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Why Do Better-Looking Members of Congress Receive More Television Coverage?

ISRAEL WAISMEL-MANOR and YARIV TSFATI

Based on psychological research on the attractiveness effect, this study investigated the role of legislators' physical attractiveness in shaping the amount of their news coverage. The physical attractiveness of members of the first session of the 110th U.S. Congress was evaluated by non-American college students. Computerized searches in news transcripts archived in Lexis-Nexis were used to determine the number of times each of the representatives appeared on national TV news, radio, and newspapers. Multivariate analysis, controlling for a host of predictors of coverage (e.g., seniority, state size, number of bills sponsored by members, number of press releases sponsored, members' ideology and extremity, and assignment to a prestigious committee), demonstrated that televised news coverage was associated with the measure of physical attractiveness. Possible mechanisms underlying the association were empirically explored.

Keywords physical attractiveness, news coverage, Congress

The amount of coverage a legislator receives in the news media is a key element in shaping his or her political success. In the age of mediatization and candidate-centered politics, the “electorate . . . has grown accustomed to looking directly at the candidates through the media” (Wattenberg, 1995, p. 21). Voters are likely to support only those candidates they know enough about, and this knowledge is obtained mostly from the media (Bartels, 1988; Cook, 1986). In addition to the centrality of news media coverage for reelection, legislators are increasingly recognizing that such news coverage has become a part of the policy-making process within legislative institutions (Cook, 1986; Kingdon, 1995; Sellers, 2000; Wawro, 2000), and they increasingly use media as a tool to influence their counterparts in the policy-making process (Kedrowski, 1996).

But what factors shape legislators' news media coverage? In an ideal democracy, the amount of news coverage representatives receive should be determined by the quality of their work and the originality of their ideas. Each original idea should have equal access to the public sphere, and every interest should be equally represented in the public discourse. Reality, of course, is different from ideal models of the public sphere. Previous research tells us that the frequency and amount of coverage legislators receive is determined to a

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large extent by the characteristics of the media covering the representative, such as the congruence between the media market and the congressional district (Vinson, 2003) and the resources that media outlets can spend on congressional coverage (Arnold, 2004). Actor-centered explanations have traditionally emphasized the role of legislators' political power and factors such as their seniority and tenure in Congress, as well as their legislative activity, in shaping their coverage (Arnold, 2004; Cook, 1986; Hess, 1986; Squire, 1988). More recent research has noted the role of individual-level factors such as legislators' media skills and charisma (Sheafer, 2001) and media motivations (Vinson, 2003). Past research was able to explain only a limited amount of the variance in the coverage received by legislators, demonstrating that many factors shaping coverage have previously been ignored. The current exploration examines whether the coverage received by members of Congress is shaped not only by their hierarchical position in the power system, and the efforts they invest in obtaining coverage, but also by their physical attractiveness.

Former U.S. President Richard Nixon once offered Senator Ted Kennedy advice on how to make a serious run for the presidency: "Lose twenty pounds" (Postman, 1986, p. 4). The importance assigned by politicians to their physical appearance is attested to by many other anecdotes as well (Murray, 2006, p. A1). The political significance of physical attractiveness in the age of the Internet and television, when the whereabouts of public figures can be broadcast instantly to wide audiences, is also underscored by political consultants (see Brown, 1994; Reid, 2004), some of whom even specialize in grooming the looks of political candidates (Brown, 1994). The fact that candidates spend substantial resources on the services of such consultants also demonstrates the importance of physical attractiveness in political life.

Media scholar Neil Postman (1986) long ago asserted that the current media systems pay more attention to politicians' cosmetics than to their substantive arguments when selecting their interviewees. "Handsome" was also mentioned by Stephen Hess (1986, pp. 54–55) in his seminal study of coverage of senators in the national media, as a characteristic legislators bring to Washington that affects the way they are received by the congressional press corps. However, empirical evidence about the role of physical attractiveness in shaping legislators' news coverage is extremely limited (Tsfati, Markovitch-Elfassi, & Waismel-Manor, 2010). Therefore, in the current exploration, we measured the physical attractiveness of members of the U.S. Congress and estimated the impact of this variable on their appearances in television news.

The Attractiveness Effect

The principle underlying the current investigation is that, given that people are attracted to beauty and aesthetics, physical attractiveness carries with it advantages, rewards, and benefits (Etcoff, 1999). Psychological research has labeled this phenomenon "the attractiveness effect" and documented it in a variety of contexts: Attractive babies receive preferred treatment from their parents (Langlois et al., 2000); attractive people are more popular and are perceived as having higher social status (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001); attractive people are perceived as more socially competent, more powerful, and more intelligent. In the psychological literature, the human tendency to assign socially desirable qualities to physically attractive people is referred to as the "what-is-beautiful-is-good" stereotype (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). While there are several qualifications to these positive perceptions (e.g., attractive women are perceived to be more snobbish and materialistic; Dermer & Thiel, 1975), the what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype has received support across numerous studies (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991).

Perhaps because they have higher self-esteem and “possess characteristics that dispose them to be more effective communicators” (Chaiken, 1979, p. 1387), attractive people are judged as more trustworthy and are more persuasive (Horai, Naccari, & Fatoullah, 1974). Probably as a result of these advantages (Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006), attractive people receive many rewards: They get better grades in school, have more friends, receive lighter sentences from the courts, and are treated better by the job market (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003; Judge, Hurst, & Simon, 2009). Consistent with these findings, political scientists have found that good-looking politicians enjoy more electoral success (Surawski & Ossoff, 2006).

The explanations for this attractiveness effect are either evolutionary or cultural (Rhodes, 2005). According to the evolutionary explanation, attraction to beauty is part of the Darwinist struggle that pushes human beings toward activities that are likely to promote the survival of their genes (Etcoff, 1999). Those features to which people are most attracted—for example, facial symmetry and averageness—are often signals of fertility and healthier genes (Rhodes, 2005), which are preferred because they produce genetically resistant offspring or promise better parental care for the offspring (Grammer & Thornhill, 1994). Consistent with the evolutionary explanation, people agree about who is and is not attractive, both within and across cultures (Langlois et al., 2000). The fact that a preference for beauty is innate is also attested to by evidence demonstrating that 3-month-old babies spend longer periods of time looking at pictures of people rated by adults as attractive (Langlois et al., 1987).

The second explanation for the attractiveness effect argues that it stems from social and cultural reasons (Wolf, 2004). According to socialization theory, people are socialized to prefer beauty and to judge others according to their physical appearance. Western cultures associate beauty with good things and ugliness with bad things (Eagly et al., 1991). According to social expectancy theory, this socialization process results in self-fulfilling prophecies, caused by the differential expectations from attractive and unattractive targets (Langlois et al., 2000, p. 392). In other words, we learn that beauty is good, and thus expect more of attractive people. These expectations lead us to judge and treat attractive and unattractive people differently. As Langlois et al. (2000) explain, the cultural and biological theories are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and may be operating simultaneously. The source of the attractiveness effect may be in human evolution, but it is amplified and reinforced by culture and socialization, which create differing expectations. To sum up, according to the social-psychological literature (Etcoff, 1999; Kalick, 1988), attractiveness is a physical trait that is distinct both from the perceptions that it raises among evaluators (that are the result of the beauty stereotype) and from the differing abilities and efforts that are measured among attractive people (that are probably the indirect result of the attractiveness stereotype, through the stereotype’s influence on individual and social expectations).

