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## **En-Gendering Choice in Congressional Leadership Elections**

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## Abstract

Women in congressional leadership are exceptional, in three senses of the word – being a rare occurrence, deviating from the norm, and being held to higher standards and expectations. In this paper, I review the status of and obstacles for women in congressional leadership, analyze the media coverage of recent contests for Democrat and Republican Party congressional leadership positions, and pose some questions and implications for the study of women in congressional leadership.

I find that women members of Congress more so than men are associated with contested leadership races in the last decade. As the number of lower-level leadership posts expanded in the 1990s, so too did the frequency of leadership contests involving women, both those challenged by men and those running against other women. Women's rise to congressional leadership confronts the obstacles of numbers, districts, informal processes, and outright resistance.

In recent leadership races, the media coverage suggests important differences in gendered discourse. The media pay much greater attention to but contradictory interpretations of Rep. Nancy Pelosi's leadership style, which could be due to perceived incongruities of her femininity with the unspoken masculinity of congressional leadership. I argue for more gendered analyses of congressional leadership and suggest that current theoretical assumptions be challenged as distinctly gendered.

# **En-Gendering Choice in Congressional Leadership Elections**

Cindy Simon Rosenthal

The more things change, the more they stay the same.<sup>1</sup>

Women today serve in the U.S. Congress in greater numbers than ever before and congresswomen are climbing the leadership ladder with greater frequency. In spite of this apparent progress, signs of resistance and the problem of invisibility persist both in the institution and the political science literature. Women in congressional leadership are exceptional, in three senses of the word – being a rare occurrence, deviating from the norm, and being held to higher standards and expectations.

The goals of this paper are: 1) to recount the status of and obstacles for women in congressional leadership, 2) to analyze the media coverage of recent contests for Democrat and Republican Party congressional leadership positions; 3) to pose some questions and implications for the study of women in congressional leadership, and 4) to argue for more analyses of gender in congressional leadership elections.

## **A Review of the Literature**

In fact, there is virtually no literature to review on women in congressional leadership. Because of the relative novelty and recency of women in congressional leadership, it is not surprising that the literature in political science has done little gender analysis of the processes or norms of congressional leadership. Indeed, the literature has long been dominated by a focus on

leadership embodied in the stories of great men and a theoretical perspective that embraces an unspoken masculine perspective.

The absence of gender from the literature is certainly understandable, but the persistence of masculine imagery in even recent literature is odd. For example, it may have been understandable that Mackaman (1980), at a time when women were exceedingly rare in leadership, employed a football metaphor to describe leaders as “the would-be quarterbacks of Congress” (6). It is oddly jarring, however, to hear a similar metaphor –“sack the quarterback”-- used in 2004 applied to the electoral strategy of trying to defeat congressional party leaders like former Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD) at the polls.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, Sinclair’s (1990) definitive review essay on congressional research also makes little note of women in Congress, which understandably reflects the historical scarcity of women in leadership at the time. What seems odd is the gender-neutral language employed throughout the essay. Sinclair writes, “The potential challenger must persuade his or her colleagues not just that he or she is preferable to the heir apparent, but that the heir apparent is so lacking ... “ (1990, 122), but oddly Sinclair offers nary a mention of women’s absence from leadership. Furthermore, the discussion of heirs apparent seems to beg for some mention of Rep. Mary Rose O’Kearney (D-OH) or Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) or Rep. Lynn Martin (R-IL), who went from heirs apparent to victims of intraparty challenges as they sought to assert their claim on the next rung of the leadership ladder.

Three more contemporary omissions of gender from analysis of leadership suggest the persistent invisibility of gender and women from the congressional research agenda. Grofman, Koetzle, and McGann (2002) revive a controversy over what drives the selection of leaders.

They test what David Truman (1959) first called the “middleman” hypothesis (i.e. that leaders are most likely to be drawn from the ideological middle of their parties) against what Clausen and Wilcox (1987) suggest is a preference of members of Congress to turn to leaders from more partisan extremes. Grofman and his co-authors present their evidence, which includes many lower-level leadership races where women can be found, supports the conclusion that party leaders are not “middlemen” but rather are more likely to come from “the area beyond the median toward the party mode” in terms of ideology (98). While the authors control for regional party leaders, they do not include sex as a relevant variable. The analysis begs for some consideration of the intersection of gender and ideology.

Similarly, Sinclair (1999) contributes an important insight that leaders in both caucuses – beginning with the House Democrats and continued by Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) – developed inclusive strategies to promote member “buy-in” through expanded leadership structures, particularly in the whip system and special task forces (428-429). She argues that the goal of the strategy is to “involve a larger proportion of the membership in leadership and thereby give them a stake in their success” (432). A gendered analysis of the same period would note the parallel trends of increasing numbers of women as MCs, expanding lower-level leadership opportunities for women in the 1990s and the emerging leadership strategies described by Sinclair (1999).

Updating her analysis, Sinclair (2006) notes that inclusion as a strategy has the paradoxical consequence of taming the membership:

The top leaders benefit from such members’ becoming a part of the leadership in a number of ways; they bring their efforts and skills to the leadership enterprise, they often

provide links to important party subgroups, and they are less likely to cause problems when they are inside the tent (133).

