

“American women never again will be second-class citizens”: Analyzing *New York Times* coverage of Geraldine Ferraro’s 1984 vice-presidential bid

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## *Abstract*

This qualitative, interpretive study sought to examine *New York Times* coverage of Geraldine Ferraro, the first female vice presidential candidate in the United States, during the 1984 presidential election. Employing previously established frames, the analysis found that *The New York Times* treated Ferraro as a viable vice presidential candidate. Some stories about Ferraro veered into Italian-American ethnic stereotypes when the angle focused on questions about her husband's finances. Although the 1984 stories published by the *Times* overall showed promise that political women would move forward with equitable coverage to men, the study found that Ferraro's bold prediction that "American women never again will be second-class citizens" did not hold true. Comparison with mainstream media coverage of vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin 24 years later and of other candidates such as Hillary Clinton revealed that hegemonic masculinity in political coverage is firmly entrenched. In fact, Ferraro's treatment by the *Times* in 1984 was more gender-equitable than more recent media coverage of female political candidates in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On July 12, 1984, U.S. Representative Geraldine Ferraro of New York, 49, became the first female vice presidential candidate on a major-party ticket in the United States when Democratic Senator Walter Mondale, 56, named her as his running mate. Another woman would not join a major-party ticket until 24 years later, when Republican Senator John McCain, 72, chose then-Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, 44, as his vice-presidential candidate. Both the Mondale-Ferraro ticket and the McCain-Palin alliance lost the presidential elections in November 1984 and November 2008.

This study examines media coverage of the first major-party woman vice-presidential candidate in the U.S. It asks how news frames characterized her in the mainstream press. As Gitlin (1980) notes, frames are patterns by which media gatekeepers organize information. “Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6-7). Through framing, journalists contribute to constructions and perceptions of reality (Gans, 1979; Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978).

Journalists often frame women, including female politicians, in gendered terms; that is, they use key words and terms, common descriptions, certain images, to convey notions about women and femininity. News media tend to emphasize female political candidates’ sex more than their positions on issues, their qualifications, or their leadership abilities. Frames may reflect sex stereotypes and beliefs about gendered societal roles. Mass media, with power to set the agenda for what is important in society and the nation, has influenced past elections through the frames that news organizations present to the public (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Norris, 1997).

This qualitative study, using an inductive and interpretive approach from a feminist perspective, examines framing in Ferraro's media coverage from the day she was named a vice-presidential candidate to the subsequent election. It analyzes coverage in the mainstream press, represented by *The New York Times* newspaper, considered at the time to be the most influential newspaper in the United States (Gans, 1979; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

This study asks the research question: How did *The New York Times* frame coverage of Geraldine Ferraro, the first female major-party vice-presidential nominee in the United States? The study also takes a comparative look at treatment of more recent female political candidates.

### **Literature review**

American politics has long been a male realm. No woman has served as president of the United States, although women have served as leaders in many other nations. U.S. society perceives politicians as male, as Wolbrecht (2008) observes: "The liberal democratic ideals on which our political system is premised are infused with expectations about political identity that are inherently masculine" (p. 7). Hegemonic masculinity is an idealized construction of masculinity that places importance on traits interpreted as male, including aggression, competitiveness and toughness. While women are subordinated in hegemonic masculinity, they also are willing participants in this socially constructed system (Connell, 1995; Gibson & Heyse, 2010). Therefore, because the expectation is that politicians are male, women who run for office are perceived not as candidates, but as *female* candidates.

Meeks (2012) examined whether female political candidates were covered differently in news from their male opponents. Analyzing coverage of four prominent women over a 10-year period, she found that women candidates, particularly when they ran for higher offices, were portrayed as novelties or anomalies. The candidates she studied were: Elizabeth Dole in her run for the 2000 U.S. presidential nomination and 1992 run for U.S. senator from North Carolina; Claire McCaskill in her 2004 bid for Missouri governor and 2006 run for Missouri senate; Hillary Clinton in her 2000 run for U.S. senator from New York and bid for the 2008 presidential nomination; and Sarah Palin in her 2008 campaign for vice president. Meeks concluded that media depictions perpetuate the notion that politics is a masculine domain and that male candidates are more competent than female candidates.

