significant, but did discover that use of feminine and masculine issues were closely balanced as a proportion of gendered communications within each platform (see Table 4.5). Kelly's use of feminine issues in tweets ($n = 130$) constituted 57.8% of evaluated communications that used feminine issues, while her tweets using masculine issues ($n = 174$) were nearly equivalent at 57.4% of all communications coded for masculine issues. Her use of feminine issues in TV ads ($n = 23$) were 10.2% of all her evaluated communications using feminine issues, while her TV ads using masculine issues ($n = 38$) were 12.5% of masculine coded messages. Finally, Kelly's use of feminine issues in debate statements ($n = 72$) were 32.0% of evaluated communications with feminine issues, compared to masculine issues in this platform ($n = 91$) which were 30.0% of masculine coded messages. Test results were as follows: for tweets ($z = 0.081$, $p = .935$); TV ads ($z = -0.824$, $p = .410$); and debate statements ($z = 0.484$, $p = .628$).

Table 4.5

Kelly Feminine and Masculine Issues: Difference of Proportions Tests

Gender	Tweets	TV ads	Debates	Total
	n (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)
Feminine	130 (57.8)	23 (10.2)	72 (32.0)	130 (100.0)
Masculine	174 (57.4)	38 (12.5)	91 (30.0)	150 (100.0)

Tweets ($z = 0.081$, $p = .935$); TV ads ($z = -0.824$, $p = .410$); debate statements ($z = 0.484$, $p = .628$).

Schmidt's Acclaims, Attacks, and Defenses

The following research question (RQ3) asked if Schmidt's campaign communications contained more acclaims, attacks, or defenses. As seen in Table 4.6, an evaluation showed that the frequency of all attacks ($n = 237$; 53.0%) by Schmidt on Kelly and others—often President Biden—exceeded the number of his acclaims ($n = 210$, 47.0%) and defenses ($n = 0$). Also, his attacks exceeded acclaims for each of the three platforms: tweets (attacks: $n = 169$ [53.1%] compared to acclaims: $n = 149$ [46.9%]); TV ads (attacks: $n = 21$ [58.3%] compared to acclaims: $n = 15$ [41.7%]); and debate statements (attacks: $n = 47$ [50.5%] compared to acclaims: $n = 46$ [49.5%]). This outcome contradicts other political communications studies using Functional Theory which returned findings that challengers in gubernatorial races issued more acclaims than attacks in tweets (Stein & Benoit, 2021), TV ads (Airne & Benoit, 2005), and debates (Benoit et al., 2007).

Table 4.6.

Schmidt Acclaims, Attacks, and Defenses by Platform

Function	Tweets		TV ads		Debates		Total	
	n	column %	n	column %	n	column %	n	column %
Acclaims	149	46.9	15	41.7	46	49.5	210	47.0
Attacks	169	53.1	21	58.3	47	50.5	237	53.0
Defenses	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

When analyzed using difference of proportions tests relative to the frequencies of his acclaims and attacks in platforms (see Table 4.7), results did not indicate statistically significant relationships for Schmidt tweets ($z = 0.083$, $p = .934$), TV ads ($z = 0.666$, $p = .505$), or debate statements ($z = -0.539$, $p = .590$). Of note, is that the proportion of Schmidt's attacks and acclaims within each platform is fairly balanced, with tweet attacks ($n = 169$) comprising 71.3% of all platform attacks and acclaims ($n = 149$) being 71.0% of all his acclaims. TV ad attacks ($n = 21$) contained 8.9% of all attacks, and TV ad acclaims ($n = 15$) contained 7.1% of all acclaims. Lastly, debate statements attacks ($n = 47$) were 19.8% of all attacks, and a slightly lower proportion than acclaims ($n = 46$) at 21.9%.

Table 4.7.

Schmidt Acclaims, Attacks, and Defenses: Difference of Proportions Tests, by Platform

Function	Tweets	TV ads	Debates	Total
	n (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)
Acclaims	149 (71.0)	15 (7.1)	46 (21.9)	210 (100.0)
Attacks	169 (71.3)	21 (8.9)	47 (19.8)	237 (100.0)

Note. No defenses were found or coded in Schmidt tweets, TV ads, or debate statements. Tweets ($z = 0.083$, $p = .934$); TV ads ($z = 0.666$, $p = .505$); and debate statements ($z = -0.539$, $p = .590$).

Kelly Traits and Issues Attacked

Asked in the next research question (RQ4) was whether Schmidt's communications that attacked Kelly were more frequent for feminine traits or for masculine traits. Among all coded communications for Schmidt attacks on traits ($n = 133$), his total attacks on Kelly were slightly higher using masculine traits ($n = 69$; 51.9%) than those with feminine traits ($n = 64$; 48.1%). (See Table 4.8.) A chi-square test indicated statistical significance in the relationship among the platforms relative to Schmidt attacks on masculine and feminine traits ($X^2(2, 133) = 9.55$, $p = .008$). Among separate platforms, Schmidt's attacks in debate statements leaned much more heavily to masculine traits ($n = 26$; 74.3%) than feminine traits ($n = 9$; 25.7%). For tweets, feminine traits attacked ($n = 46$; 56.1%) exceeded attacks on masculine traits ($n = 36$; 43.9%). Also, for TV ads, Schmidt attacks on feminine attributes ($n = 9$; 56.3%) exceeded attacks on masculine ones ($n = 7$; 43.8%).

Table 4.8.

Chi-Square Test for Schmidt Attacks on Kelly Traits by Gender and Platform

Gender	Tweets		TV ads		Debate statements	
	n	column %	*n*	column %	*n*	column %
Feminine	46	56.1	9	56.3	9	25.7
Masculine	36	43.9	7	43.8	26	74.3
Total	82	100.0	16	100.0	35	100.0

Note. Coded traits ($n = 133$): feminine ($n = 64$; 48.1%); masculine ($n = 69$; 51.9%).

($X^2(2, 133) = 9.55$, $p = .008$)

When analyzed using difference of proportions tests, two statistically significant relationships resulted—one for tweets and one for debate statements. Schmidt's tweet attacks on feminine traits of Kelly ($n = 46$) represented 71.9% of all feminine trait attacks, while his tweets attacking masculine traits ($n = 36$) were only 52.2% of all masculine trait attacks, with a statistically significant relationship ($z = 2.335$, $p = .020$) in a two-tailed test. In this regard, Schmidt used tweets as a more common platform for attacking Kelly on feminine traits. Alternatively, Schmidt's attacks on Kelly traits in debate statements referenced masculine traits ($n = 26$; 37.7%) more than feminine ones ($n = 9$; 14.1%). When analyzed using a difference of proportions test, a statistically significant relationship was found ($z = -3.091$, $p = .002$) in a two-tailed test. Schmidt's attacks on Kelly traits in TV ads—while slightly higher using feminine traits ($n = 9$; 14.1%) than masculine ones ($n = 7$; 10.1%)—were not statistically significant in a difference of proportions test, ($z = 0.694$, $p = .488$). (See Table 4.9.)

Table 4.9.

Schmidt Attacks on Kelly Traits: Difference of Proportions Tests, by Platform

Gender	Tweets	TV ads	Debates	Total
	n (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)
Feminine	46 (71.9)	9 (14.1)	9 (14.1)	64 (100.0)
Masculine	36 (52.2)	7 (10.1)	26 (37.7)	69 (100.0)

Attacks on tweets ($z = 2.335$, $p = .020$), TV ads ($z = 0.694$, $p = .488$), and debate statements ($z = -3.091$, $p = .002$), two-tailed.