Increasingly, the need to impose intra-party discipline has accentuated the pressures on members to be loyal, particularly within the Republican Conference where “meetings tend to take on a ‘locker room’ atmosphere, especially before a big vote” (Sinclair 2006, 135). Again the dynamic of inclusion, buy-in and party discipline raises interesting questions since women are perhaps the most obvious subgroup to emerge in more significant numbers in the 1990s. How are Republican women in the U.S. House navigating the margins of leadership? Unfortunately, such questions are not explored in the congressional literature.

Finally, Harris (2006) examines the strategic choices of members as they select leaders. Most of Harris’ analysis centers around a case study of Rep. Gingrich’s whip election. However, Harris also suggests a longer historical trend toward contested leadership elections in the House. He argues that we should see “leadership selection as political choices that parties make to adapt to broader contextual factors and to chart the party’s strategic course” (192) and concludes that leadership selection has become increasingly contested and conflictual since the post-reform era of the 1970s. We recast a part of Harris’ presentation, adding the most recent Republican House leadership elections and using a gender lens. Table 1 summarizes the data and Figure 1 displays the trends.

Table 1 and Figure 1 about here

Table 1 and Figure 1 offer three distinct gender insights. First and most obvious, the frequency of contested leadership races when averaged by decade shows no particular upward pattern. However, contested leadership races involving women have been on the rise during the

same period. In total, 22 of the 70 contested leadership elections (31.4%) involved women, and only six of the 36 uncontested leadership choices (16.7%) involved women. What should political scientists make of the disproportionate representation of women among contested leadership elections? “Intrusiveness theory” posits that when newcomers to an organization or institution begin to increase in number, then the prior dominant group often responds by resisting or excluding the intruders (Yoder 1991, Kathlene 1994). The disproportionate involvement of women in contested leadership races fits the expectations of intrusiveness theory. Finally, as the number of lower-level leadership posts expanded in the 1990s, so too did the frequency of leadership contests involving women running against women. Again the pattern suggests the possibility of certain leadership posts becoming “women’s posts” and prompts questions about the evolving nature of leadership responsibilities.

### The Status of Women in Congressional Leadership

At first blush, the presence of women in the current leadership ranks of the U.S. House and Senate seems undeniable. Ten of the 14 women in the U.S. Senate hold positions of leadership or committee chairships in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress. Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) is the first woman to ever lead her party in either chamber of the Congress, the highest position achieved by a woman to date in the U.S. Congress. Table 2 reports the women of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress by leadership positions in both parties and chambers.

Table 2 about here.

The road to leadership has not been an easy one, however. Figure 2 illustrates the aggregate numbers of women who have moved into leadership positions or committee chairships.



Senator Margaret Chase Smith (R-ME) was the first woman to be elected by her peers to a Senate leadership position – Senate Republican Conference Chair. Between that 1967 milestone and the 2001 election of Rep. Pelosi’s election as House Democratic Whip, women overall found ready success mostly in winning lower-level leadership contests such as secretary or vice-chair of their party conference, often relinquishing these seats to another woman. Higher level leadership positions have been more elusive and often highly contested, and women are most likely to figure in the ranks of appointed leaders, for example serving as deputy whips, assistant floor leaders, or chairs of special policy or outreach committees. Figure 2 shows the number of women who have achieved leadership or committee chairs prior to 1970 and in each of the decades thereafter.

Figure 2 about here

Prior to Pelosi’s election, which will be explored in more detail later in this paper, women succeeded in securing lesser assistant leadership posts, but in neither the House nor the Senate had a woman ever served in one of the top party leadership posts (i.e. Speaker, floor leader, or whip). The general pattern through the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s for elected leadership positions found women largely uncontested at the positions of conference vice chair or secretary but unsuccessful in efforts to move up to conference chair or higher office (Amer 2005). Rep. Mary Rose Oakar (D-OH), Rep. Lynn Martin (R-IL), and Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) were consensus choices for lower level positions who met with open competition and defeat in their efforts to climb the leadership ladder. Further there have never been more than two women in elected leadership positions of either party simultaneously.

Beginning with the last half of the decade of the 1990s, the number and success of women in congressional leadership began to change. Between the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress (1994-95) and

the current 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005-06), the number of women seeking elected leadership posts in the House totaled 16, compared to only nine women who sought an elected leadership posts from the 94<sup>th</sup> (1971-72) through the 103<sup>rd</sup> (1993-94). In 1998, Representative Jennifer Dunn (R-WA) became the first woman to run for a senior leadership post in her unsuccessful bid for the post of majority leader, and Representative Rosa de Lauro (D-CT) ran for and lost a contest for Democratic Caucus Chair but was named by Democratic Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO) to a newly created post of Assistant to the Democratic Leader. In 2003, Rep. Deborah Pryce (R-OH) became the first woman since Senator Smith to be elected chair of her party's conference.

In the Senate, Senator Mikulski broke into the all-male Democratic leadership team in 1992 as an assistant floor leader and moved up the ranks to Conference Secretary in 1995, a post she held until Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) succeeded her in 2005. Across the aisle, Senator Hutchison (R-TX) similarly broke into the all-male party leadership ranks in the 107<sup>th</sup> as GOP Conference Vice Chairwoman.