Women's representation in U.S. elected office has grown in recent decades, but women still represent a minority in politics. As of 2013, in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, ninety-eight women were serving in the U.S. Congress: 78 (of 435) in the House and 20 (of 100) in the Senate. Three of nine Supreme Court justices were women. The highest office a woman ever had held in the nation was U.S. Speaker of the House, third in line for the presidency, which Nancy Pelosi held in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress and 111<sup>th</sup> Congress (Manning & Shogan, 2012). In 2013, five women were serving as state governors.

### *Stereotypes of women candidates*

Female political candidates have observed that news media tend to focus on their physical attributes and families rather than their campaign platforms and positions on issues. In fact, "Political women argue that media treat them less seriously than they treat men, focus too seldom on issues and too often on their appearances and family lives, and

relegate stories about women and politics to the style pages” (Carroll & Schrieber, 1997). Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who also served as First Lady and New York senator, endured endless discussions of her hairstyles, clothing, and her marriage to former President Bill Clinton. Senator Barbara Mikulski, who served in the U.S. House as a Democrat from Maryland, noted that media stories about her often focused on details irrelevant to holding office, such as her short stature and “round” body (Braeden, 1996, p. 6). Coverage of vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin, formerly the governor of Alaska, often discussed her beauty, clothing and motherhood (Meeks, 2012). A 2009 social psychology study using images of Palin found that college students associated a focus on appearance as less competent and less human. The study concluded that objectification of women may have a negative effect on their success (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009). In a different article based on the same research, Heflick and Goldenberg (2010) argued that the media attention to Palin’s appearance objectified her and allowed people to see her as “less competent, warm and moral” (p. 149-150). They concluded this could have contributed to McCain-Palin’s election loss.

A study of media coverage of the 1992 election, called the “Year of the Woman” after twenty-four new women were elected to the House of Representatives and four women to the Senate, found that women politicians most often were associated in the media with so-called women’s issues (Carroll & Schrieber, 1997). These included women’s health, abortion, and sexual harassment. Carroll and Schrieber pointed out that the women elected in 1992 were portrayed as “agents of change” who were actively involved in women’s issues, but not in “foreign affairs, international trade, the

appropriations process, or regulatory reform,” even though women politicians actually were involved in those negotiations (p. 145).

Iyengar, Valentino, Ansolabehere and Simon (1997) found that voters perceive women as more credible on issues like child care, education, health and women’s rights than on issues such as crime, immigration, economics, and other sex-neutral issues. Although women politicians often publicly make stands on gender-neutral issues, they still are linked mainly with topics seen relevant primarily to women. Sunday morning political talk shows, which tend to focus on foreign policy, economics and politics, overwhelmingly feature male guests, with women making up only 13.5 percent of the guests asked to comment on major issues (Gibbons, 2010).

#### *Why look back at Ferraro?*

In light of the advances women have made on the political scene, history can inform us on how changes came about and gauge whether progress has been made. Therefore, examining press coverage of Ferraro from the 1984 campaign may reflect changes in current media practice or point out what has failed to move forward.

The male-dominated news industry never has treated women candidates as equals, and most often portrayed them as novelties. Numerous studies have shown that women in general receive much less mainstream news coverage than men and that women often are portrayed in stereotypical roles such as mothers, wives, and victims. During the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, women who demonstrated for women’s rights often were depicted in news media as radical “bra burners” (though few bras ever were set afire), unattractive deviants who hated men and were not to be taken seriously (Dolan, Deckman & Swers, 2007). Later in the 1970s, when more women