For the next research question (RQ5a) regarding the gender of issues Schmidt targeted when attacking Kelly, results showed a higher overall frequency of attacks on masculine (n = 198; 57.4%) than feminine issues (n = 147; 42.6%). While TV ads had more instances of attacks by Schmidt on feminine issues (n = 27; 52.9%) than masculine issues (n = 24; 47.1%), among the other two platforms, masculine issues were attacked more frequently. Among tweets, attacks on masculine issues (n = 107; 56.6%) exceeded those on feminine ones (n = 82; 43.4%); and among debate statements, Schmidt attacked masculine issues at a much higher frequency (n = 67; 63.8%) than he attacked feminine attributes (n = 38; 36.2%). While a chi-square test, did not result in a statistically significant result, ($X^2(2, 345) = 4.04$, $p = .133$), possibly due to its small sample size, this comparison does provide useful feedback. (See Table 4.10.)

Table 4.10.

Chi-Square Test for Schmidt Attacks on Kelly Issues by Gender and Platform

Gender	Tweets		TV ads		Debate statements	
	n	column %	n	column %	n	column %
Feminine	82	43.4	27	52.9	38	36.2
Masculine	107	56.6	24	47.1	67	63.8
Total	189	100.0	51	100.0	105	100.0

Note. Coded issues (n = 345): feminine (n = 147; 42.6%); masculine (n = 198; 57.4%).

($X^2(2, 345) = 4.04$, $p = .133$)

For research question RQ5b concerning which issues among Schmidt's attacks were more prevalent, difference of proportions tests did not produce results with statistically significant relationships in two-tailed tests for tweets ($z = 0.321$, $p = .748$), TV ads ($z = 1.616$, $p = .106$), or debate statements ($z = -1.595$, $p = .111$). As seen in Table 4.11, Schmidt's attacks on feminine issues of Kelly tweets ($n = 82$; 55.8%) were slightly higher than the proportion of masculine attacks among tweets ($n = 107$; 54.0%). His attacks in TV ads on feminine issues of Kelly ($n = 27$; 18.4%) were also higher than the proportion of masculine attacks among TV ads ($n = 24$; 12.1%). Again, while not statistically significant, Schmidt used debates far more for attacks on masculine issues ($n = 67$; 33.8%) than he did compared to feminine issue attacks ($n = 38$; 25.9%).

Table 4.11.

Schmidt Attacks on Kelly Issues: Difference of Proportions Tests, by Platform

Gender	Tweets	TV ads	Debates	Total
	n (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)	*n* (row %)
Feminine	82 (55.8)	27 (18.4)	38 (25.9)	147 (100.0)
Masculine	107 (54.0)	24 (12.1)	67 (33.8)	198 (100.0)

Attacks on tweets ($z = 0.321$, $p = .748$), TV ads ($z = 1.616$, $p = .106$), and debate statements ($z = -1.595$, $p = .111$), two-tailed.

To further examine RQ5b, Spearman's rank order correlation was computed separately for tweets, TV ads, and debate statements to determine the relationship between top ranked issues referenced by Kelly in her communications and Schmidt's attacks on them. For tweets, a positive and strong correlation existed between the two variables, $r(8) = .71$, $p = .021$, that was statistically significant using the two-tailed test. Nine of Kelly's top 10 referenced issues in tweets were issues attacked by Schmidt (Table 4.12).

Table 4.12.

Kelly Tweet Agenda Versus Schmidt Tweet Attack Agenda

Issues	Kelly tweets			Schmidt tweet attacks		
	n	%	Rank	*n*	%	Rank
Business/industry/economy	61	21.6	1	28	19.3	3
Education	44	15.5	2	42	29.0	1
Children/families	43	15.2	3	15	10.3	5
Jobs/labor/workforce	40	14.1	4	18	12.4	4
Highways/transp/infrastructure	24	8.5	5	2	1.4	8
Taxes/budgets	21	7.4	6	29	20.0	2
Health/healthcare/Medicaid	14	4.9	7.5	0	0.0	10
Veteran/military/first responder	14	4.9	7.5	7	4.8	6
Drug addiction/mental health	11	3.9	9.5	2	1.4	8
Women's rights	11	3.9	9.5	2	1.4	8
Total	283	100.0	-	145	100.0	-

Note. Issues in italics denote feminine gender.

Top 10 Kelly tweets tested for Spearman's rank order *(r(8) = .71, p = .021)*, two-tailed test.

Using Spearman's rank order correlation for TV ads, there was a positive and moderate correlation, $r(11) = .55$, $p \leq .05$, that was statistically significant with Schmidt attacking eight of Kelly's referenced issues as seen in Table 4.13.

Table 4.13.

Kelly TV Ad Agenda Versus Schmidt TV Ad Attack Agenda

Issues	Kelly TV ads			Schmidt TV ad attacks		
	n	%	Rank	*n*	%	Rank
Taxes/budgets	20	32.8	1	6	15.8	3.5
Education	16	26.2	2	6	15.8	3.5
Veteran/military/first responder	5	8.2	3	8	21.1	1.5
Children/families	4	6.6	4.5	3	7.9	6
Jobs/labor/workforce	4	6.6	4.5	0	0.0	11
Business/industry/economy	3	4.9	6	2	5.3	7
Agriculture	2	3.3	7.5	1	2.6	8
Crime	2	3.3	7.5	4	10.5	5
Health/healthcare/Medicaid	1	1.6	11	0	0.0	11
LGBTQ/transgender	1	1.6	11	8	21.1	1.5
Seniors/Medicare	1	1.6	11	0	0.0	11
Energy	1	1.6	11	0	0.0	11
Highways/transp/infrastructure	1	1.6	11	0	0.0	11
Total	61	100.0	-	38	100.0	-

Note. Issues in italics denote feminine gender.

Kelly TV ads all issues named, Spearman's rank order ($r(11) = .55$, $p \leq .05$), two-tailed test.

Using Spearman's rank order correlation for debate statements, there was a positive and strong correlation, $r(9) = .75$, $p = .008$, that was statistically significant with all of Kelly's top-ranked issues drawing attacks from Schmidt (Table 4.14). (Note that degrees of freedom for the tests differ: in tweets, the top 10 Kelly issues were tested; in debate statements, 11 issues were tested, since two issues tied for tenth with the same number of Kelly references; and in TV ads, all 13 issues referenced by Kelly were tested, since five issues tied at tenth place.)

Table 4.14.

Kelly Debate Agenda Versus Schmidt Debate Attack Agenda

Issues	Kelly debate statements			Schmidt debate attacks		
	n	%	Rank	*n*	%	Rank
Business/industry/economy	25	18.4	1	11	13.6	3
Education	18	13.2	2	12	14.8	2
Children/families	17	12.5	3	10	12.3	4
Taxes/budgets	16	11.8	4	16	19.8	1
Jobs/labor/workforce	14	10.3	5	7	8.6	5.5
Health/healthcare/Medicaid	13	9.6	6	3	3.7	9.5
Water/environment/climate	7	5.1	8	4	4.9	8
Agriculture	7	5.1	8	2	2.5	11
Veterans/milit/first responders	7	5.1	8	7	8.6	5.5
Drug addiction/mental health	6	4.4	10.5	3	3.7	9.5
Immigration/border	6	4.4	10.5	6	7.4	7
Total	136	100.0	-	81	100.0	-

Note. Issues in italics denote feminine gender.