While few leaders rise to leadership through the committee system, it should be noted that women have also not fared well in securing committee posts. In the House Republican conference even with term limits on committee chairs and the declining importance of seniority, most senior women have still been out of luck in securing committee leadership positions (Herrick 2000). A woman has not chaired a full committee since Rep. Jan Meyers (R-KS) chaired the Committee on Small Business in the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress (1995-96). While seniority has earned Representative Nancy Johnson (R-CT) clout as Ways and Means Health Subcommittee chair, her moderate politics have left her with limited influence in her caucus. Former Representative Marge Roukema (R-NJ) fell short in her bid to become the first woman to chair a

major House committee at the start of the 107<sup>th</sup>, even though term limits imposed on GOP committee chairs created the opportunity for her to secure a committee chair based on her seniority. A moderate and fiercely independent, Representative Roukema lost out to Representative Michael Oxley (R-OH) when the new Financial Services Committee was created after splitting the former Energy and Commerce Committee jurisdiction.

What are the obstacles?

Women's rise to congressional leadership must confront the obstacles of numbers, districts, informal processes, and outright resistance. Part of the "exceptionalism" of women in congressional leadership remains the relatively small numbers of women who serve in the House or Senate. Table 3 illustrates the number and percentage of women in each caucus and their leadership roles. It would appear that both parties have found ways to incorporate female members into some realm of leadership in spite of their lack of seniority. Both Senate caucuses and the House Democratic caucus have slightly more women represented in leadership roles than their number in the body. In the House Republican conference, the percentage of women in some arena of leadership deviates very little from the 10 percent mark, matching closely the percentage of women in the conference.

Table 3 about here

For both party caucuses in the House, women's competitiveness for leadership positions is complicated by the kind of districts most likely to send them to Washington D.C. The most "women friendly districts" for Republican women tend to be less conservative, more urban, and more diverse than those electing their male counterparts (Palmer and Simon 2006), thus

Republican women are likely to be outside the mainstream of their party in terms of ideology. Similarly, Palmer and Simon (2006) point out that Democratic women are most likely to win in districts that are more liberal, more urban, more diverse, and wealthier than seats won by their male colleagues. That 35 of the 44 House Democratic women backed Pelosi in the 2001 race for Democratic minority whip suggests both the possibility of gender and district affinity effects.

Certainly the claim that she was too liberal to represent the mainstream of the Democratic Party haunted Nancy Pelosi in her rise to party leader. In spite of very similar voting records, supporters of her main opponent, Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD), framed her as a “too liberal” and him as “better able to woo centrist voters and win back the swing districts.”<sup>3</sup>

“The only way we can take the House back is by getting the swing districts,”

[Representative Charles S.] Stenholm said. “We cannot do it by going to the left.”<sup>4</sup>

When she sought to ascend to party leader in 2002, challengers Rep. Martin Frost (D-TX) and Rep. Harold Ford (D-TN) made similar claims. For example, Frost described himself as “an outspoken advocate for the mainstream, centrist views that will lead us to the majority.”<sup>5</sup> Ford stated, “I am not running for Democratic leader to move our party left or right. I want to move us forward.”<sup>6</sup> Differing district factors underlie the enduring theoretical question in the literature of whether leaders are drawn from the middle or the extremes of their party and – a question certainly worth reconsidering as women attempt to navigate the leadership ladder.

Informal processes also present obstacles for women in leadership. The declining importance of seniority and the transition to term limits for committee chairs clearly have impeded women in the House (Herrick 2000). No GOP women have been selected to chair a full

committee chair even though term limits created 14 openings on the 19 major House committees in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress and more openings in subsequent congresses.

In the Senate, an institution which still values and rewards length of service, women have been able to secure committee and leadership posts by virtue of their seniority.<sup>7</sup> With the convening of the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) was the senior Republican woman ranking 18<sup>th</sup> on the GOP seniority list and followed closely by Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) at 20<sup>th</sup> and Senator Susan Collins (R-Me) at 32<sup>nd</sup>. Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in seniority among Democratic senators. As a result of their tenure, Senators Snowe and Collins both of Maine chair full committees.

Baer (2006) argues that advancement in congressional party leadership posts (not committee chairs) fundamentally turns on informal processes, which appear to have worked against women in the past. For example, she cites the example of Rep. Mary Rose Oakar, vice chair of the caucus in the 99<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> congresses and acting chair when Rep. Richard Gephardt stepped aside to pursue his presidential aspirations. Baer writes:

Shockingly Oakar was not a shoo-in for the chair post in the 101<sup>st</sup> Congress when Gephardt stepped up to the Majority Leader post. In a three-way election, Bill Gray (PA) won with 146 votes, defeating Oakar (80 votes) and Mike Synar (OK) (33 votes). Three facts are noteworthy: the usual recruitment ladder from Vice Chair to Chair was not respected in the three-way race, and Gephardt pointedly opposed Oakar (Baer 20).