began working in newsrooms, coverage of feminists became more sympathetic and favorable. The press began portraying the women's movement as a fight for rights through a series of sex discrimination lawsuits (Dolan, et al., 2007, p. 105). However, stories about feminist leaders such as Gloria Steinem still focused on her appearance in addition to her politics. By the 1980s, although changes in coverage of women had begun, news media continued to perpetuate myths about women and feminism. Scholar Caryl Rivers observed, "If you are constantly being told that the word equates with hairy, ugly man haters, that it dooms you to never getting married, never having children, being unloved and neurotic, getting depressed and anxious, and being a selfish hysteric to boot, you are probably not going to run headlong to the office of the National Organization for Women with your membership fee in hand" (Rivers, 1996, p. 111). While women have held more powerful positions in the 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century than in the past, women continue to receive much less media coverage than men, and are treated as unequal to men in business, politics and other power-holding entities in American society (Armstrong, 2006; Liebler & Smith, 1997; Zoch & Turk, 1998).

### *Being a "first"*

Ferraro often was framed in the news media as a "first," noted Sullivan (1989) in her study of framing in the 1984 debate between Ferraro and Vice President George H.W. Bush. Ferraro's candidacy challenged the masculine hegemony of the presidential political campaign game. Peter Teeley, Bush's press secretary, dubbed her "bitchy" (Boyd, 1984; Braeden, 1996, p. 109). First Lady Barbara Bush told reporters that Ferraro was "a \_\_\_\_\_, rhymes with rich" (Braeden, 1996, p. 109). Barbara Bush later contended she meant "witch," not "bitch," but the message was clear (and still gender-stereotyped).

Some in the press also portrayed Ferraro as less than competent because she was a woman. For example, in the debate with Vice President Bush, she was asked how she, as a woman, could protect national security, and also whether the Soviets “might be tempted to take advantage of you simply because you are a woman?” (p. 109). Journalist Marvin Kalb asked her, “Are you strong enough to push the button?” (p. 110). Ferraro, in turn, accused Bush of having a “patronizing attitude” toward her when he criticized her knowledge of foreign policy (Hughes & Le Veness, 1987, p. 48). When Ferraro was named the Democratic vice-presidential candidate at the 1984 Democratic Convention in San Francisco, Tom Brokaw of NBC News (in)famously declared, “Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman to be nominated for vice president ... Size six!” (Braden, 1996, p. 15).

In addition to gender stereotypes, Ferraro faced ethnic generalizations as well. Her Italian-American family was accused of having connections to organized crime (Braeden, 1996; Ferraro, 1985). Her family’s finances were the subject of many newspaper articles. “The Ferraro-Zaccaro finances were the hottest story of the year,” Ferraro wrote in her autobiography, detailing the stress the media attention caused her (Ferraro, 1985, p. 168). No wrongdoing by her or her husband, John Zaccaro, ever was found. In her autobiography, she wrote that conservative pundit George Will sent her flowers as an apology for writing a column incorrectly saying her husband had not paid his taxes. Along with the flowers was a note saying, “Has anyone told you are cute when you’re mad?” The next time she talked to Will, she retorted, “Vice presidents aren’t cute” (Ferraro, 1985, p. 182).

Articles also focused on where she got her hair colored and the fact she had stayed home with her three children for 14 years before starting her law career (Braeden,

1996). Ferraro and Zaccaro used different last names, which raised eyebrows at the time. The Associated Press stylebook, considered the standard for print journalism, in 1984 still mandated that women be referred to with courtesy titles, Miss or Mrs., depending on marital status (unless they held another title, such as Dr.). However, neither “Mrs. Zaccaro” nor “Miss Ferraro” was accurate, and Ferraro preferred the title Ms., which did not refer to marital status. *The New York Times* and other publications were opposed to using Ms., because, as columnist William Safire wrote, they viewed it as “propaganda for the women’s movement” (Safire, 1984). So the *Times* incorrectly called the candidate “Mrs. Ferraro.” The newspaper’s editors responded to Safire’s August 1984 column calling for the use of Ms. with, “it still sounds too contrived for news writing” (Safire, 1984).