Top 11 issues tested for Spearman's rank order *(r(9) = .75, p = .008)*, two-tailed test.

Kelly on Abortion and Gendered Strategy

Asked in the next question (RQ6) was how Kelly and her campaign treated the issue of abortion in gendered terms in a divisive election year. Kelly's references to abortion among the platforms were rare with only two references among tweets, four in debate statements, and none in TV ads. In each case, Kelly teamed this feminine issue with a masculine trait, expressing consistency in her record, firmness in her stance, and decisiveness in who should, or should not, be involved in this healthcare decision. In an interview with the author—and a nod to the feminine trait of collaboration—Kelly commented that the issue just didn't bring us together. (See Table 4.15.)

Table 4.15.

Abortion Treatment by Kelly and Campaign in Tweets, Debates, and Interviews

Statement	Treatment	
	Trait	Gender M/F
"I have been consistent on my position on this issue since I entered the state senate 18 years ago. I will stay consistent no matter what happens." L. Kelly, debate, Sept. 10, 2022	Consistent	M
"Politicians should not be making decisions about women's healthcare. Women make up at least 50% of our population. They are entitled to the same rights as the other 50%." L. Kelly, debate, Sept. 10, 2022	Decisive	M
"Reproductive healthcare decisions should be a private matter between a woman and her physician. We must respect our fellow Kansans' right to make personal health care decisions for themselves." L. Kelly, tweet, Sept. 10. 2022	Decisive	M

"When we stand up for fundamental rights and reject divisive legislation that puts our economy and women's health at risk, we're protecting our future." L. Kelly, tweet, Oct. 5, 2022	Stands up under pressure	M
"I believe and always have believed, and been very consistent on my position on this, that a woman's medical decisions should be made between her, her family, and her doctor." L. Kelly, debate, Oct. 5, 2022	Consistent	M
"For 18 years I've had the same position on this issue. So I really don't have much more to say." L. Kelly, debate, Oct. 5, 2022	Firm	M
On the topic of abortion, "I have a habit of not being vocal on divisive issues that don't bring us together." L. Kelly, personal communication, Oct. 11, 2022	Consistent/ collaborative	M / F
"We don't focus on that topic much. It reinforces that Kelly is focused on righting the ship and minimizing partisan politics." M. Omero, personal communication, Oct. 17, 2022	Persistent/ collaborative	M / F

Asked in the final question (RQ7) was what strategy existed for the Kelly campaign's communications regarding gendered trait and issue treatment. To this question, Kelly's pollster offered that there was no defined strategy specific to gendered traits and issues: "We didn't intentionally think [in terms] of masculine versus feminine" (M. Omero, personal communication, February 23, 2023).

Yet while no intentional effort was put toward gendered treatment, there was clearly an effort undertaken to highlight those aspects of Kelly's strengths that voters perceived as important for the role of governor. Maybe a more latent approach existed without a manifest strategy. For example, when Kelly was asked why she would make a better governor for

Kansans, she offered: "I think it's really the personal qualities that have made me a good governor for this time in Kansas history" (L. Kelly, personal communication, September 29, 2022). Asked how her campaign highlighted those traits, Kelly cited her collaborative campaign theme and her approach to issue priorities:

> You know our middle-of-the-road ads. We've put a huge emphasis on bipartisanship, middle of the road, consensus-building, bringing people together. We really talk about that on a regular basis. And I think we sort of feature some of my 'wonkishness.' We just released our plan for "The Road Ahead" and it's really clearly thought out. These are the things we plan to get done . . . no nonsense, just all business.

> In this description, Kelly presented feminine-defined traits of collaboration, and the
masculine traits closely aligned with analytical and productive. Kelly's "The Road Ahead" laid out plans in her second term to address masculine issues of tax cuts, balanced budgets, and fiscal management, and feminine issues of relief for seniors and families (for purchasing school supplies).

> In the same interview, when asked if she sensed some voters connected with her more strongly because of her female attributes, or because she's a female candidate, Kelly responded in the affirmative, referencing strengths relative to both traits and issues:

> I think, one, people trust me. A lot of figures when they were growing up were women, their teachers. Women are perceived as caregivers. I really do care about the people of Kansas and the children of Kansas, and that's why I fund our education system. I understand the importance of jobs to families; that's why I fund our roads and bridges, so it builds our economy. I think those are the kinds of things where being a woman is incredibly helpful.

In this statement Kelly described herself with feminine traits of honesty (trust) and compassion, and she tied her strengths as a female candidate to issues categorized not only as feminine (education, children/families), but also to issues categorized as masculine (jobs, highways, and economy).

Kelly also believed that gender played into her opponent's criticisms of her. Schmidt's debate attacks portraying Kelly as ineffective was a gender-nuanced message to "cut me down so that people can't see me as the CEO of the state." Kelly also offered: "Calling me ineffective, that's a code word: 'You're a woman, and you can't be a leader if you're a woman.'" But Kelly insisted that Schmidt knew of her abilities, given their service together in the Kansas senate. "He knows perfectly well how capable I am and how effective I am in getting things done, working across the aisle and finding a way to get things done. He knows it" (L. Kelly, personal communication, September 29, 2022).

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This study tested the general election campaign communications of Laura Kelly and Derek Schmidt in the race for Kansas governor to evaluate the gendered treatment of traits and issues—both for how Kelly employed them and for how Schmidt attacked them. By a slim margin, Kelly prevailed in the election with 49.5% of the vote to Schmidt's 47.3% (Kansas Secretary of State, 2022a), and it stands to reason that her campaign communications were critical to this outcome. From research of these communications, two major takeaways were identified—one speaks to the focused manner in which Kelly conducted her campaign; and one speaks to the number and nature of Schmidt's campaign attacks.

Kelly's Focus

Despite Schmidt's reliance on a variety of attacks, Kelly remained largely focused in her communications, reinforcing to voters her strengths for leading the state. In this race, Kelly was considered by a Washburn University political science professor and campaign authority to have run "one of the most disciplined campaigns I've ever seen" (Bahl & Tidd, 2022, last para.). Kelly's campaign offered similar feedback suggesting that the keys to Kelly's success was message discipline, staying focused, and avoiding a temptation to be reactive or go off message (Communications director, personal communication, November 18, 2022).

A content analysis of tweets, TV ads, and debate statements suggested that Kelly employed a mix of feminine and masculine traits and issues for maximizing her campaign communications to voters. Among platforms—for both traits and issues—Kelly relied slightly more on masculine examples, except in her TV ads, which were coded with more feminine traits than masculine ones. Bystrom (2019, p. xlii) offered that "the intimacy of television may demand the use of a more feminine style" while other forms of communication may be "more neutral, or

even masculine, and call for an emphasis on mostly masculine traits associated with winning political office" (p. xlii). Despite Kelly's reliance, in terms of frequency, on masculine traits and topics, her overall application of gender among all platforms was balanced, with traits being 46.4% feminine and 53.6% masculine, and issues being 42.6% feminine and 57.4% masculine.

