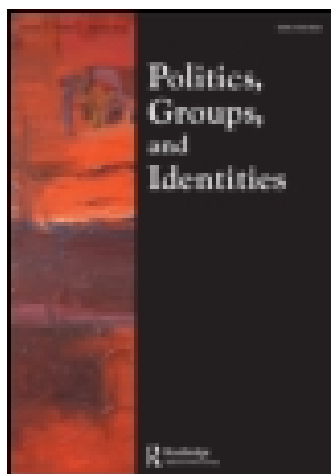


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From Ferraro to Palin: sexism in coverage of vice presidential candidates in old and new media

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An analysis of news coverage of vice presidential candidates finds the previously observed media biases for women who run for other political positions to be present for women vice presidential nominees, and especially in the arena of new media, where editorial filters are mostly absent. Using content analysis of major print news and online blogs, we find sex inequalities in coverage tone, type, and hard sexism (overtly gendered insults). Coverage of female vice presidential candidates is more negative, more focused on her appearance and familial role, and more sexist, than coverage of male vice presidential candidates. Furthermore, we find that negative tone and hard sexism are more pronounced in the online blogosphere. The implication for women, especially for those with presidential ambitions, is that known media hostility may be a deterrent, and further stimulates the chronic underrepresentation of women in our governing institutions.

Keywords: women and gender; elections; mass media; political representation

Introduction

Many political pundits were surprised at Walter Mondale's selection of Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate in 1984, and were again surprised when John McCain chose Sarah Palin in 2008. Their unexpected nominations provoked media frenzies, which many political practitioners suggested contributed to their campaigns' eventual demise. To be sure, inequalities in the amount, tone, and type of media coverage between male and female political candidates have been well documented in the past two decades (Banwart, Bystrom, and Robertson 2003; Burke and Mazzarella 2008; Bystrom et al. 2004; Dunaway et al. 2013; Kahn 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991), and are especially pronounced for women running for the highest executive office, the presidency (Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Carroll 2009; Duerst-Lahti 2007; Han and Heldman 2007; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Lawrence and Rose 2010). The implication of media coverage that neglects female candidates, or covers them in stereotypically feminine terms, is presumed to be that voter perception is affected in ways that disadvantage female candidates (Bystrom, Robertson, and Banwart 2001; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1992; 1994a). While there is some evidence to suggest voters are more likely to rely on partisan cues when making voting decisions (Dolan 2013; Hayes 2005), where partisan cues are less

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relevant, such as during primary races, and for voters who are less partisan, and less informed, media effects are likely to be especially pronounced. Furthermore, if the media environment is one of hostility toward women, women may be deterred from running for office, a major contributor to women's underrepresentation in government, generally (Lawless and Fox 2010).

We fill a gap in the media bias literature by extending this body of research to the rather unique position of the vice presidency, which has evolved from a virtually powerless position, to one of influence and notoriety in modern times. Additionally, we advance the scholarship on media coverage of elections by including analysis of online news blogs to consider whether the inequalities in coverage for women in print media are worse, better, or the same, in the blogosphere, where Americans are increasingly turning to for their political news. To assess the prevalence of sex inequalities in media coverage of vice presidential nominees in both print and online news, we collect two data sets. The first is an Old Media Dataset, which is a random sample of print media news articles that mention vice presidential nominees for election years 1984–2008, to incorporate the nominations of both Geraldine Ferraro and Sarah Palin. The second data set is a New Media Dataset, which samples articles from popular online news blogs that mention Sarah Palin during the 2008 election. Using content analysis, we find sex inequalities in coverage tone, soft sexism (mention of appearance and family), and hard sexism (overtly gendered insults) that disadvantage female nominees. Female nominees are four times more likely to receive hard sexism in their coverage than male nominees. What is more, negative tone and sexism are significantly more pronounced in the online news blogosphere.

Gender biases in media coverage

Studies of media coverage of women running for political office assess differences in the amount, tone, and type of news coverage compared to men, to infer whether there is a media bias. Amount of coverage refers to the number of articles published that mention a candidate. Less coverage of a candidate may signal the candidate is not competitive or is less viable (Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Kahn 1996). The scholarship on sex inequalities in amount of coverage is mixed. Atkeson and Krebs (2008) find that male and female mayoral candidates receive about the same amount of coverage. Banwart, Bystrom and Robertson (2003) find women in the US senate primary races and gubernatorial primary races receive more coverage than their male counterparts. Yet, female senatorial candidates nominated by their party receive less coverage, even when competitiveness and incumbency are controlled for (Kahn 1994a, 1996). This mixture of results has led political scientists to poignantly suggest that the field considers contextual characteristics such as the level and type of office when conducting analysis (Dunaway et al. 2013; Fowler and Lawless 2009). This suggestion stems from the theorized association of more masculine characteristics and qualities with executive offices, whereas this association is weaker for legislative offices, thus signaling an incongruence for women who run for executive offices and less incongruence for women who run for legislative offices (Brooks 2013; Dunaway et al. 2013; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Furthermore, coverage for gubernatorial elections is more focused on traits, than issues, in general, whereas coverage for senate races is more focused on issues (Hayes 2008), and thus the office under analysis may moderate the observed media bias when looking at women's coverage. These race-type characteristics offer more depth to analysis surrounding media coverage of elections that may help explain some of the inconsistencies in empirical studies.

Sex inequalities observed for the amount of coverage of female presidential candidates have also been mixed. For example, Elizabeth Dole received significantly less print media coverage than comparable male contenders in the 2000 presidential Republican primary race (Anderson 2002; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005). Yet in 2008, Hillary Clinton received comparable coverage to her male competitors in terms of overall amount during the Democratic primary race

(Lawrence and Rose 2010; Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010). As Dunaway et al. (2013) note, inequalities in the amount of coverage women receive may no longer hold, especially for well-known female candidates. Previous analysis on sex inequalities in the amount of coverage for vice presidential candidates is naturally sparse, because of the rare instance of a female nominee.

