

Sending them back to the political nursery?  
Gendered Media Coverage: 2008 vs. 2012

BY

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**Abstract:**

Women are becoming more politically involved in American society. The 2008 presidential election highlighted the difference in the media's portrayal of male and female political candidates. This study seeks to determine through a comparative content analysis, if there has been a change since 2008 in the portrayal of female and male political candidates in the 2012 race to the White House. This study showed that the media continue to portray female presidential candidates more negatively than male candidates vying for the same position. Female candidates also received less coverage associated with traditionally masculine issues (i.e. defense and economic concerns).

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Whenever America prepares for another Presidential election cycle our society and news outlets are abuzz with political news, gossip, and projected results. One can hardly turn on a television or peruse the internet without some mention of a presidential hopeful and his or her quest for national support. The media coverage for candidates differs, both in terms of quantity and quality. What is the cause of this difference? The media certainly use the traditional factors such as a candidate's education, money, connections, and experience to describe (and/or recommend) the candidate to the voting public. All of these factors play an important part in the process, but the media's portrayal includes another important dynamic-gender. Society has different expectations of men and women, and has distinct roles for each gender. These expectations are applicable to the political sphere as well and result in differing media portrayals of men and women on the campaign trail.

The media depict male and female candidates differently in quality and quantity. There must be a reason for the difference. According to Kahn and Goldenberg (1991), if female candidates are viewed by the media as "less viable and thus less important than their male counterparts, then female candidates will receive less exposure" (p. 185). The researchers also discovered that "if female candidates are covered differently in the news, then these differences in reporting may influence the content of voters' evaluations of the candidates" (p. 187). The media creates, presents, and reports information to audiences. This results in a correlation between its coverage and voter reactions to a particular candidate. The presence of women in politics is changing and so must the media's portrayal of female candidates.

In 1984 the incorporation of women in politics reached to top ticket. Mondale selected Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro as his vice-presidential running mate. Mondale and Ferraro

changed the role of women in politics from symbolic to competitive. According to Goldstein (2011) Ferraro was the first serious female contender. Mondale supported his vice-presidential selection stating that, "America is for everyone who works hard and contributes to our blessed country." Ferraro echoed upon the theme of equality stating, "American history is about doors being opened, doors of opportunity no matter who you are." This mentality made politics more inclusive and accessible to female candidates (Goldstein, 2011). The political presence of women has developed somewhat slowly since that time though more women are running for political office in America than ever before. Over the course of the next twenty years women became more involved in the American political process. The "Year of the Woman" was 1992. During the elections of 1992 a large number of women were elected to Capitol Hill, many new female Senators joined the chamber in several high profile campaign battles. The "Year of the Woman" was deemed a great victory and many anticipated that soon vast numbers of women would be joining the American political machine.

The year of 2008 was also groundbreaking for female politicians in general and those campaigning for the presidential ticket in particular. Female candidates contended for the top ticket in previous years, but the 2008 election cycle brought new exposure and awareness of women in politics. Presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton and vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin burst onto the national stage in a way the country had never experienced. In 2012, Congresswoman Michelle Bachmann (R-MN) vied for the Republican nomination. Though her bid for the presidency was short-lived, her campaign was greatly discussed and spotlighted by the media.

The 2010 midterm elections resulted in "nine female governors and 17 female senators" (Sheckels, Gutgold & Carlin, 2012, p. 3). Currently, 20 United States senators are female and

18% of House representatives are women. Because greater numbers of women are participating in the political process the portrayal of female candidates is likely to be more closely scrutinized by academic scholars.

The media is enormously influential when shaping a voter's impression and/or attitude toward any candidate, including Palin, Bachmann, and Clinton. Female presidential candidates and the media's portrayal of these candidates became one of the most discussed points during the 2008 election cycle. Scholars and political/gender junkies have taken issue with the gender-biased nature of the coverage. The media coverage "remained narrow and mired in stereotype, shedding remarkable little light on the issues important to them [Clinton and Palin]" (Hollar, 2009, p. 1).

The following study will compare and analyze the content of one national news magazine (*TIME Magazine*) in terms of quantity and quality of coverage by the media. A content analysis of the media's portrayal of candidates in the 2008 bid for the presidency and 2012 candidates will provide an account of whether the media portrays candidates differently. The study will also discover if the coverage is gendered (focusing on issues related to gender or using stereotypical gendered traits). The following study will determine whether there is a difference in the media portrayal of male and female presidential hopefuls during the early stages of the 2012 election season, following the landmark year of 2008. A comparison of media coverage of the 2008 and 2012 presidential race may show if the media have evolved in its coverage of female political candidates. The comparison may demonstrate whether the media has equalized coverage between male and female political candidates over that four-year span.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Gender Issues:

Sex and gender are often used synonymously. It is important to distinguish between the two terms. Sex refers to the biological or innate make-up of male and female DNA whereas gender is a cultural and social construct – reflected in what we read, how we dress, how we present ourselves, and how we think.

Through societal norms and expectations people make decisions about what is normal and/or acceptable behavior for either males or females. Society's formation of gender development influences and shapes "the most important aspects of people's lives, such as the talents they cultivate, the conceptions they hold of themselves and others" (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 676). Society constructs men and women to be very different creatures, according to Bem (1981) "the distinction between male and female serves as the basic organizing principle for every human culture" (p. 354); the distinctions between the genders permeate all facets of life, from clothing preferences to nonverbal behavior. The differentiation between the sexes becomes more important "because many of the attributes and roles selectively promoted in males and females tend to be differentially valued with those ascribed to males generally being regarded as more desirable (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 676). These differences in societal expectations of behavior and attributes are amplified when viewed through a political lens and each discrepancy communicates a message about a given candidate. A more serious or at the very least a more substantial implication of these differences lies in the way society views and ultimately regards members of each gender. In terms of nonverbal behavior male and female political candidates differ greatly. Fridlund (1991, 1992) proposed, "...the function of nonverbal expression is to convey intentions and needs; nonverbal cues are social tools, used as a means of communication

in interactions.” Examples of nonverbal communication include: “physical appearance, facial expression, paralanguage (vocal qualities), gestures, and gaze” (Kopacz, 2006, p. 8). Physical appearance contains obvious information about a candidates “race, sex, age, and attractiveness.” Together these traits form a “political demeanor,” defined by Kopacz, as “a distinct and reliable image regarding a person’s fitness for public office” (Kopacz, 2006).

The issues and societal repercussions caused by differences between the genders often result in more negative consequences for women. According to Devere & Davies (2006) the process of gendering refers to “when a person’s gender is emphasized without it being specifically context-relevant and where appearance is given considerable attention” (p. 65). The use of gendering in reference to women in politics is evidenced by the media’s description of women holding or vying for these offices. They are “always described specifically as women politicians” (Ross & Srebemy, 2000, p. 88).

Kanter (1977) confirmed four common stereotypes of professional women: sex object/seductress, mother, pet, or iron maiden. The seductress/sex object stereotype includes a females’ clothing, behaving or speaking in a feminine style, appearance, and sexuality. The mother stereotype views women as caring and understanding, emphasizing the nurturing characteristic that women are expected to embody. Often those who utilize the “mother” stereotype see women as being more “compassionate and more likely to be honest” (Jost, 2008, p. 1). The pet stereotype refers to any time a woman is “symbolically taken along on group events as mascot—a cheerleader for shows of prowess” (Kanter, 1977, p. 234). The pet stereotype was nicknamed the “child” by Wood (1994). The child stereotype manifests itself when women are viewed as “too weak, naïve, or unprepared to handle a difficult task without a man’s help...” thus reducing a woman’s ability to take on leadership responsibility. Women

who exemplify too many masculine traits are called “iron maidens.” This stereotype often results in ridicule for the candidate (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, p. 327-328).

Women are also subjected to metaphors, often likened to animals. Sutton (1995) remarked that these metaphors help to decrease a female candidate’s credibility. In regards to a woman’s figure or appearance she might be called “foxy” or as a woman ages and/or becomes more uncompromising she might be equated to a “barracuda, old bat, shrew, or cow” (Nilsen, 1997). The media’s continued use of stereotypes and metaphors trivialize the political campaigns of women (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009).