Physical Attractiveness as a News Criterion

In this article, we argue that better-looking members of Congress receive more televised news coverage because physical attractiveness affects news selection decisions made by journalists and editors. Of course, as documented by decades of communication research, this criterion does not supplant, but rather supplements, existing news criteria. In a seminal study, Galtung and Ruge (1965) noted that journalists and editors are faced every day with a stream of messages and events that compete for the limited time and space news outlets have to offer. Information is provided to journalists by a variety of sources,

including government officials, leaders of interest groups, spokespeople representing various parties, and celebrities who are often eager to appear in the news media in order to disseminate messages that promote their interests (Gans, 1980). Journalists and editors employ a process of selection, based primarily on professional considerations, when deciding what sources and which stories will be covered (Berkowitz, 1997; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001).

While Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal study offered a set of news criteria that journalists use when deciding which *events* should be covered, later research has focused on the question of which *newsmakers* are more newsworthy. Such criteria include relevance (the more a person is directly related to the issue at hand, the more coverage he or she receives; Schoenbach, De Ridder, & Lauf, 2001), past suitability (the probability of using a source increases if that source has provided useful information in the past; Gans, 1980), credibility (journalists prefer sources that they perceive as trustworthy; Gans, 1980), seniority (journalists prefer sources who hold high-ranking official positions, because they have access to ample information they consider credible), cultural proximity, and productivity (given limited resources, journalists prefer sources that provide ample information easily, without the expenditure of time and effort on the part of the journalists; Gans, 1980). These criteria shape news coverage in the political arena. Their most obvious outcome is the fact that not all politicians or candidates receive equal amounts of news coverage (e.g., in the context of U.S. elections, incumbents receive much more coverage compared to contenders; see Clarke & Evans, 1983).

Research focusing on variation in the coverage of legislators has documented that legislators' place in their legislative institution's hierarchy (as indicated by chairing a committee or a subcommittee or serving as a party leader; Arnold, 2004; Hess, 1986; Tresch, 2009), their political activity (e.g., initiating bills, running for higher office, or being investigated by the ethics committee; Arnold, 2004; Squire, 1988, Tresch, 2009), and, to a lesser extent, their motivation to be covered by the news media (Vinson, 2003) and cooperation with journalists (Hess, 1986) predict the amount of attention they will receive from journalists. When it comes to ideology, however, there is little agreement in the literature. Some scholars found that liberal House and Senate members receive more coverage (Cook, 1986; Hess, 1986, p. 60), while others found that a member's political ideology is, by and large, unrelated to his or her coverage (Squire, 1988; Tresch, 2009). Sheafer (2001) also pointed out that legislators' charisma—their verbal and communicative talents—increase their value as media sources. For example, the more a politician knows how to work with journalists and how to conform to the demands of news routines, the more likely he or she is to receive news media coverage. As Sheafer (2001) points out, these charismatic skills and resources do not encompass the entire scope of charisma, which may include physical appearance as well. Given the literature regarding the attractiveness effect in psychology and the review above that documented the many advantages afforded to attractive people in a variety of contexts, explained by both evolution and culture, it is possible to hypothesize that politicians' physical attractiveness will be correlated with the extent of their media coverage, such that more attractive politicians will receive more coverage (H1).

Indeed, consistent with this hypothesis, recent research has documented an association between politicians' physical attractiveness and their televised news coverage (Tsfati et al., 2010). In this investigation, the authors measured the attractiveness of Israeli members of the Knesset, Israel's Parliament. Their findings demonstrated that this measure was correlated with the frequency of their appearances in the media. The results held even after controlling for a host of political and demographic variables.

The current investigation extends previous research into the American context and examines whether physical attractiveness is correlated with news coverage of members of Congress. Such an investigation advances past research not only because it increases the generalizability of previous findings about the attractiveness effect and news coverage, which may operate differently across cultural contexts, but also because it improves our understanding of the association in several important ways. First, the U.S. context provides us with access to data about the coverage of politicians not only on television but also in print and radio outlets. Second, the U.S. context offers more control variables and better measures of control variables. Thus, replicating previous findings in the U.S. will not only increase the generalizability of the findings, but also add greater certainty that the association between physical attractiveness and news coverage is not in fact spurious. As explained shortly, the possibility of collecting additional data on news coverage in different media and with additional covariates helps us broaden our understanding of the association between physical attractiveness and news coverage.

The main limitation of the previous investigation is that it did not identify the exact mechanism through which physical attractiveness affects journalistic coverage. Previous findings on the attractiveness effect suggest three such possible mechanisms. The first mechanism may be related to journalists' knowledge about the importance of beauty in life and their projection of this knowledge onto their audience. According to this explanation, knowing that people are attracted to beauty makes journalists inclined to offer more coverage to better-looking representatives because they expect that coverage of better-looking newsmakers would attract the attention of the audience. This is true in particular in the era of commercial television, in which public affairs issues are essentially treated as entertainment (Postman, 1986). Considerations about achieving "a good audience draw" (Berkowitz, 1997) preoccupy the minds of editors and journalists, especially in the televised medium (Altheide, 2004). The desire to satisfy as many audience members as possible may lead journalists to prefer physically attractive interviewees, because they may perceive that this is what their audience would be interested in watching, given the human preference for beauty. This explanation is the one most consistent with Postman's (1986) argument and with similar arguments by scholars who contend that television production in general prefers better-looking protagonists (Signorielli, 1993).

The second mechanism maintains that the association between physical attractiveness and news coverage may be explained by the fact that attractive people possess characteristics that make them more newsworthy. Journalists may prefer physically attractive interviewees because, as documented above, they are perceived as more trustworthy (Horai et al., 1974), and journalists tend to prefer trustworthy sources (Gans, 1980). In addition, given journalists' preference for articulateness and charisma (Sheafer, 2001), attractive people may be preferred as news sources, because they may be viewed as possessing better communicative skills (Chaiken, 1979; Mobius & Rosenblat, 2006).

The third mechanism, the proactive search for coverage by confident politicians, is not related to the perceptions of journalists, but rather to the qualities of the newsmakers. Given that it is well known that attractive people have greater self-esteem (Eagly et al., 1991), perhaps their more confident personalities make them more proactive in seeking news coverage. Furthermore, the great majority of routine news stories involve the intentional promotion of politicians' accomplishments. Given that in such routine stories journalists do not often actively seek information that they are not "fed," a key predictor of a politician's news coverage is the amount of effort he or she exerts to obtain coverage and his or her willingness to cooperate with journalists (Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheafer, 2008). Therefore,

the higher self-esteem of better-looking politicians may increase their media motivation and help them obtain more coverage.

In sum, the effect of physical attractiveness on television news coverage may be mediated by journalists' expectations of a better audience draw, journalists' perceptions of eloquence and trustworthiness, or by representatives' self-esteem or confidence vis-à-vis journalists. It is also possible that these three explanations operate simultaneously.

The current investigation offers us an opportunity to determine which of these three possible mechanisms accounts for the association between news coverage and physical attractiveness. If an attractiveness effect of a similar magnitude emerges in radio and print news outlets (where the emphasis is on the written or spoken word), we will have evidence against the first explanation. Journalists' perceptions about audience expectations of seeing attractive news protagonists are obviously irrelevant for radio news, as attractiveness is a visual phenomenon. A similar but weaker argument could be made about the print media (in which, despite the emphasis on the written word, some of the politicians are presented in pictures). On the other hand, evidence of the attractiveness effect solely in television news coverage may support the "audience expectations" mechanism. Lastly, if more attractive politicians are more eloquent or trustworthy, there should be no difference between the amount of coverage they receive on radio and television, as both qualities are well appreciated in these media. However, evidence of the attractiveness effect on TV alone would rule out the second mechanism.