Understanding the importance of informal processes figured prominently into Rep. Pelosi's race for party whip. Her closest advisor and campaign manager was Representative John Murtha (D-PA) whose bonafides as part of the party "old guard" are undisputed. When

then-Leader Gephardt delayed in setting an election date, some saw the reluctance as giving Rep. Hoyer a chance to “peel away votes from Pelosi,” but Murtha intervened with Gephardt to level the playing field.<sup>8</sup> In the thick of the whip contest, reporting confirmed the importance of informal processes:

“This is an insider’s game,” says a Democratic lawmaker, who explains that Hoyer is better positioned because of his seniority and his status within the ‘old boys’ club’ to win over the ranking Democrats on the committees and subcommittees. They, in turn can then influence other members.”<sup>9</sup>

Such insider resistance is thought to have ultimately blocked Rep. Rosa DeLauro’s (D-CT) efforts in her second bid to be Caucus Chair. Whispers of “too many women” in leadership may have contributed to her loss by one vote to Rep. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) in the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, the same year that Nancy Pelosi rose to the Minority Leader’s position.

Finally, hints of resistance to women’s leadership can be seen in the lack of deference shown toward Representative Pelosi and persistence doubts about her skills. Generally, routine and unchallenged leadership advancement from party leader to Speaker has been the norm (Amer 2005), though it is not unusual for parties to acknowledge an alternate leader waiting in the wings (Baer 2006). Baer, however, suggests that Rep. Hoyer has used his status of “Speaker-in-waiting” among some members to engage in very public disagreements with Pelosi. Even more unusual, Pelosi’s appointee to the DCCC, Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-IL), has confronted Pelosi on policy and strategy and failed to show her the respect normally accorded the party leader (2006, 20).

Reflecting the persistent doubts about Pelosi's leadership, members of her own conference whisper about whether she is up to the task of meting out party discipline in the way that her Republican counterpart Tom DeLay did. Though she has "systematically adopted many of the bare-knuckle tactics" of sanctioning members who defy party leadership and imposing fundraising quotas on members to help the party, the doubts get reported:

"... many Democrats told us privately that they believe Pelosi lacks precisely that killer instinct to place her in the tradition of DeLay or Cannon: She is not seen as menacing enough to scare members into action."<sup>10</sup>

#### Applying a Gendered Analysis to Recent Leadership Choice

The critique of previous studies suggests how gender analysis might yield new insight into understanding and studying congressional leadership. To further illustrate this point, I turn to an analysis of media coverage of recent elections involving contested Democrat and Republican Party congressional leadership elections. Specifically, I analyzed 99 articles pulled from a Lexis-Nexis using the major paper file and from major news magazines including *Newsweek*, *CQ Weekly* and *National Journal*. First, I identified 46 articles that included the terms "Pelosi," "leadership" and "election" for the period between January 1, 1999 and December 31, 2002. Of these, 16 relate to the Democratic whip election in October 2001, and 30 pertain to the subsequent Democratic leader election in November 2002. Second, I identified 53 articles using the search terms "House," "majority leader," and "election" for the period between January 1, 2005 and February 3, 2006. The period covers the resignation of then-Majority

Leader Tom DeLay and the subsequent leadership race between Representatives John Boehner (R-OH), Roy Blunt (R-MO) and John Shadegg (R-AZ).

The analysis is principally descriptive and exploratory in an effort to pose some questions and implications for the study of women in congressional leadership. The limitations of the analysis are that it primarily focuses on print media coverage, which may not be an accurate snapshot of the event, and it focuses on two fairly unique leadership elections, which may be difficult to generalize. The coverage and the sentiments quoted may not reflect the ultimate calculus made by members and cannot be definitively shown to be causally linked. Story framing, however, is often acknowledged to provide insight on how political leaders attempt to frame public messages and how the media “evince the power and point of view of the political and economic elites who operate and focus it” (Gamson et al. 1992, 374).

Content analysis included several coding decisions. Two readers coded, discussed and recoded the articles in an effort to achieve a high degree of reliability. The coding involved several objective counts as well as subjective judgements. The coders counted the number of explicit gender references made in the article and tallied quotes by male and female members of Congress as well as other male and female voices. The three key subjective judgements included: 1) identifying leadership appeals made by the candidates and their supporters, 2) coding leadership style using one of five styles, accommodative, competitive, avoidance, compromising and collaborative (Thomas 1975, Rosenthal 1998), and 3) assigning a primary and secondary story frame for the article based on the leadership appeals and members decisionmaking.



I use Dodd's (1996) three theoretical perspectives to determine a story frame of member-leader choice. Dodd uses the three perspective to explain institutional change and the relationship of the members to the leaders within Congress. While he did not use these perspectives to understand a specific leadership election, I believe that they have some relevance to the choices members make in selecting new leaders. Dodd's perspectives include social choice theory, which emphasizes that members choose a leader based on the congruence of their goals and who they think is best able to help the party achieve their goals; social structure theory, which posits that members will choose an institutional leader based on a need to respond to larger external forces in society; and social learning theory, which argues that members will choose a leader who they believe is best able to respond to an immediate crisis and offer suggestions for experimentation to adapt to those crises.

Each of these three perspectives parallel other work on leadership selection and all have been applied to understand the career of Speaker New Gingrich. The social choice perspective comes closest to principal-agent theory in leadership choice and informs Sinclair's analysis of Gingrich (1999). Social learning theory places greater emphasis on institutional context which is a perspective emphasized by Peters (1998), and social structure theory looks beyond the members and the institution to place emphasis on political and social forces writ large, a perspective adopted by Strahan (1996) to understand Gingrich's speakership.

