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Sarah Palin And The Media During The Elections

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SARAH PALIN AND THE MEDIA DURING THE ELECTIONS

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By

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2013

SARAH PALIN AND THE MEDIA DURING THE ELECTIONS

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze former candidate Sarah Palin's portrayal by the media during the 2008 political campaign for vice-president of the United States. Through media framing, political communication, politics and the media, the study will present a qualitative study on her portrayal through two different media sources. The presidential elections of 2008 involved two women, a first in American history, and made waves for varying reasons. The purpose of the study is to build a greater understanding between the unique relationship between the media and political candidates.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In every election cycle, candidates and the media build a relationship that is highly interactive. The association between journalists and politicians influences the construction of what the public will learn about the candidates themselves. The challenge for those who hope win the political office is intertwined in the relationship that they will build with media, because media create the strand between the candidate and the potential voters. In turn, media has the power to frame messages and issues that voters will use to understand candidates. The unique dynamic between media and political candidates has the potential to ultimately determine the success of a person's political career. The thesis looks at news coverage of a candidate to understand how media constitutes or challenges candidate identity. Media framing, political communication, and a closer look at politics and the media provide room to discuss the role media played in the 2008 election when covering stories on the vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

In 1984 when Geraldine Ferraro was selected as the first female vice-presidential candidate on the Democratic ticket, she dealt with the challenge of overcoming biases that faced women in an election cycle. For instance, in one of their introductions, the media introduced her as a "Size 6 Ferraro" (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009). In other presidential elections, female candidates like Elizabeth

Dole's campaign was known to receive less media coverage than the male candidates, and the media coverage attained was often negative (Dolan, et. al., 2011). In fact many women deplore that the press objectifies and sexualizes them instead of focusing on the issues during a campaign (Dolan et. al., 2011). Twenty-five years later that same dialogue that objectifies female candidates has not changed. In the 2008 presidential campaign two women entered the political arena. The thesis will look at vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin and the stories covered by print media during the McCain/Obama presidential race. Though little was known about her in the beginning, conservative voters took an immediate liking to her (Nedeau, 2008). Some studies have suggested that it may have been certain traits about her such as her Upper Midwestern dialect and informal use of speech that helped her connect with a niche (Thomas, et. al., 2009). Palin boosted McCain's campaign and helped raise McCain's numbers in the polls. Yet her popularity quickly faded (Nedeau, 2008).

As journalists discovered more information about her personal life and circumstances, resulting reports had some influence on both positive and negative public opinion. Baird argues "by perennially casting women as decorative, not substantive, it sidelines them for debates and trivializes their ideas (26)." Baird's insight demonstrates how media impacted perceptions of Governor Palin that type

of framing has been present in politics and other women have been subjected to this treatment.

Certainly a battle of the sexes has played a role in politics for an indefinite time. However, with contemporary women climbing the political ladder, media outlets become that much more involved with issues that may not be a factor for male candidates. The question is how do the media play these determinants upon broadcasting them to the public.

RQ1: How did major media outlets present vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin in the period after the announcement of her selection?

RQ2: What values were communicated by the media through the coverage of vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin?

Chapter two will present the literature review of material used to create the foundation for the thesis. The chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of political communication, media framing, politics and the media and women in politics.

Chapter three will present the methodology for the entire project. The chapter will provide an explanation of how the research was collected and conducted; all leading to the analysis.

Chapter four will provide the findings and analysis of the research, including insight into how the analysis extends existing work presented in the previous chapter.

Chapter five of the thesis is the conclusion. Significance of the project will be reiterated and contextualized with the research questions. In addition, suggestions for further study or limitations on the study will be presented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will cover present literature in political communication, media framing, politics and the media and women in politics. Through the material covered in the literature review the reader can have a deeper understanding of past and present themes and research on media and political candidates.

Political Communication

The media's role in how leaders have influence in the public's attitude has become communal, which, has allowed media to level the public's need to discuss more elements of politics. That discussion, identified as political communication, is considered a process "by which a nation's leadership, media, and citizenry exchange and confer meaning upon messages that relate to the conduct of public policy (Perloff, 1998, pg. 8)." Political communication, though not precisely defined, dates back to Aristotle. Athenians in fifth century BC would unite in polis, a city-state, to give speeches to the people to support war against Persia. Sanders explains that the Athenian polis would be where both theory and practice on political communication originated (2009). In Aristotle's work *On Rhetoric, a Theory of Civic Discourse*, he assayed the art and science of persuasion or rhetoric (Sanders, 2009). According to Aristotle, rhetoric and politics went hand in hand, and additionally, he felt rhetoric was critical in attaining successful

communication. Aristotle faced his critics though, such as Plato when he argued that rhetoric had no substance, which in essence could have "an ignorant man mislead and manipulate other ignorant men in the pursuit of power rather than the achievement of good (Sanders, pg. 10, 2009)." Yet, in political communication, the existing problem of rhetoric being used for unworthy ends has remained an issue through time; where kings and emperors have communicated and promoted the appearance and reality of royal power to friends and foes (Sanders, 2009). These visible events were demonstrated through choreographed events and processions, such as the processions of imperial Rome or Byzantium's coronation rituals where the continuities of royal power were emphasized.