Some scholars conclude that professionals in the media seldom use gender stereotypes because of the implementation of style manuals. These manuals are designed to prevent gender stereotypes and/or gendered language usage. Though manuals are available, the usage of gendered language and portrayal is still a problem in politics. According to a survey conducted by Deloitte and Touche (2000) 66% of Americans feel that the “press, in assessing leadership would be tougher on a female candidate” with only 5% claiming that men would experience more difficult coverage.

### **Women in Politics:**

Researchers are concerned with how media and society view female politicians. Scholars (Lawless, 2009; Chang & Hitchon, 1997; Sapiro, 1993; Jennings, 1983; Johnston & White, 1994) found that the majority of Americans are less inclined to view a woman equipped to hold high political office. A survey conducted by Lawless (2009) showed 25% of Americans believe that men are more emotionally equipped for politics than women. In keeping with social expectations of the gender roles of men and women, professional women are seen as more caring and nurturing and thus better suited for political issues that would incorporate those skills, (e.g.

welfare programs, education, family-concerns) (Kanter, 1977). When female candidates receive coverage that centers on children and marital status the public associates them with these roles, and the societal expectations that accompany those roles, rather than politically focused responsibilities (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, p. 329).

Jennings (1983) offered an explanation behind this societal norm. He examined interactions between parents and adolescents in eight westernized countries. Jennings found that a father's increased attentiveness to politics creates a perpetuating expectation of gender differences in the next generation of women. Men are supposed to be interested in politics and to pass this on to male children, while women are expected to care little for politics and to rear their daughters in a similar fashion. This difference between expected gender behaviors has produced a gap between women and political office. To explain this phenomenon Sapiro (1993) stated that politics are considered normal for men and not normal for women. Chang and Hitchon (1997) found that "...voters perceive female candidates in general to be inferior to their male competitors..." (p. 33). This belief and perception exists because politics are socially more linked to men. Scholarly research has concluded that politics are typical for men and unique for women. Society's comfort with women occupying governmental positions is changing and growing. In 2002, 2005, and 2007 polls revealed that the America comfort with female leaders increased from 77% in 2002 to 89% in 2007 (Whitehouse Project, 2009). And "three-quarters of Americans say that they would feel comfortable with a woman as president of the United States" (Sheckels, Gutgold, and Carlin, 2012, p. 4). If Americans are comfortable with the notion of female leadership in the office of President of the United States, why hasn't a woman been elected to that office? There must be a factor that impedes female presidential hopefuls from attaining the presidency.

Scholars found that voters perceive the competence and validity of women in politics differently compared to men holding the same offices (Jamieson, 1995; Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Jamieson, 1998). Scholars cite a phenomenon called the double blind: “women who are considered feminine will be judged incompetent and women who are competent, unfeminine...those who succeed in politics and public life will be scrutinized under a different lens from that applied to successful men” (Jamieson, 1995, p. 16; Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). This “double blind” provides female political candidates with almost an assured lose-lose situation. Jamieson (1998) further stated that females entering politics must balance strict issue-based masculinity with stereotypical feminine caring. A female politician who the audience considers “too aggressive” will be labeled unfeminine and have less chance of being elected. A lack of femininity contradicts traditional gender roles and behavior. This results in unease for voters. The audience feels conflicted about a woman running for political office instead of rearing a family (Johnston & White, 1994).

### **Media Coverage of Political Candidates and Its Effects:**

Scholars have concluded that men and women running for political office often experience differences in media coverage and portrayal (Aday & Devitt, 2011; Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003; Devitt, 2002; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Kahn, 1994; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Lundell & Ekstrom, 2008; Lee, 2004). These differences can include not only the amount of coverage but the tone (in terms of negativity and positivity) of the coverage as well. This variance can erode the credibility of a woman’s political campaign and thus her chances of election success. Female candidates tend to be under-represented by the media when compared with their male equivalents and generally receive less media coverage concerning political issues. Media instead focus on appearance, personality, relationships and family.

(Lundell & Ekstrom, 2008). Media coverage of women candidates' political issues usually center on domestic matters-education and welfare programs for example. The traditionally more masculine political issues (i.e. military and economic concerns) are downplayed or ignored. This could make it difficult for voters to actually cast his or her vote for a female candidate because little is known about her stance on hard-hitting political issues. Former Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius fought back against traditionally gendered media portrayal. Following a debate during her first campaign for governor a reporter wrote an article about each of the candidates. The article featuring Sebelius briefly mentioned her role as Insurance Commissioner, but focused more on the color of the polish on her toes and the sandals she wore. Thus highlighting traditional expectations of women and distancing Sebelius from seeming like a capable and knowledgeable candidate. The Sebelius campaign chastised the reporter for the gendered portrayal. The reporter apologized and never wrote another article of that kind again. Sebelius began to demonstrate her political capabilities beyond those considered traditionally feminine (i.e. education and welfare). Sebelius organized a review group called BEST (Budget Efficiency Savings Teams) to examine state expenditures. Her initiatives cut expenses and showed her economic and budgetary prowess (Sheckels, Gutgold, & Carlin, 2009). Though Sebelius showed her ability to succeed with traditionally masculine political issues, the media continues to portray female candidates traditionally and in accordance with societal gender roles.

According to Lee (2004) when the media frames the 'conventional' roles of women in regards to political hopefuls, women are further associated with the private (or home life) instead of the public sphere. Lee further argues that the media's stereotyping of gender lessens a woman's chance to be viewed as a capable and viable political candidate.

Two females fought against the media's portrayal of their political aspirations in the 2008 bid for the presidency (Kornblut, 2008; Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Neduau, 2008). 2008 was a landmark year for women in politics--Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin both held fast to stereotypes that would best aid them in their respective campaigns. Kornblut (2008) stated, "the debate over sexism, feminism and the role of women in public life was one of the defining aspects of the 2008 campaign" (p. 1). Both Palin and Clinton asked to be considered, "candidates who happen to be women" rather than "women candidates" when faced with sexist language and portrayal (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). Clinton and Palin both experienced a gendered portrayal that sought to discredit and detract from their qualifications during the 2008 Presidential election. Neduau (2008) stated,

"Both women came from completely different political points of view. Both women presented themselves in completely opposite ways on the national political stage. But, both women experienced the wrath of a society seemingly afraid to see a woman in power. . . . While there has been no lack of critique, analysis and conversation about how sexism played a role in both Senator Clinton and Governor Sarah Palin's campaigns, one thing that has not been well-identified is the resolution of how society will proceed and one day elect a female commander-in-chief" (para. 2, 4) (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, p. 338).

According to Carlin and Winfrey (2009), the gendered media portrayals of political candidates "do send messages that women are not as competent and are unsuited for certain offices—whether they have the qualifications or not" (p. 339). Foutaine & McGregor (2002) blame the media for the damaging portrayals of female political candidates, concluding that the training that journalists receive is the chief proponent of these gender stereotypes.

## Chapter 3: METHOD AND PROCEDURE

### Theoretical Framework:

The current study draws from several theories to understand the media's portrayal of men and women in the 2008 and the 2012 presidential races. Media coverage and portrayal has the power to influence the way people think about the world. And political media coverage is no exception. Research contends that the media portray male and female political candidates differently. The media utilizes framing theory to highlight certain specifics about a candidate. Often times the difference is based on gender, this includes gender roles, gender differences, stereotypical gender traits, and gender issues. Differences in gender are emphasized by the media though the audience is unaware that the portrayal is gendered. In addition to framing theory, the schema theory and the gender schema theory determine how an individual's perception of a particular gender influences the way he or she responds to a political candidate. Kittilson and Fridkin (2008) stated, "Gender differences in candidate coverage may influence voter's evaluations of male and female candidates, candidates' choice of campaign strategies, and ultimately, people's view's regarding women's role in the political area" (p. 372). These theories explain how media coverage and portrayal of candidates develops and guides an individual's perception during a presidential election and possibly voter behavior on election day.