The present investigation also extends earlier research by examining the explanation related to the proactive activities of confident politicians who actively seek out coverage (the third explanation for the attractiveness effect discussed above). Its main advantage in this respect lies in its control for the number of press releases issued by each Congress member, as an indicator of his or her initiative and effort vis-à-vis journalists. If the association between physical attractiveness and news coverage becomes insignificant (suggesting that the number of press releases is a mediator between attractiveness and news coverage), this will serve as evidence supporting the third explanation, the "increased confidence and effort" explanation. In that case, the explanation, supported by the data, will be that the increased confidence and self-esteem associated with attractiveness increases legislators' initiative and proactiveness in seeking coverage, which in turn translates into increased coverage. If, on the other hand, adding the press releases indicator into the model has little effect on the coefficient for physical attractiveness, this will serve as evidence against the "confidence and competition" explanation. The different explanations and expected supporting and refuting evidence for each explanation are summarized in Table 1.

Thus, this study asks the following research questions:

RQ1: Will the association between politicians' physical attractiveness and their news coverage be contingent on the news medium (television, print, and/or radio)?

RQ2: Will the number of press releases issued by the politicians serve as a mediator between their attractiveness and their news coverage?

The Context: Coverage of Members of Congress on National Television, Newspaper, and Radio News

To examine the association between physical attractiveness and legislators' news coverage, we chose to focus on the coverage of members of the U.S. Congress on national television, newspaper, and radio news. The focus on both chambers (the House of Representatives

Table 1
Summary of alternative explanations for the news coverage attractiveness effect and expected evidence

	Explanation 1: Audience expectations	Explanation 2: Different characteristics	Explanation 3: Proactive search for coverage
Mechanism	Journalists cover attractive congresspersons because they think the audience prefers watching attractive newsmakers.	Journalists cover attractive congresspersons because they perceive them as possessing qualities that make them more newsworthy (e.g., articulateness, trustworthiness).	Attractive politicians receive more coverage given that they are more confident and hence more active in seeking news coverage.
Expected evidence if the explanation is correct	Attractiveness effect in TV news only	Not tested	Attractiveness effect is fully mediated by the number of press releases issued by congresspersons.
Refuting evidence	Attractiveness effect of similar magnitude across media	Attractiveness effect in TV news only	Attractiveness effect remains significant and of the same magnitude after controlling for press releases issued by congresspersons.

and Senate) stems from several considerations. First, the larger size of the Congress (compared to the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives alone) increases the statistical power and maximizes the variance of the dependent variable (since compared to senators, most House members receive relatively little coverage on national media). The fact that on average House members are less politically experienced and their relationships with the news media are less established than those of senators is also relevant and important. As mentioned above, psychological research on the attractiveness effect shows that this effect is stronger in shaping first impressions (Dion & Berscheid, 1974) and less important in later stages of interpersonal interactions and long-term relationships (Etcoff, 1999). Thus, we would expect that the effect of attractiveness on news coverage would be stronger in the House of Representatives compared to the Senate. Thus, we can hypothesize that physical attractiveness would interact with the chamber of the Congress (Senate/House), so that the effect of attractiveness would be stronger for House members compared to Senators (H2).

Studying both houses of Congress is not only suitable as a context for the current investigation for methodological reasons. It is also a suitable context because it is extremely important to investigate variations in coverage of Congress members in the national media.

This is so because the extreme variation in coverage of members of Congress may carry important political consequences (Clarke & Evans, 1983; Schaffner, 2006). Despite this importance, not much research in recent years has examined variations in the coverage of Congress in national media. In fact, little has changed since Cook (1986) wrote more than 20 years ago that “only a handful of studies provide content analyses of how the national media cover Congress as a whole” (p. 205). As Cook noted, most early studies (e.g., Hess, 1986; Veblen, 1981) emphasized print over electronic media and often focused only on senators. While in several cases scholars in the past two decades have collected data on national TV coverage of House members (e.g., Niven & Zilber, 1998), they have used this variable as an independent rather than a dependent variable. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, the most updated investigation of the factors shaping House members’ coverage on national television is still Cook’s seminal study, which referred to the 95th and 96th Congresses (1977–1980), though several studies in recent years have examined House members’ coverage in *local* media (e.g., Fogarty, 2008; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Vinson, 2003).

The central studies examining coverage of senators in the national media also date back to the 1980s (Hess, 1986; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Squire, 1988), though some studies have examined gender differences in the coverage of senators and, more recently, coverage of senatorial campaigns in the national media. Obviously, the national news media landscape has changed dramatically since the 1980s (with news broadcast 24 hours a day every day on CNN, Fox News, and MSNBC, for example), and this fact itself calls for an investigation that revisits the factors shaping the coverage of Congress members on national media.

Method

To examine the above hypotheses, we collected data about the physical attractiveness and the amount of news coverage allocated to the members of the House of Representatives and Senate during the first session of the 110th U.S. Congress (2007). We focused on a single year because it is much simpler to model for Congress members’ news coverage outside the context of elections. The focus on a nonelection year neutralizes the influence of factors such as campaign spending, competitiveness of races, campaign scandals, challengers’ news value, and bids for higher office.

While Congress is comprised of 535 members, we removed those members who did not serve in Congress for the entire session: the late Julia Carson (IN 7th), Craig L. Thomas (WY), Jo Ann Davis (VA 1st), Paul Gillmor (OH 5th), Juanita Millender-McDonald (CA 37th), and Charlie Norwood (GA 10th), in addition to Tim Johnson (SD), whose medical condition accounted for his coverage in 2007, and Bobby Jindal (LA 1st), Marty Meehan (MA 5th), and Dennis Hastert (IL 14th), who resigned. We also removed seven senators and four representatives who announced their candidacy for president and for whom coverage was mostly about their run for the White House: Evan Bayh (IN), Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (DE), Sam Brownback (KS), Hillary Rodham Clinton (NY), Christopher J. Dodd (CT), John McCain (AZ), Barack Obama (IL), Duncan Hunter (CA 52nd), Dennis Kucinich (OH 10th), Ron Paul (TX 14th), and Thomas Tancredo (CO 6th). We also removed the Speaker, Nancy Pelosi (CA 8th), and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (NV) as obvious outliers in the case of news coverage.¹ For example, Reid appeared on television news 970 times in the period under investigation, almost 3 times as often as Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (330), almost 4 times more than House Minority Leader John Boehner (245), and almost 40 times more than the average television appearance score of 24.67 (the figures

for Speaker Pelosi are even higher). After these cases were removed, the effective sample size was 512 (422 House members and 90 senators).

Measures

Independent Variable: Physical Attractiveness. Physical attractiveness is typically measured by requesting study participants to evaluate the attractiveness of the faces of people presented to them in still photographs (Eagly et al., 1991, p. 117; see also Berggren, Jordahl, & Poutvaara, 2007). The physical attractiveness of congressional members was evaluated by 463 undergraduate and graduate communication and political science students enrolled in a large university in northern Israel (59.2% female, with an average age of 24.81, $SD = 4.29$). Non-American evaluators who were not familiar with the faces of U.S. members of Congress (and who were not told that they were evaluating American politicians) were used in order to rule out political biases in the evaluations of physical attractiveness (a Democrat may perceive Republican politicians as relatively unattractive because of their political dissimilarity). To provide a standard presentation of the representatives to the participants (in terms of the level of cosmetic enhancement, photograph angle, and the quality of the pictures), official photographs downloaded from the congressional Web site were used. Each student ranked the attractiveness of a random sample of approximately 50 representatives, whose pictures were randomly ordered.