A more definitive form of modern political communication emerged in the late 1500's in France and continued through the French Revolution, when the working class sought to end the autocratic government of the time (McNair, 2007). However, in order for bourgeoisie or capitalist class to emerge, there needed to be free thought. Consequently voting rights were soon introduced through this movement. McNair offers the importance of participation in order for democracy to be real and ascertains invaluable terms to its effectiveness through constitutionality, participation and rational choice (2007). Through time, modern political communication effectively emerged upon the actualization of the newspaper in the nineteenth century. The birth of the newspaper created a forum

for public opinion, which made political communication a compelling topic for different political classes. Sanders finds that much of the innovation in politics and the media was seen in the Americas and are key to the development of political communication (2009). For instance, Andrew Jackson's presidential campaign in 1828 used rallies and other campaign strategies that are commonly used today. The actual study of what is known as political communication sparked from propaganda studies from World War I.

“Political communication ‘is’ a process, ‘is strategic’, and ‘is’ unique in terms of content (Denton and Woodward, pg. 11, 1998).” Political communication should be defined not by its source but by its content and purpose. In other words, political communication should be understood through its exchange of symbols, which, in the end, serve a purpose and function for the existing political system. Craig Allen Smith (1990) defines political communication as “the process of negotiating a community orientation through the interpretation and characterization of interests, of power relationships, and of the community’s role in the world. (vii).” Through Smith’s definition, it offers a look into the dynamics between the community and politicians. In McNair’s words, political communication is “purposeful communication about politics” (Sanders pg. 18, 2009). McNair also acknowledges the difficulty in defining political communication due to the fact that both elements of the phrase are overtly general (McNair, 2007). McNair introduces

three elements that formulate the form in which political communication needs to be understood in order to be realized (McNair, 2007). These groups work simultaneously with one another and allow consent rather than coercion to take place in a democratic society. The three groups are political organizations, media, and citizens. The political organizations entail the roles of the political actors, political parties and public organizations. The political actors are “those individuals who aspire, through organizational and institutional means, to influence the decision-making process.” (McNair, pg. 5) Political actors pursue these aspirations by attaining political power. Her/his message will be sought through the establishment of a political party where common ideologies are cultivated and therefore create a structure of common goals. Those political actors entail not only political candidates and their political parties, but it also involves public organizations, pressure groups, terrorist organizations and governments (McNair, 2007). These groups then work together to gain the necessary popularity to win upon election time. That popularity must gain ground with the second element, the audience. Without the audience, political organizations would have no purpose. An audience may be seen as broad or narrow term. Under a broad perspective, the audience may entail an entire nation where a debate for example will be nationally televised. Under a narrow perspective, the audience is a more selective audience. This message is deliberately meant for a more specific group. The third key

element is media organizations. These organizations vary from print, broadcast, and the internet. The media function as the transmitters of political communication. Through reporters and bloggers the media acts as the senders of political messages. Due to the media's role, it is important that political actors use the media effectively and cooperatively. In addition, there is always the concern that the media may be subjective and bias, a subjective reality.

Analysis of political communication is delineated by the "application of a range of theoretical and methodological approaches (Sanders, pg. 13)." Sanders argues that political communication "necessarily implies theory building (pg. 13)." No one theory can explain the different concepts of political communication. Sanders' concept elaborates into three main perspectives: the positivistic, the critical, and the hermeneutical outlook. Positivism was first utilized by researching media effects in propaganda and voting studies focused on effects and audience. Positivism is a theory that applies the notion that everything can develop from scientific method (pg. 14). It was first used to explain research seeking media effects of propaganda and voting studies; therefore, research responses needed to be more calculated. These studies have been credited to take the approach of "examining the transmission process in which senders and receivers encode and decode messages" (Sanders, 2009, pg. 15). Critical theory takes a Marxist approach arguing "theory should be directed towards achieving social change,

analyzing social and cultural structures in order to free those subject to their power' (pg. 16). Critical theory, in other words, liberates social change through "critical reflection on social practices" (Sanders, pg. 16). The hermeneutical model emphasizes on culture and one's own personal experiences to play a prominent role on one's own decision making.

Johnston divided political communication research into four categories: election communication, political communication and news, political rhetoric and political attitudes, behavior and information; upon researching the role media may play in politics, structuralists argue that the political economy must be considered as a factor, which correlates to the critical social approach (Sanders, pg. 20). Additionally, Archer presents the argument that powers emerge in politics due to the relations with natural, practical and social realities of an individual, where values are based on religion and its historical context as part of understanding political communication (Sanders, pg. 22). The process of political communication is known to create influence in people by making known their views, opinions, and policies (Sanders, pg. 24). Commercialism is considered an element that often sets the course for the media to awaken a more critical form of intense examination of issues revealed in politics. Politics is, thereupon, framed in a more dramatic, personalized style by the media.

Basing their work on those specific reactions from the public, McCombs and Shaw (1974) provide the first evidence of agenda setting. “This first confirmation of a ‘fact’ intuitively understood by political campaigners represented a significant moment in political communication research, pointing to the real contributions that researchers might make in understanding its practice (Sanders, pg. 13).” Media are essentially one of the primary framers of political rhetoric and discourse.

Media Framing

In addition to political communication, the literature review introduces media framing as a form to better understand this study. Candidates seek forms to communicate with the voters, and with the presence of the media, voters can familiarize themselves with them. Candidates should be concerned with how media frame them throughout their campaign since it is through media that most voters will learn about them.