### Framing

Media Framing is defined by Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw (2004) as the "focus of how issues and other objects of interest are reported by news media as well as what is emphasized in such reporting" (p. 257). The media creates frames by using language and specific word choice. Gitlin (1980) defined news frames as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (p. 6).



Stereotypical language creates a frame focused on societal expectations rather than reality. Stereotypical language is common when discussing a woman in any professional sphere, including politics. Often, male and female candidates are portrayed based on socially constructed, stereotypical strengths. Kittilson & Fridkin (2008) reference the research of Carroll & Schreiber 1997 and Kahn in 1996 stating, “The issues of foreign policy, defense, trade, and the economy were more likely to be discussed for male candidates, whereas women candidates, in their campaign coverage, were more frequently linked to issues of poverty, education, and health care” (p. 373). The use of stereotypical language reinforces what is to be considered appropriate for a male and usually, what is considered inappropriate for a female.

The power of framing lies in its somewhat concealed nature. The audience receives a message framed by the media in a predetermined context. Tankard (2001) states “the power of framing comes from its ability to define the terms...without the audience realizing it is taking place” (p. 97). Before the audience has an opportunity to form an opinion, the media establishes opinion options. Members of the audience choose his or her opinion from the available selection. Any message created by the media can be altered. Tankard (2001) expresses the power of the media lies in its ability to weaken arguments and eliminate voices within a message. Lundell and Ekstrom (2008) stated,

“when it comes to women politicians in the media, the main research areas have focused on the question of (in)visibility and on the various ways in which women’s representation more often than not builds on stereotyping and conventional gender frames” (p. 892).

The media alters messages to frame women in less visible roles. The perpetual occurrence of invisibility has lead scholars to define the phenomenon more concretely. Tuchman (1978) coined the term “symbolic annihilation” to describe the “omission, trivialization, and

condemnation of women” in politics by the mass media (p. 154). McGregor (2000) and Foutaine & McGregor (2002) investigated whether the number of cases of symbolic annihilation decreased due to the increase of female politicians in today’s society. McGregor’s press content analysis of a female official showed that the media framed her in terms of her gender, age, marital status and children. McGregor and Foutaine wanted to discover whether Tuchman’s 1978 research still had merit in the politics of today. The scholars found that there are a large number of symbolic annihilation instances despite the expansion of women in political realm.

Frames created by the media construct the public’s understanding of society and the world. The huge amount of information presented daily by the media necessitates a sorting and organizing method. The schema theory illustrates how each person within a society uses shortcuts based off previous experience to quickly process and understand information.

### **Schema Theory:**

Bem (1983) described a schema as “a cognitive structure, a network of associations that organizes and guides an individual’s perception. A schema functions as an anticipatory structure; a readiness to search for and to assimilate incoming information in schema-relevant terms” (p. 355). A schema had previously been defined as ‘mental representations of a category’ (Neisser, 1976; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). Fiske (1984) added that schemas include “a cognitive structure that contains a concept’s attributes and links among those attributes” (p. 84). Schemas are simple to use but are complex in their make-up. Each individual draws upon numerous factors to create one schema specific for one particular situation. Lau & Sears (1986) describe the composition of a schema as a “category label, generic description of the stimulus domain, particular instances and interconnection among these” (p.349).

Information processing is the foundation of the schema theory. Schema theory focuses on the utilization of past experiences to make sense of something completely new. To help process unknown, incoming information people call upon various schemata—or specific models formed from past experiences to serve as a template for new information. If triggered by an event or situation, a person’s schemata (template) will manage the fresh information in a systematic manner. The interaction that occurs is a direct result of ‘incoming information and perceiver’s preexisting schema’ (Neisser, 1976).

The definition of schemas and schemata are often confused. A schema is the framework of an individual’s overall perception of the world (or overall perception of specific parts of the world), stemming from past experiences. Schemata are the specific, isolated instances from past encounters. These instances are used as a guide to make sense of unfamiliar circumstances.

Chang & Hitchon (2004) provide an example of a schema stating,

“without a clear memory of what a professional woman wore, a person might infer that she wore a suit, thus filling in the gap in a particular instance of recall with an inference based on general knowledge of how professional women dress” (p. 199).

In this example the schema is the recall of past experience(s) to infer what would constitute the wardrobe of a professional woman and the schemata would be a specific memory of a woman in professional attire (i.e. recalling a female professional who spoke to your college English class freshman year). Schemas are comprised of several different and unique schemata. The resulting combination forms an individual’s perception. This perception is totally dependent and a direct consequence of an individual’s past experiences.

The schematic structure directs focus to information that is consistent with what an individual already knows and/or feels comfortable with. “People tend to allow their own

preconceptions about certain candidates, exacting gender which may influence the certain campaign appeals that candidates strategically utilize” (Kahn, 1993) (Robertson & Anderson, 2004, p. 4). When schematic structures are used to process foreign data, gaps occurring in the comprehension of material are filled in by past experiences that are consistent with a specific schema (Taylor & Crocker, 1981).

“The coding schema utilizes categories formulated to gather demographic information (e.g. the candidates’ name, sex, the campaign year, and sponsor of the spot), as well as categories that describe the verbal and nonverbal content of the ad, and the production techniques used in the televised political commercials” (Robertson & Anderson, 2004, p. 5).

According to Chang & Hitchon (1997) “gender schema theory offers several advantages to researchers when compared with the more traditional explanation of sex stereotyping, whereas the term stereotype can have negative connotations, schema is a neutral term applied to organized knowledge stored in memory” (p. 29-30). Chang and Hitchon state that the “gender schema theory also accords a role to individual differences in responding to mass communication...” (p. 29-30). Schemas are functional and serve to ease the burden of excess information by streamlining the incoming data into a manageable grouping (Chang & Hitchon, 2004).

Schemas are of particular importance to those with low involvement, interest, or information. A greater utilization of schemas signals less information or knowledge about a particular subject matter. Limited use of schemas represents a greater comprehension of a stimulus. If an individual is lacking information about a new experience, that person employs schemas (created by past experiences) to make sense of the unknown. And if an individual has

ample information about a situation, the need and use of schema will decrease; little to no gaps in understanding diminishes the need for schemas.

The gender schemas of voters are crucial to the outcome of an election, but perhaps equally important are the schemas of news reporters and media editors. The schemas housed within the minds of these gatekeepers have the power to influence gender schematic processing and thus election outcome.

### **Gender Schema**

Sandra Bem (1981) constructed the gender schema theory and proposes that gender issues are derived at least in part by “gender-based schematic processing, from a generalized readiness to process information on the basis of the sex-linked associations that constitute the gender schema” (p. 355). While examining sex typification, Bem stresses the importance of gender-schemas within society by stating: “gender-schema becomes a guide...that prompts the individual to regulate his or her behavior so that it conforms to the culture’s definitions of maleness or femaleness” (Bem, 1981, p. 355). This conformity to the roles of men and women further emphasize the gender-based differentiation within our society. According to Martin & Halverson (1981) people’s “understanding of the traits, activities, and behaviors traditionally associated with men or women forms a conceptual cognitive structure which can be referred to as a gender schema” (p. 1121-1122). Sex stereotypes differ from gender schema. Sex stereotypes (seductress, pet, iron maiden, etc...) are often thought of as “irrational, dysfunctional, and detrimental” (Chang & Hitchon, 1997, p. 35), gender schema include both positive and negative information about each gender.

Martin and Halverson (1983) studied the impact of gender schemata on the cognition of children. The researchers showed pictures of men and women performing both gender-

consistent and gender-inconsistent tasks to children (age 5-6). After a week the children were asked to recall the gender and the behavior that was presented by each actor. The children tended to alter the gender of the actor to make it consistent with the gender roles of society. This further corrals women and men in to specific societal expectations. Thus reinforcing what is “normal” for a woman and what is not.