Ferraro did, however, take credit for spurring news organizations to assign more women to cover politics (Ferraro, 1985). Her challenge to the “old boys club” of politics paved the way for Palin’s 2008 candidacy and the candidacies of dozens of other women who subsequently entered politics. Ferraro died of cancer March 26, 2011 at age 76.

### *Framing*

This study, rooted in feminist theory, takes an interpretive, qualitative approach to framing. As Reese (2010) explains, the interpretive approach gives “greater emphasis to the cultural and political content of news frames and how they draw upon a shared store of social meanings” (p. 18). Feminist scholars have noted that frames also “reinforce gender-related myths” and “reinforce commonsense assumptions that privilege men in the social hierarchy” (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010, p. 312). This hegemonic process allows the public to accept as normal that men and masculinity are associated with power and

dominance, and marginalizes women as subordinate or lesser in these realms. Feminists seek to expose this social construction of reality by uncovering cultural beliefs that males are superior and attempting to change them (Hardin & Whiteside, 2010). Van Zoonen points out that in media production, newsroom employees often are socialized to accept “unwritten rules, norms and values of journalism” that favor a “masculine” approach to journalism work (Van Zoonen, 1994, p. 56).

In this interpretive, inductive approach, I will seek out the ways in which the media text, *The New York Times*, constructed frames surrounding Ferraro’s 1984 vice-presidential candidacy. Lind and Salo (2002), in their study of news media coverage of feminists and feminism, identified six common frames for women’s media portrayals: demonization (feminists are deviant); personalization or trivialization (focus on appearance or personal qualities); goals (attention to accomplishing equality and equal rights); victimization (women are weak and vulnerable); agency (feminists are strong and capable); and site of struggle (home, workplace or other location). These frames are the basis for this study of Ferraro’s media coverage. Ferraro identified herself as a feminist during the vice-presidential campaign.

#### *A sidebar on coverage of Sarah Palin*

Although Palin is not the main focus of this analysis, it is worth noting that 24 years after Ferraro’s run for vice president, Palin faced even more stereotypes than Ferraro did when she was a “first” in the 1980s. Palin was portrayed as a mother, though it should be noted she purposely ran on a platform that emphasized that role. Consequently, much media coverage about her focused on her family. She called herself a “hockey mom” and often appeared at campaign events with her five children, including

an infant and a pregnant teenager. Of course, male politicians with children have been running for office in the United States for more than 235 years without an emphasis on their parental roles and whether that affects their ability to govern.

Gibson & Heyse (2010) found in a study that Palin “reinforced traditional scripts of masculinity and femininity” (p. 244). She represented herself as a maternal figure, but also as a tough leader who stood for independence and individualism. Her most famous line: “You know they say the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull: lipstick,” (You Tube, 2008), seemed to represent a new type of femininity. Yet, Gibson & Heyse argued, Palin’s performance was “faux maternal” in that it actually undermined women’s voices in favor of men’s. Her political rhetoric celebrated the manliness of her running mate, Senator John McCain, and denigrated the feminine qualities of nurturance, empathy and caring, which she associated with their opponent, Barack Obama (Gibson & Heyse, 2010). In that sense, she willingly participated in and promoted hegemonic masculinity—the idea that stereotypically masculine traits make candidates best suited for elected office.

It is important to point out that Palin was different from a number of previous female candidates because of her conservative stances on issues (Bradley & Wicks, 2011). In addition to her portrayal as a mother, she also painted herself as a “rugged individualist” by emphasizing her hobbies of hunting and other outdoor activities. Meeks noted that Palin was a new kind of candidate who “embodies and projects aspects of both femininity and masculinity; aggressive behavior deemed appropriate for a mother protecting her children, and even, the whole of American values” (Meeks, 1997, p. 189-

190). Still, Palin endured judgment and criticism from both women and men for having the audacity to try embracing both motherhood and ambition (McCarver, 2011).

