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## Looking Back at the Media's Future: A Mixed Method Analysis of Race and Gender Bias During the 2008 Democratic Presidential Primary Season

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The University of Southern Mississippi

LOOKING BACK AT THE MEDIA'S FUTURE:  
A MIXED METHOD ANALYSIS OF RACE AND GENDER BIAS  
DURING THE 2008 DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY SEASON

by

Tim Vance

Abstract of a Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
Of the University of Southern Mississippi  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

## ABSTRACT

### LOOKING BACK AT THE MEDIA'S FUTURE:

#### A MIXED METHOD ANALYSIS OF RACE AND GENDER BIAS DURING THE 2008 DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARY SEASON

by Tim Vance

May 2015

Political knowledge has been defined as the individual's ability to recall candidate names, personal characteristics, and qualifications. Furthermore, it is the ability to identify election issues, current campaign developments, and recognize connections between candidates and issue positions (Atkin & Heald, 1976). I posit that political knowledge has become much more...and much less.

I have introduced, in this paper, a number of sources for political learning: ads, newspapers, YouTube, and television news. All hold some interest for investigation as political knowledge sources, but methodology cannot be standardized across all sources. As such, the focus of the qualitative part of this study is television news. Following that discussion, a qualitative study of news stories as well as alternative sources of political knowledge is performed.

Television news is becoming more of a conduit for direct messaging by campaigns because ads produced by campaigns are often included in news coverage.

So, to be clear, this was not a study to determine if learning can take place via television news, as that has been done (Atkin & Heald, 1976; Atkin & Gantz, 1978). This work examines what can be learned. It proposes the question: Is

the electorate being given enough information to make an informed, rational decision; or are news sources only informing the audiences through stereotype and bias at the expense of issue coverage?

Mixed methodology was used in an attempt to exhibit the frequency as well as depth the of racial and gender references in news stories, as well as alternate, yet still primary, sources of political knowledge. Textual analysis allows for a close-up examination of the broadcast scripts and context of a story without the constraints of being assigned a definable number or data point (Campbell, 1995). This same technique is used to examine user-generated content on the Internet that became subjects of news stories.

The sample for the quantitative study was randomly selected from a population of all campaign news stories between October, 2007 and March, 2008. This represents the time prior to the conventions when two candidates from the same party, an African American man and a white female, were beginning to separate themselves from the other candidates for the Democrat Party nomination. The sample for the qualitative section was purposive and taken from the news story population as well as other sources available to the electorate.

The results demonstrate that bias in news stories does exist, but not at the frequency expected. The study also finds that race and gender bias can be both overt as well as subtle. Bias is far more prevalent in internet sources, user-generated content and social media.

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A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2015

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family: my wife Candace, son Dylan, and baby girl, Arlo. Without your support, words of encouragement, and sacrifice of the dining room table, this project would have never been completed. You have my most sincere gratitude.

I also dedicate this to many friends, colleagues, and fellow doctoral students who supported and motivated me and convinced me that a project of this scale was within my capabilities. You were my cheerleaders.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to the late Professor Gene Wiggins. He convinced me to come to the University of Southern Mississippi by exhibiting the caring and friendship that I can only hope to show my students.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A commonly held belief in the United States has been that this democracy requires and depends on the active and informed citizens who are capable of making rational voting decisions in local, state, and national elections (Williams & Edy, 1999). The American political system was based upon this premise, according to Edward R. Murrow (Bliss Jr, 1967, p. 362). The assumption was, and still is today, that these rational decisions will be made by actively seeking out information from media followed by critical thought processes necessary for making the decision (Noelle-Neumann, 1995; Schudson, 1995).

The literature review that follows demonstrates that citizens seek information from the media, and that, for decades, network broadcast television news programs have been a primary source of political issue and campaign information (Craft, Leigh, & Godfrey, 2000; Graber & Dunaway, 2014; Kohut, 2002; Pew, 2000) In the last decade, television news audiences have been shifting to cable news stations (Pew, 2004), but broadcast network news programs still hold a larger share of the audience than individual cable broadcasts (Fox, Angelini, & Goble, 2005).

The presentation of news stories and the corresponding framing of the issues becomes an important area of study because of these realities. Of particular importance is an examination of the frames associated with political campaigns and candidates in broadcast news stories. The frames represent the

quality of the coverage provided by these sources, and thus, the ability to gain political knowledge by watching the program. It is important to examine the quality of political information provided in television news political campaign coverage, and it remains particularly important to examine this coverage during the broadcast networks' nightly newscasts. This study examines the frames used by broadcast television networks' nightly news programming as well as some alternative, but no less important, sources of political knowledge.

This dissertation is a search for bias via the study of broadcast news story frames, as well as alternative sources of political knowledge, and the associated texts broadcast or available to the electorate during the 2008 presidential campaign season. Specifically, it examines, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the nightly newscasts stories focusing on the presidential candidates in the time leading up to the Democratic primary in 2008. In addition to news stories, it examines qualitatively alternate sources of political knowledge, such as user-generated ads, newspaper stories, advertising, or any other source that was framing a political candidate in the race. This mixed method study attempts to describe the information that is available to the electorate, as a passive audience, and determines whether or not the categorical needs that are required for a reasonable level of political knowledge were met by main-stream media sources.

The 2008 presidential election cycle had two Democratic candidates, a woman and an African American, who were clearly early front-runners. This was not the first time for a serious run by an African American or a woman as Shirley

Chisholm was the first in both of these categories for Democrats in 1968. There have also been other African American and female candidates since. The primary difference in news coverage of these earlier candidates and the coverage of the 2008 candidates can be attributed to the likelihood of these later candidates actually being elected (or at least nominated).

Chisholm ran for the office in a time of social unrest, with civil rights being debated and women working for a greater share of the American dream. The candidates in 2008 certainly had a societal and cultural advantage. In the 2008 campaign for president, women and minority candidates were electable based on their position in polls and fundraising prowess. But even with this current cultural advantage, there is still the possibility, or even probability, that well-established biases and stereotypes were being included in the coverage of these candidates.

The 2008 campaign season, as well as the changing presentation of news media, gave rise to a new method of covering campaigns and candidates. It follows then, that these changes in coverage could have a substantive effect on the political knowledge as well as the attitudes, beliefs, and voting behaviors of the electorate. This is important because the American news sources dubbed Hillary Clinton as the Democratic Party front-runner in the 2016 election cycle. The examination of the 2008 election coverage of Hillary Clinton may be predictive of the future coverage as well as predictive of other races which involve female candidates.

In 2014, there were only five females sitting as elected governors. Twenty women serve in the United States Senate (20%) and 79 serve in the House of

Representatives (18%). Certainly, there has never been a woman elected president or vice-president. Unfortunately, this trend extends beyond elected office in the United States. As of the data available for this writing only 14.6% of Fortune 500 executive officers are women (Catalyst, 2014). These numbers clearly represent some type of barrier(s) that women face in the workplace as well as American executive politics. Among these barriers are the portrayals of women in the media.

The electorate rarely, if ever, has the opportunity to interact with a candidate directly. Instead, voters are at the mercy of mass media when forming views and opinions of political candidates. This media-mediated exposure takes many forms and all of these can affect political knowledge. The Internet has become a major source of political knowledge about candidates, as well as cable television entertainment programming such as *The Daily Show, with Jon Stewart*, on Comedy Central network and *Saturday Night Live*, an NBC program that has used politics as a comedy topic since its inception in the 1970s. Brewer and Cao (2006) have demonstrated a positive association between viewing of political comedy shows and political knowledge. Furthermore, according to a 2008 Pew report, Jon Stewart ranked fourth on a list of most admired journalists. Further compounding the perceived legitimacy of this source is the occurrence of mentions, quotes, or even clips from the shows being used as subject matter as popular culture references are used for traditional broadcast news stories (Rosenstiel & Mitchell, 2008).

Most research of political knowledge sources has been centered on political advertising and television news coverage. Since this exposure to television news programming constitutes the primary method of developing political knowledge, the flavor of that coverage, the frames the stories contain, (Entman, 1993) and the potential for alternate interpretations becomes important for the electorate as well as the candidate.

These opportunities for differences in interpretations or perceived meanings by the electorate, when they indeed are found to exist, could be a major hurdle in the quest for a female or minority candidate's election to the White House.

Framing in a news story can occur through the identifiable reference to the candidate in a news story. According to Entman (1993) frames can be considered thought processes or mental images that "define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies" (p. 49). Furthermore, these frames can exist in any of four parts of the communication process: the sender, the text of the message, the receiver or audience, and the environment in which the communication occurs—the culture (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Research is plentiful on communication frames and textual frame analysis (De Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006; Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2005; Entman & Rojecki, 2001) but the opportunity to study race and gender bias frames in a presidential campaign has not truly existed until 2008.

Mass media in general and television in particular has been credited with perpetuating gender stereotypes in countless research articles. Yet, according to

Carroll and Schreiber (1997), the overt use of gender stereotypes are rarely used when news sources cover female leaders. This study posits that any stereotyping, or race and gender bias, is not contained in the broadcast news script directly, but instead in the framing of the candidate in the story. These frames, in themselves, could be interpreted as an opportunity for bias in coverage.

Opportunities for bias exist by using a particular setting for a news story or, more commonly, by using quoted candidate description provided by a political opponent.

Stuart Hall tells us that there are many possible meanings to any statement. Furthermore, some of these possible meanings can be the result of non-negotiable ideologies that determine the meaning for the individual (Hall, 1993). Therefore, where some viewers may see a negative bias, others may see a glaring truth.

In television news coverage, issues and positions on public policy may most assuredly be pushed aside as coverage of personal attributes gets pushed to the forefront. Moreover, the public perception of a candidate may be diminished if any expression of his/her issue positions are constantly suppressed, thus giving the public—the electorate—a sense that the candidate has no legitimacy.

This perception of credibility and electability is the result of the viewer's interpretation of the frames used or implied from the presentations of the candidate stories in the newscast. Some of this framing, and the consequences

from the bias frames, are completely unintentional and perhaps even used solely for the purpose of increasing ratings (Salzman, 2004).

Also, since determination of electability of a candidate by the voters is made, in large part, by the coverage of that candidate in the media, a prior determination of the candidate's status by the media source constitutes a frame in itself—electable versus unelectable, covered or not covered. And since these frames are generated through campaign coverage, it stands to reason that an analysis of media framing of political candidates is in order.

As an example, if television news sources use a candidate's race frame in news stories, then it could become a detriment in the success of a candidate's campaign. Williams conducted a national survey and established that white candidates were associated with more of the positive attributes of a qualified candidate than were black candidates (Williams, 1990). Terkildsen (1993) found that skin tone was also a determining factor in assessment, in that African American candidates judged "more white" were evaluated less harshly than darker skinned candidates. The attributes in question included such conditions as 'hard-working,' 'intelligent,' and 'trustworthy.' This was found to mirror the stereotypes played out in many other media forms—entertainment television programming (Terkildsen, 1993; Terkildsen & Damore, 1999).

Furthermore, the public, as opposed to the academics, have noticed the variation in coverage of male versus female candidates (Aday & Devitt, 2001). Sixty-six percent of Americans claim a belief that the media would be tougher on

a female candidate than an equally qualified male. Only 5% believe that the coverage would be tougher on a male, according to these scholars.

While research on the subject has provided varying results, a few patterns have been exposed in the analysis of news coverage as it pertains to comparisons of male versus female candidates. Kahn has reported specific differences in the coverage (Kahn, 1994). As an example, there were distinct variations in the amount of reporting on attire, personality, appearance, and marital and family status (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). By contrast, men were mostly described by their accomplishments, occupation and experiences. In fact, these references to occupation and experience were apparently purposely omitted from stories about female candidates (Piper-Aiken, 1999). Moreover, Carrol and Schreiber demonstrated that when the media did report on female politician accomplishments it was in the form of the collective contributions of female legislators (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997). These studies also indicate a difference in the amount of coverage of positions on policy issues between male and female candidates (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997).

The idea of a rational decision-making process hinges upon the accumulation of enough political knowledge to make that decision. But if the electorate is being intentionally or unintentionally steered in a particular direction by the use of frames, it makes that process all but impossible. The aforementioned research demonstrates that passive sources, such as television, are typically used to acquire political knowledge. This knowledge therefore might be limited by the actions, inactions, or inclusion/exclusion of content or frames in

news stories. The findings could reduce the legitimacy of television news coverage as a primary source of political knowledge.

This dissertation begins with an examination of the coverage and the media frames used by the major television networks during their prime time news coverage of Democratic presidential candidates. The questions directing this examination involve the potential for differences in the way candidates are covered in news stories based on the candidate's gender or race. I have examined frames contained in television news stories in terms of gender and race references and demonstrate quantitatively how pervasive and common these frames are and how they are represented in newscasts. Following the quantitative analysis, I qualitatively discuss how deeply bias exists in newscasts and alternative political knowledge sources and how candidates may even use these sources for benefit. Additionally, I believe a discussion about how the electorate could interpret the content in ways other than the "preferred meaning" (Hall, 1980) is in order. The interpretation of these story frames is directly related to the development of political knowledge as well as the level of perceived electability of a given candidate.

Media analysts have already studied how frames have been used to emphasize aspects of the candidate being covered (Entman, 1993). These previous studies have now been applied to the 2008 Democratic candidates. These frames can include 'business owner,' 'military leader,' 'long term legislator,' and, of course, 'woman' and the plethora of frames that entails. But research has demonstrated that gender stereotyping has decreased in political

campaign coverage (Carroll & Schreiber, 1997). It is assumed that this is due to the use of style manuals in news rooms designed to eliminate such stereotyping (Jamieson, 1995). We may assume that the same is true of racial stereotypes. Campbell (1995) points to the dichotomy exhibited between the fictional portrayals of African Americans (*Cosby Show*) and the poverty-stricken, drug using and/or criminal portrayals used elsewhere in mass media (Campbell, 1995). And while style manuals may attempt to constrain gender and racial bias, it does still occur, as this study demonstrates.

In this dissertation, the frames of interest are not those associated with the issues or positions, other than for the purpose of establishing a ratio, but on any possible gender or race bias contained in the story of the candidate. This is important because of the possibility that news coverage of political candidates, and the use of gender or racial frames therein, may have consequences in terms of both political knowledge as well as perception of electability. This has implications for how the electorate should interpret news coverage of candidates during campaigns. Furthermore, the study lays groundwork for further research. While this study adds to the current literature that exists on political news coverage and frame theory, it also adds to the body of knowledge by discovering significantly biased content in news coverage while determining whether or not the reach and frequency of any biased content may be adequate for an effect on political learning.

Secondly, this study contributes to the body of knowledge associated with media framing by looking at a relatively extended time-frame during a campaign

and analyzing the content for bias both quantitatively as well as qualitatively. As mentioned, there has been little opportunity to study race and gender bias in news scripts until the 2008 campaign season.

The results provide significant considerations and implications for campaign staff as well. The results of this study can be used to determine a course of action for campaign messaging that can be controlled, unlike that of the news media. Furthermore, this type of analysis could be used to determine which topics to address in political advertising and which topics to use strategically that might be used as subject matter in political news stories.

This research may be of a significant benefit to journalists as well. Even if biased statements are not intentional, the results demonstrate that they do exist, as well as point to the frequency that they appear in broadcast news stories. Journalists and broadcast news media professionals can then take special care to eliminate most possibilities of bias appearing in news stories. In summary, this study has the potential of being relevant to media scholars as well as media professionals. It is a jumping off point for more research that is sure to come following the 2016 election cycle. In terms of tying the studied presidential race to future races, broadcast media will always be constrained by style guides. But as Internet sources become more prevalent, including social media and user-generated content, bias will grow with the extremism that is in those sources.

The following chapter examines the issue of political knowledge: its meaning, how it is developed, and the primary sources providing meaning and knowledge to the electorate. I explain how Framing Theory and Stuart Hall's

notion of “representation” can be applied, among other scholarly foundations. Following is a discussion of media bias—race and gender—often found in television programming, including network newscasts. I then explain my research questions and hypothesis that were developed leading to this dissertation. I finish the section with an explanation of the methods used in the analysis, first quantitatively and then qualitatively. Following chapters contain the quantitative results, the qualitative results, and, finally, a discussion of the findings in general, their implications, and ideas for further research.