While findings regarding the amount of coverage women receive compared to men are mixed, sex differences in news coverage tone and news coverage type are largely a well-established phenomenon. Coverage tone is usually described in terms of negative, positive, mixed, or neutral descriptions of a candidate in an article or broadcast. For instance, this passage from an article written by Mary McGrory from the *Washington Post* describing Elizabeth Dole as “a ‘Stepford wife,’ an over programmed perfectionist,” is an example of negative tone in coverage (McGrory 1999). Negative tone would also include coverage that is mostly critical of a candidate. When it comes to the tone of coverage, female senatorial candidates receive significantly more negative coverage than male senatorial candidates (Kahn 1994a, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). At the presidential level, both Elizabeth Dole, in 2000, and Hillary Clinton, in 2008, received considerably more negative coverage than their male competitors (Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010). As such, we would expect female vice presidential candidates to receive more negative coverage than male vice presidential candidates.

Type of coverage is related to the focus of the majority of the article or broadcast. For instance, articles can focus on the issues, polls, or a candidate’s appearance and personality. Articles that focus on issues usually have a positive impact on perceptions of a candidate’s political viability, in that when issue positions are reinforced, readers are reminded of a candidate’s political relevance and knowledge. On the other hand, articles that focus on personality, appearance, or on the candidate’s family and home life alienate that candidate from the political issues – and arguably from political relevance. When media focus on a candidate’s personality and appearance, they take away from coverage that might otherwise be dedicated to campaign issues; this contributes to the perception that the candidate is less viable, less credible, and less experienced (Dunaway et al. 2013; Lawrence 2000; Woodall and Fridkin 2003). Furthermore, it suggests that the candidate is less serious, since her coverage is focused on less-serious topics.

Female gubernatorial and senatorial candidates garner less issue-related coverage than men, signaling that their candidacies are less serious (Kahn 1994a; 1994b, 1996). Instead, reporters tend to focus more attention on women’s personality traits (Kahn 1996), and their personal lives, dress, and appearance (Woodall and Fridkin 2003). For instance, Dunaway et al. (2013) find that when a female is running for office, overall media coverage is more focused on traits, in general, than in races where two men are running against each other; when a female is running there is also less issue coverage, overall, than when the race is between two men. This observation is strongest for female gubernatorial candidates. At the presidential level, both Hillary Clinton and Elizabeth Dole received disproportionate horse race coverage at the expense of more substantive policy coverage (Falk 2008; Heldman, Carroll and Olson 2005; Lawrence and Rose 2010). Furthermore, press coverage of Elizabeth Dole’s dress and appearance was more intense than her male competitors (Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005). Hillary Clinton also received an unusual amount of attention focused on her appearance (Heimer 2007, Stein 2009). We conceptually group together coverage that is focused on candidate personality, dress, and appearance, and family life as *soft sexism* news coverage, because this kind of coverage subtly alienates campaigns from more serious issues and topics, while not being explicitly critical. This coverage is in contrast to issue coverage, and horse race coverage, which focuses on political issues, and who is leading in an electoral contest, respectively.

A new line of research has identified sexually objectifying candidate coverage as yet another media barrier to female leadership (Heflick and Goldenberg 2009; Heldman and Wade 2011).

Sexually objectifying coverage refers to a person as an object, or less than fully human (Heflick et al. 2011). For example, Gary Trudeau, author of the cartoon strip *Doonesbury*, who is known for depicting politicians as objects, personified a feather to portray vice president Dan Quale in his comics to draw out the perception that Quale was a political lightweight. Yet, the objectification of men does not have the same effect as the objectification of women. Women, but not men, who are objectified are perceived as being less competent, warm, and moral (Heflick et al. 2011). Objectification also occurs when individuals “are viewed as if their body is capable of representing them” (Heflick and Goldenberg 2009, 598). For example, during the 2008 presidential election the *Newsweek* magazine printed a picture of Sarah Palin speaking to a large audience, from the knee down, her bare calves framing the face of a young man in the crowd. This image objectified Palin by reducing her to her bare legs and high heels.

Heflick and Goldenberg (2009) assessed the effects of objectifying coverage, in particular on opinions of Sarah Palin. Using an experimental setting, Heflick and Goldenberg found that subjects who were exposed to objectifying images were more likely to perceive Palin as less competent, less warm, and less moral. Furthermore, Republicans who were primed to focus on Palin’s appearance were significantly less likely to vote for the McCain–Palin ticket, demonstrating negative electoral consequences of this kind of coverage. Though we do not include images or comic strips in our sample data sets, objectifying coverage can take a variety of forms. We therefore conceptualize coverage that uses sexually objectifying language in a demeaning manner as *hard sexism* news coverage. For example, a *Huffington Post* article from October 2008 stating, “... the newest wave of hypocrisy to come spewing perkily forth from the ever-smiling, ever-smirking, perfectly lipstick-kissed mouth of Governor Palin (Mackey 2008) ...” is both sexually objectifying and demeaning. We would characterize this passage as *hard sexism*. We distinguish between hard and soft sexism as a means of better understanding the form and style in which sexism persists in media coverage of female candidates, and across mediums.

Sex inequalities in media coverage have electoral consequences in that they affect voter perceptions in ways that disadvantage female candidates (Bystrom, Robertson, and Banwart 2001; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1992, 1994a). While media do not tell their consumers what to think directly, they tell us what topics to think about through agenda-setting, and how to think about these topics by framing them in certain ways with emphasis placed on some aspects and not others (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). For example, Burns, Eberhardt, and Merolla (2013) found framing Palin in terms of masculine characteristics versus feminine characteristics to influence evaluations, demonstrating framing effects. Indeed, the media serve as a conduit between candidates and citizens, and when reporters systematically advantage one type of candidate over another for non-meritorious reasons, it becomes an anti-democratic conduit.