Coverage of Palin dwelled heavily on her appearance. Her hairstyles, her clothes and beauty, and how men responded to these, were the focus of media attention. Male TV and radio pundits commented on how “sexy” and what a “babe” she was, while some writers, male and female, questioned her qualifications, in part because of her past as a beauty pageant participant (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). During the campaign, news organizations revealed the Republican Party’s efforts to change Palin’s wardrobe and hair to make her look more sophisticated and attractive (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009). Her Democratic opponent, Joe Biden, even said at one point in the campaign that they obviously differed as candidates because: “She’s good-looking” (Datta, 2008).

## **Method**

To represent the mainstream media, all Lexis-Nexis All Academic archived articles from *The New York Times* between the date Geraldine Ferraro was named the vice-presidential nominee on July 12, 1984, and the day after the presidential election, November 7, 1984, were downloaded. The search term used to search the electronic database was “Geraldine Ferraro.”

Daily newspaper circulation was at its all-time peak in 1984 (Seelye, 2006), with *The Times* as one of the most influential, if not the most influential, U.S. newspaper. *The New York Times* published 260 articles mentioning Geraldine Ferraro in its daily editions between July 12, 1984 and November 7, 1984. Those included news stories, columns, editorials, letters to the editor, reviews, and transcripts of speeches, debates and press

conferences. I read all 260 articles, identified frames within the articles, and categorized and summarized them according to the frames established by Lind and Salo.

## **Results**

### *The mainstream press*

The majority of *The New York Times*' coverage immediately after Ferraro's nomination focused on her role as a "first" – the first woman on a major-party ticket – but did not dwell on her appearance. In fact, one article that mentioned her hairstyle went out of its way to discuss Mondale's hair as well. Since she was a U.S. House representative from one of the *Times*' home districts, Queens, reporters there already were familiar with Ferraro. *Times* stories and an editorial also emphasized that in addition to breaking a gender barrier, she was the first Italian-American on a major-party ticket. The newspaper articles discussed her appeal to the mostly blue-collar voters in her Queens, N.Y., district. This coverage did not differ much from the "horse race" frames so common in U.S. media political coverage that focus upon the competition rather than the issues. However, stories did portray Ferraro stereotypically as a woman who could "do it all"—fulfill her role as a mother and wife, and also have a successful career. A state supreme court justice in her district, Francis X. Smith, was quoted as calling her "Supergal" and saying "She can do everything – an assistant district attorney, raising a family, president of the women's Bar Association, a very talented tennis player, a great musician, she speaks French..." (Lynn, 1984, p. A10). Another article described Ferraro as "one of the boys" in Congress, but also discussed her life as a wife and mother of three who stayed home until her younger daughter started school. The same story revealed she was known to her children's teachers as "Mrs. John Zaccaro" (the *Times* continued to refer to her as the

incorrect “Mrs. Ferraro”). The article pointed out that after she landed a job in the Queens District Attorney’s Office (with the help of her male cousin, the *Times* noted), she discovered she was being paid less than the men and complained to her boss, who said, “But Gerry, you have a husband” (Perlez, July 13, 1984, p. A1). Another front-page article took a trivial tone, discussing whether Mondale and Ferraro should kiss each other as a greeting and how he should address her (Dowd, July 18, 1984). Columnist Tom Wicker celebrated Ferraro’s nomination, proclaiming, “a door has been opened” and predicting that women nominees would be a “future fixture in both parties” (Wicker, 1984, p. A27). A story about Ferraro’s exchange with a Mississippi state official who asked her if she could bake blueberry muffins was described by the *Times* as “good-natured” (Weintraub, 1984, p. A16).

By mid-August, the *Times*’ coverage had turned to her and her husband’s finances. Ferraro insisted she and Zaccaro kept separate finances and said she could not release his tax returns because they belonged to him. However, *Times* stories pointed out that she listed herself as “treasurer, secretary and stockholder of her husband’s company” (Perlez, August 15, 1984, p. B7). The *Times* noted that no law requires public tax return disclosure for political candidates or their relatives, but Zaccaro did finally release his returns, as did Ferraro. The *Times* never made any organized-crime accusations against Zaccaro, but reported on a *New York* magazine story that accused him of having ties to the Mafia. Ferraro told reporters in late August that she had revealed “probably more financial disclosures than you have from any other candidate in the history of the United States and from any other spouse” (*The New York Times*, August 22, 1984, p. B6). The president of the National Organization of Italian-American Women wrote a letter to the

editor of the *Times*, protesting the “attempts to link Geraldine Ferraro and John Zaccaro to organized crime” (Sirey, 1984, p. A22). By September, the *Times* had written a story about Ferraro’s “crowd appeal,” implying that the financial controversy had not damaged her campaign (Clendinen, 1984, p. A20).