When Kelly spoke about working with others, her messaging reinforced with voters that she was collaborative, sincere, and likable—all feminine traits. Kelly's signature "middle of the road" slogan captured these feminine attributes, which appeared regularly in her campaign communications and was featured by name in three of her general election campaign ads: TV Ad #5, "Middle seat" (August 19, 2022); TV Ad #9, "Middle of the road 2: Tax cut" (September 30, 2022); and TV Ad #12, "Back in the middle of this road" (October 18, 2022).

Among masculine traits, surfacing regularly in Kelly's communications were descriptors of determined, achievement-oriented, competent, and consistent. Research suggests this trait-balancing behavior among women candidates is intended to maximize their likability while communicating masculine qualities voters perceive to be consistent with effective government leaders (Bauer & Santia, 2022). Research also suggests that "voters prefer their elected officials to exhibit such masculine characteristics as leadership, experience, and toughness but also want them to be honest, sincere, and, in more recent years, willing to cooperate with others" (Bystrom, 2019, p. xli). Kelly's strategy seemed to align with this trait-balancing model.

In Kelly's issues strategy, as corroborated by the difference of proportions tests, Kelly balanced feminine and masculine issues among all the platforms studied, but she leaned toward masculine ones, particularly among her top ranked feminine and masculine issue references. Kelly often combined the ability to get something done concerning a masculine issue with a feminine trait of collaboration. By working across the aisle or working from the middle, Kelly

talked of accomplishments on masculine, or agentic, topics. In terms of frequency, first among

Kelly's masculine referenced issues with 89 mentions was the category of

business/industry/economy, and second with 58 mentions was jobs/labor/workforce. During the

September 29 interview with the author, in a reference to bringing Panasonic and 4,000 jobs to

Kansas, Kelly indicated her issue ownership of economic development, having appropriated the

typically Republican-advantaged topic. Yet in the TV ad that featured this achievement, she

spoke of having "brought both parties together to land one of the world's largest employers,"

continuing to suggest that working collaboratively was a part of the success.

In third place for the top-referenced masculine issue with 57 references was

taxes/budgets. On this topic, Kelly offered proof of her budget knowhow, reminding voters of

her 14 years of experience serving on the budget committee in the state senate. A tweet by Kelly

pollster, Margie Omero, reinforced that Kelly's work to secure tax cuts on food sales was

tracking positively with voters in final polling (Omero, 2022). (See Figure 5.1.)

Figure 5.1.

Kelly Pollster Tweet Reinforced Positive Voter Connection to Kelly Tax Cuts

Topping the feminine issues most named by Kelly overall, as well as in each platform, was education and children with 78 and 64 references respectively. These mentions reflected Kelly's interest in being known as the "Education Governor." The topic of education was also featured in one of her general election TV spots: Ad #6, "Need fully funded schools" (September 13, 2022). In this TV ad, Kelly wove the feminine issue of education with the masculine topic of budgets and spoke to her commitment to restore funding to this policy priority.

Although the Kelly campaign offered that no intentional effort was focused on managing communications of specific traits and issues by gender, what seemed effective for Kelly in this female-male matchup was a latent trait-balancing approach relying more on masculine attributes and masculine issues. Based on Kelly's success, in a similar future race for governor, a communications strategy that could advantage a female candidate recommends cultivating gendered traits and issues that lean more masculine. Regarding traits, most effective to highlight would be feminine attributes of likable, honest and collaborative, and masculine attributes of experience and leadership. These traits are reinforced by Bystrom (2019) as largely what "voters prefer their elected officials to exhibit" (p. xli) and also were traits evident in Kelly's communications. Further, analysis suggests that Kelly used more masculine issues in her campaign messaging. To strengthen a female candidate's position, this approach could inform campaign communications for comparable campaigns in the future. As examples, Kelly embraced masculine issues of business/industry, jobs, and tax cuts.

What was not overtly present in these Kelly communications was the topic of abortion. In the first part of September, abortion became the most mentioned topic in campaign ads nationwide among House, Senate and gubernatorial races (Marquez, 2022). In Kelly's communications, she represented the topic as "private medical decisions" (Johnson County

debate, October 5, 2022) and "a private matter between a woman and her physician" (Kelly tweet, September 10, 2022). Given the unanticipated outcome on the Kansas primary's abortion question, increased voter registrations among Kansas women, and heightened attention abortion received in other races in Kansas and across the country, Kelly's limited treatment of abortion in tweets, TV ads, and debates seemed unusual. But an explanation ties back to the discipline exercised by the Kelly campaign. Kelly's pollster offered that "abortion is not a top-of-mind topic when voters think of her" (M. Omero, personal communication, October 17, 2022).

The Kelly campaign did not emphasize abortion in outreach to voters among these platforms studied. In an early interview with the campaign director (personal communication, August 15, 2022), it was suggested that attention to abortion instead would focus on calling and getting out the vote. Kelly also offered that "you may see other groups who strategically target women and young voters on this topic" (L. Kelly, personal communication, October 11, 2022). Kelly's pollster offered that abortion did not need to be front and center for Kelly, that the focus of her messaging remained on "righting the ship" relative to state government while minimizing partisan politics. Kelly explained it this way: "I have a habit of not being vocal on divisive issues that don't bring us together" (L. Kelly, personal communication, October 11, 2022). Talking about abortion could distract her from that focus, and Kelly's record on the topic spoke for itself anyway. As governor, Kelly had prevailed when a socially conservative state legislature tried to ban abortions in Kansas. In the October 5 debate, Kelly stood firm: "For 18 years I've had the same position on this issue. So I really don't have much more to say."

The Kelly campaign offered that abortion was not front and center as an issue. Yet the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* that summer—and in Kansas, the "explosion of engagement we saw on August 2" (Kelly prepared remarks to Greater Kansas City Women's Political Caucus,

September 22, 2022)—likely continued in November to give voters pause. These events may have influenced voting behavior—and even the election outcome—given its narrow margin of victory for Kelly.

Schmidt's Attacks

The second major takeaway of this research regarded the number and the nature of Schmidt's campaign attacks. The study found that Schmidt used all platforms for delivering both attacks to undermine Kelly and acclaims to bolster his own record and proposals. Schmidt's communications did not present defenses—not unusual, in that defenses constituted low frequencies among the three functions in past research using Functional Theory. Schmidt's attacks, however, exceeded acclaims in each of the three platforms. While studies using Benoit's Functional Theory have suggested broadly that candidates attack more often than they acclaim, for challengers in gubernatorial races, this is not the case. Several studies returned findings that challengers in gubernatorial races, specifically, issued more acclaims than attacks in tweets (Stein & Benoit, 2021), TV ads (Airne & Benoit, 2005), and debates (Benoit et al., 2007).

Motives for a challenger to use more acclaims than attacks point to Benoit's perspective that attacks can damage the candidate who is attacking. Even though attacks may diminish the desirability of an opponent, attacks also may distance voters who disapprove of the candidate using attacks (Benoit, 2007). Challengers typically use acclaims for introducing themselves to the electorate, building their favorability ratings, and explaining why they are better suited for elective office, both in terms of character and policy. It appears that Schmidt's strategy deviated from this formula—at least among these platforms—by focusing more on driving negative perceptions of his opponent than on acclaiming his own record or proposals.