Pretests of different question wordings demonstrated that 1–5 Likert-type scales labeled *very unattractive* to *very attractive* in response to “Please rate the physical attractiveness of the people in the pictures” resulted in very poor variance, given that politicians are, by and large, not particularly attractive. Therefore, we eventually used the following wording: “Look at all the following photos and rate the attractiveness of the persons in the photos, comparing each to the others. Relatively speaking, on a scale of 0 [ugly] to 10 [good-looking], how would you rate these persons’ physical appearance?” This question produced variance in the evaluations and, hence, was utilized. The internal consistency of the responses was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha. In a similar manner to the deletion of nonreliable indicators when creating scales from survey items, 28 students whose evaluations negatively affected the reliability of the attractiveness scores were not used when creating the scales. After this deletion, the minimum alpha was .80. Each House member (evaluated by 20 to 40 students) received an attractiveness score that was simply the average evaluation he or she received from the students ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.02$).

To rule out the possibility that cultural differences between the foreign evaluators and American culture may account for the findings, the attractiveness scores of senators were correlated with the attractiveness evaluations of American students studying at the overseas program at a university in northern Israel ($n = 27$; 72.0% female; $M_{age} = 20.72$, $SD = 2.31$). The correlation was very high and statistically significant ($r = .86$, $p < .001$), indicating high rates of agreement between American and foreign students regarding who is and who is not attractive. This result is consistent with the predictions of the evolutionary perspective on physical attractiveness, which argues that evaluations of beauty are fairly consistent across cultures, and with meta-analytic findings (Langlois et al., 2000).

Dependent Variables: Newspaper, Radio, and Televised News Coverage. The amount of news coverage was determined by searching the names and nicknames of all members of Congress in the transcripts of national television, radio, and newspaper news items broadcast or printed during the first session of the 110th U.S. Congress (January 4 through December 19, 2007), available through Lexis-Nexis. As argued by Arnold (2004, p. 24),

computerized text searching is superior to any form of human-based content analysis, given the advantages of efficiency and accuracy. Arnold noted that a subsequent audit of an early study of congressional coverage utilizing a commercial clipping service revealed that the human-based coding used by the clipping service missed two thirds of the articles. The efficiency of using computerized text search enabled us to use a huge sample containing a year's worth of transcripts archived by Lexis-Nexis.

The television coverage transcripts include national news programs and news magazines from the following television networks: ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, NBC, and PBS. The radio coverage measure is comprised of all NPR radio programs (*Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, *Day to Day*, *Tell Me More*, *Talk of the Nation*, *News & Notes*, and *Weekend Edition*), while the newspaper measure includes all articles that appeared in *USA Today*, all sections, front to back.

Each hit was inspected by trained human coders to make sure it referred to the actual Congress member and not to someone else with the same name (similarly to the procedure described by Arnold, 2004, p. 25). Each time a member was quoted in the transcripts (as opposed to being mentioned by someone else), be it on television, in a newspaper, or on the radio, it was counted as an appearance.² This variable (ranging between 0 and 515 appearances for television, 0 and 75 for the radio measure, and 0 and 58 for the print measure) was heavily skewed (for television: $M = 24.67$, $SD = 56.42$, median = 6.00, mode = 1.00; for radio: $M = 4.18$, $SD = 9.36$, median = 1.00, mode = 0.00; for newspaper: $M = 2.63$, $SD = 5.56$, median = 1.00, mode = 0.00). Probably due to the relatively standard set of professional decisions made by journalists, and given intermedia agenda setting, there was a high correlation between the television, print, and radio measures ($r_{TV-radio} = .84$, $r_{TV-print} = .76$, $r_{print-radio} = .86$, all significant at the $p < .001$ level).

Control Variables. Several variables known in the literature to impact politicians' news coverage were used as covariates in the analysis reported below. These particular control variables were selected based on previous research on coverage of Congress in local or national media (e.g., Arnold, 2004; Cook, 1986; Hess, 1986; Squire, 1988; Vinson, 2003).

Political Standing. Our measure of political standing was based on Cook's (1986) leadership status and Ray's (1982) committee prestige. Highest scores (5) went to the majority and minority leaders and whips, the chairmen of the Democratic Caucus and the Republican Conference, followed by the chairpersons and ranking members of the Committees on Appropriations, Ways and Means, Foreign Affairs, Homeland Security, Armed Services Energy and Commerce, Budget and Rules (4), Oversight and Government Reform, Judiciary, Science and Technology, Agriculture Committee, Natural Resources and Small Business (3), Education and Labor, Financial Services, Transportation, Veterans' Affairs, House Administration, and all the chairpersons and ranking members of the appropriations subcommittees (2). All other members received a score of 1.

Committee Assignment. As explained by Hess (1986, pp. 30–43), sitting on a prestigious committee is a crucial factor shaping congressional members' coverage. To control for committee assignments, we created a dummy variable representing service in one of the three most prestigious committees in every chamber of Congress according to Ray's (1982) committee prestige ranking. The variable was coded 1 for "member in a prestigious committee" and 0 for "nonmember."

Electoral Invulnerability. As explained by Vinson (2003, p. 47), a member who is in electoral jeopardy is more newsworthy than his or her colleague who has a safe seat. Prior to election season, the best measure of electoral vulnerability is a representative's

percentage of the vote in the previous election (Arnold, 2004, p. 42; see also Niven & Zilber, 1998). Thus, we controlled for the percentage of the vote each member received in the latest elections (2006 for all House members and 2006, 2004, and 2002 for the Senate). Members who ran uncontested received a score of 100.

Political Ideology. As documented by previous research, a legislator's political ideology may shape his or her attractiveness to the national news media. Previous research contended that liberal House and Senate members receive more coverage (Cook, 1986; Hess, 1986, p. 60), but other studies have not found any such biases (see Squire, 1988, pp. 144, 147–149). To capture members' ideological tendencies, we relied on each of the representatives' ideology scores as measured by Carroll et al.'s (2010) DW-nominate scores. As the relationship between ideology and news coverage may not be linear, with the possibility that extremity, not ideology, is the factor shaping coverage (Arnold, 2004; Squire, 1988, p. 144), we also added the square of the DW score to the equation. The DW-nominate scores vary from -1 (for the most liberal) to $+1$ (for the most conservative).

Indicators of Activity in the House. The number of bills sponsored by each legislator was entered as a control variable as well, given that more active members of a legislative institution receive more news coverage (Cohen et al., 2008; Fogarty, 2008; Squire, 1988; Tresch, 2009). In addition, following Arnold (2004, p. 42), we also controlled for the number of times each representative was mentioned in the *Congressional Quarterly Report (CQR)*, a publication that covers what happens on Capitol Hill for an audience of reporters, lobbyists, and congressional specialists. As argued by Arnold, such references are indicators of performing newsworthy activities in the House. This argument received robust empirical support, as this indicator emerged as a strong predictor of coverage in all of Arnold's models (Chapter 2).

Indicator of Media Effort. As explained above, previous research has demonstrated that legislators' motivation and efforts vis-à-vis the news media are major predictors of their news media coverage (Cohen et al., 2008; Vinson, 2003). To tap congressional members' media motivations and efforts, we used a count of the number of press releases they issued obtained from Lexis-Nexis Academic (similarly to Arnold, 2004). This measure was validated by correlating it with the number of press releases appearing in congressional members' Web sites for the period under investigation, for a sample of 297 members whose sites contained their press releases ($r = .46, p < .001$).