### *On to the convention*

A Maureen Dowd story on Republican women at the RNC convention in Dallas, Texas, quoted several Republican women saying that Republican feminists, including Sen. Nancy Kassenbaum and Rep. Olympia Snowe, had been “shut out” from speaking there (Dowd, August 20, 1984). Dowd followed this with a piece two weeks later about Ferraro’s candidacy and the scrutiny of her and husband’s finances, characterizing women’s responses as “from misogynistic glee to sisterly anger.” One woman quoted in the piece said “women do not belong in the White House.” Dowd wrote that Ferraro “is as much symbol as candidate” (Dowd, September 6, 1984, p. 12). The story also quoted several prominent women who supported Ferraro, including authors Gail Sheehy and Betty Friedan, Patricia Carbine (the publisher of *Ms.* magazine), and several academic scholars. Offering another perspective, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, at the time the chief U.S. delegate to the United Nations, said that politics is “a harsh game and I don’t think women want whatever is at the end of that particular rainbow badly enough to pursue it” (Dowd, September 6, 1984, p. 12). Two days later, the *Times* published a quote from Mondale’s wife, Joan Mondale, expressing surprise that she had a pleasant conversation with Ferraro: “Oh, what do women talk about? She liked my new red dress. I was so surprised that she could still think in feminine terms. That’s what’s so wonderful! She’s not jaded and sour and crabby” (*The New York Times*, September 8, 1984, p. 1). The

*Times* also ran a trivialized story questioning whether Ferraro was eclipsing Joan Mondale's role as potential first lady. However, another article addressed Ferraro's ability to function amid crisis and criticism, observing she "seemed to depend on deep reserves of resilience and grit, laced with good-natured humor, to help her survive" (Perlez, September 30, 1984, p. 22). A later piece by Dowd observed that Ferraro had to "walk a fine line" between being tough but not being perceived as unfeminine (Dowd, October 10, 1984, p. 1).

Another controversy that arose in September was Ferraro's stance on abortion, which angered Catholic bishops in part because she identified herself as Catholic and the church opposed abortion. Ferraro proclaimed she personally opposed abortion, but would not impose her views on others; she supported the right of women to choose and the separation of church and state. Meanwhile, opponents Reagan and Bush staunchly opposed abortion. Despite the controversy, much of the coverage at this time focused again on the "horse race" aspect of political coverage: discussions of who was ahead and who is behind and the competition between the Republican and Democratic ticket. The press by September 1984 already was discussing a November election landslide in favor of Reagan and Bush.

#### *Feminine vs. feminist*

While stories in the *Times* referred to Ferraro as a feminist, they also observed traits that journalists attributed to her being a woman. For example, Perlez, in a *New York Times Magazine* profile on September 30, reported that unlike male candidates, "she usually travels with her children" and that she "appears to be less self-conscious and more natural than most male politicians" (p. 22). The same article called her approach

“un-Presidential” because she was forthright and straightforward. The piece concluded that Ferraro and Mondale were unlikely to win because of *his* lack of popularity, and that she would have to convince people that as a “first,” “she is indeed capable of taking over the reins of government” (p. 22). Following the vice-presidential debates after which Bush’s press secretary and Barbara Bush called Ferraro gender-specific insulting names (witch and bitch), the *Times* ran an editorial condemning the Bush campaign for its “vulgarity” (*The New York Times*, October 14, 1984, p. 22). The Ferraro campaign asked for an apology but didn’t receive one. However, Ferraro’s stances on various issues from the arms race to education to abortion to economic policy to the environment received relatively equal weight in *Times* articles; she was not portrayed as a candidate who supported only “women’s issues.” The *Times* also cited various statements Ferraro made supporting women, such as “We are not women doing men’s jobs, we are women doing work” (Perlez, November 4, 1984, p. 19).