By employing attacks on Kelly that exceeded his own acclaims in number, Schmidt potentially displaced opportunities to build and burnish his own qualifying traits or proposed policies. Further, although defenses are more rare—and have their own drawbacks (Benoit, 2007), perhaps voters would have responded to a defense by Schmidt that refuted KVI and Kelly communications linking him to former Governor Brownback and what the Kelly campaign and KVI TV ads referred to as a tax experiment that devastated education funding. What was never forthcoming from the Schmidt campaign, at least among these platforms, was such a defense.

Schmidt's attacks of Kelly traits combined among platforms was higher in number for masculine attributes, but he employed attacks more on feminine traits in tweets and TV ads. Considered statistically significant in a difference of proportions test, his attacks in tweets indicated a much higher proportion of attacks on Kelly's feminine attributes. Feminine traits attacked by Schmidt were Kelly's honesty and skills at collaborating. Schmidt challenged Kelly's middle-of-the-road credentials around which Kelly built much of her campaign identity as a collaborator. In a tweet dated September 2, Schmidt charged that "Laura Kelly has been telling Kansans for months that she is in the middle of the road. Truth is, on the issue of Fairness in Women's Sports and many others she is far from it." On TV, Schmidt doubled down on this charge. One RGA TV ad closed with "she's not middle of the road, and she's not honest with Kansas" (RGA TV Ad #8, "Kelly vetoed transgender ban," September 30, 2022). This accusation referred to Kelly in her own TV ad saying "of course, men should not play girls' sports" (Kelly TV Ad #7, "Men should not play girls sports," September 20, 2022). It was a statement the Schmidt campaign said contradicted Kelly's vetoes of legislation intended to limit transgender athletes' opportunities to compete.

Attacks on her trait of honesty especially disappointed Kelly. When interviewed and asked what quality makes a good governor, Kelly's response was immediate and to the point: "honesty and not telling people what they want to hear, but telling the truth" (L. Kelly, personal communication, September 29, 2022).

Among debate statements, notably higher counts of masculine traits and issues surfaced both for Kelly's references and for Schmidt's attacks. Schmidt's more prevalent frequency of attacks in debates on Kelly's masculine traits was corroborated by a chi-square test and difference of proportions test. These outcomes bear out an expectation that participants in debates employ more competitive (masculine) styles. "Policy debate's competitive nature and emphasis on powerful speaking skills often encourages [*sic*] performances of aggression amongst competitors" (Robertson et al., 2022, p. 1031). Kelly even offered later that during the state fair debate, she felt compelled to elevate her performance and level up to the energy on display by supporters in the audience. "You walk into that state fair debate, and it really is like going into an arena [like] a gladiator" (L. Kelly, personal communication, September 29, 2022). Also, audiences at the two debates—geared to the agricultural community at the state fair and to legal professionals at the bar association debate—could have skewed topics to more agentic interests and expectations.

Among masculine traits, Schmidt attacked perceived shortcomings of Kelly that spoke to a failure of being competent, consistent, effective, and strong. For example, in debates, Schmidt accused Kelly of being an ineffective leader. When Kelly was asked if she sensed her opponent worked to define her leadership skills based on gender, Kelly offered that the attack by Schmidt on her effectiveness (a masculine trait) was apparent throughout the state fair debate (L. Kelly, personal communication, September 29, 2022). On the debate stage, however, Kelly anticipated

the criticism and responded to the charge saying: "Maybe I'm not flashy, but I am effective" (Kansas State Fair debate, closing statement, September 10, 2022). Kelly then pushed back by naming a list of agentic issues she led to success as governor, including new business investments in Kansas, jobs created, taxes cut, and budgets balanced.

Schmidt's attacks on issues leaned slightly more feminine for TV ads owing to his use of the medium to attack Kelly's position on education (for closing schools during COVID-19), on LGBTQ/transgender issues (for supporting transgender women in sports), and on diversity/racism (for recommendations of the Commission on Racial Equity and Justice). Totaled among all platforms, however, for which rank correlation tests proved statistically significant, Schmidt most often attacked masculine issues. In rank order, those top issues Schmidt criticized involved taxes/budgets; business/industry/economy; and jobs/labor/workforce. With these topics, Schmidt suggested that sales taxes on food would be lower if not for Kelly; that overall inflation and high gas prices were attributable to Kelly and Biden policies; and that actual statistics for job creation were not what Kelly's figures claimed.

Schmidt's attacks, while not consequential in turning enough voters against Kelly, may have worked against his own success. Rank correlation tests proved Schmidt directed attacks to the top issues on which Kelly also campaigned, but other issues on which he attacked focused on culture wars playing out nationally and in Republican party politics. While Kelly largely stuck to kitchen-table issues, Schmidt's attacks that included transgender bans in sports and drag shows in Kansas "risked ceding moderate Republicans and independents to Kelly" (Shorman & Bernard, 2022b, para. 43).

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

In a campaign for governor, the outcome is especially consequential. "Except for the presidency, the governor is the most powerful elected official in the country" (Marshall & Mayhead, 2000, p. 124) and a role with the capacity to greatly impact the policies of state government and every person in the state. This study sought to examine the gendered communications strategies of the two leading candidates seeking to fill this important role in Kansas.

Evaluated were Laura Kelly's campaign communications relative to traits and issues, and Derek Schmidt's attacks on Kelly's traits and issues, relative to his own acclaims. The study disclosed patterns of campaign communications that offer relevance for future candidates in a similar gubernatorial matchup.

In that regard, a major takeaway of this research regarded the number and the nature of Schmidt's campaign attacks. His attacks exceeded his acclaims and potentially displaced opportunities for offering voters a sense of his own qualifying traits and policy positions. In this approach, at least during the general election and among these platforms, Schmidt's reliance on attacks meant he possibly spent too little effort on conventional challenger communications—those intended to build favorability ratings and familiarize voters with the candidate's qualifications and fit for the job. Perhaps the Schmidt campaign believed his previous statewide successes in electoral politics had already addressed that function—that acclaims were less necessary. Yet Kelly's polling offered that, well into the general election campaign, Schmidt's unfavorable rating was higher than his favorable rating, and he hadn't created widespread enthusiasm among voters (M. Omero, personal communication, October 17, 2022).

Schmidt directed attacks to the top issues on which Kelly also campaigned, but other issues on which he attacked were cultural issues prominent in Republican politics nationally, including LGBTQ/transgender issues. While Kelly worked to focus on top issues of concern to Kansans, it was suggested that Schmidt's attention to culture wars alienated voters among his own party and among independent voters.

While it is unclear if Kansans voted against Schmidt for his divisive attacks, or voted for Kelly's collaborative style, what is clear is Kelly worked to stay disciplined in her messaging, which is another meaningful takeaway from this study. Kelly worked to sustain focus in her communications, endeavored to concentrate on topics specific to Kansas, and distanced herself from national Democrats associated with the unsteady economy and soaring inflation. In separate interviews, Kelly and her campaign staff addressed the importance of maintaining focus and sidestepping the issues that were national in scope and not a part of everyday Kansans' concerns.

Issues Kelly believed to be important to Kansans addressed the well-being of children and families, and the top feminine issues she featured among all platforms were education and children. Kelly wove the feminine issue of education with the masculine topic of budgets and spoke to her dedication of restoring funding to an area considered important to families and the future.