The content analysis yields interesting results with striking contrasts between the coverage associated with Rep. Pelosi's two contests and the most recent Republican leadership election. Table 4 illustrates the exceptional role of gender in the contrasting coverage.

Table 4 about here

Clearly the novelty of Rep. Pelosi's ascendancy to be the first woman to hold the position of party whip for either party drives the much higher number of references to gender. While the number of gender references drops when she runs in 2002 for party leader, the coverage of her second race for minority leader is still in stark contrast to the total absence of any references to gender in the 2006 election to replace Rep. DeLay. In 53 articles about the race to succeed Rep. DeLay, not one included a gender reference. By comparison, the articles about the Democratic leadership races averaged more than three references. The references were both predictable and varied, for example, from one article the reader learned:

“... the first woman in congressional history...”

“... support from ... many women lawmakers, while some ol' boy conservatives...”

“Hoyer was a boy wonder in the state Legislature ...”

“ ... Democrats need to ‘walk the walk’ when they are presented with a qualified woman candidate.”<sup>11</sup>

Hoyer was credited with being a “member's member,” a construction that is seemingly ungendered but echoes the characterization of a “man's man” in the historically male environs of the U.S. Congress.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly those quoted in the articles show a distinct gender pattern. Women were almost three times more likely to be quoted in the articles about Rep. Pelosi than in the articles about Reps. Boehner, Blunt, Shadegg and DeLay. In fact, in 31 of the 53 articles (58.5%) about the Republican leadership race, no women were quoted compared with at least two male voices being heard in 43 of 53 articles (81.2%). Looking only at members of Congress being quoted in the coverage, women are barely visible in the Republican leadership race but quoted on average

in proportion to their share of the conference membership. Women MCs are present and heard from in the Democratic leadership races, in numbers disproportionate to their share of caucus membership.

In terms of leadership style, the most striking aspect of the coverage is the lack of characterizations of the different representatives' leadership style. For most of the candidates, descriptions of their leadership style were non-existent (Shadegg, Frost, Ford and Blunt.) Only Representatives Pelosi and DeLay's leadership style garnered much attention. In 15 articles, Pelosi's style was variously characterized as "unfailingly gracious,"<sup>13</sup> "relentless fighter,"<sup>14</sup> "politically shrewd" with "collaborative skills"<sup>15</sup> and having "the ability to make merry while reaching for the jugular."<sup>16</sup> By contrast, ten articles characterized DeLay's well-known, take-no-prisoners' aggressive style, which earned him the nicknamed "The Hammer." Four articles made reference to Rep. Hoyer's leadership style, and five articles made reference to Rep. Boehner's style.

The greater attention to Rep. Pelosi's style and the multiple perspectives taken suggest two possible explanations. First, the men running for leadership may have presumptively been credited with having a leadership style that is so congruent with the norms of leadership that no description was needed. Alternatively, the perspectives on her style may reflect an effort to reconcile her femininity with the unspoken masculinity of congressional leadership. The attention to DeLay's leadership style may in turn reflect the media's fascination with the icon of aggressive, masculine leadership, which contributed to his notoriety and ultimate demise. As a *Washington Post* article noted:

“Every generation has one: the tough-as-nails leader with the pugnacity to demand the discipline, money or power to control Congress. With Tom DeLay’s dramatic rise and fall, the job’s now open.”<sup>17</sup>

Finally, I turn to the issue of story frames. My interest is in understanding the meaning attached to different leadership contests and the extent to which they might be seen in a gendered context. Table 5 presents the coverage both in terms of the primary story frame as well as the combined primary and secondary frames identified with a particular article. In both instances there are substantively interesting and statistically significant differences.

Table 5 about here

In terms of primary story frames, the coverage of Rep. Pelosi’s two races can be seen principally in terms of which of the leadership candidates could best meet the needs of the members and their goals. This is the essence of principal-agent theory where the members’ expectations will shape leaders’ responses and strategies to meet those expectations. In the case of Pelosi, however, the coverage of her ability to meet those goals is consistently paradoxical. More than half of the articles mention her significant fund-raising and campaign organizational prowess, but in the same stories, doubts (in the tradition of the “middleman” theory) are prominent. For example:

“...many are nervous that House Democrats under Ms. Pelosi’s leadership will exacerbate the broader struggle between conservatives and traditional liberals.”<sup>18</sup>

“The competition was being framed as a choice between a woman from one of the party’s anchor states who could reinvigorate House Democrats with new ideas and leadership

style and a man who has tangled successfully with tough Texas conservatives...It presents lawmakers with a crucial decision on which candidate they think can shape a message and an agenda that can broaden the party's appeal to voters."<sup>19</sup>

The paradoxical language used to frame Pelosi's elections in terms of social choice theory typically acknowledged her skills in advancing members fortunes on the campaign trail while simultaneously casting doubts on her ability to lead the party to majority status. No one described the gender ambiguities more colorfully than former Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D-CO):