### **Gender Schema Theory and the Politics of Today**

The use of schema can be applied to each component of daily life, and in particular to politics. During each election media consumers are bombarded with enormous amounts of information. The media presents debate results, poll outcomes and more importantly candidate profiles to the public. The candidate profiles are comprised of the ‘need-to-knows:’ personal information, past employment, background, party affiliation, rap-sheets. The list goes on and on. Voters use schemas to sort through the massive quantities of information about those running for political office. According to Chang & Hitchon (1997) schemata “guides us in perceiving political information, drawing inferences, and making decisions” (p. 34). Most voters have some semblance of what a political candidate should be; therefore voters draw upon a ‘candidate schema.’ These particular schemas are often defined by the “conspicuous actions of the incumbent president” (Kinder, Peters, Abelson, & Fiske, 1980). Chang & Hitchon (1995) found that the recall of female candidates was greater when the political advertisements centered on ‘female-domains’ (i.e. appearance and mentions of family). The media’s continuance of gendered coverage of female candidates is extremely detrimental. By primarily focusing on stereotypical social issues or roles of women, female candidates do not have the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities in handling traditionally masculine areas of expertise. Kittilson and Fridkin (2008) stated “when issues like the economy, terrorism, or foreign policy dominate the

political landscape, women candidates may be particularly disadvantaged” (p. 386). Gendered coverage limits female candidates and damages their chances of winning. This research further solidified that politics are predominantly perceived as a male-dominated sphere. The candidate schemas represent what a voter considers to be a typical candidate. Usually, the typical candidate is male. Consequently voters are left to construct another schema (gender-schema) to process women in politics. To illustrate how voters use schema to understand female candidates, Chang and Hitchon (2004) provide the following example,

“When confronted with a new challenger who is a female candidate, voters may use category-based knowledge of women, and, for instance, expect her to be compassionate toward disadvantaged and minority populations. As specific information emerges about the candidate as an individual, voters become less reliant on category-based generalization” (p. 197).

Further examination of the differences in media portrayals of female and male political candidates participating in the 2012 presidential race reveals if the media changed its biases in coverage of men and women in politics and to what extent. This study discovers whether or not the historically significant year of 2008 for women in politics has changed the differences that exist between the portrayals of female and male candidates by the media. 2012 is an opportunity to truly witness a potential shift in the way the media views candidates of different genders.

#### **Method:**

To understand the potential difference in media portrayal of men and women between the 2008 election cycle and that of 2012, a comparative textual content analysis was utilized.

According to a definition given by Krippendorff (1980), content analysis is a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (p. 20). In 1969, Holsti

made two important distinctions within the method of content analysis. Holsti cited manifest and latent content analysis types to describe the differences between qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Manifest content analysis is used to describe quantitative findings of a particular word, phrase, or content type. Manifest content analysis shows usage but cannot infer meaning. Latent content analysis analyzes interprets words and phrases to discover underlying meaning within the context of the content. A combination of latent and manifest creates an all-encompassing content analysis.

Content analysis has been a trusted research method when examining political phenomenon and/or political shifts. Many researchers have used this method to accurately grasp the nature of the American political machine (Krippendorff, 1980; Robertson and Anderson 2004; Scharrer, 2002). Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart (2001) analyzed the 2000 Senate and gubernatorial primaries. They found that women did receive a greater amount of media coverage than men. Though the coverage was greater in amount, it still focused primarily on issues stereotypically associated with female politicians. Male candidates were coupled with traditionally masculine issues (e.g. taxes and international policy). Female candidates also received more media attention concerning marital status than their male colleagues. These are all examples of the media portraying female candidates in gender specific terms. News stories on female leaders commonly mention gender-related themes and the coverage is less than what is received by a male candidate running for the same position (Kittilson and Fridkin 2008; Norris 1997). The differences the media's portrayal of female and male candidates is more pronounced and increasingly varies during bids for the American presidency. When Elizabeth Dole sought the Republican nomination for the presidential race in 2000 the media covered her campaign less and the portrayal was much more gender focused than the males vying for the same position



(Aday and Devitt 2001; Bystrom 2006; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008). The amount of media coverage is not the only issue that female candidates endure on the campaign trail. Media portrayal often differs in terms of quality and tone.

In a content analysis of political advertisements performed by Robertson and Anderson (2004) consisting of two research questions, each related to gender and politics, found that there were:

“Significant differences in the use of negativity in political campaign spot ads. Results of the content analysis found that ‘women were more likely to use negative advertisements than men, 53% of the commercials were coded as negative’” (p. 15).

Scharrer (2002) has found the newspaper coverage of then senatorial hopeful Hillary Clinton became increasingly negative as her political candidacy progressed. The content analysis revealed that not only was her campaign covered in a negative manner, she was framed negatively by the newspaper media. In this example, the use of framing and gender schema portrayed a female political candidate differently and in this case inferior to that of male candidates. This is not a new phenomenon. In 2007, Richard Fox analyzed female congressional candidates and found that women believe that media coverage of women political figures emphasizes and highlights gender stereotypes. In 2000, Elizabeth Dole was also framed more negatively by the media than her male counterparts (Aday and Devitt 2001; Bystrom 2006; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Kittilson and Fridkin 2008).

Kittilson and Fridkin (2008) conducted a content analysis of newspaper coverage of political candidates in the “2006 Canadian, 2004 Australian, and 2006 U.S. elections.” The study focused on the “quantity and prominence of coverage for men and women candidates, the press attention devoted to the candidates’ families and to the candidates’ viability and the substance of

issue and trait coverage” (p. 379). The content analysis showed that “gender is tightly woven into contemporary campaigns” (p. 385), though it produced results which differed with the existing body of research. The study failed to demonstrate “any significant gender differences in 1) the amount and prominence of candidate coverage, 2) the amount of attention given to the candidates’ viability, 3) the focus on the candidates’ family background, and 4) the tone of coverage” (p. 381). Kittilson and Fridkin also examined the issues that were covered by the media and whether the coverage was stereotypically gendered. The study found that traditionally masculine issues “(e.g. economy, business, taxes, energy/oil, defense, etc...)” were covered 80% of the time for male candidates compared with 70% of the time for female candidates (p. 382-383).

The results differed from the existing literature on gender differences in media portrayal of political candidates. This discrepancy can possibly be a result of incorporating non-U.S. media coverage. This difference in media portrayal might be uniquely an American media problem. Further examination of American media outlets is necessary to determine if there has been a significant change in the media’s portrayal of male and female political candidates. The year of 2008 thrust the issue of gendered political coverage back in the spotlight. Would the results differ from Kittilson and Fridkin’s study of 2006 election versus 2008 or 2012?

The current study employed a two-pronged content analysis and comparison of news articles of political candidates in a prominent U.S. news magazine, *TIME Magazine*, for the both the 2008 and the 2012 election cycles. *TIME Magazine* was selected for its circulation and reach of readership. According to a June 2012 report from the Audit of Bureau of Circulations (ABC) *TIME* magazine (with a circulation of 3,276,822) placed 11<sup>th</sup> out of the top 25 in the Consumer Magazine by total paid and verified circulation category (ABC, 2012). Second, *TIME*, is read by

both democrats and republicans ensuring that an accurate representation of the political system is shown by the research. And third, this publication features routinely significant coverage of the Presidential races within the weekly issues. Analysis of this magazine is aimed at discovering not only the quantity but also the quality of media coverage a male or female candidate receives during the 2012 presidential race, and how that differs from the content of the previous election cycle. To determine the quantity of coverage a unit of analysis must be chosen. Smith (1997) used a 'day's newspaper coverage' as his unit of analysis to study the signs of media parity in coverage of female candidates. His unit of analysis was defined to "include all stories mentioning a candidate" (p. 73). For this study the unit was an article, including all articles involving potential 2012 presidential figures. To ensure the relevance of the coverage, only articles of at least one full page were examined. This calculation determined the amount of coverage received by each candidate in the 2012 presidential race, and then a comparison was made with the data from an identical content analysis of the 2008 election cycle.

