

UNNATURAL, INCOMPETENT, AND UNVIABLE: PRESS PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN CANDIDATES FOR PRESIDENT

*Erika Falk**

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INTRODUCTION

Women have headed nations throughout the world, including in unexpected places such as Turkey, Ireland, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, not to mention Canada, France, and England. Yet in the United States, which considers itself the most advanced democracy in the world, no woman has ever held the presidency or the vice presidency. Only twice has an American woman even been selected as a vice presidential candidate on a major party ticket. It is remarkable that women have never held the presidency in the United States, given that studies have consistently shown that women who run for lower political office win just as often as men do.¹

It is true that over the 130-year period in which American women have been running for president, attitudes about women's roles and potentials have changed. In February 1937, a Gallup poll asked respondents, "Would you vote for a woman for President if she qualified in every *other*

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1. RICHARD A. SELTZER, JODY NEWMAN & MELISSA VOORHEES LEIGHTON, *SEX AS A POLITICAL VARIABLE: WOMEN AS CANDIDATES & VOTERS IN U.S. ELECTIONS* 92 (1997).

respect?"² Perhaps the respondents were influenced by the thinking of the times or perhaps they were affected by the wording of the question, which supposed that being a woman disqualified one for the job, but only 33% of respondents said they would vote for a woman.³ Through the ensuing years, pollsters continued to ask the same question with minor variations (they dropped the phrase "every other respect" after 1939).⁴ Favorable responses rose steadily, roughly keeping pace with the year. By 1955, about half said they would vote for a woman,⁵ and by 1977, it was 77%.⁶ In 1996, 91% said they would vote for a woman for president if she were qualified and "[i]f your party nominated [her]."⁷ One might expect that the dramatic change in the answers over the last fifty years would indicate a shift in conceptions about women and their roles in politics, particularly as candidates, and that such a shift would be strongly reflected in the press coverage.

In presidential campaigns, media portrayals are particularly important. Unlike lower-level races where interpersonal contact plays a central role, in presidential contests most of what constituents know about any candidate is learned from the media. The press plays an integral role in the campaign by framing, shaping, ignoring, or presenting the candidates to the public. More importantly, how the press portrays and treats candidates may affect who later decides to be a candidate.

The essential finding of this study is that, despite striking and important changes over the last century in women's social and political rights and in attitudes about women and politics, the press has not changed how it covers women candidates. Press coverage is often biased and prejudiced, and it is not much better today than it was in 1872. The most important consequence of this is not what most people would expect: that should a woman

2. *The Gallup Poll #66*, GALLUP BRAIN (Jan. 25, 1937), <http://brain.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0066&p=2> (emphasis added).

3. *Id.*

4. See, e.g., *The Gallup Poll #360*, GALLUP BRAIN (Nov. 21, 1945), <http://brain.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0360&p=2>; *The Gallup Poll #448K*, GALLUP BRAIN (Oct. 2, 1949), <http://brain.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0448K&p=3>.

5. *The Gallup Poll #003*, ROPER CENTER (February 15, 1955), <http://brain.gallup.com/documents/questionnaire.aspx?STUDY=AIPO0066&p=2> ("If the party whose candidate you most often support nominated a woman for President of the United States, would you vote for her if she seemed best qualified for the job?").

6. *National Opinion Research Center #129*, ROPER CENTER (July 1997), <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu> ("If your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?").

7. *National Opinion Research Center #125*, ROPER CENTER (Nov. 1996), <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu> ("If your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?").

run, the press may make it less likely for her to win. The most important consequence is that the press coverage may make women *less likely to run*.