This conduit has undergone significant changes in the past decade and scholars are only recently pursuing academic research to assess the effects. Old media, which includes broadcast television networks, national weekly news magazines, and major newspapers, is rapidly being eclipsed in readership by new media that includes the Internet (e.g., blogs, social networking sites, YouTube, and Twitter), talk radio, and cable news television (Halperin and Harris 2008; Rainie 2013). New media differs from old media in its speed of news delivery (instant updates are possible); the format of delivery (generally but not always involving new technologies); the production of content (reader-and-viewer-generated content is more common); news goals (objectivity is not the primary goal); and a general lack of editorial filters. Scholars are still coming to terms with the nature and implications of the now decade-old new media environment.

The relevance of new media for presidential campaigns has grown significantly. New media organizations that were of little consequence in the 2000 election (e.g., Wikipedia, *The Huffington Post*, and YouTube) were important sources of information by the 2008 election (Shudson 2009). This new world, dubbed the “third age of political communication,” threatens to supplant print

and broadcast as the primary modes of political communication (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999, 217). The rise of the political blogosphere holds the potential to upset the “top down” influence of policy-makers and news media as information is now available from a variety of sources and the flow of communication runs both ways with user-generated content (Craig 2004). New media challenges “the presumption of mass exposure to relatively uniform political content,” and thus challenges established paradigms of political effects (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999, 221; see also Bimber 2003; Dalton 2007).

New media also differs from old media in content. New media is more in the realm of infotainment than “hard” news (Baum 2002; Davis and Owen 1998), and with fewer editorial filters, new media has enabled what Halperin and Harris (2008) call “the freak show” of politics, marked by ideological extremism and extreme character assassinations. Personal prejudices – homophobia, sexism, racism, and xenophobia – are more common in the blogosphere than in the old media (Barber 2003). New media is also more openly partisan than old media (Baum and Groeling 2008). As such, we expect new media norms are likely to facilitate an amplification of sex inequalities found in old media, and sexism to be especially pronounced for female vice presidential nominees.

Existing literature on vice presidents is relatively scant, perhaps because the formal powers of this office (presiding over the Senate, casting a vote in the event of a tie, and serving as the *heir designate* if the presidency is vacated) are so rarely used (Pika 2010). But somewhat recent changes to the Constitution (the 22nd and the 25th Amendments) have empowered the office (Pika 2010; Young 1979), and presidential directives and enterprising vice presidents have expanded the policy-making functions of the office (Hayes 2007). Vice presidents from Harry Truman through Al Gore have assumed additional formal and informal responsibilities, including involvement in policy and diplomacy. Although governing concerns have become more important in vice presidential choices in the past six decades, electoral concerns continue to carry the most weight with party and campaign officials making the selection (Nelson 1988), and media coverage of these choices central to their impact (Ulbig 2013).

Modern vice presidential candidates are chosen with the idea that they may have to assume the presidency at some point. This new respectability has attracted more experienced candidates and greater media scrutiny. For example, Patterson (1994) finds that media coverage of vice presidents has increased in both volume and negativity after Vietnam and Watergate. Furthermore, greater media scrutiny can have substantive effects. Ulbig (2010, 2013) finds that the more media coverage a vice presidential candidate receives, the greater their effect on electoral outcomes. This suggests that more scholarly attention of vice presidential media coverage is needed since greater media scrutiny means greater electoral influence.

The electoral influence of most vice presidential candidates is typically minor unless they are insufficiently vetted and scandals surface during the election, inviting media attention (Ulbig 2013). For instance, Senator Thomas Eagleton’s mental health problems in 1972 affected McGovern’s presidential run, Geraldine Ferraro’s husband’s finances were a scandal in the 1984 election, and Dan Quayle’s perceived incompetence arguably had a negative impact on George H.W. Bush failed re-election bid in 1992. More recently, turmoil in Sarah Palin’s personal life in 2008 overshadowed McCain’s bid. The press focused heavily on Palin’s daughter’s pregnancy and her husband’s involvement in the scandal “Troopergate,” where Palin was accused of wrongfully dismissing an Alaska’s Public Safety Commissioner. Both Ferraro and Palin fit the short list of vice presidential candidates who were not adequately vetted (Blumenthal 2008), which suggests that their process of selection differed from the norm.

Given the changes to the office of the vice presidency in the last several decades, and its unique proximity to the presidency, we expect that sex inequalities in media coverage will resemble presidential coverage more so than coverage of races for lower offices. The nominations

of Ferraro and Palin offer a unique opportunity to address this question and to assess whether sex inequalities in coverage, and sexist media coverage has evolved from 1984 to 2008, and whether they differ across old and new media forms. We present our hypotheses in the next section.

Hypotheses

In an effort to measure the major sex inequalities in media coverage previously identified in the literature, but for vice presidential nominees, we test six old media hypotheses, presented in Table 1, for the 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections. Ideally, research conclusions should be based on a large number of observations, but for female vice presidential candidates, this is not possible (given that there have only been two in modern history). This limitation, however, does not apply to male vice presidents. Therefore, we include all of the male vice presidential candidates during the period examined to get the best representation of media coverage for this office, as possible. We expect to find that female vice presidential nominees will receive less coverage overall, more negative coverage, and less issue-based coverage. We also anticipate finding that female nominees receive more soft sexism in the form of coverage that emphasizes appearance and familial caretaking. Lastly, we anticipate more hard sexism in coverage for female candidates that openly insults or demeans the candidate in specifically gendered ways (e.g., using a gender slur). Both soft and hard sexism undermine the electoral prospects of female political candidates.