The number of times an article features a political candidate in the pages of a magazine is not enough to appreciate the differences in gendered media portrayals of men and women in the presidential race. To understand the quality of media coverage, the study analyzed the characteristics of the coverage. Each article was analyzed in terms of gendered language. The examination focused on whether the coverage was more negative for female candidates as contrasted with male counterparts. An example of negative coverage comes from the Dec. 17, 2007 issue of *TIME Magazine*, "Hillary Clinton's attacks on Barack Obama's kindergarten assignments, they may very well tune back out until after the holidays." This content analysis is similar to that conducted by Hall (1982), who through content analysis found "...the intention to discern the implicit meanings, themes, and patterns used to describe women politicians"

(Ibroscheva & Raicheva-Stover, 2009, p. 116). The examination of the coverage of in each article helped establish how media portrayals of political figures of 2008 and 2012 differ and/or possibly favor one gender over that of an opposing candidate in the presidential races of each respective year. A portion of the content analysis focused on the tone of the headline and overall tone of the article in terms of positivity and negativity. An example of a negative headline would be, “Viewpoint: The World of Hillary Hatred” (*TIME Magazine*, Thursday, November 19, 2007). To account for other possibilities, a “mix”, “neutral”, “not about the candidate” option were added to the coding sheet. An example of a “not about the candidate” headline would be, “How American Voters Decide” (*TIME Magazine*, Dec. 17, 2007).

The research questions and hypotheses listed below guided the comparison of media portrayals of men and women within the 2008 and 2012 presidential race will be studied by utilizing the method of content analysis. The content analysis of news articles of political candidate within *TIME Magazine* will ascertain whether male or female candidates are portrayed more by the media. The content textual analysis of *TIME Magazine* will determine if the quality of media coverage differs amongst male and female candidates in the 2012 presidential race.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**RQ1:** Did the media portray male and female candidates differently in the 2008 election year?

**RQ2:** Did the media portray male and female candidates differently in the 2012 election year?

**H1:** Media will portray female candidates more negatively than male candidates in terms of gendered language in the 2008 election cycle.

**H2:** Media will portray female candidates more negatively than male candidates in terms of gendered language in the 2012 election cycle.

**H3:** What were the primary issues discussed during the 2008 election?

**H4:** What were the primary issues discussed during the 2012 election?

## Chapter 4: RESULTS

To ensure that the study could be replicated with consistent results, two coders were used to account for intercoder reliability. The coders were identically trained and participated in several practice sessions. The coders coded approximately 25 percent of the entire sample (24 of 103 articles). According to Krippendorff the acceptable intercoder percentage range is 67-79% and the good range is 80% and above. The intercoder results for headline tone were .89. For the overall article tone the intercoder reliability was .80. The intercoder analysis for issues covered in media exposure was .72 and .159 was the score for personality traits.

*TIME Magazine* issues from October 2007 through October 2008, and October 2011 through October 2012 (totaling 103 articles) were analyzed. No special or commemorative *TIME Magazine* issues were included in the content analysis to ensure that the data collected represented the normal focus of the magazine. Articles featuring a candidate running for president during either 2008 or 2012 were analyzed using a coding sheet (see Appendix I). The coding sheet content and format was adapted from the guide used by Kittilson and Fridkin (2008). The scholars studied the media coverage of male and female political candidates in 2006. The study examined not only the amount of coverage a candidate received, but also whether the content was gendered in terms of political issues and gender traits. The approach of Kittilson and Fridkin was ideal for an examination of the media's portrayal of presidential contenders in 2008 and 2012. Applying the content analysis instrument and format created by Kittilson and Fridkin discovered how the media portrayed candidates of different genders, in terms of quantity and quality in 2008 and 2012. The findings from this analysis were figured using SPSS software, using a variety of tests including t-tests, post hoc tests, and ANOVA. This study discovered if the

media portrayed male and female presidential hopefuls differently and whether portrayal correlates with society's expectations of each gender.

The content analysis of *TIME Magazine* articles provided insight as to how the media portrayed candidates, issues, and traits in 2008 and 2012. A portion of the content analysis was designed to discover what issues were portrayed the most by the media between 2008 and 2012. Approximately 8% of the 2008 and 2012 coverage focused on taxes, 11% on the economy. The most covered political issue between 2008 and 2012 was the campaigning of each particular candidate. When the years were examined independently from each other the only significant difference in issue portrayed by the media was defense issues.

Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Mitt Romney were the four most prominently featured presidential candidates. The tone of article headlines was consistent for three of the four candidates. 47.1% of article headlines about Obama did not specifically mention him. McCain's coverage was similar with 30.8% of the headlines not mentioning McCain specifically. Romney's headline coverage did not mention him out right 53.8% of the time. The major difference amongst the four in terms of headline tone was found the coverage of Hillary Clinton; 36.4% of article headlines about Clinton were negative. Clinton was the only candidate to be framed more negatively in terms of headline tone than any of the other prominent candidates. Obama's headline coverage was 14.7% negative, Romney 14.3%, and McCain 7.7%. Clinton's headline coverage was the most negative, including one article from the November 19, 2007 issue titled *Viewpoint: the World of Hillary Hatred*. The headline of this article is resoundingly negative. This article discusses what people do not like about Hillary Clinton. No other candidate had an article based entirely on why he or she is disliked and who does the disliking.

The media framed candidates differently in terms of personality traits. Male candidates were predominantly associated with traits like “hard-working” (31.1%) and “analytical” (28.9%). Female candidates were described as “erratic” in 30.8% of the articles, though 53.8% of articles about female candidates framed them as “effective.” The issues associated with either gender differed as well. Almost half of the issues associated with male candidates were economic concerns (40%) while women were linked to the economy 15.4% of the time. The coverage of the campaign process itself was high for both males (82.2%) and females (92.2%). Women were associated with welfare and similar programs three-times as much as their male counterparts.

### **Additional Results**

To achieve a deeper understanding of the media’s coverage of political issues and gender the coded issues were collapsed in to three categories: international affairs, economics, social issues. International affairs including defense, international issues, nuclear arms control, treaties, foreign affairs and trade were categorized together. The economics grouping included the economy, welfare, employment, governmental spending, and business. Social Issues included education, child care, parental concerns, pensions, gay rights, health, crime, women’s rights, abortion, HIV/AIDS, violence against women, and drugs.

A crosstab analysis showed that male candidates were associated with international affairs in 88.0% of the coverage while female candidates were linked to international affairs a mere 12.0%. The issues gap between the genders was slightly narrowed in the economics category, 79.6% of male candidates and 20.4% of female candidates were associated with economic concerns. Economic concerns were the most covered issues group in 2008 (47%) and in 2012 (56%).

A crosstab analysis of the two most prominent candidates of each gender (Clinton and Palin vs. Obama and Romney) was also conducted. Obama and Romney were featured alongside international affairs issues within 77.8% of the coverage while Palin and Clinton were associated with international issues 22.2% of the time. 75.7% of the coverage of male candidates was linked to social issues and 24.3% of female coverage concerned social issues.



## Chapter 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The media still continues to portray male and female candidates differently both in the amount of coverage and the quality of coverage. Of the 103 articles coded, 12 were about female candidates (11.6%). The remaining 88.6% of articles were about the male presidential candidates. Male candidates received more coverage in all coded areas, including: amount of coverage, issues covered, and personality traits portrayed. The unequal amount of coverage is a result of two factors; one, because women were not candidate options during the entirety of both election cycles. Hillary Clinton was a contender from the start but left the race after the Democratic nomination was lost to Barack Obama. Sarah Palin did not join John McCain's ticket as the Vice Presidential candidate until August 2008. In 2012 the only female presidential candidate was Michelle Bachmann and her bid was short-lived, though she was the projected winner according to the 2011 Ames Straw Poll.

The limited coverage of females is also a result of lack of importance and likelihood placed on the candidacies of female politicians. The portrayal of female candidates displays them as unlikely or unfit. The following excerpt was taken from the February 25, 2008 issue, "While Clinton was busy running as a pseudo-incumbent, Obama donned the mantle of change and built a fund-raising and ground operation that has proved superior to hers by almost every measure." This statement makes Clinton seem like she expects the presidency to be attained easily, while her male counterpart strives and valiantly struggles to receive the nomination. According to this article, Obama is deemed the smart choice for voters and Clinton is viewed as undesirable. Another excerpt from the February 25, 2008 article stated, "Her campaign was built on inevitability, a haughty operation so confident it would have the nomination wrapped up by now that it didn't even put a field organization in place for the states that were to come after the

megaprimary on Feb. 5.” This frames Clinton as overconfident, out-of-touch, and unlikely to succeed in her presidential aspirations.