The present study examined the press coverage of nine women who ran for president between 1872 and 2008 and compared it to that of nine men who ran in the same races and had about the same level of electoral support. The candidates examined were Victoria Claflin Woodhull and James Black (candidates in 1872), Belva Bennett Lockwood and Benjamin Butler (1884), Margaret Chase Smith and Nelson Rockefeller (1964), Shirley St. Hill Chisholm and Henry Jackson (1972), Patricia Scott Schroeder and Richard Gephardt (1987), Lenora Branch Fulani and Ron Paul (1988), Elizabeth Dole and Steve Forbes (2000), Carol Moseley Braun and Bob Graham (2004), and Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama (2008).

These nine women candidates represent seven different decades and three centuries. Of the nine, six ran for the nomination of one of the two major parties (Chase Smith, Chisholm, Schroeder, Dole, Moseley Braun, and Clinton) and three ran with the nomination of a minor party (Woodhull, Lockwood, and Fulani). Of the six who ran for major party nominations, four sought the Democratic (Chisholm, Schroeder, Moseley Braun, and Clinton) and two the Republican (Chase Smith and Dole) nomination. Of the nine, six had significant national political experience (Chase Smith, Chisholm, Schroeder, Dole, Moseley Braun, and Clinton), seven had earned graduate degrees (Lockwood, Chisholm, Schroeder, Fulani, Dole, Moseley Braun, and Clinton), and four raised enough money to qualify for Federal Primary Matching Funds (FPMF) (Schroeder, Fulani, Dole, and Clinton).

In selecting man candidates, I tried to use quantitative criteria by selecting the candidate with the closest number of votes or percentage of projected votes in polls as the woman candidate. In no case was there a perfect match available; rather, I selected the most comparable candidate. Generally speaking, the articles were drawn from the *New York Times* from the first day of the first month that the first candidate entered the race in each year studied to the day the last candidate withdrew or the election was held, whichever came first. I also searched the largest circulating newspaper in the home state of each candidate, from the first day of the first month when each entered the race until the election or the date the candidate exited the race. I collected, read, and analyzed more than 1,400 articles that mentioned the candidates.

Once the data were collected, I began reading the articles and looking for patterns. For some arguments, I analyzed the data using rhetorical analysis. For others, I collected and quantified data using content analysis. I developed a coding instrument designed to count the occurrence of various comments and words to perform the content analysis. Once the codebook was established, I trained one other coder and then conducted a reliability

test with that person. We both coded the same nineteen articles. All of the reported variables were reliable at Krippendorff's Alpha of .7 or better.⁸

I. AMOUNT OF COVERAGE

Being widely known is the *sine qua non* of an election, and in national races that cannot and does not happen unless the press is willing to write stories about the candidates. Overall, the papers wrote fewer stories and fewer words per story about women than they did about men who had similar credentials and polled about the same. On average, the men had about twice as many articles written about them (96% more) and the articles were 12% longer. For the 2008 Obama and Clinton race, which is notable not only because it is the only race examined in which the woman candidate entered the race as the front runner (a strong advantage), but also because the man candidate was black (a likely disadvantage), the margin of difference was less than in previous races, but Obama still had 20% more stories written about him compared with Clinton.

Moreover, although Clinton did better than the women who preceded her, there was no broader trend in the data indicating increased equality in the amount of coverage over time. For example, the difference in the numbers of stories about Carol Moseley Braun versus those about Bob Graham in 2004 was greater than was the difference between the numbers of stories about Shirley Chisholm and those about Henry Jackson in 1972. Instead, the differences in amount of coverage varied from race to race with women in all cases but one (1872) receiving less coverage than their men counterparts.

II. ISSUE COVERAGE

According to traditional rational models of voting behavior, citizens choose (or should choose) candidates based on the stands those individuals have taken on various issues. The degree to which the media provide that information, therefore, may be important in securing support for candidates. When I looked at each article and coded whether or not each paragraph was predominantly about issues, I found the press was more likely to cover issues for the men candidates than the women. On average for the nine races, 15% of the paragraphs about women were predominantly about issues, while 25% of the paragraphs about men were. In other words, the men had 62% more issue paragraphs than did the women. This pattern should be worrisome for women candidates, who may have a harder time getting their legislative and policy proposals to the voters. Moreover, if the voters have

8. Data collection for the Clinton/Obama and the Schroeder/Gephardt races differed slightly. For a more complete and detailed description of the method used, see FALK, *supra* note *, at 195-200.

less substantive information about the candidates upon which to base their opinions, they may be more likely to rely on stereotypes in casting their ballots.