CHAPTER II  
LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES  
AND METHODOLOGY

Political knowledge has been defined as the individual's ability to recall candidate names, personal characteristics and qualifications. Furthermore, it is the ability to identify election issues, current campaign developments, and recognize connections between candidates and issue positions (Atkin & Heald, 1976). The knowledge gained is presumed to be the building blocks of the rational decision-making process that leads to a vote for a particular candidate.

In the history of American politics, candidates have used various means of communication as strategies and tactics for the winning of votes. Historically, these have included whistle-stop tours, political rallies, public speeches, and political advertising. Most exposure of politics and political candidates today is via mass media.

The notion is that political knowledge is the result of exposure of the individual voter to many influential sources. These sources can include mass media to be sure, but also sources of knowledge such as family members, social groups and the workplace (Patterson & McClure, 1976). These secondary sources of knowledge and understanding do have merit from a cultural studies perspective and they will be addressed in a later chapter. But this dissertation is initially concerned with the traditional reporting during television broadcasts of campaign news, as well as the rebroadcasts of advertisements and new media sources by traditional network evening news programs as subjects of stories and

the possible effects on political knowledge. The new media sources include web pages, YouTube messages, and other types of message delivery vehicles that are now being used consistently by political candidates.

Obviously, the sources of political knowledge are numerous. Based on the review of literature, it appears that covering Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton presented new challenges for the mass media by nature of his bi-racial or African American status and Clinton's gender. But in either case, it is helpful to look at previous studies that have looked at the framing of political candidates as well as race and gender in the news. It is also important to examine the impact of news coverage on the public and how they perceive the candidates and compare various sources of political learning. The inclusion of secondary sources—advertising—is necessary, since ads are often the topic of broadcast news stories.

Potentially, from a pure research perspective, the most interesting aspect of political knowledge gained by social media, Web pages/blogs, and advertising is the effect of these messages after they become part of the content of news stories.

### Sources of Political Knowledge

#### *Broadcast News*

It can be assumed that broadcast journalists are conscientious reporters who attempt to gather information and inform the electorate (Halberstam, 2000). But as Hall (1980) said, "the media are where struggles over meaning and the power to represent it are waged." Media frames are powerful and have the power

to trump any image that Obama, Clinton, and their campaign staffs attempt to structure. Campaigns, as a result of the news value of a conflict story, do get considerable coverage from broadcast news sources. The idea that no political knowledge will be produced from this coverage would therefore render this enterprise pointless and is in fact simply false. Political campaigns use advertising to promote issue frames due to the fact that it is a controlled message.

What stirs some debate, then, is the attention versus repetition issue: does the increased attention paid to newscasts (and higher level of credibility) outweigh the repetitive nature (frequency of exposure) of television advertisement (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; McLeod & McDonald, 1985)? Controversy also remains in the comparison of political knowledge gained from reading a newspaper as opposed to watching the news. A number of studies have been able to demonstrate an increase in knowledge by reading newspapers and no significant change in political knowledge, or at least a relatively low correlation by watching television news (Robinson & Davis, 1990; Robinson et al., 1986; Weaver & Drew, 1993). Conversely, other studies negate the belief that reading a newspaper increases any level of political knowledge. In reference to research design, Price and Zaller (1993) found little or no effect on knowledge from newspapers *or* television news, once statistical controls for previous knowledge and motivation were added.

The controversy is pervasive in this area. Davis (1996) unequivocally states that “television news viewing has little effect on issue learning” (Davis,

1996; Mondak, 1995; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Robinson et al., 1986). They point to the lack of salient information contained in television news as the reason that increases in television consumption have no effect on increased political knowledge.

But other research suggests television news provides some political information, but perhaps not at the level newspapers do. There is a notion that “newspaper reading has a stronger effect on knowledge . . . but despite weaker effects, television news and debates are sources of issue information” (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004).

Lab-type experimental studies have shown that newspaper reading does not lead to significantly higher levels of political knowledge than watching television news (Neuman, 1992). Likewise, Mondak (1995) compared voters lacking access to newspapers, due to a labor strike, with voters from another city that retained newspaper access. He found that the access had no effect on political knowledge. This supports the notion that study design needs to control for voter motivation and the willingness to seek out political information.

Some researchers have even commented on the lack of consistency in the findings in this area. Mondak (1995, pp. 10, 76) says that “although evidence abounds on both sides, it is clear that doubt remains regarding the relative capacity of newspapers to facilitate information acquisition . . . no consensus has emerged from those studies.” Moy, McClusky, McCoy, and Spratt (2004, p. 535) agree and went on to say that “research on the differential effects

of newspapers and television on political knowledge has yielded contradictory results” (Moy et al., 2004).

The same conclusions can be seen in radio. As a medium, radio produces a different message than newspapers or even television. The Kennedy-Nixon debate is considered a pivotal moment in television campaign coverage. A calm, collected, well powdered Kennedy established himself as a confident leader while a disheveled Nixon had a poor appearance on camera, and thus was publicly considered the debate loser, even though many believed his responses to questions were superior. Lenz and Lawson (2011) have demonstrated that “better looking” candidates have a distinct advantage in the election process.

The importance of differences in information-disseminating channels was recognized as early as 1994 when Marshall McLuhan (1994, p. 7) released the concept of “the media is the message.” In other words, the media that a voter is exposed to has the ability to create meaning, and thus knowledge, in a voter’s mind. This message meaning is variable and dependent on source media. The debate mentioned above demonstrates this concept perfectly as television audiences declared Kennedy the winner while radio audiences gave Nixon the nod (Katz & Feldman, 1962).

One can suggest that the technological determinism of the 1960’s broadcast technology gave rise to the age of television campaigning. Similarly, social media, blogs, and parody sites such as Jib-Jab have become so popular in the new millennium, and in recent presidential campaigns, that the Internet is now seen as a growing source of political learning and knowledge (Rainie,

Cornfield, & Horrigan, 2006). Still, most research points to television political news coverage as well as political advertising as the primary sources of political knowledge (Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009). Thus, the frames used for candidate descriptions in news broadcasts certainly have influence on the voter's decision-making processes.

But broadcast news has evolved into a less controlled form of information dissemination. Rather than delivering content in a purely communicative way, as with a public service story frame, news sources are more apt to use social acceptability slants in the coverage of stories in an attempt, perhaps, to combat the increased pressure on audience numbers by cable news sources (Morris, 2005). Additionally, the regression and near elimination of in-depth investigation and the rise in superficial content demonstrates a decrease in the perceived 'watchdog' function of the media, making issue and legislative (political) knowledge more difficult to access (Cottle & Matthews, 2013). In the 2008 presidential election cycle, with television news moving closer in style to the yellow journalism era of the past, and combined with the unique race and gender attributes of the candidates, one might venture to guess that media coverage would be laden with myth and stereotype, or at least something lacking in solid facts.

Since television news continues to be the preferred medium for political knowledge, even in comparison to newspapers (Paletz, 2002), the choices made for story subject matter and the way it is presented, become increasingly important (Graber, 2004). Graber suggests that the viewing of television news

provides a drama that newspapers cannot match. In terms of elaboration likelihood, television news provides the opportunity for an emotional response to a story (Graber, 2001; Graber, 2006). It is these emotions (sympathy, fear, distrust, envy, disgust) that allow for elaboration and thus, long term learning (Graber, Navratil, & Holyk, 2006; Graber, 1996).

Tony Schwartz (1984) said that in the past “political parties were the means of communication from the candidate to the public; the political parties today are ABC, NBC, and CBS” (p. 82). While it has been established that much political knowledge stems from advertisements, obviously other studies consistently show that television news is a primary source of this knowledge.

According to the Chaffee and Frank’s (1996) analysis of the research published by the Roper organization, two-thirds of political knowledge is garnered through broadcast news. Still, television news has been criticized for its coverage of campaigns (Chaffee & Frank, 1996). But many critics—Brady and Johnston (1987), Arterton (1984) and Patterson (1993)—have voiced negative opinions of reporters’ focus on the game of politics at the expense of policy coverage (Arterton, 1984; Brady & Johnston, 1987; Patterson & Field, 2000) .

Others point to the lack of in-depth reporting in broadcast news. Research has found that television news is less comprehensive, less substantive, and often less neutral than newspaper news (Graber & Dunaway, 2014) when reporting political issues. Moreover, television news has been criticized as suppressing candidate voices, having edited an entire segment into a nine-second sound bite

(Just, Crigler, & Buhr, 1999). So the concern should be about what is being learned from these newscasts and those consequences.

Negative news coverage about politics and politicians is suspected to be a cause of increasing public distrust and decreasing political participation (Bennett, 1992). Reporters have a tendency to dissect a candidate's strategy and focus on politics, as opposed to focusing on policy proposals.

Still, despite the criticism, television news has been shown as a primary source of political knowledge (Morris & Forgette, 2007). People inevitably must learn most of what they know about current events and political figures from the news media, since few have any direct way to obtain this information. Not surprisingly, according to a Pew report (2007), people who say they regularly watch, read, or listen to the news know more than those who don't. And people who use more news sources know more than those who use fewer sources. The differences are dramatic. Nearly three quarters (73%) of those who say they don't get news regularly from any news source fell into the low knowledge group (Kohut, Morin, & Keeter, 2007).

Political scientists consider television news to be a detriment to political critical thought because of the lack of policy issue coverage and thus, the inability to hold government accountable to the citizens (Blumler, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1995; Gurevitch et al., 2009). These scholars, and others, have become disenchanted with the way television news sources have a tendency to focus on conflict and events as news values at the expense of information that would add to levels of political knowledge (Curran, Iyengar, Lund, & Salovaara-Moring,

2009; Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982). Others have suggested that the trend toward media consolidation has had a negative effect on coverage and journalism in general (Alger, 1998; Bagdikian & Bagdikian, 1983; Champlin & Knoedler, 2002; McChesney, 1999).

As controversial as television news is, in reference to political learning, a similar level of controversy exists with television political advertising. This is an area of even greater interest to scholars of political learning now because of the Citizens United Supreme Court ruling that will allow practically unlimited spending on television political advertising by private individuals as well as corporations. The effect of advertising has been studied as much, if not more than news coverage. But like news coverage, advertising, and the study of it, is having to evolve with the new sources of information, new media, new methods of using media, and new levels of spending on political advertising.

As the need for media buying increases, so does the need for political funding. Unexpressed limitations were in place through much of modern history through legislation such as the Taft-Hartley Act (1947) which prohibited labor unions and corporations from contributing to campaigns or attempting to influence campaigns. Earlier, the Tillman Act had expressed the same concerns when singling out corporations and disallowing them to contribute to campaigns. Certainly, these types of organizations are adaptable and, as a result, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) formed the first PAC by creating a separate political fund within the organization and naming it the Political Action Committee. Since, PACs have proliferated, generally funded by businesses

(Ford Motor Company Civic Action Fund, Coca-Cola PAC) or industries (National Association of Realtors PAC or RPAC), or ideologies (NRA), or single issue citizen's groups (National Conservative Political Action Committee). These groups have limited influence over the electorate (if not the elected) in that they are limited to contributing a maximum of \$10 thousand per candidate (in federal elections) and these funds must be raised voluntarily and not be organizational funds.

But now, with the Citizens United ruling, political campaign advertising will have an even greater frequency and reach. In contrast to traditional PACs, the new super PACs, or independent-expenditure-only-committees (IEOCs) will operate under relatively few limitations. While limits to direct campaign contributions are overt, overall spending and fundraising is essentially unlimited. During the congressional races of 2010, fewer than eighty super PACs spent a combined total of \$75 million dollars. By the 2012 presidential campaign season, the number of super PACs had doubled, and so had the spending. The legislation as well as the ads themselves have been the subject of news stories, primarily due to the unexpected consequences of the Supreme Court ruling. Citizens United opened the door to huge spending on attack ads; not attack ads directed at another party, but intra-party attacks. These ads tend to be more extreme and, as such, potentially more polarizing. According to Patterson and Field (2013, p. 270), in the 2012 Presidential Primaries, pro Mitt Romney super PACs spent \$20 million supporting the candidate, while \$40 million was spent on attacking other candidates from his same party (Patterson & Field, 2013).

Furthermore, since immediate, or rather, *timely*, disclosure of donor funds is not required by a super PAC, untrue and sometimes outrageous claims can be made in ads with little evidence of accountability.

As private contributions and spending increase, as evidenced by the 2012 election cycle, these super PACs will become a greater source of political knowledge, accurate or inaccurate.

### *Advertising as a Source of Political Knowledge*

Advertising legend David Ogilvy (2013) has quoted scholars in his book, referring to political advertising as “the most deceptive, misleading, unfair and untruthful of all advertising” (Spero, 1980).

But politicians have discovered that it is most advantageous to use advertising to persuade voters. Advertising can reach more people than speeches or rallies, is not dependent on attendance, is quicker, more efficient and cost effective than travel, and audiences do not have the opportunity to “heckle” an advertisement. One study by Chang, Park, and Shim (1998) shows that spending on advertising has increased dramatically since the 1950s from \$140 million in 1952 to \$2 billion in 1988 . About 20% of the dollars went to the purchase of airtime, but once the costs of media consultants, production expenses, and salaries are included, the total spending on mass media reached 40% of the total campaign budget.

Furthermore, according to these afore mentioned scholars, the 1996 presidential campaign began showing sharp increases in political advertising on television. This trend was evidenced early in the 2008 election cycle by the level

of spending during and before the New Hampshire primary. *Advertising Age* quotes research from a Borrell Associates study showing a 30.6% increase in television ad spending from 2008 to 2012 alone (Delo, 2012).

Still, some studies have concluded that political advertisements have little effect in swaying a voting decision (Freedman, Franz, & Goldstein, 2004). In fact, the advertisements have been shown, by these scholars, to only reinforce pre-conceived decisions for those supporting the content of the advertisement and a general disregard for the content by those opposed to the content of the advertisement. No empirical evidence has been found, but this seems to support television viewing habits and selection of a particular news source by voters.

But other studies demonstrate that television advertising spots *are* capable of changing attitudes and influencing voter choice. Yet, this may better be addressed as a question of behavioral change (Gerber, Karlan, & Bergan, 2006). News sources can be a means of developing a certain level of political knowledge, but advertising could lead to action by the electorate. Studies have found that exposure to campaign advertising creates interest in elections, develops knowledge of the candidates, and generates a greater likelihood of voting. Independent and undecided voters seem to be most susceptible to this and, as such, are targeted by advertising (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). This is important, because the percentage of voters who identify themselves with the Republican and Democratic parties has been decreasing over time. According to a Pew report, this trend has continued through the Obama presidency (Kohut, Doherty, Dimock, & Keeter, 2012).

Additionally, there has been considerable concern regarding the effects of negative advertising on the electorate. For example, some question whether negative political advertisements mobilize or rather, demobilize citizens.

Research in this area is largely due to, and built on, the work of Paul Lasersfeld in the 1940s. His work failed to find substantial direct effects of mass media on public opinion. This is in direct agreement with some advertising study findings (Merritt, 1984). Yet its theoretical breakdown, in part, was the failure to account for framing and it is in this area that substantive research gains can be achieved and where this dissertation adds to the collection of research on the subject.

Voter surveys have sometimes found little correlation between knowledge and political commercials (Drew & Weaver, 1991) while others demonstrate clear learning effects from television news (Bartels, 1993). This may be the result of voter perception of the source. The blending of sources seems to confuse this issue.

#### *Ad-Watch: Advertising as News*

There are instances when a campaign will lose control of an advertisement message. Loss of control in this situation implies that the advertisement is no longer a stand-alone entity in mass media and the message can be reconstructed. This happens when an advertisement becomes the topic or focus of a news story or a political commentary. This is an area of study called AdWatch and it blurs the credibility issue when considering sources of political knowledge.