The portrayal of male and female candidates also differed in terms of political issues associated with the candidates. Males were primarily linked to traditionally masculine issues (i.e. defense issues and the economy). In a September 2012 Gallup poll, 72% of Americans considered the economy to be the most crucial issue facing America in this election (Gallup, 2012). When female candidates receive coverage that centers on children and marital status the public associates them with these roles, and the societal expectations that accompany those roles, rather than politically focused responsibilities (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, p. 329). Females were primarily associated with traits that are traditionally feminine (i.e. welfare and education). This content analysis showed that the media continues to frame males and females in traditionally masculine and feminine ways. Defense issues were the one of the most prominent issues for 2008 and 2012. Media covered defense issues almost exclusively with the male candidates. By not linking female candidates to hard-hitting political issues, like defense or the economy, the media narrows the viability of female candidates. If the audience is not exposed to an association between females and traditionally masculine issues then it will appear as though female candidates are ill-equipped to handle these issues, thus undermining the possibility for political success.

The personality traits covered by the media differed between the genders. Men were portrayed as “analytical”, capable of critical thinking, and “hard-working.” Women were described as “effective” in 53.8% of the articles coded. But women were also classified as “erratic.” The media considers female candidates to be effective but also erratic. The use of the term “erratic” to describe female political candidates decreases women’s chance of even being

considered for the position, let alone elected. An article from the March 17, 2008 issue of *TIME* Magazine framed Clinton as an erratic and desperate candidate frantically searching for a way to avoid defeat by stating, “Finally, with nothing left to lose, the actual Hillary Clinton came back, in a dizzying array of moods and aspects that seemed to confuse the press.” A subsequent article from May 5, 2008 remarked upon Hillary Clinton’s strategy to defeat Obama’s popularity surge in the primaries stating, “She's got the kitchen sink flying, the china flying — the buffet is coming...” The media coverage focuses almost entirely on traits that damage the campaigns of female candidates because the voters are shown undependable and unpredictable female candidates.

The use of gendered stereotypes is still present in the coverage of female political candidates. Hillary Clinton was likened to negative and positive stereotypes in the April 7, 2008 issue, “Hillary Clinton is often compared with the conniving Lady Macbeth (by her enemies) or with the fierce and nurturing Roman goddess Juno (by her supporters).” Clinton was stereotypically considered a savior and a curse for the American political system. By associating her to stereotypical expectations of women (i.e. savior or curse) the media diminish her role as a serious political candidate. The focus instead becomes the novelty of her bid, not the substance of her campaign. Clinton was also framed as an iron maiden by the media. In one instance an article discussed how voters are afraid of Hillary Clinton, “Iowans who say she makes them feel afraid are far less likely to support her than are their counterparts at the national level.” (Dec. 17, 2007)

Palin was stereotypically framed by the media. When she was not filling somewhat of a cheer-leader role for the Republican Party, Palin was framed as a wife and mother who just happened to be a Vice Presidential candidate. The coverage she received as a Vice Presidential

candidate equaled the coverage of her role as a mother and a wife. A significant portion of an article focused on her marriage to Todd Palin and how his influence shaped Sarah Palin. The article stated,

“Her marriage to high school sweetheart Todd Palin upped the family's Alaska quotient: he was part Yupik native and all man. He would go on to become a commercial fisherman and part-time oilman and win the nearly 2,000-mile (3,170km) Iron Dog snowmobile race four times” (Sept. 15, 2008) .

The coverage of Sarah Palin fulfilled another gendered stereotype. She was framed as somewhat of a “pet” for the Republican Party. Kanter (1977) described instances of the “pet” stereotype as any time a female is “symbolically taken along on group events as mascot—a cheerleader for shows of prowess” (p. 234). A January 9, 2012 article stereotyped the campaigns of Michelle Bachmann and Sarah Palin stating, “After a year that has already seen the surge and collapse of short-lived darlings like Cain and Michele Bachmann and the flirtations of Sarah Palin, the field is still convulsing.” By referring to Palin’s and Bachmann’s campaigns as “flirtations” it weakens campaign significance because it is framed as trivial or fleeting, something to amuse but of little substance. Calling Bachmann a “darling,” shows that the media considers her candidacy to be an unlikely option though her campaign was entertaining. It’s as if the media is patting female candidates on the head and sending them back to the political nursery. The continual use of stereotypes trivializes the campaigns of women and decreases the likelihood of election success.

The importance of marital status was reserved almost exclusively for the women of the election season. Hillary Clinton was rarely covered in an article without some mention of her

husband Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton was mentioned many times and often became the area of focus in an article supposedly featuring Hillary Clinton. Hillary was rarely mentioned devoid of Bill. Bill Clinton held the office of President of the United States for two terms and is one of the most beloved and most loathed American leaders. His political past and prowess certainly plays a part in how Hillary's campaign was covered and portrayed by the media. The distinction lies in how the coverage was portrayed. In many of the articles Bill Clinton is referenced as both a blessing and curse to the Hillary Clinton presidential aspirations. The media seems to consider that Bill's presence and his presence alone will determine the success or failure of Hillary Clinton's bid for the presidency. An article from the Dec. 17, 2007 issue stated,

“...She comes not only with Bill attached but also with a permanent carnival: all the screaming from the right and from those in the media obsessed with the Clinton-family follies. After 16 years, the public may be tired of an always embattled presidency.”

The coverage incorporated Bill as a primary electability factor rather than Hillary's merits and experience. As her husband and former president, her association with Bill is both a blessing and a curse. The success of the first Clinton Administration is an attractive linkage to those who want to return to the glories of the Clinton-era. In some instances, political association with Bill was advantageous to Hillary. The connection between Hillary Clinton and the presidency of her husband was often framed negatively by the media. An article from the May 5, 2008 issue stated, “...not sure that Bill and Hillary Clinton are reasonably sane human beings, at least not when they are running for office: they become robo-pols, tireless and seemingly indestructible.” This excerpt portrays the aggression of the Clinton's as undesirable and ruthless. The article frames the couple as damaging juggernaut for the American political system.

Though the media framed her in many different scenarios, the portrayals of Hillary Clinton were primarily negative. An article discussing Bill's philandering, Hillary was described as an enabler to his cheating. The article stated, "She has certainly been as much enabler as victim of Bill's infidelities; her instinct has always been to attack any of his paramours who go public" (November 19, 2007). The media also questioned Hillary Clinton's experiences as First Lady. An article was dedicated to fact checking her time in the White House to determine whether or not her accounts are accurate. The article stated, "Now the former First Lady claims at least a share of the credit for a wide range of the Clinton Administration's signature accomplishments, both domestic and overseas. Does she deserve it?" (March 24, 2008) The article lists several accomplishments mentioned by Hillary Clinton and then offers an explanation, either rebuking or reinforcing each claim. The article discussed three triumphs mentioned by Hillary Clinton: lobbying for health-care for children, bringing peace to Northern Ireland, and negotiating open borders for Kosovo refugees. In each circumstance the article supports Hillary's claim of success, but always with a caveat. When referencing her work with children's childcare the article somewhat dismisses her contributions by stating, "The record suggests Clinton did indeed lobby for children's health coverage but that many others were responsible as well." Assessing her role in bringing peace to violence-torn Northern Ireland the article limits Clinton's achievements by stating,

"Clinton played a role in hearing the concerns of Irish women left out of the peace process, and in encouraging them to put pressure on their countrymen to pursue negotiations. But that does not mean she rolled up her sleeves and conducted or led the talks that resulted in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement."

Hillary Clinton's success with Kosovo border negotiations were also censured by the author stating,

“In the case of Macedonia, Clinton engaged in personal diplomacy that brought about change. But securing the return of American business partners is not the same as the opening of borders to thousands of refugees. That accomplishment was a result of broader U.S. and European efforts during the war.”