As with overall coverage, Clinton did better than women who preceded her. Both she and Obama had about the same amount of issue coverage (9% Clinton to 8.5% Obama). This percent, however, is well below the average for a typical white man in the eight races previously examined. In other words, both Clinton and Obama were covered more like typical women than typical white men. Moreover, the difference does not represent a trend. The only other race examined in which the woman had more issue coverage than the man was in 1872 and the women with the greatest disadvantages in issue coverage ran in 1964 and 1987.

III. DROPPED TITLES

Women who ran were referred to in less respectful ways than their man counterpart. When women candidates had titles like Senator or Representative, these titles were more likely to be dropped in favor of their marital titles (e.g., Mrs.) than they were for men candidates. On average, women's honorary titles were dropped in 30% of the references. The rate for men was just 13%. Clinton was more likely than Obama to have her title dropped. She was referred to as Mrs. Clinton instead of Senator Clinton in 25% of references. Obama was referred to as Mr. Obama 18% of the time. Though Obama's percentage was far higher compared to previous white male candidates, he was still less likely to have his title dropped than was Clinton, and in that sense, these percentages are consistent with past patterns.

IV. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTIONS

In the presidential races examined in the present study, the women were more likely to be described physically than were the men. The press described women by how they looked in 38% of the articles about them. The press described men physically in just 13% of articles. Thus, women were about three times more likely to be described physically in an article than were men.

Interestingly, the press was only slightly less likely to describe Obama physically (12%) as it was to describe Clinton (15%). However, the types of physical descriptions were very different between the two candidates. When the press described Obama physically, it was usually to describe his skin color. In 85% of the articles that mentioned a physical aspect of Obama, the description was of his race. In no cases was his gender highlighted or his attire mentioned. For Clinton, the type of physical description was typical for most women who preceded her. When the press mentioned Clinton's

physical presence, 81% of the time it was to point out that she was a woman or a female. The second most frequent type of description was what she was wearing.

Despite the promising finding about Clinton, there was no evidence of a broader trend for improving coverage for women over time. The Democratic candidate Pat Schroeder was described physically more often than was the Equal Rights Party candidate Victoria Woodhull in 1872. In 2000, the Republican candidate Elizabeth Dole was described physically about as often as the Republican Margaret Chase Smith had been in 1964. This enduring pattern suggests that women today are still judged (and valued) by how they look. The persistence with which the press has tended to comment on women's appearance reveals the enduring legacies and unconscious ideologies of this dated value system.

V. VIABILITY

When I looked at the explicit expressions of positive viability, I found the campaigns of the women candidates were less likely to be described as viable than were those of the men. Assessments of positive viability would include, for example, this comment about Jackson: "The people up there [in New Hampshire] . . . tell us that [we have] a shot at winning."⁹ Similarly, the *Bangor Daily News* printed this paragraph about Chase Smith: "[O]ther Maine GOP leaders said Senator Smith's chances in a three-way battle in New Hampshire probably would be 'pretty good' because her candidacy would be a 'way out' for many not desiring to vote for either Goldwater or Rockefeller."¹⁰ I also coded this as a positive viability assessment.