Political campaign advertising has increasingly become a source for television news stories (Kaid, Gobetz, Garner, Leland, & Scott, 1993). This has an intertwining effect between campaign advertisements and the news (Kaid et al., 1993). Networks first acknowledged the importance of television campaign spot advertisements in 1984. The news stories were, in fact, an analysis of local television spot ads (Reinsch, 1988).

Later, criticisms of this practice were voiced including William Boot's (1989) remark that "confusion (about the campaign) was compounded in 1988 by a proliferation of television news reports about commercials, of commercials inspired by news reports, and of commercials about commercials" (p. 29).

Yet, ad-watch has still become an ever-increasing practice for television news. There are many explanations suggested to explain this new phenomenon. Some of these explanations stem directly from the financial fat-trimming performed at the networks in recent years. Television news has a need for a visually compelling story because of the nature of the medium. But quality video is not inexpensive to produce, so less expensive routes to content are sought (Kaid, 1976). In addition to talent, a production crew also includes a producer, camera and sound operators, and in some cases, lighting technicians and other skilled crew members. Rather than embarking on this expensive proposition, a news agency may instead opt for pre-made video (Kaid, 1976).

News coverage of political spot advertisements has increased in the latest elections as well. Some argue that television spot ads have become an accepted form of political debate (Baukus, Payne, & Reisler, 1985) and that

television's predisposition for the visual, controversial and dramatic is well fed by content generated from campaign ads (Kaid et al., 1993). Subsequently, many U.S. news agencies were found to be dependent on campaigns for news content (Kaid, 1976).

A political advertisement is ready-made for broadcast. It is generally a highly produced piece of video and can easily serve as visual content for a story line. Furthermore, political advertising provides welcomed programming due to its conflict, drama, and adversarial nature (Kaid et al., 1993).

There is suggestion that as partisan identification has declined, individuals have become more reliant on media coverage in political races as sources of political knowledge. It is this exposure to the media, and the frames presented in the story, that provide individual voting cues. Yet research has shown that attention—watching news stories or interesting advertisements—is a better predictor of knowledge than just exposure alone (Zhao & Bleske, 1995; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995). In one study, ads were found to be considerably more upbeat and positive about politics than news stories aired in the same time period (Just et al., 1999) which may lead to increased attention.

This increased media attention and subsequent dissection of ads can also establish stereotypes associated with a candidate or assumed personality traits. But advertising tends to focus on issues while news stories tend to center on candidate traits (Spiliotes & Vavreck, 2002).

Generally, an increase in media attention, and not necessarily advertising, translates into greater support from the electorate, particularly among

independent and weak partisans. This leads to more media attention, which can give rise to a “band-wagon” effect resulting in non-competitive, open-seat elections (Goidel & Shields, 1994). The same could hold true for coverage or use of advertisements as part of television news stories. This is particularly important when considering the importance of the source in political communications (Cho, 2005). Advertisements have been shown to be more informative than news in some circumstances, but can vary in effectiveness—political learning—depending on the ad content, source credibility, and the quality of the message (Zhao & Chaffee, 1995) and both are inundated now with references to popular culture. Unfortunately, research examining the indirect effect of political ads, that is ads covered in news stories, is relatively scarce. West (1994) surmised that “Because news stories place the ad in a larger political context and the reference can be either favorable or unfavorable to the candidate, this style of coverage is an important new development in the media environment. It therefore is important to see how the interpenetration of ads and news influences citizens’ impressions of the candidates” (p. 1056).

Equally interesting are Internet messages created by candidates or even independent individuals (see “Obama” 1984 ad in the qualitative section) that receive attention on television newscasts. This is beginning to occur in U.S. elections fairly commonly. In the 2008 election cycle, news agencies aired the “Obama Girls” video produced for YouTube quite frequently.

The Internet and cable television programming, such as *The Daily Show* and old standards like *Saturday Night Live*, have brought popular culture-

embedded politics directly into living rooms. Television news has recognized this and has even mentioned these programs and used the term “pop culture” in news stories.

### *The Internet and Political Knowledge*

According to Rainie, Cornfield, and Horrigan (2007), 52% of Internet users, or roughly 63 million users, went online to retrieve news or other information about candidates in the 2004 election. Furthermore, as many as 11% of those users contributed money to a campaign through the website (Rainie et al., 2006, Horrigan, 2006).

The Internet, a pop culture phenomenon in its own right, has become an integral part of election campaigns. The number of voters using the Internet as a primary source of information has grown from 11% in 2000 to 24% in 2004, and continued to grow into the 2008 election cycle beyond 37% (Rainie et al., 2006). This number resulted in the authors referring to the Internet as a mainstream source of political information. This advance, in itself, is an indication of the postmodern analysis of American politics considering the origins of the internet through the DOD. While postmodernism remains difficult to define, there have been attempts that demonstrate the nature of postmodernism in media and thus, political advertising. Harms and Dickens (1996) point to communication itself as the point at which postmodernism begins to exist through the nature of language and signification, and that at the center of the current postmodern condition is communication technologies “where information and knowledge are the new organizing principles of society” (p. 211). Jim Collins (1992) said, “one of the

preconditions of the postmodern condition is the proliferation of signs and their endless circulation” (p. 331). These signs are multiplied by technology (VCRs, computers, cable television, etc.) and are constantly being interpreted and reinterpreted (Collins, 1992). These interpretations are based entirely on significantly different ideological agendas and if enough *real* interpretations appear, then all reality begins to simply disappear. Scholars have ascribed the postmodern life as one released from institutional roles and unencumbered by time. There could be involvement in one institution or another, and, as such, one has the ability to create meaning rather than simply to interpret it (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Twitter, Facebook, and other social media sites have begun to be a conduit for political information in a number of styles. Campaigns are using these sites as well as interest groups. But user generated content seems to be the most prolific as well as the most polarized, to the point of extremism. This area begs for further research. Social media use has been shown to have some effect on voter attitude, particularly for young adults (Kohut et al., 2007). In fact, 27% of voters younger than 30 years of age used the Internet/social media for campaign information in previous cycles (Kohut et al., 2007). It only stands to reason that this evolution in mass communication be embraced by political candidates because it certainly cannot be shunned or defeated. As such, we have the postmodern politic.

#### Framing, Race and Gender

This study examines the 2008 Presidential primary race and is focused on television campaign news stories featuring Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

The unusual nature of this election cycle did present a challenge in finding applicable literature, though plenty of applicable studies were found. Studies do exist in multitudes that are concerned with the analysis of a bi-racial election or a male versus female election cycle. But a party convention making a choice between a white woman and an African American man has never had the opportunity to be examined.

As with earlier research, this study is concerned with how the press covers female and African American candidates. However, in order to develop a fuller understanding of how these candidates are portrayed, we need to consider not only how they are described and framed in the broadcast media, but whether male/female/black/white candidates receive different types of coverage. In addition, this analysis explores other factors such as the gender of the reporter, if possible, and the length of stories relative to candidate. These topics reported on within a story are the foundations of political knowledge and represent the 'media frames' associated with the story. As previous research suggests, framing analysis can reveal how opposing political candidates are covered in the media (Aday & Devitt, 2001).

#### *Framing/ Media Frames*

News frames have been described as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). Tankard (2001, p. 96) continued by stating that the "power of framing comes from its ability to define the terms of a debate without the audience realizing it is taking place." If journalism practices

hold true on television broadcast news, then stories will be produced that have strategies, issues themes and personalities at their center. Iyengar et al. (1992) posits that when creating these stories journalists inadvertently create frames.

Popkin (1994) said, "the change of frame from thinking about a candidate to thinking about a future president is so big, and . . . , voters care about some of the policies of their party and their country" (p. 148). Primaries have a tendency to draw media attention due to the constant changes in headlines and the resulting conflict. Some scholars believe that the current process of nominating a candidate focuses more on media attention than on issues. It has resulted in the ultimate media horse race of attention with disregard for ideas, character of the candidates or programs that may be proposed (Cronin & Loevy, 1994). In comparison to general elections, primaries depend more on media coverage due to the lack of partisanship. In fact, in the partisan structure of general elections, media is in large part marginalized (Polsby & Wildavsky, 1988). Some research suggests that shortcomings in media coverage are magnified through the primary season. One scholar stated that "it is the mass media that interpret the results, handicap the races, determine the visibility of candidates, and ultimately pronounce victory and defeat" (Asher, 1987, pp. 223-224). Graber lists four types of media coverage for presidential elections: 1) campaign information, or more appropriately referred to as horse race coverage; 2) issue information; 3) candidate information; and 4) trivia, when the candidate's dog is mentioned or there is a report on his/her golf score (Rose, 1994). Often, the third and fourth seem to blend together.

Often, studies show the criticism concerning lack of in-depth coverage is substantiated. A content analysis study focusing on the 1988 presidential race found that more than half (60%) of newspaper articles were about trivia and horse race information, but issue and policy information was slight (Buchanan, 1991). Candidates themselves have an indignant, codependent relationship with the media. The tendency is to complain while simultaneously being dependent on favorable coverage by the media. The lack of reporting (in favor of horse race coverage) makes it difficult to get issue information to the voters, according to candidates. As a result, political candidates employ teams of public relations professionals to control media coverage and disseminate issue stances, creating opportunities for interviews, press conferences and other tasks. All of this expense and effort is designed to control how the candidate is reflected, or framed, in the media stories. This is referred to as information subsidies (VanSlyke Turk, 1986). This study examines broadcast news stories looking for the frequency of specific frames.

Described another way, frames select and then elevate the importance of certain aspects of a story. Some framing occurs when journalists "select some aspect of a perceived reality and make [it] more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993). Entman describes framing as the inclusion as well as the exclusion of particular information. Examination of frames can suggest the extent of media power in setting the public agenda by the manner in which it

covers issues, including the exclusion. This idea of the story frame is the result of work by Tuchman on the social construction of meaning and reality accomplished in media stories (Tuchman, 1978).

If the broadcast news media focuses on the horse race and campaign trivia distorts the issue positions of the candidates, it becomes difficult for the electorate to develop a level of political knowledge satisfactory for rational decision making. Ironically, as mentioned, it has been argued that journalists also create frames by suppression of those attempting to generate news coverage of a candidate, issue or policy (Tankard, 2001).

While the counting process of quantitative analysis launches this project, the further in-depth examination of media frames will come from the qualitative approach. This is due to the realization of the possibility that several frames, including conflicting frames, are included in the same news story. The individual frames may even be in conflict because the story was not intentionally written into a frame; rather, frames were introduced as facts into the individual elements of the story. These facts subsequently carry no meaning until they are “being embedded in a frame or storyline that organizes them and gives them coherence, selecting certain ones to emphasize while ignoring others” (Gamson, 1989, p. 157; Hall, 1982, p. 59). A purposive sample supplied full stories and advertisements to examine this in greater depth.

Considering the effects that network news programming has on political knowledge, this study becomes important in understanding how television news covered these unusual presidential candidates, and perhaps more importantly,

how this type of coverage may forecast or even predict news coverage in multi-race/multi-gender races in the future. It will also provide a non-statistical glimpse at the potential effect on political knowledge of the electorate as well.

*Bias: Race, Gender, and Media Stereotypes*

Entman (2007) addresses the term bias and suggests that it has yet to be clearly defined in communications literature. He proposes that the term has three major meanings: "Sometimes it is applied to news that purportedly distorts or falsifies reality...sometimes to news that favors one side rather than providing equivalent treatment to both sides as in political conflict...and sometimes to the motivations and mindsets of journalists who allegedly produce the biased content" (p. 163). The first and the latter definitions of bias are of concern in this study.

African Americans have been found to receive more negative attention than whites (Entman, 1992, 1994; Zilber & Niven, 2000). Research has shown that African American leaders are often portrayed as corrupt and/or completely unqualified to perform the duties of their elected office (Entman, 1994). African American leaders are also covered in news stories on a limited number of issues as opposed to white leaders (Entman, 1994; Zilber & Niven, 2000).

Similarly, the portrayals of women in office often slant toward incompetence, and thus are relevant only on issues that are of importance to female voters, families and children (Braden, 1996; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). There is suspicion that the origin of any bias is in the newsroom itself. One study reveals that half of all news rooms have no African American journalists on staff

(Campbell, 1995). African American journalists are outnumbered by an 8 to 1 ratio (Campbell, 1995) and editors are outnumbered by 16 to 1 (Gibbons, 1993). Women fare a bit better in the news room, but not much (Mills, 1997).

In addition to harsh negative assessment based on race and gender, minority and female candidates also must overcome another obstacle: the stereotype of what a political candidate is 'supposed to look like.' According to Sigelman, Sigelman, Walkosz, and Nitz (1995), an individual voter's belief of what a candidate should 'look like' is a better predictor of overall evaluation than racial attributes, negative or positive (Sigelman et al., 1995).

Moreover, television news has become an extension of the entertainment programming. This may be evidenced by the increased number of celebrity stories and the repetition of the more sensationalized stories. Thus, the stereotypical portrayals of minority groups that are still common in programming are also reflected in news coverage (Lester & Ross, 1996). Entman and Rojeski (2001) found that white Americans' attitudes were in part shaped by the way portrayals of African Americans as inferior were constructed in the media. Furthermore, Latinos and blacks were over-represented as law-breakers on television news (Dixon & Linz, 2000).

Coverage of the political candidates, and the resulting frames contained within the story, are most likely the result of these stereotypes that are generally accepted from within as well as outside of the newsroom. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, some stereotypes associated with political candidates are born in the newsroom itself.

The mainstream media has consistently been scrutinized for perpetuation of race and gender stereotypes. As television broadcast news becomes less informational and more infotainment oriented, the possibility or likelihood of these stereotypes being used in news stories becomes greater. With enough repetition, these stereotypes, perpetuated by the media, can give rise to a bias that is reflected in most of the stories that follow.

The notion of political knowledge is based in the idea that a rational decision can be made on a political position and will influence a vote at the polls. But research has shown that perception of electability, as opposed to candidate qualifications, is also a contributing factor in voting choice (Burden & Jones, 2006; Shaw, 2004). As an example, in the 2004 election cycle, Howard Dean held a considerable lead in the polls until the now famous scream from the podium caused his poll numbers to plummet. Emerging from Dean's fall was another candidate, John Kerry, who then took over as party leader as he was then suddenly perceived as being more electable (Burden & Jones, 2006; Skewes, 2007).

According to Wu and Lee (2009), the perception of electability is perhaps more crucial than a candidate's platform. Perhaps of equal consideration with issues, in terms of electability, are personal characteristics. But mass media has a reputation for perpetuating stereotypes. This notion can prove to be a detriment to political candidates who do not fit the profile of the 'typical' candidate for a particular office. Terkildsen and Damore (1999) looked at news coverage of biracial elections in the 1990 and 1992 cycles, including in their analysis contests

involving two white candidates. They concluded that enough support was discovered for what they referred to as their “racial dualism hypothesis,” concluding from the results of their study that “the media act as racial arbitrators by limiting racial emphases; the media bring race to the forefront of campaigns by highlighting candidate race; and media coverage of elections involving African American candidates suppresses the use of race among the candidates themselves, but accents the race of black candidates and their constituents” (p. 680).

As with the race of a political candidate, gender too often defines the type of media coverage and portrayals in news stories (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991).

Campbell, in his study of racial bias in news media (1995), refers to that bias as a distortion of reality, as myth, and suggests that news organizations often allow bias to seep into stories by “casting African Americans as well as other minority groups in the mold of the traditional stereotypes” (p. 62). In other words there are certain scripts or stories about African Americans that are consistently told over and over again with a new cast of characters each time. This coverage “reflects a mythical understanding of non-white Americans as different from non-minority Americans” (p. 62). Based on previous media research, it seems likely that stereotype would rear its head in the midst of the pre-election coverage of Barack Obama. Likewise, that same myth-making ability of the media might influence the voter’s perceptions of a female political candidate.