We also measure the major sex inequalities previously identified in the literature for the new media realm, using the 2008 election as a case study. We expect sex inequalities in media coverage to be more pronounced in the blogosphere, due to the nature of online news, reviewed above. To explore the differences in sex inequalities in coverage between new and old media, we test six new media hypotheses, presented in Table 2. Compared to her print media coverage, we expect online blog coverage to have a smaller percentage of articles that focus solely on Palin, to be more negative, to be less likely to mention policies in conjunction with Palin, to be more focused on her family and her appearance, and to be more overtly sexist.

Description of the data

We generate an Old Media Dataset to test the first set of six hypotheses, and a New Media Dataset to test the second set of six hypotheses. The Old Media Dataset includes a representative sample of news articles mentioning one or both vice presidential candidate from election years 1984–2008. The “major papers” filter of LexisNexis was used, which includes the top 57 circulated

Table 1. Old media hypotheses.

H ₁	Old media amount: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly less media coverage than male vice presidential candidates
H ₂	Old media tone: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly more negative coverage than male vice presidential candidates
H ₃	Old media policy: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly fewer mentions of policy issues in their coverage than male vice presidential candidates
H ₄	Old media caretaking: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly more coverage that mentions their family/caretaking than male vice presidential candidates
H ₅	Old media appearance: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly more media coverage that mentions their dress/appearance than male vice presidential candidates
H ₆	Old media hard sexism: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly more hard sexism coverage than male vice presidential candidates

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Table 2. New media hypotheses.

H ₇	New media amount: Palin received less coverage in new media versus old media, as a percentage of total articles mentioning the vice presidential candidates
H ₈	New media tone: Palin received significantly more negative coverage in new media versus old media
H ₉	New media policy: Palin received significantly less policy issue coverage in new media versus old media
H ₁₀	New media caretaking: Palin received significantly more coverage that mentioned her family/ caretaking in new media versus old media
H ₁₁	New media appearance: Palin received significantly more media coverage that mentioned her dress/ appearance in new media versus old media
H ₁₂	New media hard sexism: Palin received significantly more hard sexism coverage in new media versus old media

newspapers in the USA. We look at 1984 through 2008 to provide points of comparison, and to include the candidacy of the only two female vice presidential candidates (Ferraro in 1984 and Palin in 2008). We included news articles as well as opinion pieces from the date the vice presidential candidate was formally announced (or the first date of the party convention for incumbents) through Election Day. Articles from wire services were included, but any duplicate articles were only coded once.

Table 3 shows the total number of articles mentioning each candidate, overall. From the large pool of articles mentioning the vice presidential nominees we generated a random, representative sample of 1769 articles. The number of articles mentioning vice presidential nominees varies from candidate to candidate and year to year, but increases substantially over time, signaling increased media interest in vice presidential candidates.

The New Media Dataset includes online news blogs mentioning Sarah Palin during our time span in 2008 from five sources: *The Daily Kos*, *The Huffington Post*, *Slate.com*, *Politico*, and *The Drudge Report*. Our selection covers the partisan and ideological spectrum with *The Daily Kos* and *The Huffington Post* on the liberal side, *Slate* in the middle, *Politico* as ideologically mixed, and *The Drudge Report* as a conservative site. These particular blogs were selected because blogging is a new media phenomenon, and these were the most popular blogs that were in existence for both the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections, signaling they were more established in covering politics than other blogs. A total of 276 articles from these blogs mentioned Sarah Palin during our time frame, and each was included in the new media analyses.

Six coders, including the authors, analyzed the articles, and the same coding frame was used for both the Old and New Media Datasets for comparative purposes. Our variables of interest for

Table 3. Old media articles mentioning vice presidential candidates (1984–2008).

Election year	Candidates	Number of articles	Sample size
1984	Bush–Ferraro	2872	218
1988	Quayle–Bentsen	3176	245
1992	Quayle–Gore	6234	261
1996	Kemp–Gore	6852	250
2000	Cheney–Lieberman	9725	219
2004	Cheney–Edwards	6989	228
2008	Palin–Biden	14,180	348

Notes: The total number of articles for each election year was generated from LexisNexis using our search parameters (the “major papers” filter of LexisNexis, including articles that mention either vice presidential candidates name, from the date the vice presidential candidate was formally announced (or the first date of the party convention for incumbents) through Election Day).

both data sets include: (1) the tone of candidate coverage (“very positive,” “somewhat positive,” “neutral,” “somewhat negative,” “very negative,” or “mixed”); (2) mention of policy(ies) when discussing the candidate; (3) mention of the candidate’s family and/or caretaking roles; (4) mention of the candidate’s dress or appearance; and (5) the use of sexist language to describe the candidate (recorded verbatim). All six coders achieved both absolute agreement and Cohen’s Kappa agreement after a five-month planning and training process.¹

Analysis and findings

For Old Media, we conduct our analysis in two stages. In the first stage, we use descriptive statistics and tests for significance to determine whether media bias exists. In the second stage, we run either Ordinary Least Squares regression (OLS) or logistic regression analysis to see whether our descriptive findings hold up after controlling for other variables. Each regression model includes a set of candidate-specific variables (candidate sex, incumbency, and candidate party affiliation), article-specific variables (the sex of the reporter, single versus multiple reporters, whether the article is “hard” or “soft” news, and whether multiple candidates were mentioned in the article), and election-specific variables (election year).

Amount of coverage

Table 4 shows the total number and percentage of articles that mention each candidate by election year for the Old Media Dataset.

We had expected that female vice presidential candidates would receive less overall coverage than male vice presidential candidates, even though findings from previous studies on women in other offices were mixed. The results in Table 4 do not support our first hypothesis. In fact, Palin received more coverage than any other vice presidential candidate in the study, and the two female candidates received a significantly greater proportion of total and candidate-only articles than the male contenders ($p < .001$). Ferraro received 85.2% of the vice presidential print media coverage in 1984, and Palin received 94.5% in 2008. We expect that the novelty of the Ferraro and Palin nominations garnered more press interest than male nominations for other election years. While female presidential contenders’ coverage in terms of amount has been mixed, with Dole receiving

Table 4. Volume of articles by candidate for Old Media Dataset.