Each instance was briefly supported and then extensively criticized by the author. The fact-checking proved that Hillary Clinton did play a crucial role in each case, but the admission of success was always accompanied with limitations. Her successes were never framed as a result of her personal capabilities, rather the competence of those surrounding her. The explanations offered by the author never framed Clinton as an essential component of each accomplishment; instead she was portrayed as a periphery player overindulging in glory.

This study reinforced that the media portrays male and female candidates differently. The media's continued focus on motherhood and married life instead of political aspirations weakens the association of women with the political sphere. Women are repeatedly framed with issues, traits and experiences that further associate them with the home and private life. The media's portrayal of female political candidates damages their campaigns because the public is not exposed to women as political contenders. The media frames the campaigns of women as a novelty, something to marvel at but not truly consider as a viable option come election day.

## Chapter 6: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study, like most academic research, has several limitations. The first limitation is the relatively small number sample of articles examined. 103 articles of *TIME Magazine* might be inadequate to provide a true representation of the political climate of the 2008 and 2012 election cycles. Increasing the number of articles examined will result in a more representative picture of the media's portrayal of male and female candidates during presidential election cycles. A longer time frame is also crucial to understand the subtle changes that happen during the election process. By examining an extended period of time it is possible that research could reveal the precise moment when the media's portrayal of male and female political candidates shifted or not. The study might not reveal an equalized change, but it could unearth other discrepancies that had not been previously addressed. In addition to an increase in the amount of articles, a greater number of magazines analyzed would improve the accuracy of the study.

*TIME Magazine* is widely circulated and respected for political news, but one magazine cannot serve as a complete representation of the news media. More magazines should be analyzed to give an accurate portrayal of the how the media framed candidates. *The Week* and *Mother Jones* would both provide additional information concerning the media's portrayal of political candidates. In addition to more magazines other media must be examined to understand the holistic media portrayal of female and male presidential candidates. Most Americans still receive their political news from AP newspapers and nightly news broadcasts. Analysis of AP newspaper articles and nightly news broadcasts would more accurately represent the media's portrayal of male and females candidates.

An adjusted coding sheet would result in more significant findings and thus improve the effectiveness and the validity of this research. At times the results were skewed because of the



large amount of options provided on the coding sheet (see questions 16 and 17). Altering the coding sheet by grouping specific issues and traits into categories would provide a better representation of what issues and traits were highlighted by the media. In addition to categorizing the issues and personality traits developing a rubric of gendered language would be beneficial. The rubric would include specific examples and suggestions for what constitutes gendered language (i.e. gendered stereotypes/metaphors, spotlighting gender, etc...). The rubric/outline would fulfill the manifest content analysis component; quantifying the amount of gendered language. These adjustments will show whether the media coverage of political candidates was stereotypically gendered.

A cross-tab analysis of the two 2008 front runners for both president (Obama & Clinton) and vice president (Biden & Palin) might have shown a difference in how the media portrayed each candidate. This comparison is more “apples-to-apples” and possibly could have presented more equalized coverage.

Gender is a social construct that is continually reinforced, shaping what is deemed feminine and masculine. Women see the world differently than men, just as men view the world differently from women. The differences in men and women are demonstrated in every facet of life. These differences include variations in the way men and women think. Markus and Oysterman (1989) examined how society constructs male and female self-perceptions and whether that construction alters cognitive processing. They found that society’s perpetual reinforcement of gender-identifying expectations influences differences in the way men and women think. The cognition of the genders usually aligns with traditional societal expectations of each gender. Differences in cognitive processing could potentially effect the way political campaigns are conducted, how the society/media reacts (i.e. if a female candidate runs a more

masculine campaign and the backlash that could ensue from traditional gender-role betrayal), and how successful the result of the campaign (i.e. was the desired office attained). The importance of gender specific thinking and how society/media manipulate cognitive processing would be a valuable addition to future research.

The most significant and interesting limitations are linked to the context and characterization of the media portrayal. It is difficult to precisely measure how the media subtly frames a particular candidate and how that impression affects those who are exposed to the media's portrayal. The amount of coverage certainly plays a role in how important the candidate seems, as does the tone of context and characterization. These components can often be illusive and difficult to quantify. Though an article can be deemed generally positive that does not mean that there are not small instances of negativity that quietly erode the credibility of a candidate. For example, the May 26, 2008 issue primarily featured Barack Obama but Hillary Clinton was negatively spotlighted within the article. An excerpt from the article stated, "For many Obama activists, Clinton's brass-knuckles campaign confirmed everything they had always suspected about Hillary and her husband: that they're cynical and ruthless..." Negativity seems to be a greater influencer in information processing about candidates. After a candidate's identity has been manufactured, either positively or negatively by the media it is difficult to separate that particular candidate from that association. Each positive aspect is considered a fluke while each negative aspect reinforces the unlikelihood of that candidate. The March 17, 2008 issue of *TIME* Magazine referenced Hillary Clinton stating, "For the first time, she doesn't seem elite and entitled. For the first time, she's almost one of us." Though this excerpt centers on the identifying unity the audience feels with Clinton in that particular moment, the tone makes it seem like this is a mere stroke of luck for Clinton rather than an honest representation of her.

These often unseen occurrences make the context and characterization of media coverage mysterious and difficult to measure. Discovering a way to accurately and succinctly measure context and characterization would improve this study and all future content analysis.

More women must bid for the presidency before an accurate and complete analysis of the media's portrayal of female presidential candidates can be understood. Until a female candidate is elected to the Presidency it will be impossible to truly understand the differences in the media's portrayal of male and female candidates. What will 2016 bring both in terms of election results and media coverage? Hillary Clinton has resigned her role as Secretary of State-will another attempt at the Whitehouse prove more fruitful? The media will certainly have its input about how candidates, male and female alike, should be considered.

**Appendix I:  
Coding Sheet:  
TIME Magazine Portrayal of Presidential Candidates  
Gendered Coverage and Tone in Media Coverage**

1. Coder (enter your coder number): \_\_\_\_\_
2. ID number: (assign a unique number to each article coded, starting with 1): \_\_\_\_\_
3. Magazine Publication Date: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Page number: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Gender of author: \_\_\_\_\_
  1. Male
  2. Female
  3. Both

**Amount of Coverage:**

6. Length of article (please code only articles of 2008 political figures) (do not code articles shorter than one-page) (enter a number): \_\_\_\_\_
  1. One Full page
  2. Two Full pages
  3. Three- page spread or more
7. Candidate Name (please record the name and gender of the politician; if there is more than one political candidate featured, select the most prominent –ONE- political figure):  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Gender of Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_
  1. Male
  2. Female
9. Is there a picture of the candidate? \_\_\_\_\_
  1. Yes
  2. No

**Tone of Coverage/Portrayal:**

10. Tone of Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Mix
4. Neutral
5. Not about the candidate

11. Tone of article: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Positive
2. Negative
3. Mix
4. Neutral
5. Not about the candidate

**Gender Coverage/Portrayal:**

12. Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Married
2. Never Married
3. Divorced
4. Widow/Widower
5. No Mention

13. Are the children of the candidate mentioned? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Yes
2. No

14. Is the physical appearance of the candidate mentioned? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Yes
2. No

15. Is the gender of the candidate mentioned? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Yes
2. No

## Issue Coverage/Portrayal

16. What issues are mentioned in the article? (please include all that apply):

1. Defense Issues
2. International Issues
3. Organizations
4. Economy
5. Nuclear Arms Control
6. Treaties
7. Taxes
8. Foreign Affairs
9. Welfare
10. Education
11. Child Care
12. Parental
13. Leave
14. Employment/Jobs
15. Pensions
16. Environment
17. Crime
18. Women's Rights
19. Gender Quotas
20. Energy/Oil
21. Abortion
22. HIV/AIDS
23. Violence Against Women
24. Government Spending
25. Trade
26. Drugs
27. Health
28. Women in Politics
29. Business
30. Gay Rights
31. Campaigning

