

**NAME IT
CHANGE IT**
sexism & equality don't mix!



WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER
WMC

Name It. Change It.
An Examination of the Impact of
Media Coverage of Women
Candidates' Appearance
Findings from an online dial survey of 1500
likely voters nationwide with an oversample
of 100 young women voters

About This Research

- In 2010, on behalf of Name It. Change It., the Women's Media Center, and She Should Run, we conducted research to explore what happens to a woman candidate's electoral chances when the media covers her in a sexist fashion.
- Building on this research, this spring we conducted a study to examine how media coverage on a woman's appearance impacts her viability as a candidate.

Key Findings

- This experimental survey shows that when media coverage focuses on a woman's appearance, she pays a price in the horserace, her favorability, her likelihood to be seen as possessing positive traits, and how likely voters are to vote for her.
- Neutral, positive, and negative descriptions of the woman candidate's appearance all had detrimental impacts on her candidacy. Importantly, the adverse reactions are not isolated to critiques of a woman's appearance; even appearance coverage that purports to be neutral or complimentary damages the woman.
- While this appearance coverage is very damaging to women candidates, the male opponent paid no price for this type of coverage.
- Acknowledging and responding to the sexist appearance coverage helps the woman regain some of the ground she lost.

Topline Data

- When voters heard coverage that focused on a neutral description or a positive description or a negative description of the woman candidate's appearance, it hurt her likeability and it made voters less likely to vote for her.
- Appearance coverage damages voters' perceptions of the woman candidate on all key traits we tested, but the greatest average losses are on being in touch, being likeable, confident, effective, and qualified.
- When a woman candidate responds directly by saying this coverage has no place in the media and that her appearance is not news, she regains the ground she lost.
- Moreover, even voters who had not heard the appearance descriptions respond positively to the woman candidate standing up for herself.

Methodology

Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Bay Consulting designed and administered this survey which was conducted online March 3 – 7, 2013. The survey reached a total of 1500 likely voters nationwide with an oversample of 100 young women, age 18-35.

The sample was drawn from an online panel and respondents were screened to include only registered and likely voters. The data were weighted slightly by age, education, race, region and party identification to reflect the attributes of the actual population. The young women oversample was weighed down into the base.

The margin of error for the total sample is +/-2.5% and +/-9.8 for the 100 oversample.

Methodology

The survey was divided into a systematic experiment with a hypothetical Congressional contest between female candidate Jane Smith and male candidate Dan Jones. Voters read a profile about the two candidates and then heard a series of news stories about each. The full sample heard a story about the male candidate that covered his position on an education bill.

In the stories about the female candidate, in addition to focusing on the education bill, we included various descriptions of her appearance. A quarter of the voters, a control group, heard a description of Jane Smith that did not reference her appearance in any way. A quarter of voters heard a neutral description; a quarter heard a positive description; and a quarter heard a negative description.

Methodology

- **Neutral description:** Smith dressed in a brown blouse, black skirt, and modest pumps with a short heel...
- **Positive description:** In person, Smith is fit and attractive and looks even younger than her age. At the press conference, smartly turned out in a ruffled jacket, pencil skirt, and fashionable high heels....
- **Negative description:** Smith unfortunately sported a heavy layer of foundation and powder that had settled into her forehead lines, creating an unflattering look for an otherwise pretty woman, along with her famous fake, tacky nails.