Election year	Candidate	Total articles for candidate	Candidate-only articles	Candidate-only articles as percentage of total articles
1984 ($n = 218$)	Bush	67	16	7.3
	Ferraro	200	152	67.9
1988 ($n = 245$)	Quayle	127	50	20.4
	Bentsen	197	118	48.1
1992 ($n = 261$)	Quayle	181	110	42.1
	Gore	145	76	29.1
1996 ($n = 250$)	Kemp	170	125	50.0
	Gore	124	79	31.6
2000 ($n = 219$)	Cheney	114	87	39.7
	Lieberman	130	101	46.1
2004 ($n = 228$)	Cheney	105	63	27.6
	Edwards	163	122	53.5
2008 ($n = 348$)	Palin	302	235	67.5
	Biden	111	41	11.7

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less coverage than her competitors, and Clinton receiving coverage on par with her competitors, female vice presidential contenders are disproportionately showered with attention, perhaps because they are already formally on the presidential ticket. This finding sets Ferraro and Palin apart from women who run other offices, signaling that media coverage of female vice presidents does not necessarily fit neatly with existing literature on female candidates, in general. Therefore, we reject H_1 .

Tone of coverage

We test our second hypothesis that female vice presidential candidates received significantly more negative coverage than male vice presidential candidates by looking at the tone of the candidates' coverage using a six-point scale ranging from "Very Positive" coverage to "Very Negative" coverage, with "Neutral" and "Mixed" options. Negative and positive tones were prescribed from the assessment of the terms used to describe the candidates, and extent of critique or praise in coverage in the article. We found male candidates received nearly twice the amount of "Very" or "Somewhat Positive" coverage than female candidates (40.1% compared to 26.3%; $p < .001$). Furthermore, female candidates received twice the amount of negative coverage (40.0%) as male candidates (20.2%) ($p < .001$). As Table 5 shows, candidate sex remains a significant predictor of coverage tone when we control for other variables. Being female is a significant predictor of negative tone in coverage. Therefore we accept H_2 .

Table 5. Article tone in old media.

OLS regression estimates: article tone		
Variables	Standardized coefficient	Standard error
<i>Candidate-specific variables</i>		
Male dummy	-.590**	.117
Incumbent dummy	.309**	.090
Democrat dummy	-.510**	.052
<i>Article-specific variables</i>		
Article author male	.103	.054
Article author unknown	.010	.063
Multiple article authors	-.064	.092
Soft news article	.194**	.042
Both candidates mentioned	.011	.044
<i>Election-specific variables</i>		
1988 election	.606**	.129
1992 election	.454**	.110
1996 election	.256*	.112
2000 election	.398**	.132
2004 election	.679**	.132
2008 election	.137	.080
<i>Overall Model Evaluation</i>		
Constant	3.151	.084
df	14	
R^2	.095	
N	2076	

Notes: Dependent variable represents the tone of the article, where 1 is very positive and 5 is very negative. Higher coefficients indicate more negative coverage.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Policy coverage

Our third hypothesis is that female candidates received less coverage that mentions political issues and policies than male candidates. We find sex inequalities in media coverage in terms of policy coverage, with 45.7% of male candidates’ coverage discussing a policy issue compared to 28.8% of female candidates’ articles ($p < .001$). This observation is likely to be especially effectual, given that female candidates’ viability is more likely to be questioned, then men’s viability, in general. As Lawrence and Rose (2010) note, media that neglects coverage of issues is more detrimental to women candidates than to men who run for office, because of the presumed, albeit implicit, disassociation of women and political leadership. As such, women often emphasize their issue positions as a means of stockpiling credibility as a campaign strategy. If the election coverage neglects the issues, women may miss out on the opportunity to assuage fears about their perceived issue incompetency. However, as Table 6 column 1 shows, candidate sex is not

Table 6. Old media coverage logistic regression analysis.

Maximum likelihood estimates				
Column	1	2	3	4
	Policy mentions	Caretaking mentions	Appearance mentions	Hard sexism ^a
Dependent variables	Odds ratio			
Variables				
<i>Candidate-specific variables</i>				
Male dummy	1.031	0.404**	0.284*	0.021***
Incumbent dummy	1.148	0.958	0.585	0.886
Democrat dummy	0.776*	0.880	0.581*	0.390***
<i>Article-specific variables</i>				
Author male	1.035	0.644***	0.773	0.724
Author unknown	0.877	0.680**	0.288***	0.460*
Multiple authors	0.997	0.905	0.387	0.980
Soft news article	0.925	0.742**	0.991	1.285
Both candidates mentioned	0.664***	0.672***	1.717***	2.317***
<i>Election-specific variables</i>				
1988 election	0.524**	0.239***	1.513	
1992 election	0.883	1.236	1.866	
1996 election	1.077	0.504*	0.701	
2000 election	0.721	0.667	0.303	
2004 election	1.540	1.081	2.857	
2008 election	0.655**	1.093	1.565	
<i>Overall model evaluation</i>				
Constant	-0.282	-0.394	-1.871	-1.690
df	14	14	14	8
Pseudo R^2	0.027 ^b	0.091	0.110	0.055
N	2131	2131	2131	2131

Notes: Cell entries are odds ratios. Dependent variable for each column is a dichotomous variable where 1 represents the mentioning of indicated independent variable under analysis in articles and 0 represents no mentioning of variable in articles.

^aElection year variables are removed from this model as quasi-complete separation occurred with the sexist coverage variable and some election years.

^bWe use McFadden’s pseudo R^2 calculation to generate this statistic.