"Male, female, purple, whatever, she's the best candidate," says Schroeder. "The only negative is that she's a woman." Asked to explain, Schroeder says the undercurrent in this race is what she calls "the Bubba beat – the Bubba tom-toms – that the party needs somebody who can talk to Bubba."<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, the more recent Republican party election took on a frame that focused primarily on the meaning of the race in response to the developing scandals surrounding Tom DeLay. More than 62 percent of the stories took on the social learning frame focusing (at least for public consumption) on how the candidates would respond to the ethics crisis engulfing the party and lead the party in a new direction away from a "culture of corruption." For example:

"Republicans seek to assemble a new team that can better weather the storms developing around the Abramoff scandal and the recent bribery guilt plea and resignation of Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham."<sup>21</sup>

"Republicans in the House of Representatives have sought to put a 'fresh face' on their leadership with the surprise choice of Ohio's John Boehner to replace Tom DeLay as majority Leader ... Mr. Boehner campaigned as a candidate of reform."<sup>22</sup>

An examination of the secondary frames provide further insight. In the case of Pelosi's races, the historical significance of the first woman to achieve these heights of leadership was not lost in the coverage. Thus the combined dominant frames of the Pelosi elections tapped both the social choice and the social structure perspectives. Again for Pelosi, however, gender presented a kind of double-bind for her to navigate. The comments of the Pelosi and Hoyer themselves illustrate the conflicting messages sent.

“Members need to decide whether to have a symbol, or someone who represents a different kind of district, holds centrist views, backs a strong defense, and believes that we can compete in the world.” (Hoyer)

“I didn't run because I'm a woman, but because I can help us win the majority ... But the idea of a woman as whip is very powerful. It is an important signal to women that there is infinite opportunity.” (Pelosi)<sup>23</sup>

Further navigating the shoals of gender, Pelosi sometimes asserted that geography as much as gender played a role in her rise to power. As for gender, she noted, “I'm not running as a woman, but we should understand who elects Democrats. I have the credentials. Being a woman is sort of a bonus.”<sup>24</sup> Interestingly Pelosi's gender disappeared as distinctive in Rep. John Lewis's (D-GA) brief flirtation and rationale to join the race for Democratic whip. Making a pitch for needing a minority face among the party leaders, Lewis noted:

“The leadership should be a reflection of the makeup of the Democratic Party and the country. Right now, the ... leadership is all white.”<sup>25</sup>

The secondary frame for the House Republican majority leader's race was not surprisingly the social choice perspective. One article, making little note of the shadow of scandal against which the race played out, summed up the dynamics:

“... part of the concentrated lawmaker-to-lawmaker campaigning typical of party elections, members of the exclusive electorate [try] to gauge how a candidate might do the job, and perhaps more important, calculate what might be in it for them ... And the candidates are not shy about reminding their colleagues what they have done for them in the past and could do in the future — or not.”<sup>26</sup>

Unlike in the contests involving Pelosi, none of the candidates were questioned about their ability to deliver the goods to their congressional colleagues.

### Implications and Questions

So what should we learn from these recent leadership elections and the role of gender? First and foremost, the coverage should remind scholars of the need to pay attention to gender in congressional leadership dynamics. Gender plays out unevenly as a factor, even though both men and women have gender and perform gender (Duerst-Lahti 2002). The unspoken masculinity of Congress and its leaders who have gone before creates the conditions of women's exceptionalism. Exceptionalism needs to be understood not only as the historic firsts of the likes of Nancy Pelosi and other women, but also in terms of the consequences for women as they deviate from the norm or are measured by entrenched gender standards.

Second, congressional leadership research would benefit from reconsideration of ostensibly gender-neutral theories. For example, the picture of distinctive districts painted by

Palmer and Simon (2006) suggests that the “middlewoman” and the “middleman” in the Democrat or Republican conferences may not be equivalent positions from which to launch a leadership bid. Principal-agent theory yields powerful insights into legislative behavior, but the theory must be examined in the context of an environment with a distinctive social demography of token numbers of women in a hitherto masculine enclave. In theory, principals select an agent based on skill and expertise, but in real life such selections may also be clouded by trust, familiarity, prejudice and fear. The contradictory assessments of Pelosi’s ability to help her members achieve their goals reflects the range of factors.

Third, gender analysis would enrich our scholarly understanding of the institutional changes which have taken place in the U.S. Congress over the last two decades. The changes – more women among the membership and lower-level leadership, changes in seniority norms in the House, leadership strategies that are both inclusive and pacifying – need to be revisited as a piece. Yoder (1991) posits that male-dominated institutions respond to increasing numbers of women as “intruders” by adopting strategies of resistance. Her “intrusiveness hypothesis” offers an interesting explanation for increasingly common contested leadership elections in the House. At a minimum, however, scholars need to ask whether and how more women in Congress affect institutional change. Alternatively, thinking about women in leadership as the dependent variable, how have changing structures affect women’s prospects for leadership?