The *Times*, in an editorial, endorsed the Mondale-Ferraro ticket for the presidential race, even though it noted that Ferraro “is not as ready to be President as George Bush.” The same editorial singled out “a backwash of troubling questions about her husband’s dealings and associates” (*The New York Times*, October 28, 1984, Section 4, p. 22). Even though she and Mondale lost, Ferraro summed up her candidacy as a victory for women: “My candidacy has said the days of discrimination are numbered. American women never again will be second-class citizens” (*The New York Times*, November 7, 1984, p. A21).

## **Discussion**

This analysis sought to examine how *The New York Times*, as representative of the mainstream press, covered Geraldine Ferraro in the 1984 presidential campaign. Based on previous research findings that journalists tend to frame woman politicians in gendered terms, the study identified some gendered language in the *Times*' coverage. But the newspaper most often used this tactic when reporting and quoting comments made by others. One example is the sex-stereotyped name-calling by the Bush campaign, which the newspaper reported on but also condemned in an editorial. The study finds that the *Times* went out of its way to treat Ferraro as a candidate, not only as a female candidate, although the newspaper had no choice but to portray her as a "first."

While the *Times* is used in this study as an example of the mainstream media because of the newspaper's influential role in American society and American journalism, it is important to note that its editorial board endorsed the Mondale-Ferraro ticket in the 1984 presidential race. The *Times* also has a reputation for backing politically liberal candidates. Therefore, the newspaper is not an unbiased source in this case. Results may well have been different if other news organizations were analyzed. Also, two female journalists, Jane Perlez and Maureen Dowd, were assigned to cover Ferraro during the 1984 campaign and their coverage dominated the *Times*' stories about Ferraro. Women journalists have been shown in previous studies to pay more attention than men to stories involving women, to be more careful than men with the language used to write about women, and to interview and quote women sources more often than male journalists (Armstrong, 2006; Mills, 1997; Nicholson, 2007). The *Times*' framing of Ferraro according to Lind and Salo's frames revealed the following:

#### *Demonization*

Lind and Salo's demonization frame states that mainstream media often portray feminists as deviant, "as crazy, ill-tempered, ugly, man-hating, family-wrecking, hairy-legged, bra-burning, radical lesbians" (p. 218). The *Times* coverage rarely depicted Ferraro this way, although the paper reported a quote from Joan Mondale in which she seemed surprised that Ferraro was not "jaded and sour and crabby," which apparently is the way she expected a feminist to behave.

#### *Personalization/trivialization*

This frame refers to coverage that focuses on "personal attributes, such as appearance, marital status, personal habits, or personal style" (p. 219). Again, the *Times* coverage did not dwell on this type of coverage the way the mainstream press did 24 years later with Sarah Palin. However, much of the 1984 campaign coverage focused on Ferraro's husband's finances and allegations of possible (never proven) wrongdoing on his part. Ferraro's children were mentioned a few times in stories when they campaigned with her, and profiles of her noted that she had been a stay-at-home mother before her law and political careers. She also was portrayed as a woman who "can do it all."

#### *Goals*

Lind and Salo define this frame as journalistic content that deters from feminist goals, including "civil rights, workplace rights, reproductive rights, preventing violence toward women, and improving general conditions for women" (p. 220). The *Times* portrayed Ferraro as a supporter of feminist goals, but it can be argued that the incessant attention to Zaccaro's finances and the controversy about what the Catholic Church thought of her abortion stance took the focus away from feminism.