Media framing (Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw, 2004) deals with how media present issues and what is emphasized in their coverage. The early stages of framing theory were first seen in Bateson’s and Goffman’s work in social sciences in the 1970’s. Bateson’s approach to framing consists of two analogies, “the physical analogy of the picture frame and the more abstract, but still not psychological, analogy of the mathematical set” (Bateson, pg. 186). Bateson deciphers framing by setting apart the physical from the psychological in this

statement. Although scholars today engage and utilize frame analysis today as a method to analyze the media, there is no specific definition adopted by the academia to define the term (Barberena, pg. 5). Entman (2004) provides the basic notion that framing, though indeterminate, can be viewed as the ways in which people interpret media as part of their subconscious.

Scheufele (1999) introduces three primary stages to framing: mental framing, group framing and content framing. “This suggests that frames exist in our heads and also serve as filters for outgoing messages, making the process ongoing and continuous-thereby difficult to define (Barberena, pg. 5).” The media frame and organize socially shared principles that figuratively structure the social world.

Additionally Entman (2004) characterizes framing as the instance that provides more noticeable and meaningful information that leads to organizing an idea. That idea provides meaning to the following parts of the sequence to the story.

Lippman’s research in *Public Opinion* evaluates that people don’t respond to their environment but rather a pseudo-environment created by the media (1922). Gitlin (1980) creates depth to the argument by referring to the media sources as symbol handlers that typically classify discourse.

In media framing an essential element to establishing frames within the media is language. Language used in politics is further dissected by studies done by Nelson and Oxley (1997). Nelson and Oxley argue that the media play a major

role in establishing and defining social and political issues for its audience through framing. The media decide what topics to stress and thereby determine what is important and what is not important by the viewer. Lakoff argues that “Framing is about getting language that fits your worldview. It is not just language” (2004, p. 4). The public’s attitude may be best shaped, however, through frames created by the political elites, the media and virtually any public figure. The media’s and public figure’s frames, in turn, bring up agenda setting.

Agenda setting unveils that an audience’s concern for a topic depends on the amount of time devoted to that issue by the media. Agenda setting establishes two levels (first-level agenda setting and second-level agenda setting). Sheafer argues that both models concentrate on an intuitive component: “they are the combination of message strength and direction” (1). The first level talks about the media’s influence over the public’s view by emphasizing certain issues over others. In McCombs’ words, the first level is salience of objects or traditional level (2004).

Second level agenda setting takes the viewer from “ ‘what to think about’ to their function of telling us ‘how to think about’ objects (Sheafer, 2).” Ultimately, second level agenda setting’s main argument points to the fact that the object emphasized by the media establishes what will be important to the public or the salience of attributes (McCombs, 2004). Additionally, the media’s successful clarity or salience to the public agenda arises wherever there is a reasonably open

political and media system (McCombs, 2004). At the second level, the idea is focused on the actual pictures in “our heads,” much like Lippmann’s theory (1922). Additionally, McCombs introduces two groups of attributes at the second level of agenda setting: cognitive and affective attributes. Cognitive attributes introduce the issues’ definitions by the media, and affective attributes deal with the media’s tone to a given subject or issue. Agenda setting has also expanded due to the fact that there are more educated people in the United States; however, diversity has also promoted quicker time coverage per issue (McCombs, 2004). As a result, constituents are exposed to a “more volatile public agenda” (McCombs, p. 25, 2004).

That tone can be further dissected under Lakoff’s idea of when an audience is told not to think of an issue or topic a certain way; the viewer will generally be provoked to view it anyway in that undesired way. “When we negate a frame, we evoke the frame” (Lakoff, 3). In politics, he provides an example that was often times done by former President George Bush and his staff. In this instance Lakoff unveils the Republican Party’s success with framing. He discusses the GOP’s method of creating their assumed role as the “tough Dad” to the general public. The “tough Dad” is known to be strict and he would hit his children, but in the end he knows best and is doing it with the best intentions of raising his children the right way. The “tough Dad” would be the President, and his children would

obviously be the American public. Lakoff uses what took place in the immediate aftermath of September 11 as an example. Americans were in much distress and fear over the attacks. At that point, no one would argue that a “tough Dad” would know how to protect his children.

Another example of images (frames) created by the media, Haider-Markel et. al. provide a study on media framing and racial attitudes in the aftermath of Katrina. In their study they provide valuable information that confirms Lakoff’s argument that framing is not just language. Rather it is about using language appropriate to an individual’s worldview. Haider-Markel, et. al., hypothesis states that people’s attitudes about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina would vary in accordance to a person’s race. The end result proves their hypothesis as Blacks felt a stronger connection to the victims of the hurricane, and they held more negative attitudes towards the government’s response to the Katrina’s victims.

As earlier discussed, media framing plays a similar role. Lippmann (1997) states that the media constitutes the essential bridge between the world “out there” and the pictures in “our heads”. Additionally, the general public should understand today’s politics as mediated (Bennett and Entman). “This makes both political actors and the citizenry highly dependent upon the news media for information and communication (Strömbäck, J., Van Aelst, P.)” As part of Stromback’s and Van Aelst’s argument on framing in politics, they present the idea

that when the media transmit messages those messages are not neutral. Rather, the news is framed in a certain way to the extent where the media intervene in political communication processes (Esser, 2008). In this manner, the media then prompts a process of “mediatization of politics”.