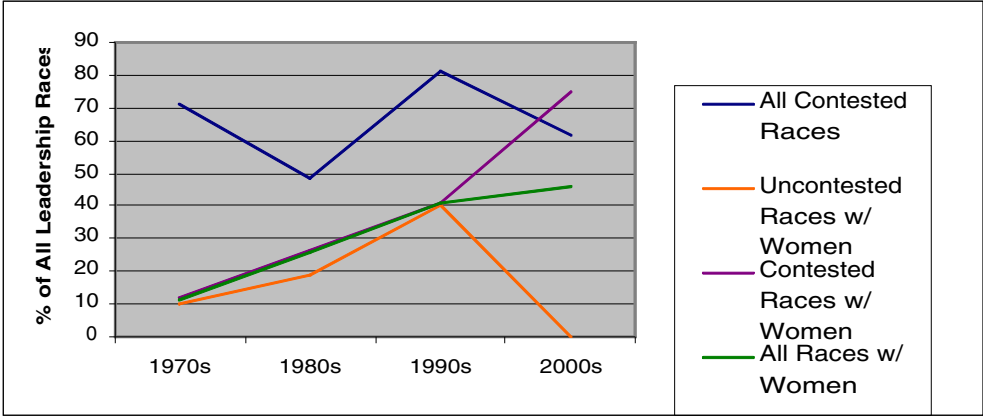
A rich set of questions lie ahead but for gender scholars a twofold challenge persists. In the first instance, the study of gender and congressional leadership remains elusive because of the exceptionalism of women in these roles. In the second, the theoretical limits of existing research and the discipline must be pushed to include gender.



**Table 1. Gender Patterns of Leadership Change in the House of Representatives**

	Uncontested Elections		Contested Elections					
	Democratic Conference	Republican Conference	Males Running Against Males		Males Running Against Females		Races with at least Two Females	
			Democratic Conference	Republican Conference	Democratic Conference	Republican Conference	Democratic Conference	Republican Conference
<b>1971-1980</b>	4 males; 1 female	5 males; 0 females	6	16	1	2	0	0
<b>1981-1990</b>	6 males; 2 females	7 males; 1 female	4	7	3	1	0	0
<b>1991-2000</b>	0	3 males; 2 females	5	8	1	4	1	3
<b>2001-2006</b>	1 male	4 males	0	2	3	2	1	0

Figure 1: Gender Patterns of Contested Leadership Elections in the House of Representatives



**Table 2: Current Status of Women in Congressional Leadership**

<b>109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005-2007) -- U.S. Senate</b>	
<b>Leadership Roles</b>	
Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA)	Chief Deputy Whip
Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY)	Chair, Steering and Outreach Committee
Sen. Elizabeth Dole (R-NC)	Chair, National Republican Senatorial Committee
Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-TX)	Republican Conference Secretary
Sen. Blanche L. Lincoln (D-AR)	Chair of Rural Outreach
Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)	Assistant Floor Leader
Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)	Democratic Conference Secretary
<b>Committee Chairs</b>	
Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME)	Chair, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Sen. Olympia J. Snowe (R-ME)	Chair, Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
<b>109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005-2007) -- U.S. House of Representatives</b>	
<b>Leadership Roles</b>	
Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)	House Democratic Leader
Rep. Barbara Cubin (R-WY)	Secretary, House Republican Conference
Rep. Diana DeGette (D-CO)	Chief Deputy Whip
Rep. Rosa De Lauro (D-CT)	Co-Chair of the House Democratic Steering Committee
Rep. Deborah Pryce (R-OH)	Chair, House Republican Conference
Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)	Chief Deputy Whip
Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA)	Chief Deputy Whip
<b>Committee Chairs</b>	
None	