Among all platforms combined, Kelly's issues focus leaned more to masculine topics. Repeatedly addressing the top categories of masculine issues with references to businesses and jobs, Kelly cited the related capstone success of her first four years: bringing to Kansas the biggest economic development project in the state's history, and with it, thousands of new jobs. Her messaging returned again and again to the successes she helped lead in Kansas, all while working collaboratively to bring people together and to achieve results. Kelly reminded voters of

these critical successes and used them to reinforce and showcase her strengths for leading the state as its top executive officer for four more years.

Relative to traits, Kelly employed a mix of feminine and masculine attributes, with her use of feminine traits less common overall. In her use of feminine attributes, she reinforced collaboration and caring, and in her use of masculine traits, she spoke to her skills and experience needed to accomplish the work at hand. When asked to define power in the context of a governor's role, Kelly offered: "I see power as the ability to get things done…. lead people to get to an agenda that does good things for the state of Kansas" (L. Kelly, personal communication, September 29, 2022). In this description, she referenced one of the Blankenship and Robson (1995) characteristics of feminine style: "conceptualizing the power of public office as a capacity to 'get things done' and to empower others" (p. 359), rather than as a tool for personal ambition.

The first characteristic of feminine style defined by Blankenship and Robson (1995) applied to Kelly, as well. On the characteristic explained as "basing political judgments on concrete, lived experience" (p. 359) was premised perhaps one of Kelly's most consequential decisions—that of closing public school buildings when COVID-19 was at its peak. At a critical crossroads for public health and public education (both feminine issues), Kelly's lived experience as a mother advised her decision-making and directive (Executive Order No. 20-07, 2020) to close school buildings to personal instruction for the remainder of the school year. Not only did Kelly want to protect children's health, but she also felt that parents needed to know what to expect—not just a week at a time—and to plan accordingly.

Research of congressional candidates' campaign styles by Bauer and Santia (2022) offered that female candidates in 2008 exhibited more feminine traits in a campaign year that

coincided with a recession and suggested that voters sought those traits for "comfort and reassurance" (p. 702). Similarly, perhaps the crisis of confidence in our institutions and the specter of rising inflation experienced by voters in 2022 drove them to seek a calming reassurance they found in Kelly's collaborative messaging. While Kelly's use of masculine traits were slightly higher than feminine ones, she reflected feminine attributes, and in fact, her middle-of-the road slogan, premised on the feminine trait of collaboration, was likely the most memorable feature of her campaign communications.

This slogan served as the umbrella for disciplined communications that limited divisiveness, reinforced collaboration, and provided the opportunity to communicate traits and issues considered important to voters. In her inaugural address and swearing-in ceremony on January 9, 2023, Kelly captured the dual communal and achievement-oriented message her campaign reflected: "We got our state back on track, and we did it by working together, as one Kansas—not western or eastern, not Democrat or Republican," Kelly said. "One Kansas" (Kite & Carpenter, 2023).

Limitations

Other research regarding female candidate outcomes has examined the influence of party affiliation, prevailing economic conditions, and treatment by earned media. This study did not consider those factors at length, and any of those influences could add to overall understanding of communications strategies employed by the candidates. Lost in the analysis of written communications are the non-verbal communications that display traits such as energy, emotion, or compassion, as examples. Such an analysis could present additional material for study and add to the evaluation. Also, while the author had access to certain internal communications and polling of one candidate, this study could have benefited from access to the opponent's internal

polling data and campaign staff, and an understanding of circumstances that prompted his attacks relative to gender of traits and issues. A further limitation of this study is not understanding to what extent voters' perceptions and voting intentions were influenced by the gendered communications that were tweeted or aired or debated. These messages varied in frequency of views by voters and offered different capacities for influencing voters.

Contributions to Theory

Despite these limitations, this study makes a meaningful contribution to a vital body of knowledge in the field. Since the 1990s, researchers have applied Functional Theory to the study of candidates' use of acclaims, attacks, and defenses for political races at all levels, domestic and non-domestic, and additionally, have parsed data based on incumbents, challengers, and party affiliation. The current research contributed to Functional Theory for its novel examination of campaign attacks specifically through a lens of gendered treatment. Further, this research considered the theory's application in the loss by the male challenger whose attacks were under study.

The research also contributed to framing theory for its examination of how candidates for governor applied gendered treatment in political communications, specifically to what extent the female candidate employed gendered traits and issues on different communications platforms, and to what extent the male challenger framed gendered traits and issues in his attacks.

Contributions to Literature of Gendered Communications

Findings of this study also challenge the literature on gendered communications. Clearly, Kelly's campaign communications style did not align robustly with traits commonly considered feminine. Overall, her use of masculine traits was 53.6% of total traits coded for all platforms, but in TV ads and debate statements, her masculine trait use approached 65% for each platform.

Even though there was no intentional strategy around use of masculine traits in the campaign, Kelly's communications leaned to masculine trait use. Kelly described her own agentic strengths as competitive and effective, and in addition, offered interview feedback of: "I've always liked problem solving;" "I actually like to get things done;" and "It's hard to knock me off course" (L. Kelly, personal communication, September 29, 2022).

Traits exhibited in Kelly's communications above as competent, effective, and decisive—all masculine—appeared innate to Kelly's character. In a quick pivot back to issues, and an example of perceptible feminine-masculine dissonance, Kelly offered that "being a woman is incredibly helpful" in connection with supporting jobs, roads, bridges and the economy (L. Kelly, personal communication, September 29, 2022).

Given these examples, should the traits that Kelly demonstrated—analytical, competitive, firm, leadership ability, persistent, and productive—be newly and permanently ascribed to the list of feminine traits, or at least be shared as both feminine and masculine? Should Kelly's political campaign behavior, premised on her character, serve as a case study that re-writes or blurs the distinctions of traits considered either feminine or masculine? At a minimum, these findings challenge the assumption that such traits are inherently masculine.

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Appendix A - Codebook: Kelly Tweets, TV Ads, Debate Statements

Mark coder number 1 or 2.

Type of communication, select one:

1. Kelly tweet

2. Kelly TV ad or affiliated ad

3. Kelly debate statement

Supply month and day of month for communication, if applicable.

Supply number assigned to communication, if applicable.

<u>Traits evident in source</u>. If the trait is apparent, then coder should determine its attribute as feminine (1), masculine (2), or both (3) based on examples provided below. Coder should assign (0) if no trait is apparent.

Examples of traits that should be coded as communal/feminine (1) include the following:

collaborative, communicative, compassionate, *honest, likable, modest sensitive, sincere, sympathetic, and understanding.

Examples of traits that should be coded as agentic/masculine (2) include the following:

achievement-oriented, ambitious, analytical, competent, competitive, consistent, decisive, direct, *determined, *effective, experienced, firm, persistent, qualified, stands up under pressure, and strong.

*Traits not listed in Hentschel et al. (2019, p. 19) but present in campaign rhetoric of candidates.

<u>Issues evident in source</u>. Coders should assign a code for issues present, including separately coding multiple issues.

List any additional issue if no code is assigned:_____.