* $p < .10$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

a significant predictor when we control for other variables. What we find is that certain election years (1988 and 2008) saw less policy coverage overall, and being Republican also deflated policy mentions. We therefore reject H_3 .

Caretaking coverage

Our fourth hypothesis, female candidates receive more coverage of their family or caretaking roles than male vice presidential candidates, is supported by the data. Reporters are eight times more likely to mention the families of female candidates as male candidates (24.1% compared to 3.2%) ($p < .001$). A logistic regression with “mention of family” as the dependent variable shows that candidate sex (female), reporter sex (female), and type of news (“soft”) significantly increase the likelihood of family mentions (Table 6, column 2). We therefore accept H_4 . As a side note, the preponderance of Palin’s coverage was critical of her parenting: the pregnancy of her teenage daughter; whether Palin is spending enough time with her special needs infant, Trig; and concerns about Palin “bringing her kids everywhere” with her. Thus not only was Palin’s coverage largely about her family, but her familial coverage was largely negative.

Appearance coverage

Our fifth hypothesis is that female candidates receive more coverage that mentions their appearance than their male counterparts. The data support this hypothesis. About 10% of the articles about female vice presidential candidates comment on their dress or appearance compared to less than 1% of articles about male candidates. Although our female candidate sample size is only two, it appears that press focus on appearance was more pronounced in 2008 than 1984. Palin received two times the amount of coverage focusing on her appearance as Ferraro (13.7% compared to 5.6%) ($p < .05$). Table 6, column 3, presents the results from the logistic regression analysis, and finds sex as a variable to approach significance ($p = .08$) so we accept H_5 , with slight reservation. Much like how less policy coverage overall is of more consequence for women than for men, so too is coverage that emphasizes personality and appearance. Coverage that focuses on appearance and personality draws attention to the perceived incongruence between feminine traits and political office, as many Americans express a preference for masculine traits and qualities in their political leaders (Gordon and Miller 2003; Huddy 1994; Lawless 2004).

Hard sexism

For hypothesis six we expect female vice presidential nominees to be characterized in sexist terms more often than male nominees. We found the sexism in Palin’s coverage was intensely misogynistic: “I initially dismissed her as good-looking, [but] that backfired” (Talev and McClatchy 2008); “Caribou Barbie ... Presidential Barbie” (Dowd 2008); “Winking Wonderwoman of Wasilla” (Parker 2008a); “His cheerleader choice” (Brett 2008); and “Hugh Hefner asked Sarah Palin to pose for Playboy, because right now she’s posing as a vice presidential candidate” (Rasak 2008). It is also worth noting that Palin was the first vice presidential contender to have a blow-up doll created in her likeness that included instructions to “blow her up and show her how you are going to vote” (Wheatley 2008, para. 1–4), the first to have a pornographic film made with her likeness (titled “Nailin Palin”), the first to have her face Photoshopped on the body of a gun-toting, bikini-wearing woman who received millions of views in a matter of days, and the first to have a reputable news service (*Reuters*) publish photos taken between her legs.

Our quantitative analysis supports qualitative observations of overt sexism directed at Palin. Less than 1% (.31%) of the male candidate’s coverage included sexist language compared to

12.4% of female candidate's coverage ($p < .001$). The few articles involving sexist coverage of male candidates involved overtly sexualizing them in diminutive ways. For example, one reporter notes tongue in cheek that "Edwards was chosen because of his charm, sex appeal, and great hair" (Page 2004). Another reporter writes about Dan Quayle's "adoring smile" (Dowd 1988) and being chosen because he "looks good on television" (Boyer 1988). But the sexism toward male candidates was significantly less, compared to the female candidates. Our logistic regression results in Table 6, column 4, shows that candidate sex remains a significant predictor of sexist coverage when other variables are controlled for, so we accept H_6 .

For old media we conclude that although female vice presidents receive significantly more media coverage than male candidates, while this coverage tends to be more negative, more focused on family and appearance, and more overtly sexist. To explore whether amplified sex inequalities in terms of amount, tone, soft sexism, and hard sexism are present in the blogosphere, we turn to a case study of Sarah Palin's new media coverage.

New media coverage

As stated in our new media hypotheses (Table 2), we expect Palin will receive a smaller percent of coverage focused on her candidacy, more negative coverage, less policy coverage, more soft sexism (appearance, and family and caretaking coverage), and more hard sexism in her new media coverage than in her old media coverage since diminished editorial filters translate into content with more personal prejudice, as described in the literature review. In sum, we expect the nature of online news does not bode well for women. We begin by using descriptive analysis to uncover whether biases are more prominent in new media than old media.

Table 7 presents descriptive data analysis for each of our new media hypotheses. To test H_7 we compare the amount of Palin-only articles in her old media coverage to her new media coverage. The assumption is that more coverage signals viability, and while this assumption may be discredited where coverage is negative, we argue attention to amount is still warranted. We expected Palin to receive less coverage in new media that is focused only on her, than in her old media coverage, suggesting that in the new media realm female vice presidents are given less credibility. The descriptive analysis shows that Palin-only coverage in the online blogosphere is less than in the old media environment, as a proportion of all the articles that she is mentioned in. Given that she was given more singular attention in old media coverage than in new media coverage, we accept H_7 .

We also compare the number of articles in old media that mention Palin in conjunction with policy issues, her family and caretaking role, and her appearance, to her new media coverage. As Table 7 also displays, Palin received less mentions of policy in her new media coverage than in her old media coverage; in her old media coverage, the articles that mention Palin are more likely to have a policy focus than in the new media articles that mention Palin. Certainly it is possible

Table 7. Comparison of Palin's old media and new media coverage.