Figure 1: Number of Female Congressional Chairs/Leaders by Decade

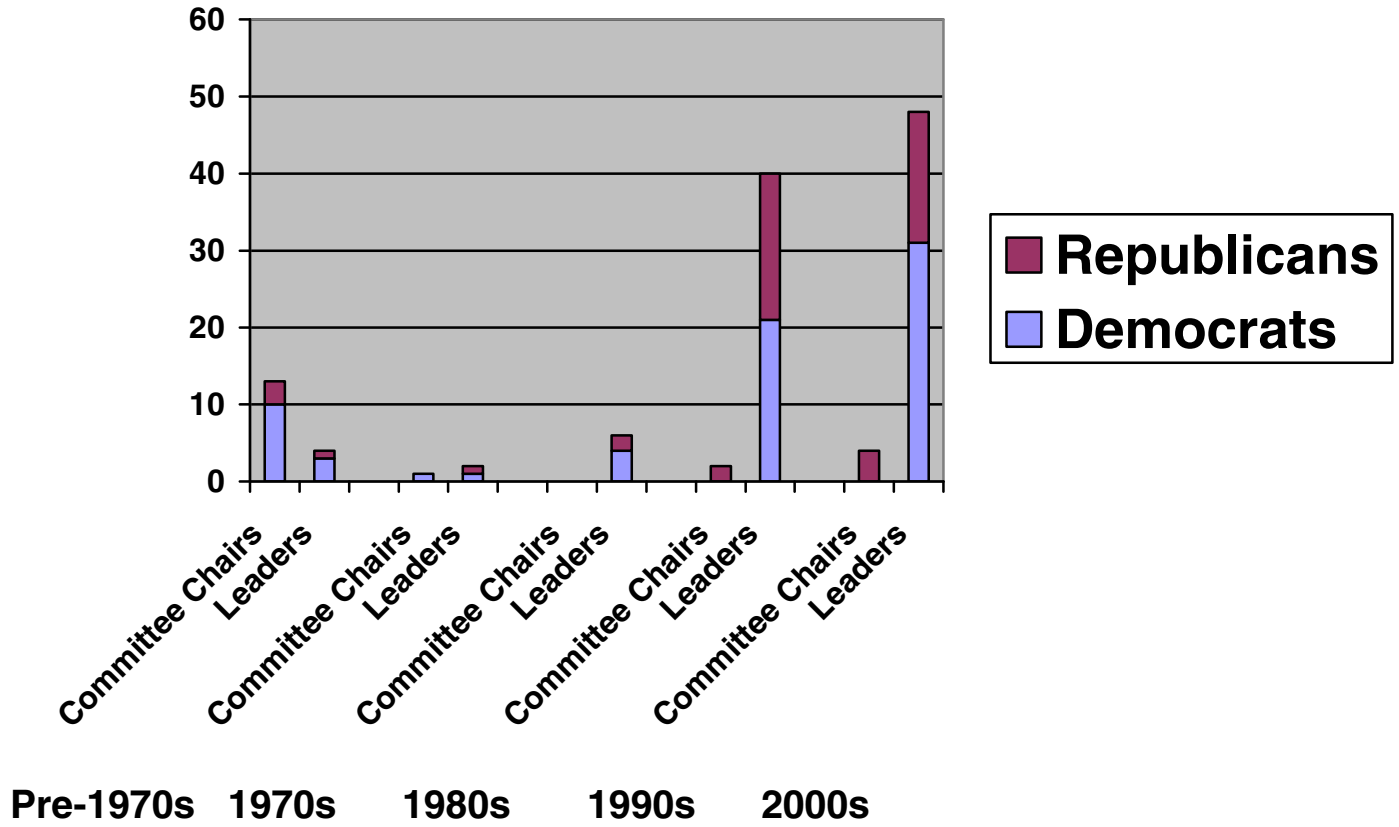


Table 3: Percentage of Women in Party Leadership by Conference and Chamber

	% Women in Conference Membership	% Women in Top Third of Party Seniority	% Women on Party Steering Committee	% Women in Party Leadership	% Women as Chairs & Ranking MM
House Democrats	21.3% (43 of 202)	11.2% (8 of 67)	31.4% (16 of 51)	25% (9 of 36)	21.1% (4 of 19)
House Republicans	10.3% (24 of 232)	2.6% (2 of 77)	10.7% (3 of 28)	10% (1 of 10)	0% (0 of 19)
Senate Democrats	20.5% (9 of 44)	6.7% (1 of 15)	21.1% (4 of 19)	33.3% (4 of 12)	0% (0 of 20)
Senate Republicans	9.1% (5 of 55)	5.6% (1 of 18)	n.a.	15% (3 of 20)	10% (2 of 20)

Source: Center for American Women in Politics , *Fact Sheet*, 2006; *CQ's Politics in America 2006*. (This source was selected because it contained the greatest detail in terms of listing leaders.)

Table 4: Voices and Gender Coverage in Recent House Leadership Elections - Mean Counts (Std. Dev.)

	Gender References	Total Women Quoted	Total Men Quoted	Female MC's Quoted	Male MC's Quoted
Pelosi's Whip Race N=16	5.31	1.31	2.88	1.25	2.56
	(4.71)	(1.35)	(3.14)	(1.24)	(2.94)
Pelosi's Leader Race N=30	2.10	1.60	2.80	1.20	1.83
	(2.47)	(1.35)	(2.46)	(1.00)	(1.95)
Race to Succeed Delay N=53	.00	.51	4.11	.32	3.11
	(.00)	(.70)	(2.42)	(.50)	(2.25)
Mean for all Articles N=99	1.50	.97	3.52	.73	2.64
	(2.98)	(1.16)	(2.61)	(.94)	(2.34)

Table 5: Primary and Combined Frames Associated with Leadership Elections

Primary Story Frame	Pelosi's Whip Race	Pelosi's Leader Race	Race to Succeed Delay
No Primary Frame	0 (0%)	4 (13.3%)	1 (1.9%)
Social Choice	13 (81.3%)	20 (66.7%)	18 (34.0%)
Social Structure	3 (18.8%)	2 (6.7%)	1 (1.9%)
Social Learning	0 (0%)	4 (13.3%)	33 (62.3%)
N=99	16	30	53

Pearson Chi-Square = 38.384, df = 6, p = .000

Combined Primary & Secondary Frames	Pelosi's Whip Race	Pelosi's Leader Race	Race to Succeed Delay
No Frame	0 (.0%)	4 (13.3%)	0 (.0%)
Social Choice Only	4 (25%)	8 (26.7%)	5 (9.4%)
Social Structure Only	0 (0%)	1 (3.3%)	1 (1.9%)
Social Learning Only	0 (0%)	4 (13.3%)	6 (11.3%)
Social Choice + Social Structure	11 (68.6%)	8 (26.7%)	2 (3.8%)
Social Choice + Social Learning	1 (6.3%)	5 (16.7%)	37 (69.8%)
Social Learning + Social Structure	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.8%)
N=99	16	30	53

Pearson Chi-Square= 61.12, df = 12, p = .000.

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