On average the men had more than three times as many positive viability comments as the women (3.2 mentions compared with .8 per 10,000 words). The woman who was most frequently described as a viable candidate was Chase Smith (the 1964 campaign). This is notable because, of all the women who have run, she had the credentials that were the most similar to those of the men who have run and won. Unlike any other candidates I studied, Chase Smith had sat in both the House and the Senate. Despite her prominence, her rate of positive viability mentions still lagged behind those of most of the men. Of the eight men in this study, all but Ron Paul, a Libertarian, were described as viable at a greater rate than that of Chase Smith, including her opponent, Nelson Rockefeller. He garnered about the same number of votes as she but had over three times the rate of positive viability

9. R.W. Apple Jr., *Jackson and Yorty to Run in New Hampshire Contest*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 5, 1971, at 26.

10. Lorin L. Arnold, *Can She Win in N.H.? Sen. Smith's Chances: Maine GOP Sees 'Ifs'*, BANGOR DAILY NEWS, Jan. 28, 1964, at 1.

mentions in the press. There is no evidence of women candidates being increasingly likely to be portrayed as viable over time.

The patterns for positive viability assessments in the Clinton/Obama data were consistent with previous races. Clinton got fewer positive viability mentions than did Obama. Clinton had a little less than one positive viability mention for each 10,000 words about her—just about the same rate as the aggregate for the eight women that preceded her. This is a bit surprising since she entered the race as a front-runner, and she led in national polls for the whole of 2007. Obama had about twice as many positive viability mentions, about 2.5 per 10,000 words written about him. His rate was just below that of the average for the white men who preceded him. Thus, in this race, like the previous ones, the man was more likely to have positive viability statements made about him.

Research does show that people believe women have a harder time being elected than do men (even though there is no empirical information to support this position).¹¹ One might expect to learn that such beliefs on the part of reporters affect the news content of their stories and result in portrayals of women as less viable than comparable men. As noted earlier, the problem with such a pattern is that these portrayals may perpetuate the myth of women's lesser viability. Moreover, women and girls may find that such beliefs diminish their own political aspirations.

VI. EMOTIONAL DESCRIPTIONS

The assumptions that women are emotional and men rational is part of conventional stereotyping.¹² Such stereotyping also has its basis in the separate-spheres philosophy, which held that natural sexual differences included the irrationality of women and the rationality of men. Two professors of psychology, Janice Kelly and Sarah Hutson-Comeaux, described the belief that women are more emotional and men rational as one of the most common findings in gender stereotype research.¹³ When popular attitudes that attribute emotionality to women and rationality to men are applied to the arena of political judgments, they have often been used as the premise for an argument for keeping women out of the political sphere.

To determine if women were portrayed as more emotional than men, I counted any emotional descriptions of the candidates in press accounts. For

11. See SELTZER, NEWMAN & LEIGHTON, *supra* note 1, at 90.

12. See Leslie R. Brody & Judith A. Hall, *Gender and Emotion in Context*, in HANDBOOK OF EMOTIONS 395, 395-408 (Michael Lewis, Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones & Lisa Feldman Barrett eds., 3d ed. 2008). See generally JULIA T. WOOD, *GENDERED LIVES: COMMUNICATION, GENDER, AND CULTURE* (8th ed. 2009).

13. Janice R. Kelly & Sarah L. Hutson-Comeaux, *Gender-Emotion Stereotypes Are Context Specific*, 40 *SEX ROLES* 107, 107 (1999).

example, the words or phrases “alarmed,”¹⁴ “delighted,”¹⁵ “was moved to wipe away tears,”¹⁶ and “showed a flash of temper”¹⁷ would each have been counted as one emotional description. When I examined the number of emotional descriptions in the presidential campaign press coverage of women compared to that of the men, in every case except one there were more for women. On average, women were described as emotional thirteen times for every 100 articles that mentioned them, while men were described as emotional just eight times for every 100 articles. The press may have reinforced and amplified the stereotype that women are emotional and irrational and, therefore, unfit for leadership while creating a contrasting picture of men as less emotional, more rational, and more like leaders.