Code number is the number appearing to the left of the topic below:

0: no issue present

Issues coded as feminine:

-1: poverty (added as a late code)

1: abortion

2: children / families

3: diversity /race

4: drug addiction / mental health

5: education / schools

6: health / healthcare / Medicaid

7: LGBTQ / transgender

8: seniors / Medicare / Social Security

9: water / environment / climate

10: women's rights

Issues coded as masculine:

11: agriculture

12: business / industry / economy (include inflation)

13: crime

14: energy

15: government distrust

16: guns / Second Amendment

17: highways / transportation / infrastructure (include internet)

18: illegal drugs (ex: fentanyl)

19: immigration / border

20: jobs / labor / workforce

21: taxes / budgets

22: unemployment (note if coded as feminine or masculine; depends on context)

23: veterans / military / first responders

24: housing (note if coded as feminine or masculine; depends on context)

25: death penalty

Other guidance for coding:

- Coder should not code a "Thank you" or gratitude as a trait.

- For endorsements, coder should only code if candidate comments on endorsement and includes an issue or trait reference. Do not code contents of linked endorsement.

- For evaluating tweet traits and issues, coder should ignore any supplemental materials attached as an image, link, or retweet.

- To evaluate traits within communications may require the coder to draw inferences relative to character and intended meaning. For example, Kelly announcing a plan or stating definitively that she will do something should be coded as masculine. Similarly, communications that are goal-oriented and/or accomplishments without hints of modesty or collaboration are treated as masculine.

Appendix B - Codebook: Schmidt Acclaims, Attacks, and Defenses

Mark coder number 1 or 2.

Type of communication, select one:

4. Schmidt tweet

5. Schmidt TV ad or affiliated ad

6. Schmidt debate statement

Supply month and day of month for communication, if applicable.

Supply number assigned to communication, if applicable.

Does the communication contain:

0. No attack on Kelly

1. Attack on Kelly

2. Attack not naming Kelly

3. Schmidt acclaim

4. Schmidt defense against an attack (no matter the origin of the attack)

Only if the communication contains an attack on Kelly, the coder should then assign codes for any traits and/or issues attacked, if present, per instructions below.

Traits evident in source. If a trait is apparent, then coder should determine its attribute as feminine (1), masculine (2), or both (3) if both a feminine trait and a masculine trait is present, based on examples provided below. Coder should assign (0) if no trait is apparent.

Examples of traits that should be coded as communal/feminine (1) include the following:

collaborative, communicative, compassionate, *honest, likable, modest sensitive, sincere, sympathetic, and understanding.

Examples of traits that should be coded as agentic/masculine (2) include the following:

achievement-oriented, ambitious, analytical, competent, competitive, consistent, decisive, direct, *determined, *effective, experienced, firm, persistent, qualified, stands up under pressure, and strong.

*Traits not listed in Hentschel et al. (2019, p. 19) but present in campaign rhetoric of candidates.

Issues evident in source. Coders should assign a code for issues present, including separately coding multiple issues.

List any additional issue if no code is assigned:_____.

Code number is the number appearing to the left of the topic below:

0: no issue present

Issues coded as feminine:

-1: poverty (added as a late code)

1: abortion

2: children / families

3: diversity /race

4: drug addiction / mental health

5: education / schools

6: health / healthcare / Medicaid

7: LGBTQ / transgender

8: seniors / Medicare / Social Security

9: water / environment / climate

10: women's rights

Issues coded as masculine:

      11: agriculture

      12: business / industry / economy (include inflation)

      13: crime

      14: energy

      15: government distrust

      16: guns / Second Amendment

      17: highways / transportation / infrastructure (include internet)

      18: illegal drugs (ex: fentanyl)

      19: immigration / border

      20: jobs / labor / workforce

      21: taxes / budgets

      22: unemployment (note if coded as feminine or masculine; depends on context)

      23: veterans / military / first responders

      24: housing (note if coded as feminine or masculine; depends on context)

      25: death penalty

Other guidance for coding:

- Coder should not code a "Thank you" or gratitude as a trait.

- For endorsements, coder should only code if candidate comments on endorsement and includes an issue or trait reference. Do not code contents of linked endorsement.

- For evaluating tweet traits and issues, coder should ignore any supplemental materials attached as an image, link, or retweet.

- To evaluate traits within communications may require the coder to draw inferences relative to character and intended meaning.

- For tweets in which Schmidt refers to a topic in a just-tweeted message but doesn't state the issue again, his reference to the previous topic should be coded as the same topic in the newer tweet.

- Regarding the statement of "Kansas can do better" coder should not code as an attack on Kelly unless additional language alludes to Kelly or the governor.

- Code as Schmidt "acclaim" if his statement constitutes a position on his own trait or policy (or alluded issue), or addresses past performance and/or future plans, actions, or how a condition ought to be. Coded as an acclaim would also be Schmidt stating support from law enforcement, for example. But coder should not consider as an acclaim, for example, a brag about crowd size or audience.

- In tweets, when Schmidt alludes to an issue in a negative light that he has used to attack Kelly previously, coder should consider that an attack on Kelly.

- When Schmidt undercuts Kelly for not caring about Kansans, makes no apologies, or says she's proud of doing something that he says negatively affects Kansans, he challenges a feminine trait of compassion or understanding, and therefore suggests she fails to meet that feminine trait expectation. Code this as a feminine trait attacked.

Appendix C - Interview Perspectives

During the general election campaign, the researcher conducted interviews with Governor Laura Kelly on September 29 and October 11, 2022. These discussions offered a timely perspective for examining how Kelly's lived experiences served as the prism through which her communications for reelection were cast. Telephone interviews with campaign staff (with either the campaign director or the communications director) were conducted during the general election campaign on August 15, September 12 and 27, October 10 and 24, and after the campaign on November 17 and 18. An interview with the campaign's pollster, Margie Omero of GBAO Strategies, was conducted by telephone on October 17. The governor's perspectives and those of her campaign staff and pollster are reflected in the following narrative.

Kelly's Early Background

Laura Kelly is a study of contrasts. Seeing her now, you would hardly guess that Kelly as a girl growing up had a powerful arm that earned her in junior high school the record for the longest softball throw. Kelly defined herself as an athletic youth, quietly competitive. But unlike her brother who was not nearly the athlete she was, Kelly could not play on a softball team because she was a girl. At an early age, Kelly sensed life wasn't fair, but resolved to just "factor that in" as she moved forward. Decades removed from that experience, as a gubernatorial candidate standing for reelection, she continued to navigate the expectations that come with being a woman in a field dominated by men.

Kelly's Use of Traits

Kelly is nothing if not straightforward. In response to a question about the most important quality for a governor, Kelly answered immediately with this quality: honesty. She further offered additional traits: being a good and genuine listener, and a collaborator—all of which are

notably feminine attributes. But she added, to be a good governor, you ultimately have to be the decider, which reflects the masculine trait—decisive.

As governor, Kelly described her style as steering away from party ideology, and instead, working to draw people together in a bipartisan fashion for achieving consensus. Her campaign team understood those qualities in Kelly and worked to show that side of her to voters. Her repeated return to the phrases "governing from the middle," "middle of the road," and "reaching across the aisle to get things done" were simple to communicate in TV ads, tweets, and statements and were appreciated by voters who Kelly's pollster suggested were "tired of hyper-partisan politics" (M. Omero, personal communication, October 17, 2022). In another nod to Kelly's feminine traits and voters' perceptions of them, the pollster offered that voter feedback characterized Kelly as "fair and kind and giving."