Market–District Congruence. The most important finding stemming from research on the coverage of the House of Representatives in local media is that the extent of geographical overlap between media markets and electoral districts has a strong effect on legislators' coverage (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Vinson, 2003). While the logic behind this finding is rather irrelevant to coverage in the national media (the chances of a House member receiving news attention in a media market covering several congressional districts are simply lower), we did take this factor into account in the current exploration. In order to fill larger news holes, in the era of 24-hour-a-day news channels, the national media may be more likely to pick up stories about House members from the local media. Therefore, members who are more likely to be covered by the local media may end up receiving more coverage in the national media as well. To control for the potential effect of this increased coverage of House members in the local media on their coverage on national television, we collected data on the number of media markets covering each congressional district. We then collected the total number of congressional districts in each of the media markets covering a given district.³

The formula for the congruence variable was:

$$\text{Congruence} = \frac{1}{\text{number of districts in market 1}} + \frac{1}{\text{number of districts in market 2}} + \dots + \frac{1}{\text{number of districts in market } n}$$

where n is the number of media markets covering a given district. According to this formula, a House member whose district is covered by only a single media market that covers 35 other districts (e.g., Michael Ferguson, NJ 17th) received a congruence score of $1/36 = 0.027$; a member whose district exactly overlaps a single media market, and whose district is the only one covered by the media market (e.g., Keith Ellison, MN 5th) received a score of 1. A score of 1 was also received, for example, by Jim McCrey (LA 4th), whose district is covered by three media markets—the first shared by another House member, the second shared by an additional two, and the third by an additional five ($1/2 + 1/3 + 1/6 = 1$). Finally, members whose districts are covered by several media markets that covered only their districts received higher scores. For example, Dennis Rehberg's (MT) congressional district is covered by nine media markets, five of which covered only this district, and the other four covered additional (1 to 5) congressional districts. His total congruence score was 6.28.

Using a similar formula, we calculated the congruence for the Senate, where:

$$\text{Congruence} = \frac{1}{2 \times \text{number of states in market 1}} + \frac{1}{2 \times \text{number of states in market 2}} + \dots + \frac{1}{2 \times \text{number of states in market } n}$$

However, we multiplied by 2 to account for the existence of two senators per state. In addition, given that some states, especially the populous ones like Florida or Texas, have mostly state-confined media markets, adding those to the formula would have artificially inflated the congruence score compared to a state like Arizona, where the Phoenix media market is also state-confined and covers 80% of the state. Hence, all state-confined media markets were counted together as one, adding 0.5 to the congruence score. The score could be as low as .125 for Utah, whose Salt Lake City media market expands beyond state borders to Nevada, Idaho, and Wyoming and therefore covers eight senators ($1/8 = .125$), and as high as 2.58 for Alabama, whose nine mostly border-crossing markets cover, on average, four senators each.

Additional controls included the House members' party affiliation (coded 1 for Republicans and 0 for independents and Democrats), gender (male = 1), and race (dummies for Caucasian and African American legislators, with the "other" race category as the reference category). Like Arnold (2004), Cook (1986), and Squire (1988), we also controlled for *seniority*, measured as the years of the congresspersons' tenure in office. As age was strongly correlated with seniority ($r = .60, p < .001$) and might lead to multicollinearity problems, this variable was not included in the model. Finally, given that national media outlets tend to concentrate on large population centers and ignore peripheral states, and following Squire (1988), the size of a state in terms of its population (in millions of people) was entered as a predictor of news coverage. The distribution of these control variables is presented in the Appendix.

Results

Our investigation focused on the influence of Congress members' physical attractiveness on their appearances on television news. Unfortunately, the use of an ordinary least squares regression is problematic in this case, due to the violation of the assumption of a normal distribution of the dependent variables (49.4% of the Congress members appeared on national TV news only five times or less, 62.9% appeared 10 times or less, 75.6% appeared 20 times or less, and the remaining Congress members appeared between 21 and 515 times). This problem was solved using the negative binomial regression, which is the recommended technique for modeling discrete, extremely skewed, and hence nonnormal dependent variables (Allison, 1999). The negative binomial model is especially recommended when modeling variables that have nonnegative integer values (Allison, 1999, p. 226) like our dependent variables, which essentially count the number of times each member of Congress appeared on national television or radio and in newspaper news.

To test H1, negative binomial regression models were run with news coverage as the dependent variable and physical attractiveness and the control variables as the independent variables. Results are presented in Table 2. As the table demonstrates, and as suggested by the research literature on politicians' news coverage, the representatives' news coverage was shaped by a variety of factors. The higher the political standing of the representatives ($B = 2.85, p < .01$), the more frequently they talked on NPR, after controlling for all other factors.⁴ While sponsoring bills did not directly affect coverage, the more a representative performed activities deemed noteworthy by *CQR*, the more coverage he or she received on national TV, radio, and in the newspaper ($B = .05, B = .05$, and $B = .04$, respectively, all significant at the $p < .001$ level).⁵ *Ceteris paribus*, membership in the three most important committees was a significant and negative predictor of television, radio, and newspaper coverage ($B = -.24, p < .05$, for television; $B = -.30$ and $B = -.27$, respectively, for radio and print, both significant at the $p < .01$ level).⁶

All else being equal, representatives from larger states received more news coverage on radio and television ($B = .00001, p < .001$, for both radio and television). Male members of Congress received more coverage on national TV than females ($B = .29, p < .05$). Caucasian members of Congress received more TV and radio coverage compared to the reference category composed mainly of Latino and Asian members ($B = .58$ and $B = .61$, respectively, both significant at the $p < .01$ level). African American members of Congress also received more TV and radio coverage compared to this reference category ($B = .85$ and $B = 1.27$, respectively, both significant at the $p < .01$ level). While party affiliation did not significantly affect coverage, there was a quadratic effect of political ideology such that more extreme members received more coverage.⁷ Unsurprisingly, senators received significantly more coverage in all three media than members of the House ($B = 1.00, B = 1.42$, and $B = 1.19$, respectively, for TV, radio, and newspaper, all significant at the $p < .001$ level). However, unexpectedly, there was no significant effect of tenure in Congress,⁸ market–district congruence, the number of press releases issued by the congresspersons, and electoral invulnerability on coverage on national television news.

Even after controlling for all these factors, and as expected by H1, physical attractiveness had a significant and positive impact on televised news coverage ($B = .11, SE = .05, p < .05$).⁹ The interpretation of the coefficient is that each unit increase in the 0–10 physical attractiveness scale was associated with an increase of 11.62% ($100 * \exp[.11] - 1$) in the expected number of appearances on national television news. However, in contrast to the prediction of H1, the effect of physical attractiveness on radio and newspaper coverage was statistically insignificant.

Table 2
Negative binomial regression model predicting news media coverage

	Model 1: Television	Model 2: Radio	Model 3: Newspaper
Political standing	0.09 (.05)	2.85**	-0.04 (.06)
Number of bills sponsored	0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Number of press releases	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.00)
Membership in a top committee	-0.24 (.11)*	-0.30 (.11)**	-0.27 (.10)**
Activity in the House (references in <i>CQR</i>)	0.05 (.00)***	0.05 (.00)***	0.04 (.00)***
Tenure in Congress (years)	0.00 (.01)	-0.00 (.00)	0.02 (.00)**
Electoral invulnerability (% in last elections)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.00)
State size (population in millions)	0.02 (.00)***	0.02 (.00)**	0.01 (.01)
DW	-0.36 (.34)	-0.56 (.30)	-0.43 (.20)
DW ²	1.34 (.34)***	-0.09 (.32)	-0.18 (.29)
Republican (= 1)	0.20 (.32)	0.42 (.27)	0.07 (.27)
Sex (male = 1)	0.29 (.14)*	0.21 (.15)	0.14 (.14)
Caucasian (= 1)	0.58 (.21)**	0.61 (.22)**	0.29 (.20)
African American (= 1)	0.85 (.28)**	1.27 (.28)***	0.26 (.26)
Market-District congruence	-0.12 (.08)	-0.26 (.08)**	-0.04 (.07)
House (Senate = 1)	1.00 (.22)***	1.42 (.19)***	1.19 (.17)***
Physical attractiveness	0.11 (.05)*	-0.02 (.05)	0.02 (.05)
Dispersion	1.10 (.07)	0.76 (.08)	1.13 (.13)
Intercept	-0.50 (.49)	-0.55 (.48)	0.07 (.44)
McFadden's pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.56	0.54	0.50
<i>N</i>	512	512	512