Gendered coverage	Percentage of Palin old media mentions	Percentage of Palin new media mentions	Percentage difference
Palin only (no Biden)	77.8	59.1	-18.7
Article tone negative	50.9	73.0	+22.1
Policy mention	28.5	21.7	-6.8
Caretaking mention	29.8	22.8	-7.0
Appearance mentioned	14.6	11.6	-3.0
Hard sexist in article	16.2	21.7	+5.5

that a trend of the new media environment is to be less focused on policy and substantive issues, in general, than old media. Yet regardless, as discussed above, a general trend away from coverage that focuses on policy is more likely to be detrimental to female candidates, who often emphasize their policy experience as a means of enhancing the perception of their credibility, which tends to be lower than men's, on the whole.

For appearance mentions, Palin received a similar amount of coverage in old media and new media. For her caretaking coverage and hard sexism, the difference is small; Palin's new media coverage was less focused on her role as a caretaker and parent, but slightly more likely to display hard sexism. The largest difference, however, is in Palin's coverage tone; Palin received significantly more negative coverage in new media than in her old media coverage, as we expected.

To further analyze the differences in Palin's old and new media coverage, we run *t*-tests where we compare the mean of our five dependent variables (tone, policy, caretaking, appearance, and hard sexism) for Old Media to New Media. For tone, "1" indicates more positive coverage and a "5" indicates more negative coverage. Each of the other variables are dichotomous in nature, where "1" indicates coverage of the topic under analysis and "0" indicates no mention of the topic under analysis. The results of the *t*-tests are on display in Table 8. For coverage tone, the mean of Palin's new media coverage was higher (meaning more negative) than her old media coverage; furthermore, this difference is significant ($p < .001$). Thus, we accept H_8 .

For policy mentions, Palin received less coverage in new media than in old media, which is consistent with our expectations, and corroborates our findings from Table 7. The difference in her policy coverage between old and new media approaches significance ($p = .06$). Thus, we also accept H_9 , but with some reservation. While possibly contributing to the notion that Palin was a less experienced or serious candidate by mentioning issues less often when covering Palin, her new media coverage was also less likely than her old media coverage to mention her appearance and role as a mother. This observation suggests that new media is not necessarily more likely to focus on these more superficial issues than old media, which is contrary to our expectations of new media, and thus we reject H_{10} and H_{11} . The difference in mean for appearance mentions for old and new media is not significant, leading us to surmise that new media coverage is on par with old media, on the relevance of these soft sexism topics to election news.

Finally, hard sexism is more common in new media coverage, as we anticipated, as displayed in Table 8. The difference in mean between old and new media coverage that is characterized as hard sexism approaches significance ($p < .10$) and thus we accept H_{12} with caution. In our analysis of the new media coverage we noted many explicitly sexist comments about Palin's appearance ("the ever-smiling, ever-smirking perfectly lipsticked mouth of Governor Palin" (Mackey 2008)); lewd comments about her sexuality ("I'm sexually attracted to her. I don't care that

Table 8. Comparison of means for old and new media Palin coverage.

	Old media		New media		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> *
	<i>(N</i> = 302, 52.25%)		<i>(N</i> = 276, 47.75%)			
Gendered coverage	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD		
Tone	3.39	1.02	4.07	1.09	-7.70	.000
Policy mentions	0.28	0.45	0.22	0.41	1.87	.063
Caretaking mentions	0.30	0.46	0.23	0.42	1.90	.058
Appearance focus	0.15	0.35	0.12	0.32	1.06	.291
Hard sexism	0.16	0.37	0.22	0.41	-1.69	.091

Notes: *N*, sample size; \bar{X} , mean; SD, standard deviation; *t*, *t*-value at the independent samples test; *p*, significance value. *Two-tailed tests.

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she knows nothing,” (Parker 2008b) People reported “sexual fantasies ... [of Palin] washing dishes ... making a hotel bed” (Callard and Plotz 2008)); suggestions that McCain had a romantic interest in her (“McCain Freudian-fiddling with his wedding ring as he glances at his running (soul) mate ... ” (Wolcott 2008)); comments of her “doll” or “object” status (“Put Mrs Palin back in her box” (The Presidential Election: It’s time 2008)); and several articles referencing or praising the website, “VPILF” (Vice Presidents I’d Like to Fuck (Weiner 2008)). This overtly sexist language was prominent in her new media coverage. Unfortunately, we did not include a measure of degree of sexist coverage, and thus we only capture the numerical amount of overtly sexist coverage in new media toward Palin, and not necessarily its intensity. Yet our more qualitative analysis of the actual language leads us to accept H₁₂

To summarize, we reject 4 of our 10 hypotheses (Table 9). In old media, female vice presidential candidates actually receive more overall coverage than male candidates and similar

Table 9. Summary of findings.

H ₁	Amount: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly less media coverage than male vice presidential candidates	Reject. Female vice presidential candidate receive significantly more coverage than male contenders
H ₂	Tone: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly more negative coverage than male vice presidential candidates	Accept
H ₃	Policy: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly fewer mentions of policy issues in their coverage than male vice presidential candidates	Reject. Female and male candidates receive similar amounts of policy coverage
H ₄	Caretaking: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly more coverage that mentions their family/caretaking than male vice presidential candidates	Accept
H ₅	Appearance: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly more media coverage that mentions their dress/appearance than male vice presidential candidates	Accept
H ₆	Hard sexism: female vice presidential candidates receive significantly more hard sexism than male vice presidential candidates	Accept
H ₇	New media amount: Palin received less coverage in new media versus old media, as a percentage of total articles mentioning the vice presidential candidates	Accept
H ₈	New media tone: Palin received significantly more negative coverage in new media versus old media	Accept
H ₉	New media policy: Palin received significantly less policy issue coverage in new media versus old media	Accept
H ₁₀	New media caretaking: Palin received significantly more coverage that mentioned her family/ caretaking in new media versus old media	Reject. Palin received similar caretaking coverage in old and new media
H ₁₁	New media appearance: Palin received significantly more media coverage that mentioned her dress/ appearance in new media versus old media	Reject. Palin received similar appearance coverage in old and new media
H ₁₂	New media hard sexism: Palin received significantly more hard sexism coverage in new media versus old media	Accept

amounts of issue-based coverage, but they receive significantly more negative coverage, soft sexism, and hard sexism. When it comes to new media, bloggers are just as likely to engage in soft sexism as reporters, but new media coverage is significantly more negative in tone and the amount and intensity of hard sexism.