As an example of the media’s methods of intervening in political communication processes during the 2008 presidential campaign, Carlin and Winfrey (2009) discuss common stereotypes that were presented of the different candidates. They find that the research on stereotypes demonstrates discrepancies between male and female candidates. Female candidates receive less coverage on issues, whereas as there is greater emphasis devoted to their appearance, personality and family issues (Nedeau, 2008). Additionally, emphasis is put on their clothes, appearance, size and emotional state. Stories have also been found to demonstrate a greater likelihood in mentioning their marital status, their children. Female candidates are also commonly referred to by their first name versus the male candidate, who is more likely to be referred to as “mister” (Carlin and Winfrey).

The selection of language is a crucial element when establishing frames. Through language, Kanter (1977) identifies specific stereotypes used to identify women in the professional setting: as a sex object (seductress), a mother, a pet or iron maiden. The first stereotype may deal with appearance and behavior that

would be considered sexual or feminine. The mother stereotype can be both a positive and negative view for a candidate. This stereotype can highlight her ability to work like a mother, but also calls into question her own motherly duties. The pet stereotype perceives the woman as a “pet” or “cheerleader”. This is often the view seen of a woman that is considered too weak for the job. Thereby needing a man in order to accomplish the task. The iron maiden stereotype perceives a woman as having too many masculine traits. The iron maiden often times faces distrust from the public due to the fact that she does not fit the public’s perception of what is the norm for a female candidate.

Politics and the Media

Candidates need the media in order to campaign and promote their agenda to the public. The persuader thus seeks to utilize the available media to reach out and connect with the desired viewers inclined to share their logic and procure coordination of symbolic meaning (Smith, 2010). Through symbolic meaning, the candidate “reasons with them in a shared logic to help them make sense of their world, values and prefers with them in a shared ideology to help them coordinate and prioritize their beliefs, and negotiates and applies rules with them to guide the fulfillment of the everyday needs with a set of shared rules” (Smith, 2010, p. 10). The persuader capitalizes on her/his image and credibility to make a deep connection with her/his audience to create a sense of “USness” while

differentiating her/himself from the others who would then be perceived to have their shared sense of “THEMness” (Smith, 2010). For instance, President George W. Bush created this rhetoric and sense of “them” in the media during the Iraq war when the American military was seeking for “weapons of mass destruction”. And President Barack Obama created a sense of “us” through utilizing slogans like “Hope” and “Change” throughout his campaign.

Yet, news reporters and editors ultimately control the opportunity for the persuader to focus on connecting with her/his audience through the different media outlets. Smith argues that today’s journalism is less a one-shot story but rather a development of timely updates (Smith, 2010). News organizations then elaborate on what they have “recently” learned. Contemporary journalism essentially has transformed stories into melodramas, which then “hook” the audience much like a soap opera.

“Campaign news can therefore be expected to consist largely of narrative reports that update the suspenseful soap opera of moral justice with whatever the news organization has been able to discern since their last report (Smith, 2010, p. 115).”

Due to the increasing use of this technique in news, the coverage of candidates has increasingly been negative through 2004 (Smith, 2010).

Through the use of narrative coherence, reporters and editors create the style in which the audience will receive and understand the story. The story told by the media is considered human nature according to theorist Walter R. Fisher (1987), who argued that people are storytellers. Those stories are also increasingly known to create shorter sound bites from the actual candidate. Sound bites averaged 42 seconds in 1968. They decreased to 7.8 seconds by 2004 (Smith, 2010). The viewer is then receiving the story from the reporters' narration.

In order for media reporters to keep their jobs, they also need to ensure a story that is worthy of being read. They "hook" the viewer by teasing them with the next chapter of the drama (Smith, p. 115, 2010). Campaign news then becomes updates of narrative reports much like the suspense of a soap opera. Then a presidential campaign faces the challenge of being posed as either a good or evil character in the drama. The melodramatic nature of the events then leaves the voter perplexed on what is fact or not (Smith, 2010). According to today's standards of news coverage, reporters often seek to create a compelling narrative rather than to report the dry facts. Reporters risk boring their audience with only the facts. Reporters then seek the audience's interest by promoting different biases such as personalization (Bennett, 2009). In the 2008 "Joe the Plumber" effectively connected the audience, which serves as a sample of personalizing a story. Another bias is dramatization of information (Bennett, 2009). The notion that a campaign is

perceived as a “horse race” exemplifies how reporters create a drama for their audience from a presidential campaign. The other two biases presented by Bennett are fragmentation and authority-disorder bias. Fragmentation deals with creating pieces of a story like a jigsaw puzzle. Authority- disorder bias creates the concept, that there is disorder, and elected officials intend to restore things to normal, according to the media. Media also hope to keep the viewers, advertisers and shareholders content. That contentment depends on profit (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2010). In relation to newspapers, Eshbaugh-Soha argues that profit is the driving motivation. Stories are then framed to maximize profits and readership.