News media also depicts differences between male and female candidates in the form of 'gender distinctions.' Negative gender distinctions are those that could be considered a hindrance to the campaign (Jamieson, 1995). As an example, during one campaign, Elizabeth Dole's ability to serve as Commander and Chief was questioned because, "she likes to coordinate the color of her shoes with the color of the rug on stage" (Dowd, 1999, p. 25). Witt, Matthews, and Paget (1995) confirmed that gender stereotypes are reinforced in the media coverage of women in politics.

Framing differences of male and female candidates as well as candidates of different races are well documented in newspapers (Piper-Aiken, 1999). The research demonstrates that focus on wardrobe and family is more prevalent in coverage of females than males. Still, mentions of these areas were fewer than issues of policy.

Also of interest is the difference in the number of mentions of policy between male and female legislators. Some research points to evidence that issue frames are far more likely with male candidates than for their female opponents (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). This may fuel perceptions of a candidate either being qualified, or conversely unqualified, to hold the political office sought.

Kaplan (1992, p. 251) defines a few variants of gender bias in her essay "Feminist Criticism". One is the notion of 'bourgeois' feminism, which reflects the concern for equal rights and freedoms in a capitalist system. Another is the notion of the philosophical position of 'essentialist' feminism. Here, it is assumed that there is a more moral and more humane aspect to the female, which has

been repressed by the male-dominated world and if brought into the fray, could change the world for the better (Kaplan, 1992, p. 252). A third definition is that of 'liberal' feminism in which women demand equal access to employment, benefits and positions of power (Kaplan, 1992, p. 254). This study is primarily focused on the gender references as they relate to the second and third definitions.

In the modern era, it is common knowledge that women tend to earn less money for similar effort within the workplace. One figure puts the difference at a 77% ratio with their male counterparts (Hegewisch, Williams, & Edwards, 2013). And even though a 'glass ceiling' still exists for women in the workplace, in terms of position and salary, it has become less socially acceptable overall to blatantly discriminate against women in the workplace. Once again the cultivation theory of mass media explains why the old stereotypes are so difficult to dismiss. While the glass ceiling holds true for stereotypes of female corporate executives, it is reflective of a female political candidate, as well.

### Theoretical Perspectives

If we concede that television is a primary source of political knowledge, and that news media and entertainment programming often portray or frame minorities as inferior and women as generally weaker than men, then we must examine the impact this has on candidates from the perspective of the cultivation theory. In short, cultivation analysis theorizes that television use could lead to the believing of a reality constructed by the television programming. This passive influence is responsible for a view of the world as a "scary" place and minorities as "scary" or "inferior" (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, &

Signorielli, 1978; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980). This ‘constructed reality’ can be perpetuated by the content and/or frames contained within news stories. This is further expressed in a study by Busselle and Crandall (2002) which showed that watching television news was positively related to a belief that lack of motivation was responsible for the socioeconomic status and difference between whites and blacks.

Interestingly, even when the primary frame between two individuals is identical, a sub frame may differentiate between the two in negative or positive attributes. As an example, experiments have demonstrated that in two identical crime news stories, a black perpetrator was more likely to be perceived as “lazy” and lacking intelligence than a white perpetrator (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998). Females are often perceived as the ditzy blonde, or the subservient housewife. This study assumes that this phenomenon extends to political candidate coverage.

Insights from this approach could help us establish a connection between television viewing--i.e. news programming—and the assessment of electability of a minority or female candidate.

Another means of evaluating these news stories lies in the use of Critical Race Theory. Yosso (2002) explains that Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that can address the racism, sexism, and classism embedded in entertainment media. CRT draws from and extends a broad literature base in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women’s studies” (p. 3).

Parker and Lynn (2002) characterize CRT as incorporating three main goals: a) to present storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in law and society; b) to argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct; and c) to draw important relationships between race and other axis of domination (p. 10).

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) express race and gender bias yet another way. "Society constructs the social world through a series of tacit agreements mediated by images, pictures, tales and scripts. Much of what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving or cruel, but not perceived to be so at the time" (p. 42).

"The differential racialization thesis maintains that each disfavored group in this country has been racialized in its own individual way and according to the needs of the majority group at particular times in its history" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 69). This paradigm also serves as an argument for framing analysis of race and gender bias in this study.

The relationships between citizens and politicians have evolved through the years to resemble a consumerist approach to politics. It can be argued that the citizenry now seeks a certain kind of emotional experience from the political process, and new types of relationships are forming between candidates and voters (Richards, 2004). As a result, politics has become interwoven with popular culture. This is reflected in the content of political campaign advertising. Unfortunately for the advertiser, not all voters absorb the message in the same way.

Stuart Hall's, "Encoding/Decoding" (1980) focused on the manner in which communicated messages were sent and received, or encoded in production and decoded at the receiver end. His argument is one of environment, which is to say that the reception, understanding, and proper decoding of a message only happens in times of "perfectly transparent communication" (pp. 32, 59). This only happens when the producer and receiver are operating within the same dominant, hegemonic coding system.

Hall said, "The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organized into dominant or preferred meanings. New, problematic or troubling events, which breach our expectancies and run counter to our common sense constructs, to our "taken-for-granted" knowledge of social structures, must be assigned to their discursive domains before they can be said to make sense" (1980, p. 134).

This is the essence of stereotype as well as fad language, or more commonly, political double speak, or, as Orwell called it, newspeak. Only with reinforcement from the media do the terms 'I-E-D,' or 'collateral damage' begin to have meaning. It is this media reinforcement that gives the 'sign' a dominant or 'preferred meaning.' This same analysis can be used to describe the messages being disseminated by political campaign stories, and, more specifically, the campaign communication designed to be aired by the dominant media sources of television news.

Hall (1997) describes an image as having multiple meanings. Furthermore, even if bias were to be purposely edited from a report, there is no

way to guarantee that a message will be received as intended (Hall, 1997). From a cultural studies perspective, the meaning of an image, representative of a common idea, is successful or unsuccessful depending upon the cultural baggage that the receiver brings to the decoding process. This notion is discussed in further detail in the qualitative analysis chapter.

This study examines what can be learned from television news coverage by analysis of frames as well as content of broadcast news stories. It determines if a candidate's gender or race detracts, or at least has the opportunity to detract from issue coverage in prime-time broadcast news. It poses, and in turn attempts to answer the question: Is the electorate being given enough information to make an informed, rational decision? Or, are news sources only catering to audiences through stereotype and bias?

### Methodology

As the literature review demonstrates, the television news media continues to be one of the greatest sources of political knowledge for the electorate, and thus, a source of framing for candidates as well as issues during the competition of campaigns. A mixed methodology is used to exhibit the frequency as well as the depth of gender references and frames used in the news stories.

Issue frames historically become a large and typical part of media coverage in a political race. Yet, studies show that significant differences in issue coverage occur even though female candidates tend to make the issues a cornerstone of the campaign (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). Female members of

the Senate have also been quantitatively shown to have less overall coverage than their male counterparts (Kahn, 1994).

This becomes particularly important when attempting to assess the electability of a female as well as an African American candidate. Interestingly, this aspect of electability, based on the gender or race of the candidate, becomes difficult to establish due to the unwillingness of the electorate to voice an honest opinion. This represents the “modern racism” (Wu & Lee, 2009) or the modern gender bias which must be studied by using alternate measures in order to “tease out” true attitudes toward African American (Sniderman & Carmines, 1997; Sniderman, Tetlock, & Brody, 1993) and female political candidates.

If a female political candidate is receiving less issue coverage than her male opponent, is the electorate indeed able to make a rational, informed decision? If political knowledge is defined as an individuals’ ability to recall candidate names, personal characteristics, and qualifications, are the voters actually given enough pertinent information so that they can become knowledgeable and informed? Furthermore, this knowledge is further defined as the ability to identify election issues, current campaign developments, and recognize connections between candidates and issue positions (Atkin & Heald, 1976). I posit that political knowledge has become much more and less. If issues are covered less for female and/or minority candidates, is the electorate adequately informed?

In this dissertation a number of sources for political learning—advertisements, newspapers, YouTube/the Internet, entertainment programming

and television news have been mentioned. While all hold some potential for further research, this study will focus on broadcast television news. Often, television news stories include a number of these other avenues of political messaging listed above.

Furthermore, television news is becoming more of a conduit for campaigns in that direct messaging and advertisements produced by campaigns are included in news coverage.

This study examines the time period prior to the party conventions when most of the Democratic Party candidates were still actively campaigning. Specifically, the study covers the period of September 1, 2007 until March 30, 2008. It is during this time period that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were receiving a particular amount of media scrutiny, but other candidates were still polling relatively well. It is representative of a time when a woman and an African American man began breaking away from the rest of the field and were clearly recognized as the front-runners for the democratic nomination for President of the United States.

This allows for a quantitative examination of news coverage as well as a qualitative analysis of other campaign messages to which the electorate was commonly exposed. This is important since in this time of democratic decision-making, the political knowledge gained from television news remains the primary influence on the electorate, particularly the undecided voter (Peer, Malthouse, & Calder, 2003).

Certainly one must concede that pre-primary campaigning is more reflective of fund-raising than of battling for votes. Yet, as campaign seasons tend to grow in length, these goals and objectives overlap. This is particularly true during the intra-party debate season. This is one of the only opportunities for lesser-known candidates to expose their views on issues. However, when the debate news cycle is finished, these lesser known candidates seem to lose any media momentum that may have been previously established. Unless they have some distinguishing characteristic.

As the front-runners begin to garner the bulk of the news coverage, the types of stories are typically split between issue oriented, personality profiles and horse race coverage (Lichter, 2001). In modern elections, we must now add race gender references into the story mix.

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative analysis in determining how the race, gender, or any portrayal of a candidate could have an effect on the coverage of this political campaign season. Additionally, the qualitative analysis examines the frames and possible alternative meanings presented by the type of coverage given to the candidates in question. In essence, it attempts to broadly answer some interesting questions. First, what is the electorate learning from these newscasts? More specifically, from a textual analysis view, what can the electorate be learning? This question will be addressed with the use of Stuart Hall's work with semiotics as well as a more interpretive approach. According to Chris Campbell (1995) this interpretive approach "allows for a reading of media texts in the context of larger cultural meanings" (p. 5). Initially, this study answers

the simple question of how often the electorate is exposed to candidate information that focuses on or contains either a race or gender bias.

### Research Questions

A great deal of research has been conducted on the content and/or effect of political campaign information. Additionally, researchers have been very concerned with the level of political knowledge gained by the electorate from viewing political campaign news stories and political advertising. However, little research exists that examines the likelihood of race or gender bias preventing the electorate from learning enough about a political candidate to make a truly informed decision. Likewise, how the interpretation and analysis of political stories could be varied depending upon the background of the viewer also deserves additional study. Therefore, this study analyzes television news stories in order to determine if race or gender biases exist and what types of knowledge, and how much political knowledge, can be garnered from watching evening television news. Furthermore, this study examines the possibilities of shifting meanings in news stories from Hall's "preferred" meanings to "oppositional" or "negotiated" meanings.

Specifically, the study examines, from an audience perspective, whether or not certain aspects of a presidential candidate can be learned:

- How the candidate stands on issues (issue frames)
- Non-analytical information about candidate character
- Information regarding the candidate's experience
- Information concerning the candidate's family, and,

- Information about the candidate's personal characteristics

In order to determine the prevalence of these variables between candidates, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: Will the news stories frame the race in terms of 'horse race coverage' more than any other frame as demonstrated in previous research? The significance of this question is that none of the other races studied were between an African American man and a female candidate. The measurement, of course, will be a simple frequency analysis and will be calculated as explained in the methods section of this work.

Furthermore, because Clinton and Obama were emerging as front-runners:

RQ2: Will a horse race frame be more common for candidates Clinton and Obama than for the other candidates?

Aday and Devitt (2001) found differences in the coverage of Elizabeth Dole in a 2000 presidential campaign when compared to her counterparts. While it could be argued that Dole was never a front-runner in a race with Bush, McCain and Forbes as opponents, it still gives rise to another question that can be answered in this study:

RQ3: Will Hillary Clinton (discounting gender bias) and Barack Obama (discounting race bias) each receive an equal amount of coverage compared to each other in the race?

Additionally, because of their front-runner status;

RQ4: Will Clinton and Obama combined receive a much greater number of stories than the other candidates?

Furthermore,

RQ4a: Will Clinton receive less issue coverage than the male counterparts?

And,

RQ4b: Will Clinton receive more personal attribute (gender biased) coverage than her opponents?

Likewise from this bias perspective,

RQ5a: Will Obama receive less issue coverage than the counterparts?

And,

RQ5b: Will Obama receive more personal attribute (race biased) coverage than his opponents?

### The Quantitative Method

The quantitative study consists of a frequency (content) analysis of campaign news stories as covered by the three leading network news networks (NBC, CBS, and ABC). A Lexis-Nexis search provided a universe of broadcast scripts for each of these networks' evening news programming during the campaign. This was further focused by inclusion only of the period between October 1, 2007 and March 30, 2008. These dates were chosen because this time period included all of the candidates for most of the date range and was far enough from the Democratic Convention to focus on candidate attributes. The population was derived from scripts of all news stories from the evening newscasts that contained the name of one of the democratic presidential

candidates (n=1447). Systemized random sampling was then used to create the test sample. The procedure consisted of selecting a purely random starting point in each of the network's story scripts, and then selecting every third story for analysis (n=447). Duplicate stories and stories focusing on or promoting upcoming events (i.e. debates) were eliminated.

### *Coding Categories*

Operational definitions were developed in order to properly describe the variables.

Race bias signs included but were not limited to direct mention of race, association by proxy such as mentioned in relation to race/ethnically oriented groups (Congressional Black Caucus, NAACP, etc.), or mentions of heritage. Gender bias included any mention of gender or feminism, to include stories focused on traditional stereotypical gender roles and on subjects traditionally reserved for gender stereotypes (fashion, hair, etc.).

Horserace frames were identified by the use of poll data or fundraising results. Issue frames can include any position on healthcare, education, Iraq, etc. If a candidate stand is mentioned in the story it becomes an issue story.

Personal traits can include family status, education, likes/dislikes, financial information, candidate health history, etc. For gender frame, one must be aware of any references to gender which are made directly or implied. These included references that are typically associated with stereotyped inferences specific to gender, either explicit or implicit. As with gender biased frames, when identifying race frames used one must be aware of any references to race/ethnicity which

are made directly or implied. These are to include references that are typically associated with stereotyped cultural inferences specific to race or comments made by third parties.

A codebook was developed in order to establish defined characteristics of these and other variables (see Appendix B).

### *Procedure*

A team of coders was assembled by offering the opportunity to participate in a research project to students in several undergraduate classes in a Mass Communications Department at a regional university. A total of twelve volunteers were selected for coder training.

Each of the coders was given the codebook and required to attend two evening training sessions. The first training session included a take-away of a number of paper coding sheets and five story transcripts with which to practice. The second training session concluded with all coders using paper coding sheets to code ten stories each that were then compared. Additional training areas were identified and training given, until all coders felt competent. A sample of 40 identical news stories were then given to the coders. The coders were then instructed to code the stories in an environment similar to where they would code the entire set using electronic code sheets.

The resulting data was then used to test for intercoder—interrater—reliability. Using ReCal3 (<http://dfreelon.org/utis/recalfront/recal3/>), the data were uploaded and analyzed. This resulted in a range of agreement from .72-.80 and an average Krippendorff's Alpha of .76(>.60) for variables tested. According to

Krippendorff, this represents a modest, yet acceptable, degree of agreement (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). From the reliability tests results, six coders were selected, three male and three female, to code the research sample.

The unit of analysis for this study is a single story transcript. Electronic coding sheets (Google Forms) were used by the six coders. Coders analyzed each story that mentions a candidate. Coders recorded the candidate(s) mentioned in the story by candidate(s) named in the order of mention (first candidate mentioned, second candidate mentioned, third candidate mentioned, etc.). Coders then determine if the story describes candidates by their issue positions or actions on public policy issues (issue frame), by their personal or professional background (personal frame), or by both. They also coded for horse-race descriptions of the candidate — e.g., whether or not the candidate was ahead in the polls or the success or failure of fundraising. The code sheet then asked for any indications of gender or race references, and the news information source. All of the variables were given numerical values for purposes of analysis (see Appendix A).