#### *Victimization*

In this frame, the media representation of women includes references to weakness, vulnerability, mental illness, crime (especially rape and abuse), fear, dysfunctionality, and so forth” (p. 220). Ferraro was rarely victimized in the coverage, except when random voters were quoted as saying women should not hold high offices. The most relevant victimization came during her debate with George H.W. Bush, when a prominent journalist and Bush himself questioned her competency because of her sex. The Bush campaign’s gendered insults of Ferraro following the debate also fall within the victimization frame.

### *Agency*

Overall, the *Times*’ coverage of Ferraro attempted to treat her as an equal candidate to Bush, emphasizing the fact she was a woman but not stereotyping or questioning her abilities or qualifications simply because of her sex. It appeared that the *Times* made a concerted effort not to repeat gendered scripts and tropes that the news media are known to employ when covering female political candidates. The *Times* did not dwell on such topics as hair and clothing, and certainly not body type or attractiveness, when it came to Ferraro. Much of the coverage emphasized her stance on issues, her rise to political power in her Queens district, and her leadership. The coverage veered away from those topics when it focused on Zaccaro’s finances, but by the time of the November 6 election, the *Times* again was covering Ferraro’s campaign activities and platform.

### *Site of struggle*

Lind and Salo’s final frame relates to “the aspects of our social reality in which feminism and feminist ideas may be relevant” (p. 221). Lind and Salo identified 10 sites:

home, geographic location, health, media and the arts, workplace, court/law, education, politics, sports and leisure, and religion, in which these aspects may be part of media frames. The politics aspect of this frame is relevant to this study. Ferraro's candidacy was portrayed as a victory for women and a chance to open doors to them as political candidates in U.S.A.'s highest government offices.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis of press coverage of Ferraro from the 1984 campaign indicates that media coverage largely was favorable and fair to her. The *Times*' coverage focused on Ferraro's competency and capability. Three decades later, female candidates often see stereotyping and questioning of their qualifications, contrasting with *Times*' 1984 coverage of Ferraro, the literature review showed. The *Times* went out of its way to avoid tropes about women and about feminism that continue to be repeated in current media coverage. The newspaper treated Ferraro as a serious candidate addressing issues like the arms race and abortion. However, when it came to her husband, John Zaccaro, the *Times* managed to perpetuate ethnic stereotypes. The gendered name-calling by the Bush campaign caused a kerfuffle after the Bush-Ferraro debate, but the *Times* quickly jumped to Ferraro's defense and condemned the use of gender-based attacks. It should be noted that the *Times* endorsed the Mondale-Ferraro ticket for the presidency and vice presidency.

This analysis finds that Ferraro's statement after the election that women "will never again be second-class citizens" continues to fail to be accomplished. As shown by the coverage of Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton in the 2008 campaign and other recent coverage of political women revealed in the literature review, the news media continue to

stereotype, personalize, trivialize, victimize and demonize female candidates. Masculine hegemony in politics still is the prevailing accepted reality. For example, in 2013, many mainstream media organizations covered a story about a “Slap Hillary” website that had been resurrected from the year 2000, allowing viewers to play a game in which a hand physically hits Hillary Clinton’s head (Brazile, 2013). In the 2008 campaign, Sarah Palin was sometimes referred to as “Caribou Barbie,” referencing her appearance. And recently, Texas Senator Wendy Davis, who filibustered an abortion bill in the Texas Legislature in June 2013, was called “Abortion Barbie” by a prominent conservative blogger (Erickson, 2013). Nancy Pelosi has faced scrutiny and speculation about cosmetic surgery and endured gendered, venomous insults from pundits.

Also, as the literature review showed, women in political office still are not representative of the population. Women make up more than half of the American public, yet no woman has reached a rank higher than U.S. Speaker of the House. While the 1984 coverage of Ferraro held great promise for the future, the reality is that current status of political women, 13 years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has progressed only incrementally since the 1984 election, and in some ways has worsened. The current political climate, bolstered by the free-for-all provided by the Internet and social media, often amplifies hostile gender stereotypes toward women that were not seen prevalently in the 1984 Ferraro coverage. Women continue to be regarded as outsiders and anomalies in American politics.

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