Note. Table entries are negative binomial regression coefficients. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

To demonstrate the size of the effect for television news, we calculated the predicted number of appearances for the observed range of the physical attractiveness scale (Figure 1, upper left). These predicted values were calculated for a Caucasian, male, Republican senator with average values on all covariates. For the sake of comparison, we also similarly demonstrated the effect of three other variables—state size, chamber of Congress, and gender (the three other graphs in Figure 1). These variables were selected given that their size was similar in magnitude to the effect of physical attractiveness. The effect of physical attractiveness was certainly not as strong as the effect of the best predictor in the model—the *CQR* score (a 0–60 change on the *CQR* score increased the predicted number of television appearances from 6.53 to 131.29)—but it was almost as strong as the effect of the next best predictor: state size. While an increase in state size can potentially (in the case of extreme changes) increase the predicted values from 10.73 to 23.47, the parallel increase on the attractiveness scale increased the predicted values from 8.96 to 17.70. Yet the effect of physical attractiveness was interestingly in the same magnitude of the effect of the chamber of Congress (House versus Senate) and gender (or even slightly stronger than both of these effects). Importantly, the effect of physical attractiveness on news coverage was stronger than

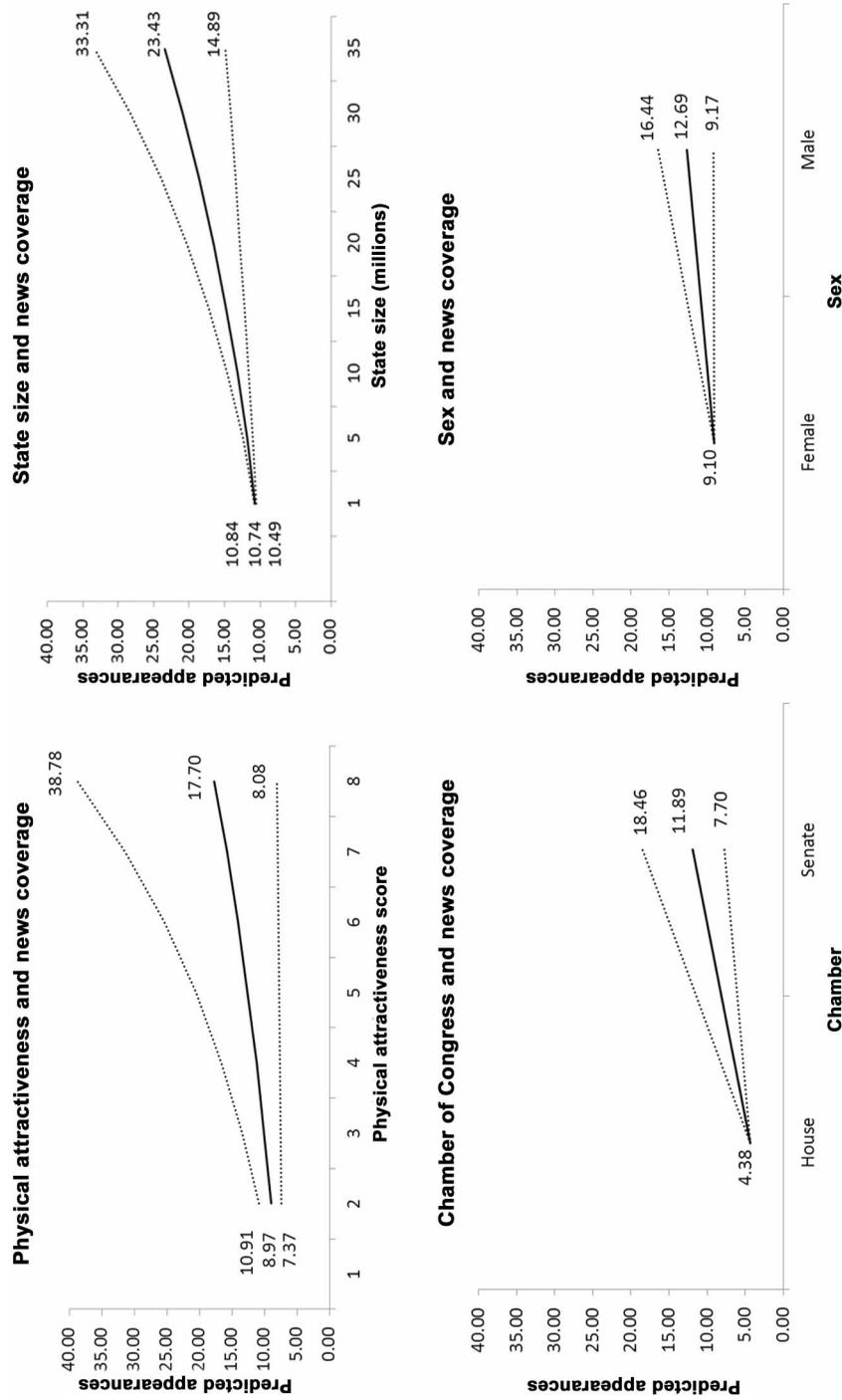


Figure 1. News coverage by physical attractiveness, state size, chamber of Congress, and sex (predicted number of appearances). Solid lines represent predicted values; broken lines represent confidence intervals. Predicted values were calculated for a Caucasian, male, Republican senator with average values on all covariates.

the effect of more likely predictors of news coverage such as tenure in office, sponsoring bills, and political standing. While numerous factors shape news coverage, Figure 1 shows that the role played by physical attractiveness should not be taken lightly.

Is the Difference Between Television, Radio, and Print Significant?

Our first research question (RQ1) asked whether the association between physical attractiveness and news coverage is dependent on the news medium. Examining this question formally requires statistical comparisons of the coefficient for physical attractiveness in Models 1, 2, and 3. To obtain such comparisons, the general equations estimation (GEE) procedure was used (Allison, 1999, p. 184).¹⁰ Results demonstrated that the coefficient for the effect of physical attractiveness on TV appearances was significantly different from the coefficient for the parallel effect of attractiveness on radio ($z = 2.33, p < .05$) and newspaper ($z = 2.17, p < .05$) appearances. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the coefficients for attractiveness in the radio and newspaper models ($z = .47, p > .10$).

Do Motivations or Efforts Mediate the Association?

Our second research question (RQ2) focused on examining whether the motivation and effort indicator (number of press releases) mediates the association between physical attractiveness and news coverage. Baron and Kenny (1986) claim that mediation occurs when the independent variable significantly affects the dependent variable and the proposed mediator; the proposed mediator significantly affects the dependent variable, controlling for the independent variable; and the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable decreases substantially when controlling for the mediator.