Additionally, story length, the particular network, and the gender of the reporter were coded initially, only for further reference, but these actually produced interesting findings to be discussed later. These variables were designed to establish or expose any differentiation in coverage between stories and subsequent candidates. The tactics the candidate used to get votes, and where the candidate campaigned—strategy frames, were not examined, even though these strategy frames are a staple of campaign coverage (Devitt, 2002;

Jamieson, 1993; Kerbel, 1996; Patterson, 1993) because it has no bearing on this particular study. See the appendix for coding instructions.

After eliminating stories for the reasons previously mentioned we finished with  $n=387$ . A sample size of  $n=303$  was determined to be statistically adequate for extrapolation of the results to the population.

## CHAPTER III

### QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The data collected by the coders was compiled and input into SPSS. Each research question was tested with a series of crosstabs. As explained, the purpose was not to find causation, but only the existence of bias or information (or lack of) that may or could adversely affect political knowledge of the electorate. As such, regression analysis was not applicable to this study.

The data sheet included variables that consisted of each candidate's name, the existence or absence of issue frames, personal frames, horse race frames, gender frames, and race frames. Additionally, the data included references to gender and race even if not considered an actual primary or secondary frame.

As the analysis of collected data began, some expected results appeared as well as some surprising, unexpected results. These will be discussed as the results are discussed.

As expected, and as demonstrated by the literature, horse race frames dominated media coverage of the campaign. A total of 196, 50.6% of all campaign stories (n=387) had horse race coverage as the primary frame. Therefore, RQ1 was affirmed (see Table 1). There were two interesting results from the crosstabs that were not actually sought. First is the range of difference between networks. The occurrence of horse race coverage as a primary frame was most prevalent with NBC. A whopping 61% of all campaign stories were of the horse race type as a primary frame. CBS devoted followed closely with 57%

of news stories to that primary frame, while ABC had horse race account for 44.8% of this genre. When a horse race frame was used as a secondary frame, CBS still used it more often with 10% of that network's stories using the frame, followed by ABC with 5.3% and NBC with 4.0%. This is the second surprise from this data. If the horse race frame does not appear first in the story, there is little opportunity to get poll data later in the story.

Table 1

*Frequency of News Story Frames by Type*

Frame Type	Primary Frame	Tertiary Frame	Totals
Issue	110/28.4%	45/11.6%	158/40%
Personal	66/17.1%	34/8.8%	106/27.5%
Horse Race	196/50.6%	26/6.7%	227/58.6%
Gender	8/2%	7/1.8%	15/3.9%
Race	7/1.8%	12/3.1%	22/12.9%
None	0%	263/68%	N/A

Sample n=386

The appearance of horserace coverage, or poll data, so often in news stories creates a frame of competition in the minds of the voter. Furthermore, if this competition is so often the most prevalent frame, the electorate certainly could begin to believe that this is the most important criteria for making a

candidate choice. This follow-the-leader type of mentality is often referred to as a bandwagon effect. This theory of the electorate essentially states that as the voters begin to see a candidate become dominate in polls and coverage, the members of the electorate begin to support that candidate more readily. Just as importantly, support for candidates doing less well in the polls, and therefore garnering less media coverage, begin to lose campaign momentum and electorate support (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2007; Goidel & Shields, 1994).

Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton also received the bulk of the horse race stories (see Table 2). 44.8% (69) of the stories began with a horse race frame.

Table 2

*Frame Type by Candidate*

Candidate	Issue			Personal Attribute			Horse Race			Gender			Race		
	P	S	T	P	S	T	P	S	T	P	S	T	P	S	T
Obama	50	12	0	28	16	3	69	14	3	1	1	0	6	8	1
Clinton	49	29	3	27	15	3	106	9	1	7	5	0	1	4	2
All Others	11	4	0	11	3	0	21	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0

Sample n=387

Note. P=Primary Frame, S=Secondary Frame, T=Tertiary Frame

Of the stories when Obama was featured in the primary frame (n=154).

Candidate Clinton seemed to be even more of the focus of poll numbers. In stories where Clinton was mentioned in the primary frame (n=190), 55.8% (106), more than half of the stories, were of the horse race variety. John Edwards actually had a higher percentage of horse race stories (68%) but those were part

of an insignificant total number of cases (25). Given this insignificant number for candidate Edwards, RQ2 is affirmed. Candidate Clinton herself accounted for 54.1% of all primary frame horse race stories.

Candidates Obama and Clinton garnered the lion's share of all stories mentioning a candidate (n=387) as well as campaign news stories (n=331). The Obama campaign was mentioned 122 times with Barack Obama being mentioned (first candidate mentioned) 32 more times for a total of 154 first mentions. Hillary Clinton was mentioned first in campaign stories 170 times and another 20 times in non-campaign related stories. As the candidate mentioned second in a story, Obama was mentioned 130 times in campaign stories and another 10 times in non-campaign related stories. Clinton was mentioned as the second person in the story a total of 94 times with 18 being non-campaign related. Both candidates were mentioned 15 times as the third candidate named in a news story.

Certainly RQ3 is affirmed by the incredible number of stories mentioning these two candidates alone. No other candidate comes close even though all but one were still in the race through most of this study period. Obama was mentioned a total of 309 times in the total number of candidate related stories in the sample (n=387). Clinton was mentioned a total of 315, making these two candidates nearly statistically equal in news coverage. Statistical balance between Clinton and Obama was found by totaling all three categories of mentions (first, second, third candidate to be mentioned in the story). But there is a distinct difference in the number of times they were the first candidate

mentioned in a story. Clinton, being mentioned first in a story accounted for almost half of a first candidate mentions (49.1%). Obama accounted for just over one third (39.8%). Another content analysis with issue-related variables would be needed to explain this difference.

Issue coverage was measured in terms of whether it was the first, second or third frame in the news story (often the stories contain more than one frame). Issues can include any position on Healthcare, education, Iraq, the economy, etc. If a candidate's stand is mentioned in the story it becomes an issue story. Listing issues mentioned on code sheet is not necessary or relevant to the study, only the fact that one was mentioned or not.

In terms of primary story frames, Barack Obama was the first candidate mentioned with an issue frame 50 times (32.5% of all issue frames), second only to the aforementioned horse race coverage. Clinton was mentioned first with an issue frame 49 times (25% of the issue stories). This is in comparison to Clinton's horse race frame total of 106. This represents a statistical dead heat between these two candidates. A comparison of the relationship of Obama/Clinton numbers against the other candidates is immaterial because all other candidates were mentioned only 11 times as the first candidate mentioned in a story. While the frequencies do show that Clinton received less issue coverage than Obama, affirming RQ4a, RQ4 was essentially rendered moot. It is interesting though that Clintons' total of (primary frame) issue stories represents only 25.8% of her individual stories against Obama's 32.5%.

Candidate Clinton did receive more than twice the second frame issue mentions than Obama with 29 versus 12.

RQ4b required a measure of gender bias. For this measure the “gender frame” variable and the “gender mentioned” variable were combined since it was quite possible for the candidate’s gender to be mentioned as part of another frame (issue, horse race, etc.). In a not-so-surprising result, Hillary Clinton did garner more gender biased coverage than all other candidates. Clinton’s gender was mentioned 31 times in 56 stories mentioning a candidate’s gender, or 55.4% of the time. This is in comparison to Barack Obama’s gender mentions of 23 times (one primary frame, one secondary frame) but that total accounts for only 41% of all gender mentions.

Table 3

*Race/Gender Bias References by Candidate*

Candidate	Race		Gender		Total	
	F	S	F	S	F	S
Obama	22	9	17	17	39	26
Clinton	9	12	23	11	32	23
All Others	1	1	1	2	2	3

Sample n=387

F= First Candidate Mentioned, S=Second Candidate Mentioned

This trend continues throughout frequencies of secondary and tertiary frames with Clinton’s gender being mentioned and three times against Obama’s

one time in a secondary frame and neither had any in a tertiary frame. These totals demonstrate a higher total percentage of all individual candidate stories for Clinton and therefore RQ4b is supported with positive results.

The previous results can also address RQ5a. Candidate Obama was the recipient of far more issue coverage than any other candidate except Clinton. But a greater percentage of his frames were issue oriented even if the raw numbers (50 Obama, 49 Clinton) were evenly matched. As such, RQ5a is not affirmed and contrary to previous research received more issue coverage than the opponents. This could likely be explained by the front-runner status.

The final hypothesis dealt with race bias. It was suggested in RQ5b that Obama would garner the majority of the race frame coverage and mentions of race in other frames. As with gender, the “race frame” and “race mentioned” variables were combined to better reflect the story content. The “race frame” was used in only 6 stories of the sample in stories when Obama was the first candidate mentioned in the script. Race “mentions” numbered 22 more which still nets a total of only 7.3% of all stories even mentioning race. In secondary and tertiary frames another nine mentions of race were added bringing the total number to 31. Again, because of the number of total stories devoted to these two candidates, and the lack of coverage of the other candidates, Clinton is the only useful comparative figure. Her combined count of race mentions (frames+“mentioned”) was ten with only one of those from a primary frame. This amounts to only 2.6% of all primary frames. As such, RQ5b was affirmed, but in no way represents a robust finding. What is interesting to note from the data

though is that even though only 9.9% of stories mentioned race, 85% of those stories had Obama as the first mentioned candidate in the story.

Lastly, when examining the data set, a couple of interesting elements expectantly showed up. The first is the differences in network coverage. This research found an interesting difference in the way the individual networks cover a political race. The total number of stories in the candidate story population was around 1400+. But there were variances in the number supplied by each network. NBC supplied 400 stories during the period studied. CBS, on the other hand, supplied 327, or about 22% fewer.

Table 4

*Frames by Network*

Network	Issue			Personal Attribute				Horse Race			Gender			Race		
	P	S	T	P	S	T	P	S	T	P	S	T	P	S	T	
ABC	53	15	1	35	16	4	58	8	3	2	4	0	4	8	2	
CBS	37	21	2	18	14	2	77	14	1	1	2	0	2	4	1	
NBC	20	9	0	13	4	0	61	4	1	5	1	0	1	0	0	

Sample n=387

P= Primary Frame, S=Secondary Frame, T=Tertiary Frame

The candidate coverage was different between networks also. NBC was much less likely to mention race. CBS was much less likely to mention gender. But one similarity exists between all networks (See Table 4). Incredibly, all news

stories included in the sample were within 10 seconds in length of each other. They ranged from 101 seconds to 109 seconds.

Secondly, it was very surprising that these two candidates, Obama and Clinton accounted for 88.9% of first mentioned candidates in all stories. This is surprising because we depend on the media almost wholly for passive candidate and campaign information. The lack of coverage exhibited of the remaining six candidates constitutes a frame worth mentioning in its own right.

Among the choices that news media make are content (whether or not an event is covered at all), how to frame a story, and how to best portray a candidate, policies, or politics in general in various situations. Studies indicate that voters often make decisions based on issues emphasized in the news (priming) and they form opinions based on the way that corresponds to how the news media frames the story (framing) (Jasperson & Fan, 2004). Of particular interest is whether or not the editorial slant, defined as “the quality and tone of a media outlet’s candidate coverage as influenced by its editorial position,” shapes candidate evaluations and voter choices. Furthermore, are these choices directly related to development of public policy or seen as framing the electability of non-electability of a particular candidate?

These candidates, regardless of qualifications, are to be considered irrelevant according to the broadcast news stories. Five of the six other candidates were still in the race until January of 2008, well into the scope of this study. But collectively, they account for 11.1 of all story frames in the sample. 6.5%, more than half of those, belonged to one candidate, John Edwards. Of

those stories, 50.6% were horse race type. All of these candidates were still able to raise money, still traveling on the campaign trail and still speaking with the “we can win this” rhetoric. Early on, nothing had determined electability of these candidates except the hegemonic nature of mass media. Indeed, the scope of this study examines campaign stories from months before the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary, the first elements of actual voter input into the election.

The history of marginalization of minorities and women in the news (and mass media in general) is not directly demonstrated in these stories. Should this bias exist in other stories or from other sources of political knowledge, it certainly would have the ability to undermine a candidate’s campaign and effect the all-important perception of electability. This biased coverage would affect campaigns similarly to the demonstrated lack of coverage of the other seven remaining candidates.

## CHAPTER IV

### QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

It was important to use a mixed methodology in this study in order to evaluate not only the frequency of informational frames and potential knowledge of the candidates' attributes but to also examine the nature of the presentation as well. It is the nature of the presentation that needs particular scrutiny in order to ascertain any conflicting or potentially alternative meanings given through the media. Textual analysis allows for a close-up examination of the content and context used in a story without the constraints of being assigned a definable number.

The frequencies and related data were used as a baseline from which a textual qualitative analysis was conducted. Furthermore, quantitative analysis alone may be construed as misleading. When taking into account penetration, rating and share (audience numbers), a story devoid of frequency and statistically insignificant may still have a substantial impact on political knowledge of the electorate.

Using previous works from scholars such as Stuart Hall, Kenneth Burke and Christopher Campbell as references, I analyzed news stories focused on the presidential candidates, focusing on Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and to a lesser extent, the other Democrat candidates. Using the guidelines of semiotics, the stories have been dissected through an ideological criticism.

These additional research questions will be addressed in the qualitative analysis section of this study:

RQ1: Are any of the news stories presented in such a manner that the viewer can easily construct alternate meanings from the preferred meaning?

RQ2: Can a news story be easily interpreted as having a blatant/overt gender bias?

RQ3: Can traditional or alternative knowledge source stories be easily interpreted as having a blatant/overt racial biased?

In addition, this section examines information the viewer can learn and if alternative meaning can be established for such topics as:

RQ4: Is there adequate explanation of how the candidate stands on specific issues when race or gender is the primary frame in sources of political knowledge?

RQ5: How does various media differ in how a candidate's character is presented with regards to race versus gender?

RQ6: How does various media present the candidate's background and experience if race or gender frames are used?

#### The Qualitative Method

Stories purposely selected from the story population (n=1447) were used as a sample for this analysis. This textual analysis also included the imagery surrounding the featured candidate (if expressed in the story) and such items as the setting of the story, story slant and other semiotic signs if reported in the story script. The analysis attempted to find evidence in the text of the stories that support the research questions. Any cultural values, gender portrayals or portrayals of race in general are evident following analysis. The textual analysis

also includes a synopsis of both denotative as well as connotative meanings within the story. Construct validity may be associated with the content analysis' use of variables mentioned as well as the textual analysis technique.

This type of analysis seeks the implicit as well as explicit indications of the sought-after variables. This then becomes a form of conceptual analysis, whereas a concept (portrayal of gender bias, race bias) was chosen for examination, and the analysis involves identifying, subjectively quantifying, and tallying of its presence. Semiotics represents the science of signs and meaning-making; a sophisticated/complicated way to interpret/analyze messages and culture—how meanings are constructed and coded/decoded. It is this “construction” of meaning that is of concern and sought. Using the theoretical perspectives of Stuart Hall and others as a basis, an examination of sources of political knowledge exposes any ideologies inset purposely or accidentally into the stories.

Through textual analysis an argument is made for alternative meanings and symbolism that can only be noticed through additional contemplation. Obviously, there is a dominant meaning textually inferred in a story, yet further analysis could uncover some more latent or negotiated meanings. This can also be thought of as the connotative versus denotative meanings of the story in question.

This is not to assume that either meaning discovered is right or conversely wrong. Hall describes “decoding” media texts through three levels of analysis. The first step is to describe the denotative (or “preferred”) meaning. Hall explains

that these readings have “the whole social order imbedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs; the everyday knowledge of social structures, of how things work for all practical purposes in this culture” (Hall, 1982, p. 134).

The second is the connotative (“negotiated” and/or “oppositional”) readings of the same message. What Hall would describe as a “negotiated” reading of the stories allows for analysis beyond the meaning intended by the team of journalists who produced them including its potential for myth-making. Fiske and Hartley (1978) include the impact of television production techniques to connote meanings: “Camera angle, lighting and background music [and] frequency of cutting are examples” (p. 45). For Hall, the denotative, commonsense meanings of the stories are less significant than the connotative, interpretive readings.