Women in Politics

Women in politics are few. The masculinized space of American politics can make it challenging for women to run for U. S. office, especially at higher offices, women representation diminishes (Meeks, 2012). Less than 19% of the 113th United States Congress is female, and 20 of the 100 Senate seats are women (Center for America Women and Politics, 2013). As of 2002 only 10% of women serve as state governors, and as of 2002 only 19 women have served in that position (Devitt, 2002). The inequality in numbers in American politics between women and political office is due to the “cultural premise that politics is a domain for masculinized behaviors, messages and professional experiences- creating a masculine stereotype for politicians” (Meeks, p. 176, 2012). According to Social

Role Theory (Eagly, 1997) women and men have an expected role in society, and each role has a set of norms a person must fulfill. Gender stereotypes then attribute certain characteristics for women and men. The real problem behind stereotypes, however, is they then “dictate the roles people are expected to fulfill” (Meeks, p. 176, 2012). Over time gender-role stereotypes become imitated and form a more forcible idea, which is considered culturally appropriate (Meeks, 2012). Thus, when a stereotyped gender of a professional role does not fit with the gender, negative discrimination occurs (Smith, et.al., 2007). For example, the role of a female police chief or male nurse could face such incongruencies based on American stereotypes. In the 2008 primaries, Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton faced the bigotry of two young men who attended one of her events with a sign that read “iron my shirt” as they also shouted those lines while she spoke in an auditorium in New Hampshire (Kornblut, 2008). Voters are also more likely to prefer candidates with more masculinized identities as they attain higher executive offices such as the United States Senate, Governor or Presidency (Smith, et. al., 2007).

Yet recent presidents like Barack Obama and Bill Clinton have been able to successfully incorporate both feminine and masculine attributes, which is a task that female candidates have been trying to accomplish for a long time (Meeks, 2012). “Female politicians are by default norm breakers in the United States”

which makes mixed-gender elections newsworthy, and it may attract journalists to describe female candidates more than their male counterparts, simply because the female candidate has chosen a deviant path from the expected social role of a woman (Meeks, 2012). Reporters describe women in such a fashion that they emphasize on women's traditional roles, but they do not hold male candidates to the same standards (Braden, 1996). Such discrimination may not be blatant, but it covertly exists (Braden, 1996). U.S. politics is formed into "feminine issues" and "masculine issues". Meeks cites feminine roles to be topics that are more family-oriented such as health care, education, and social welfare (Meeks, p. 179, 2012). And masculine issues deal with stereotypes that are considered men's issues such as military and defense, the economy, and foreign policy (Meeks, p.17, 2012). In addition, according to Rosenwasser and Seale, 1988, voters identify masculine issues as more important than female issues (Meeks, p. 179, 2012). Analysis of the 2008 presidential election unveiled that journalists offered little coverage to feminine traits in comparison to masculine traits through the campaign (Lawrence and Rose, 2010).

Rhetoric during campaigns also tends to be labeled into theories that would suit a masculine or feminine style. Masculine style tends to refer to toughness and competitiveness and the subordination of women (Gibson and Heyse, 2010). Gibson and Heyse's research reveals Palin's acceptance speech, though well

crafted to cover feminine issues, capsized by uniting with the Republican party's "celebration of hegemonic masculinity" (p. 235, 2010). Other challenges often faced by female political leaders is the perception that women must stand in favor or against certain issues without consideration that female constituents may consider certain issues to be of greater priority than other issues. And yet another group of women may be in opposition to the same topics the first group is passionately in support of such as abortion or gun rights (Lovenduski and Norris, 1993).

Furthermore, Kanter (1977) identified four stereotypes professional women, such as women in politics, must face: seductress, mother, pet, and iron maiden. Female candidates are also known to have less coverage on issues, whereas, there's more coverage on their appearance, personality and family (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009). Whenever issues are actually covered by the media, coverage tends to be around "feminine" issues rather than "masculine issues" (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009). In the instance of Elizabeth Dole's campaign, media were more likely to mention her as Bob Dole's wife during the first third of the story (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009). Other topics that are often covered of female candidates are their marital status, clothes, appearance, and emotional state (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009).

Since a female candidate's role during a campaign is an atypical role for a woman, media may capitalize on those attributes that could take the form of gender

labeling and uniqueness labeling (Braden, 1996). Gender labels refers to examples such as when the candidate is referred to by her gender or “mother” (Meeks, p.522, 2013). Uniqueness labeling refers to labels such as “first woman” or “lone female” (Meeks, p.522, 2013). Though such labels may be referring to something novel about the candidates, such novelty labels may result to have negative implications (Meeks, 2013).

This chapter covered specific themes that affect candidates’ influence and chances in winning a political race. Additionally, media’s influential role runs the risk of objectifying female candidates. There is a real danger in discriminating women candidates in this fashion because the media then dismisses them from an opportunity that was earned. Also, women in society face the need of having a voice or representation in higher offices. Yet, media have framed the same misogynistic message time and time again.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. Both newspapers are considered two of the top five circulating newspapers of the nation (www.burreluc.com/topmedia). The articles for the New York Times were collected through the LexisNexis database. The articles for the Los Angeles Times were researched and found through microfilm. The New York Times was founded in 1851. It has won 112 Pulitzer Prizes, more than any other news organization (Rainey and Garrison, 2012). The New York Times is also known to run one of the most popular news websites (Adams, 2011). It has long been regarded as a professional newspaper and a newspaper of record where others like scholars or news organizations use it as a source for their own research (Martin and Hansen, 1998). It is owned by the New York Times Company and its current chairman is Arthur Ochs Sulzberg. The newspaper is often considered a liberal one. According to its own website The Los Angeles Times is the leading source of news for southern California. It was first published in 1881, and the Tribune Company currently owns it. Though its news department is half the size of the New York Times, it is still considered one of the top circulating newspapers in the nation, according to Alliance for Audited Media.