Conclusion

Most of the media biases observed for female candidates who run for other political offices are also found for female vice presidential nominees. For old media coverage, while female vice presidential nominees get more media attention than male nominees on average, this coverage is twice as likely to contain soft sexism (mention of appearance and families) and four times more likely to include hard sexism. Female nominees are also discussed in more negative terms than male nominees. For the new media realm, the negative tone and hard sexism is more prominent, though soft sexism is no more likely.

In looking over time at our variables of interest, the intensity and volume of sexist coverage increased dramatically from Ferraro's run in 1984 to Palin's run in 2008, suggesting that the media environment has become more hostile. While Ferraro and Palin faced similar bias in the type of tone of their coverage, misogyny multiplied. This more sexist coverage for Palin may be due in part to her conservatism and more traditional gender choices (e.g., having a large family and her staunch anti-abortion position); being traditionally female may have led reporters to deliberately focus on her female traits, and perceive a focus on her appearance to have been invited. Women with more feminine rhetorical style, which avoids confrontation, and tough and combative language, may be more prone to coverage in more feminine terms. For instance, some research has explored whether Dole's rhetorical style was more feminine (Anderson and Sheeler 2005; Reiser 2009), and thus may account for the more overt focus of her coverage on her family and appearance. Yet Palin's rhetorical style was unlike Dole's; it was highly combative and especially tough. Thus, Palin's coverage was arguably asynchronous, and as such we conclude was especially biased.

Another possible explanation for Palin's amplified degradation is the normalization of women's objectification and pornification in popular culture, which Ferraro did not face in 1984 (Heflick et al. 2011; Heflick and Goldberg 2009; Heldman and Wade 2011). We now live in a world saturated with media, and an increasingly thin line between pornography and mainstream media (Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa 2007). Our modern culture tends to celebrate sexually explicit images and themes, and encourages women to participate in their own sexual objectification (Levy 2005). Ferraro and Palin were both attractive female candidates, but the hyper-sexualization of Palin versus Ferraro in the press mirrors a cultural shift, particularly in new media accounts. We would expect women running for president, especially those younger and more attractive, are likely to be subject to the similar hard sexism we observed for Palin.

Our analysis also suggests that the advent of new media, and increased coverage and campaigning online, does not bode well for female candidates. Without editorial filters and the outward pursuit of objectivity, the misogyny quotient and negativity in new media is heightened for female candidates. More newspapers are closing their doors, while news blogs and other online information sources are skyrocketing in popularity. The rise of new media presents an even higher hurdle for women seeking the highest political offices, because, as we find, new media is worse than old media for female candidates when it comes to negative tone and hard sexism.

Yet certainly the new media environment is broadening the number of voices contributing to our political discourse to include feminist blogs, as well as websites that exist to publicize the sexism in media coverage. This presents an opportunity for future scholarship. While we find

that new media is detrimental to female candidates because fewer editorial filters lead to more gendered and sexist coverage, future scholarship should focus on the ways in which the rise of the feminist blogosphere and social media use can interrupt sexist coverage in potentially powerful ways.

In the USA, female vice presidential candidates have only been included as novelties to energize an underdog ticket. In both instances, energetic, passionate, physically attractive candidates who were arguably less qualified for the (potential) presidency have been selected over more qualified choices. Reporters often discussed both Ferraro's and Palin's questionable experience and proposed that their selection was a political stunt and/or a gamble. It may be impossible to extricate these critiques from sex biases, but the fact remains that, in the end, both Palin (Mitchell 2009) and Ferraro (Baumgartner 2006) were a drag on their respective tickets. This flawed tokenism based on sex has serious symbolic implications for future vice presidential picks and female candidates more generally. Two losses make it easy to dismiss female candidates as less viable, and further what has become a US tradition of denying women representation in our two highest political offices. Our analysis here demonstrates that sex inequalities in media coverage of vice presidential candidates are a significant barrier to women being considered legitimate contenders, and this barrier is even more formidable in new media.

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Note

1. Precautions were taken at every stage of the coding process to ensure high inter-coder reliability. During training, the 3 coders for the Old Media Dataset and the 4 coders for the New Media Dataset coded 30 articles each. The New Media Dataset inter-coder sample was larger given the larger number of uncodeable articles endemic to this medium (e.g., "articles" that are actually lists of campaign events, picture galleries, etc.). Coding differences were worked out through two trials and training rounds before acceptable inter-coder was achieved. In all, training required approximately 40 hours, and well over 650 hours was spent coding articles. Inter-coder reliability for both the Old Media and New Media Datasets is based on seven key variables: (1) Type of Article; (2) Whether the Candidates were Mentioned in Passing; (3) First Candidate Mentioned; (4) Tone of Republican Candidate Coverage; (5) Republican Candidate Family Mention; (6) Tone of Democratic Candidate coverage; and (7) Democratic Candidate Family Mention. These variables were selected because they involved varying levels of subjective interpretation on the part of the coder. Percentage agreement and Cohen's Kappa were used to calculate the level of agreement between coders. The latter method is preferable to the more liberal measure of absolute agreement, but researchers are encouraged to use multiple methods to determine inter-coder reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken 2002). Each variable in both data sets reached acceptable absolute agreement (at least 0.80) and Cohen Kappa scores (at least 0.60) by each individual coder.

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