As all messages contain codes, the search for the hidden “mythology” or “ideology” contained in messages constitutes the “highest level of analysis” according to (Fiske & Hartley, 1978, p. 30) Fiske and Hartley. “This, the third order of signification, reflects the broad principles by which a culture organizes and interprets the reality with which it has to cope” (p. 30). By using Hall, Fiske and Hartley, Campbell, and others mentioned earlier as guides, I discuss how these news stories, or media messages, and even other sources of political knowledge may be interpreted by an assortment of viewers from differing backgrounds.

## CHAPTER V

### QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS RESULTS

#### Analysis of News Story Frames

Part of the justification for a qualitative analysis is in the fact that stories that are representative of the central thesis of the research can be missed. It's the research danger of random sampling when trying to find something meaningful, yet often obscure. But this is not always the case as sometimes the story missed by the random selection contains cues that are indeed, overt and may signify multiple levels of bias exhibited.

Such is the case with a story from November 27, 2007. As part of a CBS Evening News broadcast, it not only demonstrated the overtness of racial focus in political news but also tries to justify that slant by involving many different players. It is also important to notice the length of the story. At 800+ words, it is quite a bit larger than most television news stories. This is a frame in itself, to be discussed later. This story begins with a horse race frame as coded for in the quantitative section. It quickly devolves into a race frame and stays there for the next 750 words:

Clinton and Obama going after African American votes

KATIE COURIC, anchor: Now to the presidential campaign. It's 37

days until Iowa, and, according to the latest polling, Democrat

Hillary Clinton is trailing Barack Obama there.

(Graphic on screen)

The Washington Post/ABC News Poll

Iowa Caucuses

of Error: 4 pts.

Obama Clinton 30% 26%

MARGIN: Five days later, it's New Hampshire, where Clinton's lead has been cut almost in half since September to 14 points.

(Graphic on screen)

CNN/WMUR 9 Poll

New Hampshire Primary

Clinton Obama 36% 22%

Margin of Error: 4 pts.

COURIC: Today Clinton was looking ahead to South Carolina, one of the states where she's battling Obama for the support of black voters. We have two reports on that tonight, beginning with Jim Axelrod, who's covering the Clinton campaign.

JIM AXELROD reporting:

It wasn't the candidate who told the story in South Carolina today as much as the supporters on stage with her.

Senator HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON (Democratic Presidential Candidate): Join this team that you see behind me, work with me...

AXELROD: Hillary Clinton surrounded herself with African-Americans in a state where half the democratic voters are black and where Barack Obama is working hard to overcome a double-digit deficit in the polls.

Senator BARACK OBAMA: Are you fired up?

AXELROD: His wife was just here stumping in African-American beauty salons.

Ms. MICHELLE OBAMA: Can I give you a hug?

AXELROD: But when it comes to spouses, Clinton does pretty well herself in the state that will hold the first Southern primary. Her husband, highly popular with blacks, has campaigned here on three occasions. It's the first time the Clintons have had to compete for African-American support. But as her coy mention of him among those she'd rely on as president makes clear, she's up for it.

Sen. CLINTON: People like Colin Powell, for example, and others who can represent our country well, including someone I know very well.

AXELROD: Hillary Clinton's commanding lead here suggests that, for many African-Americans, this highly complicated choice comes down to record trumping race.

Unidentified Woman: And I want him to be president one day.

AXELROD: One day?

Woman: But--one day, yes. But not now.

State Representative HAROLD MITCHELL (Democrat, South Carolina):  
Our next president of the United States.

AXELROD: State Representative Harold Mitchell says his heart had him backing Obama early on. He switched to Clinton last month.

State Rep. MITCHELL: We've got to get away from this emotional feelings. I mean, if you put--you put that aside and look at the candidates, you know...

AXELROD: No brainer?

State Rep. MITCHELL: It's a no brainer.

AXELROD: For this African-American, Obama's time will come. For Clinton, he says, the time is now. Jim Axelrod, CBS News, Spartanburg, South Carolina.

DEAN REYNOLDS reporting:

I'm Dean Reynolds in New Hampshire. Barack Obama has said that the big city cab drivers who once refused to pick him up had no doubt about his blackness back then, nor should anyone else now. Campaigning, he addresses the race issue without hesitation, once even mimicking gang bangers to criticize their work ethic.

Sen. OBAMA: 'Why I got to do it? Why you didn't ask Pooky to do it?'

REYNOLDS: He quotes Martin Luther King, and occasionally slips into the cadence of a black preacher. But recent polls show Hillary Clinton is the choice of more black Democrats.

(Graphic on screen)

CBS News Polls

African American Primary Voters Sept. and Oct. 2007

Clinton Obama 51% 35%

REYNOLDS: And it's clear that Obama's racial identity gives pause to some. He is not the descendent of African slaves, but is the son of a white mother and a Kenyan father. So he alone gets questions about just who he is.

Unidentified Man #1: My black activists friends from here to Boston say you're not black, that you're multiracial. And I want to know how you self-identify.

Sen. OBAMA: By--I self-identify as African-American. That's how I'm treated and that's how I'm--that's how I'm viewed and I'm proud of it.

Mr. MICHAEL FAUNTROY (George Mason University): The issue of whether or not he is black enough is not the primary issue. The issue is whether or not he has enough experience.

REYNOLDS: Besides, Obama may have other strengths.

Mr. FAUNTROY: He is seen as more palatable and more acceptable to larger numbers of white voters.

REYNOLDS: Of course, there are whites who will never vote for Obama because he is black.

Unidentified Man #2: I don't want to say I'm prejudiced or anything, but for one, I'm not going to--I don't want to vote for a colored man to be our president.

REYNOLDS: When asked if this country would vote for a black man for the highest office in the land, Senator Obama deflects the question, suggesting merely raising it is a disservice to the American electorate. But

the American electorate has never had anyone quite like Barack Obama to consider. Dean Reynolds, CBS News, Portsmouth, New Hampshire (*CBS Evening News*, 2007).

At first glance, this is a simple campaign story. Its denotative structure is one of showing poll positions and then reporting on how the candidates are wooing the electorate in an attempt to increase these poll numbers. The horse race nature of the initial frame is bolstered by the raw data of the poll numbers, the timeline for the Iowa caucus (a very important early pre-primary stop) and a report on candidate Clinton's falling numbers going into the New Hampshire Primary. While very detailed, and reflecting a number of polls and forecasts, this story seems to be a reflection of this type of horse race story. But then the tone seems to shift.

The story immediately launches into a race frame. It speaks of Hillary Clinton wooing black voters. Not American voters or South Carolina voters, but black voters, as if they represent a separate American population. In respect to cultivation theory, this is the type of coverage that perpetuates the separatists attitudes generally associated with race stereotypes: that of difference.

The cultivated reality is that "African Americans" are a subset of "Americans." As such they need to be catered to in a different manner, separate from the rest of the voters and important because of the size and scope of the subset. The importance of this action, or the subset of the population is evidenced by the length of the story and the number of players. This story switches speakers twenty-nine times through ten different speakers. This could

only be seen as an attempt by CBS that the subject is important and should be seen by the individual voters as relevant in their own lives.

Stuart Hall would use this story as a perfect example of representation versus RE-presentation. By this, Hall explains that the notion of representation comes with a couple of different meanings (Hall, 1997, p. 17) and these meanings should be used for the interpretation, or “interrogation” of the image. This applies to the analysis of a news story.

Hall first considers the notion of representation as an image that directly reflects a reality or some reality that can be agreed upon by the audience. It is a depiction of something that is already there. This is considered the common sense approach to representation. And according to Hall, is too simple. The reality of creating meaning of an image is far more complex. Hall posits that any meaning is, in essence, individualized. That is, an image is interpreted not only in the presumed common sense way, but in context with the history of the event, place, and situation of the actors involved. To simply say that Hillary Clinton spoke in South Carolina would be much too simplistic. To say that Hillary Clinton campaigned in South Carolina is still no help. Only when the text, the signs and signifiers as Saussure calls them (De Saussure, 1916), are collected and organized, does the image (in this case a news story) begin to have meaning (in Culler, 1976, p. 19). Unfortunately, this meaning cannot be controlled by the message sender because the receivers all have different ways of organizing these signs. Hall refers to this as the “conceptual maps” (Hall, 1997, p. 19) of understanding. And this is the essence of this dissertation. It is generally

understood that everyone carries their own map, or has their own way of relating variables, texts/signs/signifiers to one another. If I were to simply say “gun control legislation,” there are those who would immediately leap to the thought of second amendment rights being suppressed while others would visualize a matter of public safety. Another person may see this phrase as a much needed referendum on gun violence and crime. Still others may get no meaning at all either because they have never heard the phrase before, therefore not having it as part of their conceptual map, or simply because of apathy.

The story above is complicated by its length, its actors, its production (many cuts and edits) as well as the script. Context cannot be assumed to be the same for all audience members.

This explains why Hall suggest the notion of connotative, or negotiated, meanings. In terms of representation, this story could directly reflect a happening or conversely, it could be thought of as a skewed representation of reality. It has a meaning now to the audience because it has been filmed, produced, packaged and re-presented to the audience. It is in the re-presentation that media frames are produced and used.

As shown and explained earlier, this story begins with a horse race frame, a foreign concept to the event itself. This frame presents no solid reality of its own until it is explained in terms of a competition between one or more players and the relative positions in that competition. Once the frame changes, the message becomes more complex still.

A timeline is introduced which puts pressure on the horse race. It is a fictional pressure and timeline since the first caucus and primary tend to be more of a media event than anything else. It is true that winners tend to move up in the polls, but this may well be because of the way the player is framed in subsequent stories. The players are quickly exchanged through editing so that within eight sentences, eight changes have been made using five different actors (Couric, Axelrod, Clinton, Barack Obama, and Michelle Obama). This MTV editing style certainly makes the story interesting to watch but possibly at the expense of in-depth reporting.

The story jumps directly into a “race” frame from the original horse race frame. Denotatively, the story becomes a report of Hillary Clinton working to draw support from the indigenous voters of South Carolina. Another meaning, a connotative meaning, may be a bit different depending on perspective. The scripted comment read by Axelrod: “Hillary Clinton surrounded herself with African-Americans” may be interpreted as Clinton using members of a group, that she is not actually a member of, to persuade members of that group to give her support. Having the African American group “surround” her is essentially a testimonial version of a campaign message yet without a speaking part for those actors. This marginalization of a group by reducing individuals to a homogenized mass, is often indicative of campaign press coverage. Such is the explanation of “difference” as exhibited by the media. This emphasis is used as a commonality, a shared meaning, in order to make potentially complex information a bit easier

to understand. It is one of the perpetrators of stereotype that mass media is so known for.

The story demonstrates, intentionally or not, the “difference” in the now marginalized group. Hillary is surrounded by a specifically Black group. And the Clinton request of “join our team” could be interpreted as a reference to sports, a place that Campbell calls this a potentially dangerous “positive stereotype” of African American athletic success that has historically been present in the news. Campbell suggests that this is “evidence of the mythical thinking of many white Americans that blacks have a ‘natural’ ability to compete as athletes, but not a ‘natural’ ability to lead and direct” (p.63). This is potentially dangerous to a political candidate who is trying to gain public trust in order to lead America.

The next time Clinton speaks in the story, she compares her former-president husband to Colin Powell. Again, looked at from two directions, she first seeks inclusion into a subgroup of which she doesn’t belong in order to gain votes (connotative). The irony is that in order to try to get this inclusion, she had to compare herself, or at least her family connections to a Republican! This bit of trivia spotlights how even denotative meanings can be overshadowed by frame and context.

Candidate Obama is subject to more than one frame in this story also. First we see the frame of electability, a media-based frame. The story speaks of Clinton’s commanding lead and immediately shifts to a presumed political novice and also a subject matter expert for comment. The anonymous novice proclaims her support for Hillary Clinton, not on issues or leadership attributes, but simply

because she is a woman. This is followed by the presumed expert opinion. Here State Representative Harold Mitchell rebuts the novice statement while supporting the same candidate. It is interesting that as he discredits emotion in a voting choice, he refers to it by stating that while his heart had him backing Obama, rational decision-making had him supporting Clinton. The inclusion of this statement can be interpreted as an electability frame for both candidates. It is therefore a very powerful statement.

As the reporter identity changes again, this time to Dean Reynolds, the story shifts back to an overt “race” frame. But this is where I believe I identify an un-named frame. It tends to be self-assigned by candidates themselves and I will call it the “same frame” or the frame of sameness. Previously, I discussed Hall’s frame of difference and this frame is the direct opposite of, or antithesis of that frame. The frame of same is exhibited as candidate Obama tries to justify his inclusion into this voter subset in a different way than candidate Clinton. Whereas Clinton was willing to accept the difference but use testimonial strategies to gain support, Obama was trying to insert himself into the population directly, as a card-carrying member. Hall would probably see this as two distinct instances of representation. First, Clinton was trying to claim that under her leadership, this subset of voters would have a voice in the country and their concerns would be addressed. Clinton would use her leadership position to “represent” this group. Obama was using a different strategy in that he was seeking inclusion, so that voters would be compelled to support “one of their own.” First was the story of being unable to hail a taxi in a large city, a relatable

tale to the audience and actually a racial stereotype. Next, he is forced to address his own racial identity. Again, the story uses an anonymous person to give an almost politically incorrect statement and then a subject matter expert to discredit the statement. Lastly, and surprisingly, the reporter finishes with “Besides, Obama may have other strengths.” Could this possibly be meant as Obama’s strength is that he is black?

In terms of research questions, RQ1 and RQ3 can both be addressed with this first story. RQ1 asks if news stories can potentially provide alternate meanings, aside from the intentional, or preferred meaning. RQ2 (gender bias) can be addressed, but less easily than the race frames of RQ3. The story is actually constructed on a race frame. So much so, that it is almost difficult to distinguish between a subtle race frame bias or an overt bias. The attempt of inclusion by candidate Clinton are an indicator that the audience is made up of a sub-set of the population and not of the general electorate. Compounding the issue is the way that the story is presented by the reporters.

Three issues about the reporting of this story directly come to mind when examining this story in terms of research questions. First is the layout of the news package. The story begins with poll data. This is a reflection of the game presentation of politics that generated a “bandwagon” effect (Goidel & Shields, 1994) in the electorate and increases interest in a particular candidate or two. Notice, from the script, that even though the first primary had yet been held, only two of the eight candidates were mentioned at all (a framing device in its own right). The horse race frame immediately jumps to a race frame and the notion of

candidate Clinton desiring acceptance through inclusion. This is demonstrating the sub-set idea. Secondly is the amount of time spent on the race frame. This package is actually a combination of race frame stories, from two separate reporters, and involving pro-African American candidate support versus non-African American candidate support. The use of descriptors for these members of the electorate sets the tone as well as the sound bite that they provide. Any essence of subtlety immediately vanishes. The third item of note, is the way that the story wraps up.

REYNOLDS: When asked if this country would vote for a black man for the highest office in the land, Senator Obama deflects the question, suggesting merely raising it is a disservice to the American electorate. But the American electorate has never had anyone quite like Barack Obama to consider (*CBS Evening News*, 2008).

It is important to note here that while these research questions deal with the subtleties of overtness of racial cues or biases, RQ4 addresses dissemination of issue information that could add to a level of political knowledge. This story ends with a message that issues are far less important than race or character. In reference to RQ4, issues are not even mentioned in this story demonstrating that when a bias frame leads, little substance follows.

As mentioned earlier, News frames have been described as “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). Tankard (2001, p. 96) continued by stating that the “power of framing comes from its ability to

define the terms of a debate without the audience realizing it is taking place.” If journalism practices hold true on television broadcast news, then stories will be produced that have strategies, issue themes and personalities at their center. As stated in the literature review, news media and entertainment programming often portray, or frame, minorities as inferior and women as generally weaker than men. The impact this has on candidates from the perspective of the cultivation theory would be interesting, yet difficult, to measure empirically. In short, cultivation analysis theorizes that television use could lead to the believing of a reality constructed by the television programming. This passive influence is responsible for a view of the world as a “scary” place and minorities as “scary” or “inferior” (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1978; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980).

