

The congressional election in 2000 marked the second largest gain in number of female United States senators in history, second only to 1992 which was coined "The Year of the Woman." Although four additional women joined the nine women of the 106th Senate in this 107th session, this phenomenon received relatively little academic and public attention compared to the election eight years prior. This thesis seeks to take advantage of the academic opportunity that these increased numbers provide for studying the behaviors of women in the Senate, as an aggregate and individually.

Utilizing historical, theoretical, quantitative, and qualitative data, this study explores the role and impact of women in the Senate. Specifically, the political behaviors of women in the 106th and 107th Senates are examined to see whether female representatives made significant efforts to appeal to the needs of female constituents. Three methods are employed to answer this question. The first is a statistical analysis of roll-call voting patterns, using a linear regression to express the effect of gender on "women's issue" voting in the 106th and 107th Senates. Women's issues were defined by eight categories: gender violence, reproductive rights, family issues, education, civil rights, women's health, political opportunity, and women in the workplace. The second method is a comparative analysis of political behaviors of a fourteen senator sample, seven men and seven women, looking at differences in committee assignments, bill sponsorship and passage, interest group ratings, voting record, term lengths and leadership positions. Thirdly, this study offers five case studies of female senators: Barbara Ann Mikulski (D-MD), Barbara Levy Boxer (D-CA), Kay Bailey Hutchinson (R-TX), Olympia Jean Snow (R-ME), and Blanche Lambert Lincoln (D-AR). These case studies provide an in-depth look at the bill sponsorship, public reputations, and floor statements of these senators.

If female legislators better represent women in the populace than their male counterparts do, a stronger case can be made for increasing the proportion of female representatives in the Senate. This study of the United States Senate finds that female senators do make concerted and consistent efforts to address women's issues, oftentimes more so than male senators. Women deserve this attention from their representation; therefore, efforts must be made to correct for the lack of female representatives in the Senate.