Moreover, women candidates in this century were no less likely to be described emotionally than were women candidates from the nineteenth or twentieth century. Elizabeth Dole in 2000 and Carol Moseley Braun in 2004 received as many emotional descriptions as did Victoria Woodhull in 1872. Clinton was among the women who were least likely to be described emotionally. Such descriptions appeared only in five articles per 100. That was still five times as often as Obama was described as emotional. Despite the advances in women’s rights, there is no noticeable trend toward decreasing emotional descriptions over time. This is surprising given the dramatic change in the number of women in leadership positions over the period covered and suggests that such stereotypes are deeply ingrained in the culture.

VII. ARGUMENTS AGAINST WOMEN

To this point, I have focused on implicit ways in which the press conveyed the idea that women may have been less suited for political office than men. However, the press also disseminated explicit arguments about why women are unsuited to leadership. An analysis of the explicit arguments in the press over the last 130 years of coverage of women presidential candidates reveals three points that were consistently made: women are unnatural in politics; women are incompetent as leaders; and women are not viable as candidates. Though these arguments were rarely justified, when reasons were given, it was usually that women were considered too emotional, unable to handle crises, or obsessed with trivial matters.

Unnatural. The notion that women are somehow “unnatural” in the public sphere but “natural” in the private sphere is one of the more enduring

14. *Mrs. Lockwood in New York*, BOS. GLOBE, Oct. 20, 1884, at 1.

15. *Butler in New York*, BOS. GLOBE, Sept. 14, 1884, at 3.

16. Lorin L. Arnold, *GOP Picks “Moderate” Delegation: Goldwater Forces Win Only Two Spots on Panel of 14*, BANGOR DAILY NEWS, May 4, 1964, at 1.

17. Robert Barkdoll, *Sen. Goldwater, Rocky Locked in Close Race*, BANGOR DAILY NEWS, Mar. 10, 1964, at 1.

arguments against women's full participation in elective politics found in press accounts of women seeking office. Typical of this line of argument is this example from a *New York Herald* editorial from Victoria Woodhull's race in 1872:

At present man, in his affection for and kindness toward the weaker sex, is disposed to accord her any reasonable number of privileges. Beyond that stage he pauses, because there seems to him to be a something which is unnatural in permitting her to share the turmoil, the excitement, the risks of competition for the glory of governing.¹⁸

Almost 100 years later, the editors of the *Bangor Daily News* similarly implied that women were unnatural in the public sphere and by nature belonged at home. After noting the dearth of women in public office, the editors wrote,

Maybe the great majority of women just aren't interested in public careers. They don't have what intellectuals nowadays like to call "motivation" Though women make up a substantial part of the nation's work force, only a relative few hold top jobs Could it be this is because women essentially are mothers and homemakers at heart?¹⁹

Though rare, similar sentiments were also expressed in Elizabeth Dole's race as recently as 2000. According to one account,

"I think she's a fine woman," Wayne Lilly, an active Republican from Chilton, N.H., said after a recent Christian Coalition event in his state. "But I don't believe a woman ought to be in that particular place of leadership. She would be a good helpmate. But the Bible teaches us that a woman should not have authority over men. It's nothing but foolishness."²⁰

One subtle pattern that may contribute to the perception that women are unnatural in the political sphere emerged in the consistent way in which women candidates for president have been framed as firsts. The first woman to publicly seek the presidency was Victoria Woodhull in 1872. She was followed by Belva Lockwood in 1884.

However, those facts did not stop one columnist from writing almost a century later of Chase Smith, "[E]ven in defeat she could take solace in that great accomplishment alone and also always be proud and happy that she had the distinction of having been the *first* woman in the country to bid for that office."²¹ Chisholm, like Chase Smith, was also framed as a first and a novelty. The *Seattle Times* wrote, "Representative Shirley Chisholm today

18. Editorial, *Woman's Idea of Government*, N.Y. HERALD, May 27, 1870, at 6.

19. *Few Women in High Office*, BANGOR DAILY NEWS, Feb. 6, 1964, at 14.