As feminist are supporters of postmodernism in that they enjoy the criticism and irony of historical attitudes, it appears that gender bias too is a product of historical context for the number of gender roles typically expressed in a negative fashion. In the case of candidate Hillary Clinton, these gender specific sexist roles were highlighted by the “Soprano’s” spoof produced by her own campaign. Unfortunately, these references to sexist norms were not isolated incidents. Many articles and news stories surrounded the Clinton campaign questioning her femininity (too much/ too little) and fitness for the job as president.

This notion of “constructed reality” can perpetuate other stereotypes by the content and/or frames contained within news stories as demonstrated in this ABC News story:

FEELING THE HEAT

GRAPHICS: VOTE 2008

GRAPHICS: THE GENDER CARD

CHARLES GIBSON (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Next, the presidential race. It has been a difficult week for the Democratic frontrunner, Senator Hillary Clinton. As we reported, the other Democratic candidates, all of them men, went after her in their debate three nights ago. The way Clinton has battled back has her opponents accusing her of playing the gender card. ABC's Kate Snow is with the Clinton campaign in New Hampshire.

GRAPHICS: FEELING THE HEAT

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) At the statehouse in Concord this afternoon, Senator Hillary Clinton signed the papers to officially run in New Hampshire...

HILLARY CLINTON SUPPORTER (MALE)

She's in.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) ...and then had this to say about all the criticism she's been taking lately.

SENATOR HILLARY CLINTON (DEMOCRAT

I anticipate it's gonna get even, you know, hotter. And if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen. And I'm very much at home in the kitchen. So I think I'll stick around.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) No mention of baking cookies. But that kitchen analogy may not be an accident. After Tuesday night's debate, Clinton's website featured a video called "Piling On."

SENATOR JOE BIDEN (DEMOCRAT

Hillary Clinton...

JOHN EDWARDS (DEMOCRAT

Senator Clinton...

GRAPHICS: STATEMENT BY PATTI SOLIS DAYLE

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) And her campaign manager sent out a fundraising plea, saying it was six against one. Six men, that is. Then yesterday, she told the all-female student body at her alma mater, Wellesley College...

HILLARY CLINTON SUPPORTER (MALE)

In so many ways, this all-women's college prepared me to compete in the all-boys club of presidential politics.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) Her male rivals suggested she was playing the victim.

GRAPHICS: STATEMENT BY FRED THOMPSON

FRED THOMPSON (REPUBLICAN

The Clinton campaign goes so far in relying upon her being a strong, strong woman. And then on a dime, they can switch to say, 'Oh, my goodness, the men are ganging up on her.'

CLIP FROM MSNBC

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) This morning, Senator Barack Obama said when he was attacked in an earlier debate, he didn't mention his ethnicity.

SENATOR BARACK OBAMA (DEMOCRAT)

I didn't come out and say, 'Look, I'm being hit on because I look different from the rest of the folks on the, on the stage.'

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) Clinton insists she's not looking for any special treatment.

SENATOR HILLARY CLINTON (DEMOCRAT)

I don't think they're piling on because I'm a woman. I think they're piling on because I'm winning.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) But some of her female supporters say they do see Clinton's gender playing into the race.

KATE ENGLAND (CLINTON SUPPORTER)

As a woman, they're taking that as a reason to go after her, which is unfortunate because I think they should look at her as a candidate and not look at her gender.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Clinton has said repeatedly she is not running because she's a woman, but because she thinks she's most qualified to be president.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) But appealing to women voters...

CLINTON SUPPORTER (FEMALE)

We feel we need a woman in the White House.

SENATOR HILLARY CLINTON (DEMOCRAT)

Thank you.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) ...can't hurt (*ABC World News with Charles Gibson, 2007*).

The implications here are obvious. Not only did the story open with a graphic saying “The Gender Card” but the use of kitchen references is clearly slanted towards a gender bias. Interestingly, in this example, candidate Clinton used this bias-framed statement herself as a metaphor for the pressures associate with political campaigning. But the story quickly jumps into a gender biased media frame. And for the rest of the story it maintains the same frame without ever really discussing an issue or anything else relevant to an informed voting decision.

Like the previous story, this story focuses on a subgroup of the electorate, this time women, and once again homogenizes individuals into a marginalized group of vote suppliers.

Also as in the previous story, this one presents an example of cultivation theory whereas the frames lead to a constructed reality of weakness and fallibility

of the female candidate based solely on the candidates' gender. In addition to the blatant kitchen reference of "feeling the heat," the numerous gender references make it difficult to label this as anything other than a gender framed story. But in a repeat of the previous story, the candidate self-frames, in a frame of "sameness" that is meant to request an inclusion into a particular subset of voters. The strategy, perhaps, is less about self-inclusion and more about exclusion of the opponent.

It seems likely that stereotype would rear its head in the midst of the pre-election coverage of Barack Obama. Likewise, that same myth-making ability of the media might influence the voter's perceptions of a female political candidate. Once established, these media-prescribed gender roles, myths, or biases can become integrated into sources of political knowledge other than news media. These various sources establish the extent of the electorate's exposure to a particular candidate and comprise the materials with which to gain political knowledge, begin forming opinions, and begin the perceived rational decision-making process of selecting a candidate in a political race. In large part, this perception is based on the news coverage of the candidate as an individual, and potentially the candidate's stance on issues, as covered in the mass media. Thus, this political knowledge is the result of exposure to bias, stereotypes, and otherwise subjective information disseminated by news sources as evidenced by the previous stories. This exposure to established stereotypes of candidates can be a product of other media types also. This example is a singular example of a story that shows how political learning might occur that incorporates stereotype.

The issue question associated with RQ4 is again demonstrated to be challenged by a story based on a bias. As a story completely based on a gender reference, it is completely devoid of any usable or even minimally substantive issue information. The candidate is shown saying that she is not running because she is a woman, but because she is the most qualified. The story falls short of asking her to explain why.

#### Analysis of Alternate Political Knowledge Sources

##### Barack's Basketball Family<sup>1</sup>

The *New York Times on-line* features video reports on their website that usually complement those printed stories featured in the newspaper. The newspaper story published June 1, 2007 was titled "One Place where Obama Goes Elbow to Elbow" and the on-line video was titled, "*Barack Obama's Basketball Family*." On the website a short caption explains that, "Craig Robinson, basketball coach at Brown University - and Barack Obama's brother-in-law talks about Mr. Obama's game and its impact on his political career." The story begins with the reporter (and narrator) explaining that in order to understand Senator Obama the *New York Times* follows him along the campaign trail, but that those closest to him say that in order to *really* understand him it is essential to understand him on the basketball court. She further explains that while he has played regulation ball he prefers a pick-up game with "no shot clock, no written rules, and no referees." (The piece (slightly over five minutes in length) continues to describe Obama as a lifelong hoops player. His brother-in-law Craig

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<sup>1</sup> Written in part with Kim LeDuff, Ph.D. as part of an unpublished paper.

Robinson then chimes in: *“You play on the south side of Chicago and you have one clientele and you play in the East Bank Club and you have a different clientele and we’ve played in all of them.”*

The story goes on to explain that the two started playing when Barack’s wife Michelle asked her brother to play him in an effort to *“see what kind of man Barack was.”* Robinson explains that *“You can tell a lot about a guy by the way he plays basketball—you can tell if he’s selfish, you can tell if he’s phony.”* Barack passed the test according to Robinson. The reporter then goes on to identify some of Robinson and Obama’s playmates who she explains would become key advisors and fundraisers for the Senator. Arne Duncan a white male and influential member of the Chicago School District and John W. Rogers Jr. a black male and mutual fund advisor in Chicago are seen in separate still pictures. Robinson goes on to explain that they play a pick-up game whenever they can and that their affiliation is *“all because of basketball.”*

The reporter then says that *“Mr. Obama’s approach to a game that is competitive and often dirty with only loose and unwritten rules says a lot about his character and approach to politics.”* While the reporter points out you won’t see him on the court anytime soon because he won’t have many opportunities on the campaign trail, she reports that *“Robinson believes the hoop on the south lawn of the White House has his brother-in-law’s name on it.”* The next shots are of Robinson interwoven with still photos of George W. Bush playing golf and jogging. The sound track is a clip of Robinson saying, *“There have been Presidents who played golf and there have been presidents who’ve played all*

*kinds of different things—who jog. I think he would be the kind of guy to get together a pick-up game every now and then and for basketball players jogging is very boring.”*

On the denotative level this is simply a story about a favorite pastime of one of the potential presidential candidates and it does not seem biased or damaging. But on the connotative level this story could be interpreted by audiences in a way that could potentially alter the image that Obama and his camp are attempting to establish. According to Berger (1995) “The media function most effectively when they stimulate people and activate material already stored in the minds of audiences and generate desired responses. Much of the stored material, it should be pointed out was put in the heads of audiences by the media in the first place. ...semiotic analysis, is one of the primary ways of determining how people find meaning in sounds and images” (p.157).

This is another example of the aforementioned notion by Campbell (1995) that addresses what he calls a potentially dangerous “positive stereotype” of African American athletic success that has historically been present in the news. While this is a story about a politician, it is potentially damaging that connections are being drawn about a black male presidential candidate and his athletic prowess. Furthermore the story suggests that he will seek advisement from his cronies on the court. Campbell’s study was done during basketball season. He noted that the sports segments of most newscasts featured the most African Americans, but there was little to no coverage of black coaches. He suggests that this is “evidence of the mythical thinking of many white Americans that

blacks have a 'natural' ability to compete as athletes but not a 'natural' ability to lead and direct" (p. 63). This is potentially dangerous to a political candidate who is trying to gain public trust in order to lead America.

Secondly, "pick-up basketball" is primarily associated with street ball in the inner cities. Obama's complex racial background appears to have worked both for and against him. On the one hand his being half white has made him more acceptable amongst white constituents, but conversely, he has been criticized by black constituents for not being black enough. Perhaps this story is an effort to make Obama appear "more black." Regardless of the intention this story is laden with stereotype. Berger (1995) argues that "Stereotypes are particularly pernicious when they are applied to roles, or the kinds of behaviors that are expected of people relative to the situations in which they find themselves, their places in society, and their status in some organization or institution" (p.160) .

This inclusion of stereotype is common in news coverage. As Hall explains, these stereotypes are used to present complex information in an easy to understand way or as he quotes Dyer, "We are always making sense of this in terms of some wider categories. Thus, for example, we come to "know" something about a person by thinking of the *roles* which he or she performs: is he/she a parent, a child, a worker, a lover, boss, or old age pensioner?" He goes on to explain that membership is assigned to a group, as in "race." These "types" are simple and widely recognized characterizations, the associated traits are difficult to change, and development of the frame is kept to a minimum (Dyer, 1977, p. 28). It certainly isn't beneficial to a campaign.

## AdWatch, Pop Culture, and Postmodernism: Connecting With the Audience

From saxophones on stage to Fleetwood Mac at the inauguration, popular culture was, and is still, a part of the Bill Clinton public persona. The Hillary Clinton campaign seemed ready to pick up the torch and attempt to build a public following like that enjoyed by her past president husband. She pursued a popularity level bordering on rock-star status albeit with a postmodern slant.

Popular culture iconography in political campaigns is nothing new. Perhaps one of the earliest examples of television and popular culture iconography in combination was the now famous “Daisy” ad which was aired only once by the Johnson Campaign in 1964. This advertisement also gave rise to the now common practice of “adwatch” as discussed earlier whereas the advertisements themselves become integrated into primetime newscasts and become a story on their own.

This movement into the realm of postmodern political campaigning is the result of an evolution in campaign tactics. It’s not a new method by any means. In fact, one could argue that the “Daisy” advertisement, which juxtaposed a cute young girl and a nuclear explosion, opened the door. In a more recent campaign, candidate Clinton’s husband, former president Bill Clinton, used the media in what can be seen as a postmodern fashion during his campaign. Making appearances on MTV and playing his saxophone on the Arsenio Hall Show were classic examples of appealing to the common man through the low art of pop culture television. It seems that no one, before or after, reached out to the young voters in the way he did. He integrated many popular culture

references into the campaign and never outwardly shied away from questions from these potential voters. Most notable was the now famous “I didn’t inhale” (Ifill, 1992) line repeated many times in news stories.

The Reagan presidential campaign was a particular milestone in the growth of pop culture iconography in television political advertising. Reagan’s use of compelling photo opportunities and visually compelling advertising was indeed a contributing factor in his landslide victory over Walter Mondale. Reagan was subsequently dubbed “the first television president” although some would argue that this title belonged to J.F.K. This influence of image over substance is exemplified by the critical news story about Reagan that was subsequently applauded by Reagan staffers because it included such flattering images of the candidate that it overshadowed the voice-over.

The popularity of YouTube, MySpace, and Internet blogging has placed American politics directly into the postmodern quagmire. The unexpressed retaliation against the hegemony of the American political system, combined with easy, affordable technology, has caused, or at least allowed, just about anyone to express political views and support for anything or anyone. The ready availability of inexpensive video equipment has given rise to the “Obama Girls” and YouTube debates. The ubiquitous nature of high-speed Internet access has made websites such as Jib-Jab famous and popular for their political humor and parodies. It only stands to reason that this evolution in mass communication be embraced by political candidates, because it certainly cannot be easily shunned or defeated. As such, we have the postmodern politic. We have old ideas being

presented in new ways. And, as such, we have candidates jumping on the popular-culture bandwagon hoping they will not be left out or forgotten. As it turns out, the internet has proven to be a worthwhile avenue for fundraising and even this is being used as a horse race frame by the broadcast news media:

COURIC: And Bob, what about Republican Ron Paul? He has raised a boat load of money, something like \$24 million so far, just \$6 million on Sunday. He's fourth behind the major Republican candidates. Is he becoming a significant factor in this?

SCHIEFFER: You know, this is the question nobody can answer, Katie. I mean, anybody who can go out like he did the other night and raise \$7 million on the Internet, he's going to take votes away from somebody on that Republican race in both Iowa and New Hampshire. But at this point you can't find anybody who can tell you who he's going to hurt. But if you've got that much money at your disposal, you're going to be able to get some votes some way or the other.

COURIC: And he's got some passionate supporters, that's for sure. Bob Schieffer in Washington. Bob, nice to talk to you.

SCHIEFFER: Thank you, Katie (*CBS Evening News*, 2007).

But with control of mass media being in the hands of a few corporations, each with a profit agenda, the voting public has become more active in the seeking out of political information. The ease of Internet publishing has been seen as both a blessing and a curse for the electorate seeking knowledge of candidates. Campaigns are losing control of candidate publicity and traditional

news organizations are being beaten to the story, if there was even a race to begin with.

This voter activism has been present in the past. A well-established website, Jib-Jab, has already taken viral political messages to new levels, but self-publishing social media sites like YouTube have allowed anyone with a camcorder and some inexpensive editing software to publish online videos touting almost any political stance. Moreover, the videos can be published anonymously. Thus we have the topic at hand. We are faced with a new form of campaign message, one independently produced by the electorate. Brian Williams, an NBC reporter, called it and similar uploads “a very scary thing for campaign managers” during a story in March (ABC Evening News, Mar 19, 2008). These internet messages are also the focus of some television news stories and that aspect is of interest to this study.

*An Internet Viral Campaign Ad: Hillary Clinton, and the Feminist Perspective*

We are faced with a new form of campaign message. To date, the message to be discussed next has been viewed nearly 4 million times. It has never broadcast with bought time on any television network yet has been broadcast on countless occasions. The purpose of this paper is to examine the alternative meanings inherent in *any* political message and knowledge source, but in this case, it's contained in an unauthorized political ad instead of a candidate or a PAC.

The ad is a remix of the now famous Apple Computer ad from the 1989 Super Bowl. The original ad was inspired by George Orwell's “1984.”