The dates that were researched included articles with the name Sarah Palin from Aug. 29, 2008 through Sept. 6, 2008. Before this date, Palin was not considered a nationally well-known political figure. As a novice in the national realm of politics, media members had the task of introducing a new person of the Republican Party to American voters. Additional dates included September 25, 2008 through September 31, 2008. The last round of date researched were dates from Nov. 9, 2008 through Nov. 15, 2008. The dates selected covered the first week after Sarah Palin was formally announced as the vice-presidential candidate, the week after Palin's nationally syndicated interview with former CBS anchor Katie Couric, and the week after Senator John McCain conceded from the presidential race. The articles selected were both news stories and editorials consisting of more than 150 words.

All of the articles, both news and editorial pieces, were read. Upon reading them, I sought to find a pattern of stereotypical labels used by the writers to describe Sarah Palin throughout the campaign. Once those labels were found, I placed them under one or more of the following labels: novelty labels, uniqueness labeling, gender labeling and coverage of feminine issues versus male issues. A qualitative study was then conducted after the labels were allocated.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in the articles collected from both major news publications demonstrate stereotypical labels and issues that are often tied to Meeks' gender roles such novelty labels, uniqueness labeling, gender labeling and coverage of feminine issues versus male issues. The articles collected from the New York Times were more than 300 articles, both editorials and news stories. Whereas, the articles in the Los Angeles Times with "Sarah Palin" were much less articles. This may also be due to the fact that Los Angeles Times houses half the size of staff versus The New York Times. The New York Times notably covered more stories of the 2008 elections versus Los Angeles Times. In the three different time frames that were researched, the coverage on Palin was notably more at the beginning of the campaign versus the coverage of Palin towards the end of the campaign. Additionally, the articles, both opinion and news stories, were, at first, more about the novelty Palin brought to the campaign. The editorial stories were often negative opinions about Sarah Palin, and the stereotypes and labels were much more prevalent in the opinion pieces versus the news stories for both The New York Times and Los Angeles Times. (RQ1) Both media outlets presented vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin as a novice candidate whose attributes were often characterized as labels that consistently objectified her during the period after

the announcement of her selection. (RQ2) The values consistently communicated by the media throughout the presidential campaign demonstrate that biases of vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin typically prevailed during the three different events covered by the research material. Though not every article framed Sarah Palin in a negative fashion, clearly, the majority of the research collected demonstrated stereotypes and labels that dismissed Sarah Palin as a qualified candidate. The research compiled covered three different events throughout the campaign. The research a cycle where much coverage is first invested to Sarah Palin, and as the week progressed, the stories would fade out. Stories about Sarah Palin were also much more prevalent at the initiation of her announcement versus the other two events covered by the research. The first portion of the research is invested on the week after McCain announced Sarah Palin as his vice-presidential selection. The next amount of research gathered the stories that ran a week after Sarah Palin's interview with Katie Couric. The final week covered included the week after McCain seceded from the race.

In the New York Times article "Two-Front Republicans," dated August 30, 2008, Matthew Continetti's editorial immediately labels Sarah Palin as the former beauty queen. The lead reads,

THE country is at war. The economy is in shambles. So whom does John McCain choose as his vice-presidential nominee? A former beauty queen turned governor from Alaska?

The editorial discusses Palin's lack of experience to run for vice-presidential office, and that she has opposing views from McCain. However, the writer's lead immediately sets the tone where Palin is perceived as a sex object, a gender label, and discredits her political experience as governor by creating the sense that the governorship was, in a sort of way, handed to her because of her beauty queen status. The lead dramatizes the country's issues and creates a clear image of a "beauty queen", who is often appreciated for her physical appearance, as someone who cannot lead a country through issues that are typically credited as masculine issues, like the economy and warfare.

On August 30, 2008, The New York Times ran an article titled, "Alaskan is McCain's Choice; First Woman on G.O.P. Ticket" by Michael Cooper and Elisabeth Bumiller. The reporters' headline choice exemplifies Meeks' sample of a unique label when Palin is referred to as "First Woman on G.O.P. ticket". The article presents Palin as a "mother of five", "hockey mom", a candidate "who opposes abortion", and it provides a visual of Palin first walking on stage with her husband and four of her children. The article's descriptions of Palin are parallel and consistent with labels and stereotypes that female candidates often face during

elections. These gender labels create emphasis to the public on how Palin should be characterized. Her stance on abortion, an issue that is often connected to women candidates, is a topic that is often discussed in the articles about Palin.

On August 31, 2008, a New York Times editorial “Vice in Go-Go Boots?” by Maureen Dowd immediately creates a visual of Palin’s appearance, a portrayal that fits gender labels of female candidates. Though the editorial is written as a satire to discredit Palin’s candidacy, Palin is portrayed as a “beauty queen” who has little else to offer.

The guilty pleasure I miss most when I’m out slogging on the campaign trail is the chance to sprawl on the chaise and watch a vacuously spunky and generically sassy chick flick. So imagine my delight, my absolute astonishment, when the hokey chick flick came out on the trail, a Cinderella story so preposterous it’s hard to believe it’s not premiering on Lifetime. Instead of going home and watching “Miss Congeniality” with Sandra Bullock, I get to stay here and watch “Miss Congeniality” with Sarah Palin.

The editorial pokes fun at Palin’s beauty queen background. It also describes Palin’s character as nothing else but a typical beauty queen airhead. The evidence serves as an example of the stereotypes that female candidates often must confront and the gender labels that were consistently designated to Sarah Palin

throughout the campaign. The same article brings up gender labels that are continuously seen of Sarah Palin such as her stand on abortion, “a hockey mom and PTA member”, “a queen who married her high school sweetheart” and a mother of five children with her youngest, a 4-month old with Down Syndrome. All labels reinforce the repetitive description of Palin, and they also substantiate how those stereotypes set the tone for her running as vice-president.