These conditions were tested using negative binomial regression models, controlling for all covariates. Results are reported in Table 3. The first column on the left tests the first condition. Similar to the results reported above, physical attractiveness (the independent variable) had a significant effect on television news coverage (the dependent variable; $B = .11, SE = .05, p < .05$), but did not significantly affect radio and newspaper coverage. The second column tests Baron and Kenny's (1986) second condition. This coefficient was obtained when regressing the number of press releases (the mediator) on the independent variable, physical attractiveness. This effect was rather strong, positive, and significant ($B = .56, SE = .24, p < .05$), consistent with our concern that physical attractiveness may be associated with increased media efforts, given the higher self-confidence of attractive people. The third column tests Baron and Kenny's third condition. The coefficients in this column were obtained when regressing the news coverage measures on press releases. In all three cases (of the TV, radio, and print models), this effect was virtually null. Finally, the fourth column reports Baron and Kenny's C' path: the effect of the independent variable (physical attractiveness) on the dependent variables (the coverage measures), after controlling for press releases, the potential mediator. When comparing this column with the first column on the left, it is easy to see that controlling for the mediator (press releases) did not have any impact on the size of the coefficient for the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Thus, our data did not meet Barron and Kenny's criteria for mediation of the indicator of motivation and effort in the effect of physical attractiveness on news coverage.¹¹

Table 3
Mediation testing for number of press releases: Negative binomial regression coefficients
($n = 512$)

	Effect of physical attractiveness on coverage (C path)	Effect of physical attractiveness on press releases (A path)	Effect of press releases on coverage (B path)	Effect of physical attractiveness on coverage, controlling for mediator (C' path)
Television	.11* (.05)	.56* (.24)	.00 (.00)	.11 (.05)
Radio	-.01 (.06)	.56* (.24)	.00 (.00)	-.02 (.05)
Print	.02 (.06)	.56* (.24)	.00 (.00)	.02 (.05)

Note. Table entries are negative binomial regression coefficients; numbers in parentheses are standard errors. All models controlled for all control variables.

* $p < .05$.

Is the Effect of Physical Attractiveness Stronger in the House or the Senate?

Our second hypothesis (H2) predicted that the effect of physical attractiveness will be stronger in the House of Representatives than in the Senate. Operationally, this hypothesis predicts a significant interaction between the congressional chamber dummy variable and physical attractiveness. To test for this interaction, a Chamber * Physical Attractiveness product term was added to the model. Results for the coefficient for this interaction term were not statistically significant in any of the three models (for television, $B = -.02$, $SE = .12$, $p = .88$; for radio, $B = -.08$, $SE = .124$, $p = .51$; for newspaper, $B = .03$, $SE = .15$, $p = .83$), suggesting that there is no statistical difference between the effect of physical attractiveness on coverage in the Senate compared to the House.

Further Analysis

As an exploratory study of the role of physical attractiveness in shaping coverage, and given past research on the attractiveness effect,¹² it is worthwhile to explore possible interactions between physical attractiveness and other predictors of news coverage. To test for these possible interactions, we calculated the product terms for 14 possible interactions and entered them separately into the regression model while retaining the interaction component variables in the model (the 14 resulting models are unreported). In all of these models, the coefficient for the interaction term was not statistically significant. In other words, the effect of physical attractiveness on coverage did not depend on political standing, sponsoring bills, issuing press releases, membership in a top committee, activity in Congress (as reported in *CQR*), tenure in Congress, margin of vote, state size, ideology, party, market–district congruence, or demographics (gender or race). We also tested for a possible nonlinear effect of physical attractiveness on coverage by adding a quadratic term to the model (unreported model). The quadratic term was insignificant, and thus we concluded that there was no evidence supporting such a quadratic effect.

Discussion

The above analysis reveals that more physically attractive congressional members receive more TV news coverage. This finding remained significant even when controlling for

other predictors of news coverage, such as political standing, state size, market–district congruence, and tenure in Congress. However, there was no significant effect of physical attractiveness on radio and newspaper coverage. Furthermore, the difference between the effect of physical attractiveness on TV coverage and its effect on newspaper or radio coverage was statistically significant. In addition, there was no evidence for a mediated effect of physical attractiveness on coverage through our indicator of media motivation and effort. In other words, physically attractive congresspersons did not receive more TV coverage because they issued more press releases.

The current results not only allow us to generalize past findings about the attractiveness effect on news coverage to the U.S. context, but also offer a serious advancement of our understanding of the mechanism underlying the attractiveness effect on news coverage. As argued in the introduction, several possible mechanisms may underlie the attractiveness effect in the context of news coverage. First, it is possible that journalists cover better-looking politicians in order to try to attract audiences, as it is well known that humans are attracted to beauty. Second, it is possible that better-looking politicians are perceived as possessing traits and characteristics (such as trustworthiness and eloquence) that make them more newsworthy. Third, it is possible that, as a result of their increased confidence and self-esteem, better-looking politicians simply try harder and invest more efforts in attracting news attention, and these efforts translate into increased coverage.

The results of this study suggest that the third explanation (increased efforts) can be ruled out. While attractiveness was indeed associated with increased effort invested in issuing press releases, the data suggested that the effect of attractiveness on televised news coverage was not mediated through issuing press releases. The second explanation (attractive people possess newsworthy characteristics) is also inconsistent with the current results. Had attractive people received more coverage because they were more trustworthy or eloquent (or because they were perceived to possess these characteristics), they should have received more news coverage on the radio and in the newspaper as well, not only on television. The fact that the association between physical attractiveness and news coverage was significant only for television news, and not for radio and print, favors the first explanation mentioned above, that television journalists cover better-looking congresspersons in order to attract the attention of audiences. Scholars have long noted television's preference for beauty (Postman, 1986; Signorielli, 1993). The current findings suggest that television journalists are a part of this tendency. They are probably intuitively aware of the fact that their audiences are attracted to aesthetics and good looks. Considerations about achieving "a good audience draw" (Berkowitz, 1997) are a part of the professional culture of journalists and editors, and covering good-looking protagonists may serve this purpose.

In addition to empirically demonstrating the role of physical attractiveness in shaping politicians' news coverage, this study has revisited other factors shaping national television coverage of members of the House of Representatives. As in similar early explorations (Cook, 1986), senators received more attention in national media outlets than House members. Again, similar to Cook's findings, political extremism predicted coverage. Interestingly, this finding was in contrast to Squire's (1988) findings about the Senate. Coverage of congressional members in the *CQR*—our indicator of House activity—was the strongest predictor of national news coverage, as was the case in Arnold's (2004) investigation regarding coverage of representatives in local media. While sponsoring bills did not significantly affect coverage, in contrast to Cook's (1986) findings, we believe that the effect of this variable in our model is mediated through the *CQR* indicator such that sponsoring bills predicts *CQR* coverage and *CQR* coverage predicts coverage on national television news. The effect of tenure and political standing (also strong predictors in Cook's

investigation) may be likewise mediated through *CQR* coverage, because when running the same model without the *CQR* variable, they emerged as very strong predictors of coverage.

Surprisingly, membership in top committees was negatively associated with coverage in all three models despite the fact that this variable was strongly and positively associated with increased coverage on all three media at the bivariate level. This finding suggests that the increased coverage at the bivariate level results from increased activity and efforts and perhaps higher political standing, but after taking into account the contribution of these factors, it is members of the *other* committees who receive more coverage. This result perhaps suggests that while Ray's (1982) committee prestige ranking indeed captures the committees' prestige and power, it does not necessarily capture their news value. For instance, committees such as the Homeland Security Committee received a great deal of attention in the 110th Congress, given the news agenda's focus on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and confronting terrorism.

As opposed to what we know about coverage in local media (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Vinson, 2003), a strong congruence between media markets and congressional districts negatively predicted radio coverage. The likely reason for this outcome is that members scoring high on congruence in our data tended to come from peripheral areas, while members sharing their media markets with several other representatives tended to come from large metropolitan areas, deemed more newsworthy by national television. While gender affected coverage on national television, and race affected coverage on both television and radio, these variables tended not to make a difference at the local level (Arnold, 2004). It is very likely that when it comes to coverage in a given local market, the representatives of that specific market will receive coverage even if their demographic characteristics make them seem less newsworthy on the national level.