In perhaps one of the most notable examples of Kelly reaching across the aisle was her meeting with President Donald Trump and working with U.S. Senator Pat Roberts—both Republicans—to secure personal protective equipment (PPE) for Kansas during the COVID-19 crisis. Kelly offered:

> When the virus was hot on the coasts, we listened to science. We had no tools to fight the virus—no PPE, no masks in Kansas. Kansas was competing with New York and other states to get our fair share. That's why I had to have relationships with Pat Roberts and President Trump.

While Kelly's campaign staff and polling team offered that voters perceived the Kelly persona as comforting and kind—feminine traits, her analytical knack and achievement-oriented approach for resolving complicated policy problems through effective funding solutions were notably masculine. These were the qualities that research says voters expect in a state executive.

Kelly's steadiness and self-confidence—again agentic traits—gave enough Kansas voters

sufficient assurances of Kelly as a leader for them to reelect her as governor.

On a foundation that was achievement-oriented—distinctly masculine in its orientation—

Kelly tapped other masculine and feminine traits that constituted a brand full of contrasts.

Kelly's campaign staff described her with attributes that pivoted from masculine to feminine as:

direct yet likeable, decisive yet collaborative, and experienced yet modest (Campaign director,

personal communication, November 17, 2022). In these traits Kelly "stayed "on brand"

(Communications director, personal communication, September 27, 2022) and straddled the

masculine-feminine spectrum, even though the campaign offered that it "didn't intentionally

think [in terms] of masculine versus feminine" (M. Omero, personal communication, February

23, 2023).

Kelly's Use of Issues

Kelly wove into her campaign messaging a number of issue-oriented achievements that

she secured after nearly four years as the state's executive officer. In these achievements Kelly

and her campaign deliberately focused on topics Kelly considered relevant to Kansas voters—

kitchen-table issues—and avoided issues that dominated national attention. In fact, Kelly's

campaign director offered that "we want to stay out of national politics as much as possible"

(Campaign director, personal communication, August 15, 2022). Kelly considered her Kansas-

focused approach a contrast to her opponent who she felt spent considerable time concentrated

on national or federal topics that were not necessarily relevant to Kansans.

Kelly said she believed Kansans cared about jobs and the economy. So she talked about

the jobs created in Kansas communities, new businesses that had committed to come to Kansas,

and improvements forthcoming for infrastructure—all masculine issues. On these topics, she

could show positive metrics, and on these topics she believed she had appropriated traditionally Republican issues. Another issue—the budget, and something Kelly called "my favorite thing"—proved to be a compelling masculine issue on which she declared success and had issue ownership. Easy to claim and to prove was that the state's budget moved from a deficit to a surplus between the previous administration and her own. These were all the subjects that ranked highest among her most-mentioned masculine issues.

In the realm of feminine issues, Kelly offered that "I really do care about the people of Kansas and the children of Kansas, and that's why I fund our education system." In this statement, she reinforced her interest in being remembered as an "Education Governor." Education and children both topped the most numerous feminine issues that Kelly named among each of the three platforms: tweets, TV ads, and debate statements. On the topic of education, Kelly focused on restoring funding that her predecessor had cut, and she used this accomplishment to inoculate her record from Schmidt's related attacks on Kelly's temporary school closures due to COVID-19.

On one topic, that of abortion, Kelly tended to spend little time campaigning. When asked why she hadn't been more outspoken on the topic during the race for governor, Kelly replied: "I have a habit of not being vocal on divisive issues that don't bring us together. In the state senate, I was rarely at the podium with mic in hand. Nothing changed since I became Governor." She offered further, "I fully recognize that I am the Governor of all Kansans, and so I am going to speak like that and not take sides."

Kelly on Attacks by her Opponent

In terms of frequency of attacks, the leading issue on which Schmidt attacked Kelly concerned the governor's decision to close K-12 schools in the spring of 2020 when COVID-19

infections were spreading rapidly. Kelly said that her experience as a mother and difficulty of

securing childcare when her own daughters were young weighed into her executive order

(Executive Order No. 20-07, 2020) to close school buildings due to COVID-19. She felt—as did

many others convened to advise her on the decision—that parents needed to know what to

expect, not a week at a time, but for the upcoming weeks and months. To support families, Kelly

offered that "we had to give them enough information to make arrangements for childcare and

other needs. We knew congregate settings were not safe, so giving parents as much information

as possible early was important." Only in this way could families prepare and plan for school

closures—a scenario likely to happen anyway given the prevailing rates of infections, teacher

shortages, and the mad scramble among states competing for hard-to-get masks and

disinfectants—with no vaccines in sight.

Another issue on which Schmidt attacked Kelly concerned the Governor's Commission

on Racial Equality and Justice which had been formed to study concerns within law enforcement

agencies. From the commission's recommendations, Schmidt made the leap that Kelly was anti-

police and had called cops racist. Kelly's interview response was that "these are mostly just dog

whistles." She further commented on the rare references in Schmidt's campaigning to his own

record as the state's top cop, as the attorney general is often referred.

Finally, Schmidt attacked Kelly's vetoes of legislation intended to ban transgender

women from competitive sports. In several TV ads, Schmidt's campaign featured an Olympic

swimmer who suggested that Kelly had not protected women's right to compete—an ironic

indictment given Kelly's own experience with barriers to competitive sports as a young girl. Of

Schmidt's approach, Kelly believed her opponent was working to appeal to women, as well as

reinforce his right flank with conservative voters. Kelly offered her perspective that this line of

attack was Schmidt trying to tap "the fear factor, the anger" among voters. This topic also may have been emblematic of one of the national issues not necessarily relevant to most Kansans. Defending her own record of supporting women, Kelly reinforced her efforts to empower others: "I've worked to ensure that women have fair representation and a balance of power, including in my appointments to my cabinet and boards and commissions."

Kelly believed that both her opponent and the Republican governor's organization that supplemented the Schmidt campaign sought to undercut her along gender lines, by calling her ineffective. Kelly believed that Schmidt's criticism of her as ineffective was a gender-nuanced message to voters suggesting she hadn't been up to the job previously and wasn't up to the job ahead. But Kelly insisted that Schmidt knew of her abilities, given their service together in the Kansas senate. "He knows perfectly well how capable I am and how effective I am in getting things done." Kelly's campaign messaging sought to make sure that voters knew it, as well.

Schmidt's attack strategy appeared to focus more on driving negatives of the incumbent in the race than building his own favorable ratings. In mid-October, possible outcomes of his chosen strategy had become apparent. Kelly's polling suggested that people were not clear about Schmidt; his overall ratings were more unfavorable than favorable; and he hadn't created widespread enthusiasm among voters (M. Omero, personal communication, October 17, 2022).

Outcome for Kelly

Sufficient numbers of voters delivered to Kelly the victory needed for her to continue serving in a role to which she admittedly never really aspired and for which she had little or no ambition. But from this position, Kelly felt she could best serve the people of Kansas and, especially, protect the outlook for women and girls. These were the Kansans who she believed

truly needed an understanding leader in the office of the governor—someone who could govern from the middle, and shield citizens from political extremes.

In an election that pundits early on predicted Kelly was unlikely to win, voters rejected the divisiveness of a Trump-endorsed candidate and instead chose a leader who they felt embodied both collaboration and competence—a preferred mix of traits for their chief executive. In this outcome, voters validated Kelly's middle-of-the-road approach and seemed to embrace Kelly's perspective that it's "amazing what you can do when you govern from the middle" (Kelly TV Ad #9, September 30).