On September 2, 2008, three articles were posted on New York Times that dealt with the breaking news Bristol Palin, Sarah Palin oldest daughter, was pregnant. One article’s headline read, “In Political Realm, ‘Family Problem’ Emerges as Test and Distraction”. The article provides a sample as the tone of the kind of scrutiny Sarah Palin would have to undergo. Though the teenage pregnancy is not an unfamiliar topic in today’s society, Palin’s credentials as a parent and her ability to juggle so much was obviously brought up by the media. On this same day another article was posted where reporters Jodi Kantor and Rachel Swarns presented the debate of whether Sarah Palin was possibly stretching herself too thin. The article “A New Twist in the Debate over Mothers” covered different interviews where America’s moms stated that they “worry that she (Sarah) is taking on too much.” Some commended her for her efforts. Others felt she needed to invest more time on her own family. The timing of the article coincidentally fits

with the same issues the articles about Bristol Palin bring up. These topics would have been underplayed had it been a male candidate.

Shortly after Katie Couric's interview with Sarah Palin on prime time, reporters immediately focused on Palin's responses where, they argued, she confirmed her lack of knowledge on foreign affairs and policy. Reporter Alessandra Stanley from the New York Times described her answers as "surprisingly wobbly: her words tumbled out choppily, like an outboard motor loosened from the stern." Those stereotypes seen in the article dealt with masculine issues where women are typically perceived to know less and care less about such topics during an election. On the same date of the Stanley's story on the Palin interview, The New York Times ran another story of Palin meeting with Pakistani leader. In the story "Palin as Meetings for a second Day with Foreign Leaders" by Kate Zernike, Zernike presents to the reader the dialogue between president Zardari and governor Palin. Zardari tells Palin she is even more gorgeous in person. Though such a conversation may not seem relevant during a campaign trail, a respectable newspaper like The New York Times ran the story. The story serves as an example of how Palin was objectified by political leaders, and then those stories served as information for the media to frame to the public.

Towards the end of the presidential election after senator John McCain concedes to president-elect Barack Obama, the need for the media to find an

answer to McCain's loss prevalently pointed to Sarah Palin. Issues about the money spent on her wardrobe to her poor interviews and lack of knowledge on foreign policy soon became hot topics for the media. As an example of these matters, The New York Times ran a story on Nov. 6, 2008, titled "How Internal Battles Divided the McCain and Palin Camps" by Elisabeth Bumiller, Julie Bosman and Michael Cooper. In the story's lead the first issue brought up about the campaign's problems was Sarah Palin and a prank call she took from a Canadian comedian. The article also brings up the turmoil that allegedly existed between McCain and Palin. Towards the end of the campaign there was apparently little conversation between the two. Additionally, leaked information stated that Sarah Palin was pushing to deliver her own speech before McCain's concession speech. In addition, the article brings up a statement made by one of McCain's advisers where they refer to Palin as a "whack job". Upon the presidential upset for the Republican Party, the media was able to sensationalize Palin character as if she were the shrew in need of being tamed. As days progressed, the articles in The New York Times consistently provided that same image of Sarah Palin as done by the story that ran on November 6, 2008.

A similar pattern is seen of Palin's coverage in the Los Angeles Times. Again, though the stories were not nearly as many as the editorials and news stories about her, Los Angeles Times reporters fiddled with the same labels and

stereotypes of female candidates during a political election, therefore, framing the same kind of message portrayed by the New York Times. On Aug. 30, 2008, reporters Cathleen Decker and Michael Finnegan ran a story titled “She’s No Good Ol’ Boy Meet Sarah Palin: governor, mother of five, hunter, reformer, creationist, runner-up to Miss Alaska...”. The headline itself creates great importance to her role as a mother considering it is the second item they noted in the headline. Palin’s gender role is underscored by the writers at the initiation of the story. In the first paragraphs of the story, the reporters talk about how Palin is “breathtakingly unlike any other” vice-presidential candidate. To describe Palin as breathtaking reiterates how reporters often objectified her, whereas a male candidate may not have been portrayed in the same fashion.

On September 8, 2008, the Los Angeles Times ran a story titled, “A new Muse for the McCain campaign: Since Sarah Palin became his running mate, he’s been much feistier. Together they’re drawing crowds.” Maeve Reston’s headline describes Palin as a muse, a goddess. Such description, again demonstrates how Palin was objectified and seen as a sex object. The article talks about how McCain was a feistier candidate with Palin by his side. The portrayal of Palin by his side creates an image of a man who’s empowered when a woman stands by his side. The author illustrates much of the same ideas previously presented about Palin’s

role in this election, which reinforce the gender roles, and stereotypes framed by the media.

Dan Morain's story, "Trig's story is safe ground for GOP: The attention lavished on Palin's disabled son may help her ticket connect with voters" covers in greater depth Palin's four-month old son's role in the campaign. Trig has Down syndrome and the article presents how Palin's affiliation with a special needs child will be helpful during the campaign. The story serves as an example of how women are often connected to feminine issues such as education and children with special needs.