20. Richard L. Berke, *Eye on 2000: Elizabeth Dole Talks of a Race for President*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 9, 1999, at 12.

21. Lorin L. Arnold, *Maine's Political Whirl: Vote Boost for Republicans Seen Behind V-P Move by Mrs. Smith*, BANGOR DAILY NEWS, Nov. 16, 1963, at 10 (emphasis added).

became the *first* black woman to begin a serious bid for the presidency of the United States.”²² Schroeder was likewise cast as a first. Papers reported, “If she runs, Mrs. Schroeder would be the *first* woman to seek the Presidency since 1972.”²³ People who are not well versed about history but read the paper may even have been led to believe that Elizabeth Dole (in 2000) was the first woman to run, as this example demonstrates: “[A] small army of businesswomen [were] angry that one of their own—and the *first* to seek the presidency—was not faring better in a field of men.”²⁴ Even Clinton who succeeded a whole line of women who had run for the presidency was framed as a first. The *New York Times* wrote, “If successful, Mrs. Clinton, 59, would be the *first* female nominee of a major American political party.”²⁵ Although the “first woman” frame may help candidates in the short term by increasing the perception of their novelty and resulting in more press coverage, the effects of reinforcing the notion of women as out of place and unnatural in the political sphere may be longer lasting and have important political consequences.

Incompetent. The second common explicit argument made against women presidential candidates was that women were too incompetent for leadership. Within this thread of argument, the notion that women are incompetent because they are emotional and irrational was often cited as a reason for keeping women out of office. This ideological position assumes that women have a biological drive toward nurturing and child raising that makes them emotional and irrational, rendering them incapable of logic and reason, and therefore of leading and legislating.

The notion that emotionality would render women incompetent at leadership was present in the news coverage of female presidential candidates. In one *vox populi*, a man put it rather bluntly: “Women are too illogical and too emotional for high elective posts.”²⁶ When asked, “Would you be prejudiced against a woman running for President of the United States?” Stephen Eisman gave a familiar reply: “Definitely! A woman is too emotional. She acts on impulse. And she’s often too sensitive to criticism.”²⁷

22. *Shirley Chisholm Declares Her Candidacy for President*, SEATTLE TIMES, Jan. 25, 1972, at A2 (emphasis added).

23. Phil Gailey, *Phil Gailey, Schroeder Considers Running for President*, N.Y. TIMES, June 6, 1987, at 1 (emphasis added).

24. Sandra Sobieraj, *Women Compelled to Help Dole Succeed*, NEWARK STAR-LEDGER, Aug. 1, 1999, at 3 (emphasis added).

25. Patrick Healy & Jeff Zeleny, *Clinton Enters '08 Field, Fueling Race for Money*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 21, 2007, at 1.

26. Jimmy Jemail, *The Inquiring Photographer*, N.Y. DAILY NEWS, Dec. 11, 1963, at 53.

27. Jimmy Jemail, *The Inquiring Photographer*, N.Y. DAILY NEWS, Jan. 28, 1972, at 45.

Women's incompetence was often made on other grounds as well. For example, the press often conveyed the idea that women were too interested in trivial matters to undertake the serious task of governing. It was Lockwood who was most often subjected to this critique. The article "Belva in the White House: A Cabinet Meeting of the Period When Women Shall Steer the Ship of State," from the *Boston Globe*, was dedicated to just this idea.²⁸ The article was intended to be a humorous, fictional look at what politics would be like if women held elected office. All the same, its content was a scathing condemnation of women in politics. For example, it described the president as being very late for a meeting with the attorney general because she was "trying on her dress."²⁹ Then when the president did arrive, the cabinet meeting was taken up with a lengthy discussion of the style and merits of her attire: "'It's perfectly magnificent' said the secretary of war. 'Those fine pleatings of crepe de chine give it such a lovely finish.'"³⁰ Though cast in a humorous tone, the message was serious. Women (and explicitly Lockwood) are uninformed, incompetent, and obsessed with their appearance. The meaning was clear. No woman could be fit for higher office.