### Trait Coverage/Portrayal:

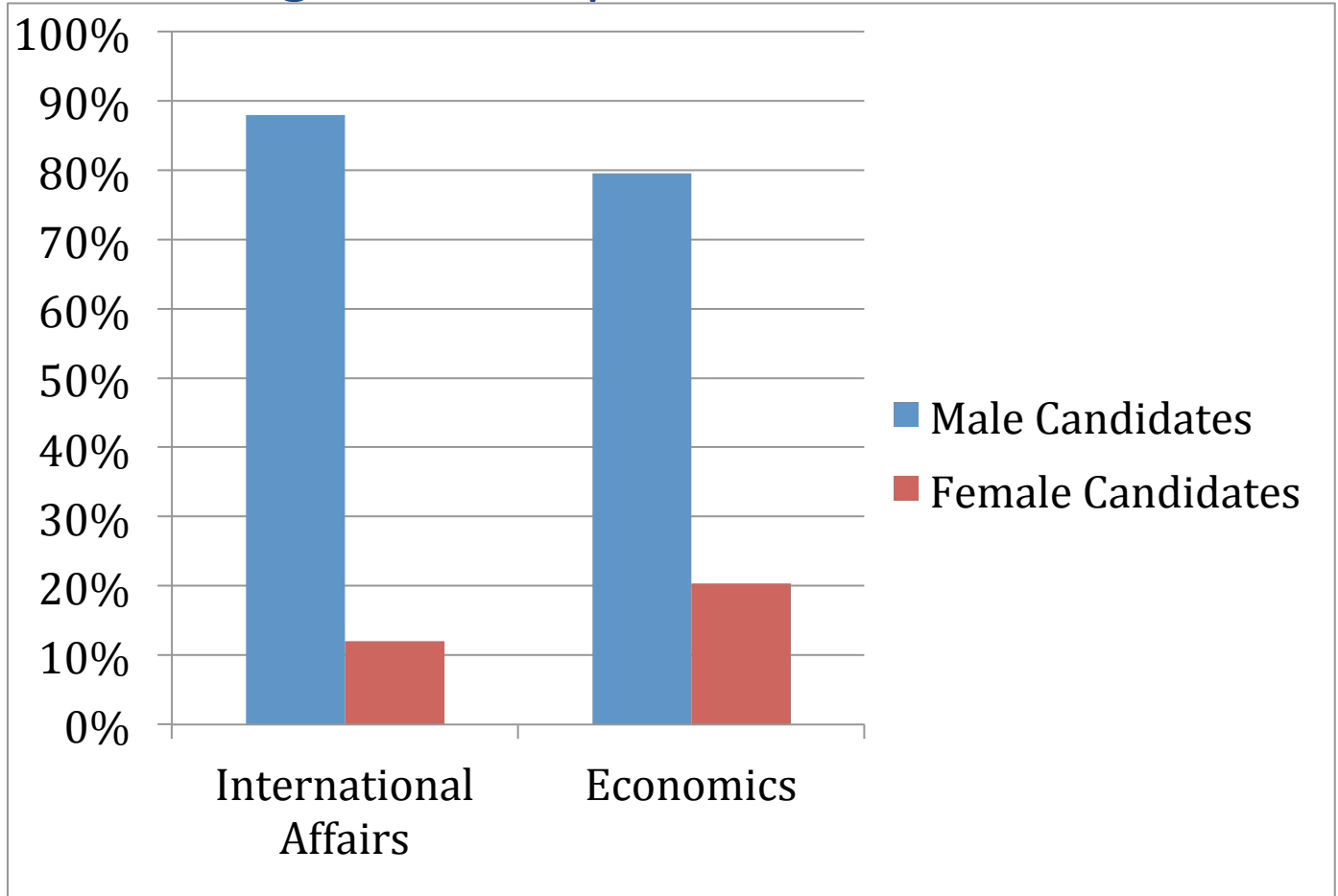
17. What traits are mentioned/portrayed in the article? (please include all that apply)

1. Honest/Trustworthy
2. Gentle
3. Analytical
4. Hardworking
5. Intelligent
6. Weak
7. Biased
8. Unattractive
9. Weak Leader
10. Competitive
11. Attractive
12. Expressive
13. Effective
14. Tough
15. Independent
16. Passive
17. Emotional
18. Uninformed
19. Unintelligent
20. Unexpressive
21. Compassionate
22. Moral
23. Knowledgeable
24. Strong
25. Noncompetitive
26. Dependent
27. Erratic
28. Ineffective
29. Ambitious/Power-Hungry
30. Strong Leader
31. Objective
32. Consistent
33. Vital
34. Untrustworthy
35. Immortal
36. Aggressive
37. Insensitive
38. N/A

Appendix II:

# Findings and Conclusions:

Issue categories compared

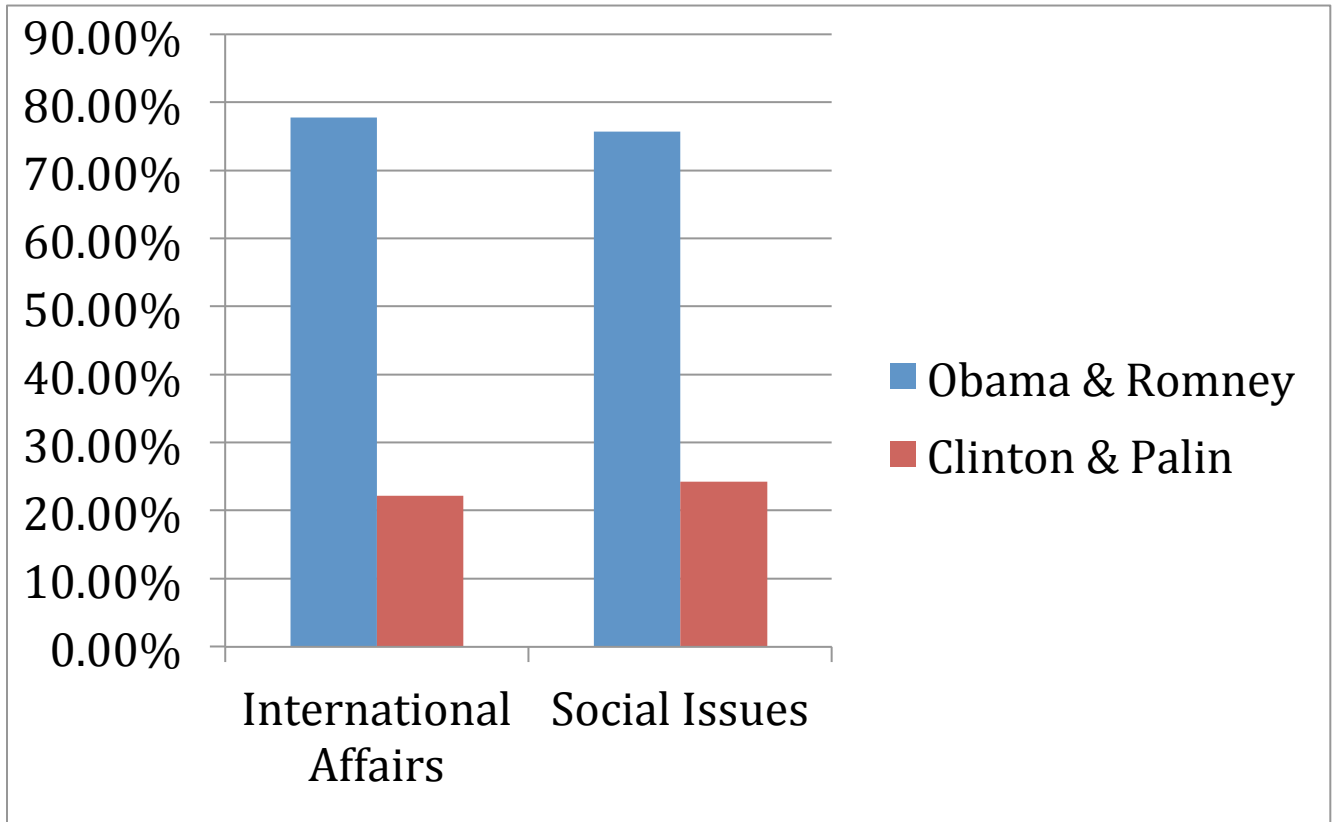




Appendix III:

# Findings and Conclusions:

Crosstab of the two most prominent candidates of each gender



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