

**Kim L. Fridkin and Patrick J. Kenney.** *The Changing Face of Representation: The Gender of U.S. Senators and Constituent Communications*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014. viii, 246 pp. (\$65.00 hardcover, \$40.00 paper).

In many ways *The Changing Face of Representation* is the quintessential political science study; the theoretical framework updates the Downsian model of rationality with gender role theory to create “Strategic Stereotype Theory” (STT). A refreshing departure from the pedantic, Fridkin and Kenney assume a basic background in political science in advancing SST, which proposes that politicians present gendered messages that are purposeful and context-dependent. In other words, senators are aware of their gendered presentations, aware of stereotyping, and adjust accordingly. The quantitative methods are buttressed by impressive content analyses spanning senatorial websites, press releases, and newspaper articles. Indeed anyone requiring a better understanding of content analysis and its application in the social sciences will find this book invaluable. The procedures are clearly outlined, complete with instruments provided in the appendices.

The book centers on the fourteen female senators of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, their male state colleagues, and an additional nine male senators who are similar to the female senators in partisanship and ideology. While squarely situated in the literature, important scholarship addressing the gender dynamics produced by political challengers is lacking thereby weakening the theoretical foundation. Kanthak and Krause (2011) application of Kanter’s model of tokenism, published in the *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, is such an example. Their work suggests that female incumbents are affected by female challengers more than men are because potential campaign donors and the public engage in tokenism when judging candidates. Moreover, senators affect one another’s gendered presentations of self. Fridkin and Kenney’s book is about the winners but purports to illustrate the *strategic* behavior of winners which begs the question of why senators, the contenders, and the media, are not treated as more dynamic players.

Chapter 2 details the coding of messages regarding senatorial personality traits, legislative accomplishments, and media depictions of senators. Specifically two types of messages/representations are identified: communal, comprised of feminine characteristics, and agentic, comprised of masculine characteristics. Chapter 3 (examining senatorial messages presented on senatorial websites) and Chapter 4 (messages presented via press releases) apply this schema to demonstrate the strength of gender presentations which vary due to a number of factors (e.g. nearness of an election and type of policy being promoted). These chapters bolster previous research (e.g. women sometimes overcompensate their masculine traits), but add empirical depth and interesting insights. See for instance their finding that men are much more likely than women to emphasize personal family characteristics on their websites. Generally speaking they find that men and women present both masculine and feminine qualities, in varying levels, in differential ways, and appear to do so with intent to mitigate negative stereotypes.

Chapter 5 turns to media coverage (local newspapers are the source of data), again supporting previous research, by demonstrating that gendered coverage does occur even when partisanship and other variables known to affect assessments of politicians are controlled. At this point in the book one may wonder why variables assessing senatorial portrayals on specific issues are not presented *in relation* to corresponding newspaper portrayals. The authors collected information about specific issue areas so it is puzzling why they would use dependent variables that are index scores (e.g. number of communal traits covered). How might a female senator who scored high on her focus on domestic violence be portrayed by the media in comparison to a similar male colleague or a female senator who scored lower? What is the timing of media and senatorial messages? These types of questions seem vital to their contention that senators behave strategically but are largely unanswerable given their methodological choices.

Similarly Chapter 6, using the 2006 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCEC), assesses aggregate measures of local news consumed by citizens to predict aggregate measures of knowledge (e.g. correctly answering questions about senators' roll-call votes). Their findings corroborate past research emphasizing the novelty of women in the Senate and the concomitant effects on citizens. Mainly both men and (especially) women know more and are more interested in female senators. But the gender gap remains. Arguably creating index variables which aggregate issue domains excludes the possibility of uncovering gendered patterns of knowledge. Fridkin and Kenney take the time to label issue areas along the agentic-communal continuum but inexplicably fail to test the effects of news coverage of specific areas and/or interest in specific areas.

Chapter 7 provides the most sophisticated of the models predicting news coverage and citizen evaluations of incumbent senators that are running for reelection. Mainly, they predict communal and "competitive" news coverage (though both are still aggregate measures of specific issue areas) by accounting for communal messages on campaign websites and find that media give men more attention for their stated policy preferences. They finally disaggregate two issue areas, health care and the economy, in predicting citizen evaluations of competence via predictors that account for issue-specific messages on websites and in other media. Here, however, they omit respondent gender and any type of interaction variable that would explain the impact of senator gender, news coverage, and website representations. This seemingly arbitrary inclusion and exclusion of variables is a theme throughout the book. Fridkin and Kenney then introduce a new source of data in this same chapter, their contribution to the CCES, which allows predictions of four perceived personality traits (levels of leadership, honesty, caring, and experience) of incumbent senators. They find that senatorial gender is less important in reelection campaigns though, without comparison and the aforementioned variable omissions, this finding seems questionable, and perhaps irrelevant.

Race is conspicuously absent. With an N at times exceeding 5,000 it is curious why citizens' racial identifications or, at minimum, district-level characteristics like racial composition, are missing. Carol Moseley Braun receives several sentences (compare to Senator

Gillibrand, also not of the 109<sup>th</sup>, yet receiving several paragraphs) but zero mention as being the first African American female senator. Their silence about race is, at best, perplexing.

These criticisms aside, the substantive quality of their data and resultant findings regarding the importance of gender on political processes are undeniably compelling. The descriptive statistics alone make this book a worthwhile and arguably mandatory read for any student of gender and politics.

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