Todd Gitlin editorial "Race for President builds characters" characterizes Palin as the saving grace of the McCain campaign by describing her as a sidekick to McCain. According to Gitlin, Palin is a combination of "myths". She is Annie Oakley but also Wonder Woman, "whose exploits and attractions appeal to both sexes". And "she is Aimee Semple McPherson, the onetime revivalist and moralist of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. In the imagination of her followers, Palin is some combination of Glamour, Outdoor Life, Playboy and DC Comics." These characteristics personify the multiple roles created by the media about Sarah Palin. Much emphasis is placed on her physical appearance and what that appearance often symbolized to the media.

A few articles also presented Sarah Palin under the same stereotypes; however, the stereotypes were bringing forth positive characteristics about the female candidate. On August 31, reporters Adam Nagourney, Jim Rutenberg and Jeff Zeleny wrote about McCain's campaign introducing Governor Sarah Palin. In the news article titled "Campaigns shift as McCain's choice alters the Race", the reporters gave her novelty labels that would be effective traits for McCain's campaign. As an example, they brought up her appeal to evangelical voters since she is a socially conservative woman. The article also credited that Palin was the second woman to be chosen as a vice-presidential candidate at a time when Obama's campaign was struggling to make a connection with women. This gender label conveys the importance of the female vote and the need for female representation in a national election.

On September 4, Alessandra Stanley gave way to Palin's speech in her column "Ending a conspicuous Silence, Palin Confidently Makes Her Own Case". In the column Stanley expressed her opinion about the speech's assertive tone and Palin's confidence in the job. She wrote, "Throughout the whirlwind referendum of experience, motherhood and family values, Ms. Palin was cast by her party as a victim of sexism, partisan politics and tabloid exploitation. She used the speech to shrug off the mantle of running mate in distress and recast herself as a tough-talking, liberal-bashing supermom." There is evidently a great quality in Palin,

created by Stanley, in referring to her as a supermom and one who can stand and fight her own battles. She is no damsel in distress.

Another opinion piece that ran the following day, titled “A Glimpse of the New,” credited Palin’s life experience, as revealed in the speech, as a credit to the ticket. David Brooks wrote, “Still it was stupendous to see a young woman emerge from nowhere to give a smart and assertive speech.” He also added, “she embodies the spirit of the moment” and “Republicans started talking about Palin... ..and a brighter future for their party.” He credits her as an innovator for a party that may have grown lackluster. The opinion piece presents a different viewpoint of Palin that was seen in the majority of the other opinion pieces that ran through the campaign.

The collected material demonstrates that the media portrayed vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin as an amateur, and they consistently objectified her throughout the race. Those values presented by the media throughout the presidential campaign demonstrate that biases of vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The findings of governor Sarah Palin in the articles from both the New York Times and Los Angeles times parallel and correlate with political communication, media framing and agenda setting research. Though the research demonstrated that there was coverage that was both positive and negative, it was evident that the coverage was more cantankerous. This study contributes to media framing, political communication, politics and the media and women in politics scholarship by examining RQ1: How did major media outlets present vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin in the period after the announcement of her selection and RQ2: What values were communicated by the media through the coverage of vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin?

Both media framed Palin under the stereotypical traits presented by Nedeau, which include setting more emphasis on appearance, personality and family issues. In addition, the material found confirms Eagly's Social Role Theory that surrounds women in politics. The findings such as those stories provided in this study provide an example of the challenges that female candidates often have to overcome in order to have an opportunity to win the race. The number of female politicians holding a seat today only reiterates that the media make the race a biased arena for female candidates.

The thesis was broken down into five chapters where chapter one introduced the topic. Chapter two provided the literature review with an in depth look at the four different scholarships, which provide a deeper understanding of existing previous research. Chapter three provided the methodology used to conduct the study. Chapter four provided the findings and a discussion of the findings.

The public's need to be educated in how the media frame different groups is crucial in order to even out the playing field for minority groups and candidates who possibly have so much more to offer without ever having a fair chance. The importance of both the data and research will serve as part of additional material for future empirical data of future campaigns and elections. Media possess a great power over the public and influencing the messages and frames provided to them during a political election. And it will not be until the media break away from the stereotypes and biases that the public will be able to have a more complete picture of their options and their candidates. As seen in the research, women still face sexism today in politics, and the media are prevalent in framing women under certain stereotypes and labels.

The findings are not without limitations. This qualitative study focused on analysis of the words and labels used based on novelty labels, uniqueness labeling, gender labeling and coverage of feminine issues versus male issues. The study only looked into two major print publications. Also the study was limited to two major

publications that are considered to be liberal newspapers. However, due to the influence and novelty behind this election, there are many other angles and studies that could be done to further analyze Sarah Palin. The study also focused on three specific events of the campaign. Further research could be done on articles covering stories from the beginning until the end of the election. Additional research could analyze the articles under different labels or standards. Other studies could also look into the same topic and study media coverage via television or internet of the same election and candidates.

Recommendations for the research would be to collect quantitative data of the same articles and see how many times the same words are used to describe Sarah Palin. Other material could compare coverage of female candidates in editorials versus news stories. Other questions of interest would be how male reporters and female reporters differ when covering the same topic or candidate. The coverage provided of Sarah Palin by more conservative newspapers would also help study a different dimension to the research. With the upcoming presidential election, it would be of great interest to see if Hillary Clinton or any other female candidate plays a role in the race. Other similar studies also be conducted of gubernatorial or senate races. Additional studies could also compare a national race versus a local race and the coverage of female candidates.

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