This study is not free of limitations. To capture news coverage, we relied on the transcripts of media texts. While we were able to decipher from the transcripts the number of times each congressperson was quoted, the transcripts do not indicate whether the senators and representatives appeared on screen or were interviewed over the phone, and whether their picture accompanied the coverage in print and on television. Our indicator of radio coverage included only NPR, which is the only national radio news outlet covered by Lexis-Nexis. However, given its public service nature, this station may operate differently than commercial and syndicated radio networks. Somewhat less problematic is the reliance on *USA Today*, as it is commercially owned and operated, and given that its tabloid format stresses visual aspects (a characteristic suitable for the current context). As we selected *USA Today* over newspapers that are nationally circulated but originate in, and are targeted at, specific geographical media markets (like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*), given that we wanted a newspaper that would not focus on certain congressional districts and states, the focus on this outlet was not as severe a limitation as the focus on NPR as a radio outlet. Finally, while we used a standard measure of attractiveness and while we made sure no familiarity biases affected its measurement (via the use of non-American evaluators), the reliance on still pictures downloaded from congressional members' Web sites has its limitations.

Despite these limitations, one thing is clear. The possibility of reverse causation, a major caveat of most correlational studies in our field, is not a serious threat to the validity of the findings in our case. It is unlikely that the evaluations of physical attractiveness, measured overseas by students who did not know they were evaluating the attractiveness of members of Congress, were affected by the politicians' coverage on U.S. national television. While the effect of physical attractiveness is perhaps mediated by some of the factors discussed above, the obvious time sequence (attractiveness typically comes before news

coverage) points out that the causal mechanism operates from physical attractiveness to coverage.

All these limitations withstanding, we believe the results are of immense importance for scholars interested in journalism and news selection criteria in the context of political communication. They show for the first time that congresspersons' physical appearance is a rather strong predictor of the frequency of their coverage on national TV news. This finding violates the Habermasian criterion of equality in access to the public sphere, a fact that has important normative implications for democratic life. The findings also have obvious practical implications for practitioners (public relations experts and media consultants) as well as politicians. Theoretically, the findings not only add physical attractiveness to contemporary knowledge about factors influencing politicians' news selection and presentation, but also add to our understanding of the journalistic culture within which such decisions are made, a culture that pursues audiences even at the expense of the democratic principle of equal access to the public sphere.

Notes

1. Including Reid and Pelosi in the models did not alter the patterns of results (coefficient signs and significance for physical attractiveness). Most importantly, the coefficient for physical attractiveness for television appearances (Model 1 in Table 2) was $b = .11$, $SE = .055$, $p < .05$.

2. When members of Congress talk on radio or TV, their names appear in the transcript all in capital letters, as opposed to regular letters when they are mentioned or quoted by others. Still, to ensure that this distinction is correct and that our coding correctly distinguishes between legislators' appearances and other references to legislators, we asked a coder to watch 40 congressionally related television news items that aired between June and July 2010 and determine whether those members of Congress in them spoke in person or not. A second coder was given the transcripts of the same items and coded them based on the same rules used to code all of the 2007 items. The two coders were in complete agreement.

3. Nielsen Media Research divides the U.S. into 210 designated media markets (DMAs). The boundaries of these geographical media units do not coincide with congressional districts. Therefore, working with county-level data sets that map the DMAs and the congressional districts, we coded the number of congressional districts each DMA covers (1–36) and, for each congressional district, the number of DMAs that cover it (1–9).

4. However, when running the same model without including the *CQR* variable, the effect of political standing was also strong and significant for TV and print (for television: $B = .35$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$; for print: $B = .23$, $SE = .08$, $p < .01$). This result suggests that the effect of political standing is totally mediated through coverage in *CQR*. *CQR* covers high ranking members, and such coverage is also associated with coverage on national television news.

5. However, when running the same model without including the *CQR* variable, the effect of sponsoring bills was strong and significant (for television: $B = .01$, $SE = .00$, $p < .05$; for radio: $B = .01$, $SE = .00$, $p = .06$; for print: $B = .01$, $SE = .00$, $p < .05$). This result suggests that the effect of sponsoring bills is totally mediated through coverage in *CQR*. Sponsoring bills increases one's coverage in *CQR*, and such coverage increases coverage on national television news.

6. The bivariate effect of this dummy variable on news coverage was positive and significant ($B = .67$, $SE = .14$, $p < .001$, for television; $B = .61$, $SE = .14$, $p < .001$; for radio; and $B = .53$, $SE = .17$, $p < .01$, for print).

7. To explore the quadratic pattern, the expected count for a Caucasian, Republican, male representative, serving on a top committee, with mean values on all covariates with varying DW scores was calculated. The resulting pattern was that more extreme congresspersons received more coverage compared to those with a DW score of zero.

8. However, again, when running the same model without including the *CQR* variable, the effect of tenure was strong and significant ($B = .04$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$, for television; $B = .02$, $SE = .01$,

$p < .001$, for radio; and $B = .05$, $SE = .01$, $p < .001$, for print). This result suggests that the effect of tenure, like that of sponsoring bills, is totally mediated through coverage in *CQR*. Tenure in Congress increases one's coverage in *CQR*, and such coverage increases coverage on national television news.

9. Interestingly, the bivariate association between physical attractiveness and television news coverage was only borderline significant ($B = .12$, $SE = .07$, $p = .08$). The variables suppressing it were gender and tenure in Congress (controlling for both of them makes the association significant): Younger representatives were, by and large, better looking, but in general less frequently covered, and these facts suppress the genuine effect of attractiveness on coverage. Females were ranked as more physically attractive, but, in general received less coverage, and these facts also worked to cancel out the effect of attractiveness on coverage.

10. For example, to compare TV with radio, two observations for each congressperson were created, one with TV as the dependent variable, the other with radio as the dependent variable. The predictor variables were identical for the two observations. Lastly, a dummy variable was created representing whether the dependent variable was TV or radio. To test for differences in coefficients, the interaction between physical attractiveness and the TV/radio dummy was tested. The advantage of the GEE model is that it allows us to work with clustered data—and the extended data were indeed clustered by the congressperson's ID number. The negative binomial function was specified in all three interaction models.

11. We also tested whether the mediated effect of physical attractiveness through press releases was statistically significant using Preacher and Hayes's (2008) indirect SPSS macro. Again, we controlled for all covariates. The bootstrap result for the mediated effect was not statistically significant in any of the three models (for television, radio, and newspaper). Thus, we again did not find any evidence for the mediation of press releases in the association between physical attractiveness and news coverage.

12. The literature on the attractiveness effect finds evidence for an interaction between physical attractiveness and demographic variables in some contexts (e.g., beauty plays a stronger role in the electoral success of women compared to men; Berggren et al., 2007) but not in others (the magnitude of the effect of attractiveness on earnings is similar for men and women; Hamermesh & Biddle, 1994; see Hosoda et al., 2003, for a meta-analysis revealing similar patterns in additional studies).

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Appendix: Distribution of Control Variables

	% in category coded 1	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Political standing		1.19	0.73	1	5
Market–District congruence		0.69	0.71	0	6.30
Electoral invulnerability (% in last elections)		66.26	12.99	46	100
Political ideology (DW score)		0.02	0.50	–1	+1
Number of bills sponsored		25.07	27.64	0	185
References in <i>CQR</i>		6.62	9.02	0	101
Tenure in Congress		10.84	15.11	1	53
State size (population in millions)		12.50	10.57	0.53	36.75
Number of press releases		5.52	27.59	0	388
Sex (male = 1)	84.0				
Caucasian (= 1)	85.9				
African American (= 1)	7.4				
Republican (= 1)	46.5				
Membership in top 3 committees	36.1				