Similar sentiments were found in other races. One article about Chase Smith, for example, invited the assumption that women are too insipid to lead; a woman who was interviewed said, "I would hope that a woman President and the Queen of England would not vie with each other in hat or dress styles. It might result in a diplomatic break."³¹

Even in recent times, the press coverage seemed to suggest women were more interested in minor issues than major ones. For example, in the 2004 race there were several stories about the rendering of Moseley Braun's last name. In a lead paragraph to a *Chicago Tribune* story, a reporter wrote, "A decade ago, after her election to the U.S. Senate, Carol Moseley Braun introduced a hyphen to her name after 15 years in politics. Now it's gone."³² Though the story went on to note that Moseley Braun "would rather discuss the war with Iraq," the reporter did not, and instead the article was filled with information about her divorce and the spelling of her name.³³

These examples contribute to the portrayal of women as incompetent as leaders because either they are too emotional or because they are too dis-

28. *Belva in the White House: A Cabinet Meeting of the Period When Women Shall Steer the Ship of State*, BOS. GLOBE, Oct. 24, 1884, at 2.

29. *Id.*

30. *Id.*

31. Jimmy Jemail, *The Inquiring Photographer*, N.Y. DAILY NEWS, Jan. 30, 1964, at 35.

32. Jeff Zeleny, *Candidate Moseley Braun Gives Headline Writers a Break*, CHI. TRIB., Mar. 4, 2003, at 8.

33. *Id.*

tracted by small (often personal) matters to concentrate on important issue of public policy.

Unviable. The third argument against women in office—that women are not viable as candidates—was the most prevalent. In the early years, the viability argument was framed as a lack of *readiness*. In later years, the argument was cast in terms of poll results, and only in 2000 did the problem of discrimination and prejudice openly make its way into the newspapers.

The earliest arguments against women candidates were set out in terms of the nation's lack of readiness for women in leadership. In Victoria Woodhull's race in 1872, one paper wrote of her, "[S]he is rather in advance of her time. The public mind is not yet educated to the pitch of universal woman's rights."³⁴ Nearly a hundred years later, in 1964, a columnist wrote,

There are a number of influential commentators here who believe Senator Smith will thank all her supporters . . . [and] say it is flattering to be considered for the high office . . . but that she is realistic enough to know that the country is not quite ready to elect a woman as President.³⁵

In 1987, one article reported, "Many observers have said that Schroeder, because she's a woman . . . doesn't have a serious shot at the nomination."³⁶ As late as 2000 the press was still promulgating the idea that America was still not ready. In a *Newark Star-Ledger* article, a woman was quoted as saying, "[T]he country is not ready for a woman president."³⁷

Though the word "viability" was not used in these early races, these are essentially arguments about women's lack of viability as candidates. In these examples, the press never questioned why people did not believe the woman candidate could win or what role prejudice and discrimination played. The women were just framed as unviable as though it was an immutable truth.

Dole's race was the first in which any voices identified prejudice as part of the political landscape for women. In an editorial, the *New York Times* wrote,

As a woman, she will have to put up with a kind of scrutiny that male candidates are not bothered with. Critiques of her appearance, her wardrobe and her style will go far beyond anything her male opponents will have to endure. That is unfortunate but inevitable, since she is taking the American public on a shakedown cruise, acclimating it to what will inevitably become a long line of women Presidential candidates in the future. The women who are moving up the political ladder behind her may be able to enter the competition on a more even basis because Elizabeth

34. Editorial, *supra* note 18, at 6.

35. *Washington Forecast: Fantastic Guessing Game Over Sen. Smith's Plans*, BANGOR DAILY NEWS, Jan. 23, 1964, at 16.

36. Joan Lowy, *Futurist Likes Schroeder's Odds*, ROCKY MTN. NEWS, Sept. 20, 1987, at 42.

37. Sobieraj, *supra* note 24, at 3.

Dole got the public used to the idea of seeing a woman running for the White House.³⁸

Another commentator did some casual research on the amount of coverage that Dole was getting compared to other candidates.³⁹ When she found that Dole got less than Steve Forbes and John McCain, she presented the possibility that the media might be discriminating against Dole because of her gender.⁴⁰ “[T]he other day, among a group of friends, I came right out and did it: I asked whether the public might be taking Dole less seriously, whether she might be having more trouble raising money and getting media coverage, because she’s a woman.”⁴¹

In press coverage, arguments against women’s fitness, viability, and capabilities persist. Women who run should be prepared to be painted in the press as unnatural, incompetent, and unviable. These charges will come via explicit statements as well as through the use of implicit frames that present her as a “first,” “only,” or “symbolic” candidate and through portrayals of her as emotional and distracted by triviality.

Though not every woman in every race was depicted as unable to handle crises, too emotional, obsessed with triviality, or unviable, at least some of these arguments were made about all of the women. Overcoming these depictions and perceptions will be an important part of the campaign strategy of any woman candidate. Traditional notions of womanhood are an enduring legacy and represent a challenge to America.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the men received more and longer press coverage compared with equivalent women in the same races. Moreover, this trend does not seem to be abating. For example, the differences in the number of stories about Carol Moseley Braun and Bob Graham in 2004 were larger than was the difference between Shirley Chisholm and Henry Jackson in 1972.

In addition, the coverage that men received contained more substantive (issues) and less tangential content (e.g., mentions of physical appearance) than did the coverage of women. Women were also portrayed as more emotional and their professional titles were more likely to be dropped.

During the mid 1800s, when Victoria Woodhull first considered running for the presidency, women could not vote and had not held state or national office. It was difficult for women to act politically at all. Walking

38. *Mrs. Dole Leaps into the Gap*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 11, 1999, at A30.

39. See Geneva Overholser, *More Press for Elizabeth Dole*, WASH. POST, Sept. 14, 1999, at A29.

40. See *id.*

41. *Id.*

door to door without a husband or escort was considered unwomanly and women who engaged in this type of political activism were often met with verbal abuse. Accommodations for women traveling alone were very rare, and “respectable” restaurants would not serve women after 6:00 p.m. unless they were escorted by a man.⁴² This world was very different from the one in which Hillary Clinton ran for president in 2008.

With the radical changes that have taken place for women in politics and journalism over the last 130 years, it is surprising that the press portrayals of women candidates have not changed more. Although I found some differences in the press over time, the strongest trends did not show regular progress. Instead, they suggested that women candidates from 1872 to 2008 were treated differently from their men counterparts, with women often getting the short end of the stick.

Though biased coverage may be very understandable given extant sex roles and sexism in American society, we should be no less concerned about its potential impacts. The most important may not be the most obvious. Current and historical coverage of women candidates (or lack thereof) may deter women from running. By framing women candidates as not serious and not viable and by giving extra measure to their hair, appearance, and what they wear, the press may dissuade potential women candidates from entering the political arena. People (including women) tend to think that women have a harder time than men getting elected to office than do men. The results of this study suggest that this misapprehension may come at least in part from press accounts of women candidates that portray them as less viable than equally viable men. If women have a negatively skewed impression of their chances of winning they may be less likely to run, and this may be the most important and worrisome potential impact of press coverage of women.

The more obvious potential implication of biased press coverage is that it may make it harder for women to get elected. Less total coverage, less issue coverage, more physical descriptions, portrayals as though women are losing candidates, and dropped titles, may all make it harder for the next woman who puts herself forward for the presidency. For a society that prides itself on creating a fair and equal political playing field open to all citizens, this should be of concern.

42. JOHANNA JOHNSON, *MRS. SATAN: THE INCREDIBLE SAGA OF VICTORIA C. WOODHULL* 74 (1967).