Interestingly, this ad never appeared in a paid time slot on commercial television. Instead, it was produced independently, outside of the campaign, and uploaded onto YouTube where it quickly became viral. This was followed by many showings on newscasts. The dialog and the images of Hillary Clinton are taken, and altered, from her announcement as a presidential candidate. All sound effects are representative of the ambient sounds associated with a large group of people gathered in an industrial-looking environment (marching sounds, echoes, metallic sounds, etc.).

The scene opens with images of an industrial-looking building interior. The coloration is falsely rendered in a blue tint to reinforce the ominous feeling of the ad. Image dissolves into a straight-line of drone-looking people, essentially marching through a tunnel. Monitors with a “talking head” image of Hillary Clinton line the walkway. There is a flash of a young, blond, athletic woman running into the area (in true color) followed by a close-up on the face of one of the emotionless drone-type marchers.

Images of the marchers from various angles are intermixed with the full color woman running and a group of storm-trooper-looking thought police in pursuit of the woman. The shot changes to the large room where the marchers are filing into theatre style seating with the talking head image of Hillary Clinton being shown on a large screen at the front of the room.

Again there is the image of the woman running toward the theatre while carrying a sledgehammer. A hard edit continues showing the drones, this time

panning the rows of still emotionless viewers of the image of Hillary Clinton speaking on the screen.

The shot changes to the woman in red shorts running through the aisle, between countless rows of seated, motionless drone people watching the screen in the front of the room. Shots cut back and forth between the woman in red shorts and the pursuing thought police.

As the young woman enters the room full of drones, the shot is of the woman spinning, swinging the sledgehammer while the thought police are still in pursuit. Clips alternate between Hillary, the woman swinging the sledgehammer and the thought police.

At this point, the woman releases the hammer into the air and it is shown flying towards the screen at the front of the room. The hammer hits the screen, resulting in an explosion. The drones are panned again, this time with mouths gaping from what they had just witnessed. The image fades to a white screen and the following text scroll up and stops...

*“On January 14<sup>th</sup>,*

*the Democratic primary*

*will begin.*

*And you’ll see why 2008*

*Won’t be like “1984”* (YouTube, March 5, 2007).

With the sound of a hollow echo, the knockoff image of an ‘O’ appears on a black screen in an attempt to parody the Apple Computer logo. Below it fades in the web address BarackObama.com (see Appendix for full description).

The video, or political ad, drew a great deal of media attention. It was played either in full length or at least a clip on each of the three major networks as well as cable television news programming. At first viewing, the ad was simply a parody of a high impact, previously aired advertisement for a consumer product. But through textual analysis an argument can be made for alternative meanings and symbolism that can only be noticed through additional contemplation. Obviously, there is a dominant meaning textually inferred in this ad, yet further analysis could uncover some more latent or negotiated meanings. This can also be thought of as the connotative versus denotative meanings of the ad.

This is not to assume that either meaning is right or conversely wrong. In Stuart Hall's landmark work, *Encoding/Decoding*, he states that there are few instances when signs organized in a discourse have only a literal meaning (Hall, 1993, p.133).

Even in its most literal interpretation, this ad lends itself to ideological criticisms, most notably the notion of hegemony. Fiske (1992) refers to hegemony as "the process by which a dominant class wins the willing consent of the subordinate classes to the system that ensures their subordination"(p. 310). This is exactly what is revealed in this ad. As Hillary Clinton announces her intent to run for President of the United States a large group of unthinking, unresponsive, mindless drones march to the rhythm of her words and take their place, side by side, in an orderly and learned response to the words of an accepted leader.

The only facial response given in the ad is when an individual, unaffected by the hegemonic rhetoric, smashes the monitor as a sign of change. From a literal point of view, this and the text that follows are meant to demonstrate Barack Obama's ability to be this force for change.

Of course, as mentioned earlier, there are other interpretations of the visual elements in this ad. While hegemonic themes are still pervasive in the ad an alternative, or connotative, interpretation of textual meanings can result by application of feminist theories.

Kaplin defines a few variants of feminism in her essay *Feminist Criticism*. One is the notion of bourgeois feminism which reflects the concern for equal rights and freedoms in a capitalist system (1992, p. 251). Another is the notion of the philosophical position of "essentialist feminism." Here, it is assumed that there is a more moral and more humane aspect to the female, which has been repressed by the male dominated world and if brought into the fray, could change the world for the better (p. 252). And a third definition is that of "liberal feminism" in which women demand equal access to employment, benefits and positions of power (p. 254).

It becomes an interesting study of this ad when these particular variations of feminism are applied. One of the most interesting aspects of this analysis is that this is an ad for a male candidate and essentially a negative advertisement directed towards the female in the race.

Upon closer examination, we can notice that all of the images of Hillary Clinton are subdued and shown as black and white video. Additionally, all of the

images of Senator Clinton are headshots, with no change of camera angles or zooms of any type. This has the effect of placing the image of Hillary Clinton in an asexual context, almost an androgynous being, devoid of any sexuality, either male or female. In contrast, there is the hammer-throwing woman. She is displayed in full color, semi attractively dressed with fashionable hairstyle and accessories (an iPod).

Taking this slant, Hillary could be seen as an extension of her husband, Bill Clinton. Moreover, she could be interpreted as an extension of the male dominated government institution as a whole. This would perhaps be part of the dominant meaning.

The three feminist perspectives noted above allow an interpretation of the full-color, hammer-throwing woman. She is tired of repression. The repression is represented by the gang of storm-troopers in pursuit of her. She is demanding change. She is demanding a position of power. And if that power is granted, she will change the world for the better. Ironically, she is working against the one person potentially able to put a woman into a position of power.

There are many male figures throughout the 70-second piece. But another point of interest is how males are represented in the ad. Male figures are either mindless, zombie-like followers of the image on the screen or they are violent storm troopers.

Lastly is an analysis of the scrolling text at the end of the ad. This too, like the imagery, can be analyzed both denotatively and connotatively.

The literal meaning is that something is going to be different in the next election. There will be a voter uprising that will force the government into new directions and the status quo will be eliminated.

But there is also a feminist interpretation. Although this is an ad promoting Obama, another presidential hopeful, the ad clearly makes reference to the year 1984. This was the year in which Geraldine Ferraro ran as vice president with candidate Walter Mondale and was beaten badly at the polls by Ronald Reagan. If there is a change due in 2008, perhaps it is that a woman finds a position of executive power in the government. This could be interpreted as a call for Hillary to be a running mate with Obama.

This represents the challenge faced by individuals who are intent on being politically active in the age of the Internet. Stuart Hall and others have already demonstrated that any message can be interpreted in a number of differing ways by those who receive it. These interpretations can be the product of social surroundings, preconceived notions of right and wrong, or even the moment of reception. Political campaigns have no control over these messages and as such are in a constant state of readiness for damage control or even plausible deniability.

Viral video may have another, unintended effect in the future. Eventually, someone is apt to call into question the value of these ads. The number of impressions garnered from this ad would be worth millions of dollars if bought on television. If this value were to be placed on the ad, would it be considered a campaign contribution?

But where the 1984 internet ad was produced independently, other sources of political knowledge are available on the Internet via established sources. These sources require, like most other Internet information, an active seeking of information by the electorate. The passive information gathering model associated with television may somewhat hold true when considering Internet options such as RSS feeds, but generally the information must be cultivated by the viewer.

These stories from well known, reputable sources can also contain biases much like the broadcast counterparts. What may make it more important though is the nature of an Internet post. Whereas a television broadcast news story only needs a passive audience and the nature of the message is fleeting, an Internet message is sought, can be re-watched, and can also be shared an infinite number of times without video degradation. This could possibly be dangerous to a campaign since a crisis control measure would be a temporary action for a traditional news story (fleeting message), an Internet message containing damaging information or unpopular frames will require an ongoing effort to quell the shared distribution and growth of a unified public opinion. This is an example of a story that shows how political learning might occur that incorporates stereotype and gender bias.

### The Postmodern Hillary

The evolution of pop culture iconography can be traced through the history of television political advertising. Truman used images of his whistle-stop tours to portray himself as a leader of people. Johnson had the "Daisy" ad and as

technology in the editing rooms developed through the 1990's, candidate images were "morphed" into popular or conversely, unpopular images. In many ways, political commercials are like miniature movies. As in movies, great care is taken to make certain each detail of production—lighting, editing, music—work together to convey a particular mood (Kaid & Davidson, 1986). At the movies, we want to enter the world the filmmakers have created, to suspend our disbelief and be caught up in the story. But political ads need to be approached more cautiously. They are not fictional stories but expressions of political opinion.

Political commercials express their opinion not simply through words. Just as music and editing help convey mood in movies, in ads they reinforce the impression of popular culture the makers want you to have.

Popular culture references appear in various forms in ads in addition to music, videography, and the use of cultural artifacts integrated into the advertisements. A visual analysis exposes the use of cultural imagery utilized in political advertising depicting references to national, regional, ethnic, religious, sub-cultural, or class characteristics in order to evoke specific themes in the ads (Griffin & Kagen, 1996). These themes are then an attempt to capture the attention of a specific demographic target, thus allowing for elaboration of the controlled message. Voters are bombarded with narrative messages particularly as election times approach. As a means of connection with the electorate, these political messages must contain inferences to the norms, values and issue themes of the current mindset. It is within these recurrent themes that the electorate can make sense of the world (Haque, 2003). These themes include,

but are not limited to, the use of pop-culture artifacts and references as content in political advertising.

According to a Pew report, 52% of Internet users, or roughly 63 million users, went online to retrieve news or other information about candidates in the 2004 election. Furthermore, as many as 11% of those users contributed money to a campaign through the website (Rainie et al., 2006).

The Internet has become an integral part of election campaigns. The number of voters using the Internet as a primary source of information has grown from 11% in 2000 to 24% in 2004, and continued to grow into the 2008 election cycle. This advance in itself is an indication of the postmodern analysis of American politics. Consider that the original intent of the Internet was to better coordinate the American war machine and now it is being used by candidates to lure voters by touting antiwar messages.

In the 2008 campaign season Republican candidate Ron Paul was successful in raising a record \$4.2 million in a single day via a web based fund drive. As for the Democrats, Obama has gone to the web himself using Facebook to garner support and citizen activists have posted videos on YouTube in support of the candidate. Videos on YouTube by Paul and Obama had been viewed more than 10 million times while the campaign season was still young. There is even an online company now that tracks such data, *techpresident.com*. So what is it about these references that allow them to have a postmodern label? Any critique of a mass media message should at least include a definition of postmodernism. Unfortunately, a clear, reliable, agreed upon definition fails to

exist. A most useful definition comes from the title of a *Television Quarterly* article: “We Know It When We See It” (Campbell & Freed, 1993, p.75). But it can perhaps be defined further. Campbell and Freed quote Charles Jencks:

Postmodernism is fundamentally an eclectic mixture of any tradition with that of the immediate past: it is both the continuation of modernism and its transcendence. Its best works are characteristically doubly-coded and ironic, making a feature of the wide choice, conflict and discontinuity of traditions, because this heterogeneity most clearly captures or pluralism. (Campbell & Freed, 1993, p.75)

Campbell and Freed continue by stating that “the technique of trying to define and categorize PoMo style is a logical, rational and modern critical practice—the very essence of what post modernism wants to resist at all turns” (p.76).

Thus we have the conundrum of defining something that inherently doesn’t want to be defined. Still, there are certain characteristics that can be defined such as a lean toward the ironic, the inclusion of cultural references, and a sense of intertextuality. It can be considered a way of viewing and critiquing culture and the events therein. Postmodernism can also be a thought process, a particular attitude used to discuss politics, culture, art or mass media that completely disregards authorial intent. If modernism is a rational, formula-based, linear means of analysis, then postmodernism is the antithesis.

Jim Collins said in an essay, “one of the preconditions of the postmodern condition is the proliferation of signs and their endless circulation” (p.331). These signs are multiplied by technology (VCR’s, computers, cable television, etc.) and

are constantly being interpreted and reinterpreted (Collins, 1992). These interpretations are based entirely on significantly different ideological agendas and if enough “real” interpretations appear then all reality begins to just disappear (p. 331).

So where does this leave the postmodern political message?

### *Hillary and the Postmodern Message*

In June 2007, Americans who tuned into the nightly news a bit late were met with a confusing piece of video. One purpose of this paper is to attempt to explain why this video was aired in a newscast, explain what it meant to most people and could have meant to others, and suggest why we should expect to see more of this type of news story in the future.

In the video a woman walks into the Mount Kisco diner in Westchester, N.Y., and takes a seat. The rock band Journey is playing “Don’t stop believing” in the background. Seconds later in comes a man, presumably the husband, dressed in a short-sleeved, untucked shirt. “No onion rings?” he asks when he sees that his wife has ordered a bowl of carrots. “I’m looking out for you,” she replies. She continues to peruse the diner’s jukebox selections. The camera focuses in on the potential selections: Tina Turner’s “The Best.” KT Tunstall’s “Suddenly I See.” Smash Mouth’s “I’m a Believer.” The husband suggests Smash Mouth will win. “We’ll see,” she says.

Throughout the video, the human side of this family is portrayed. The daughter, apparently habitually tardy, is parallel parking her car outside the diner, and not being entirely successful. The woman returns a glaring look from

another restaurant patron with an equally intense look along with questioning overtones. As tension rises in the scene, the woman reaches for the jukebox selection keys. Suddenly, the screen goes black.

Everything in the video, the parallel parking outside, Journey's "Don't Stop Believing" playing in the background, is right out of "*The Sopranos*" finale. Even Vincent Curatola, who played John "Johnny Sack" Sacramoni on the HBO show, makes a cameo. But this is not a clip from the hit television show. Instead, it is a campaign message from presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. She was the woman at the table. Former president Bill Clinton, her true-life husband, was the gentleman in the booth with her. And their daughter Chelsea was referenced as parking the car. This campaign message was a direct knock-off, but HBO, who airs *The Sopranos*, said they had nothing to do with it.

The Hillary Clinton campaign message described here is an example of the true nature of postmodern politics. It contains a reference to more than one past event, a bit of irony, some conflict, and gives rise to a plethora of interpretations. One should wonder if this was the intent or was this only an attempt to garner votes from the American youth, and Joe Sixpack? Still, it could have also been a strategic move by the campaign. This video, an inexpensive production by Hollywood standards, was aired by most all of the main news agencies. No campaign can afford that kind of publicity so early in a political race. But what did it offer in terms of political knowledge?

A study of the possible interpretations is in order here. One must consider all of the variables involved in these various interpretations but that is not only

impossible, it also flies in the face of the non-systematic nature of the postmodern. Thus, an examination of the connotative as well as denotative meanings should be textually analyzed. A few variables still come into play here. First is the political leanings of the viewer: is the viewer a Clinton supporter or not? Secondly, did the viewer see the final episode of *The Sopranos*? These two variables would have a significant effect on interpretation.

This calls into play a brief synopsis of Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding. His theory focused on the manner in which communicated messages were sent/received, or encoded in production and decoded at the receiver end. His argument is one of environment. Reception, understanding and proper decoding of a message only happens in terms of "perfectly transparent communication" (Hall, 1980, p. 129). This only happens when the producer and receiver are operating within the same dominant, hegemonic coding system.

Hall said, "The different areas of social life appear to be mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organized into dominant or preferred meanings. New, problematic or troubling events, which breach our expectancies and run counter to our common sense constructs, to our taken-for-granted knowledge of social structures, must be assigned to their discursive domains before they can be said to make sense" (Hall, 1980, p. 129).

This is the essence of fad language, or more commonly, political double speak. It is this media reinforcement that gives the "sign" a dominant or "preferred meaning." Of course, the same holds true for television shows like "The Sopranos" which are viewed by an extraordinary number of people.

Furthermore, Hall described various interpretations such as the “preferred,” “negotiated” and “oppositional” meanings. This is what leads to the textual analysis of the Clinton video from a postmodern prospective.

The preferred meaning is one produced by a viewer who generally agrees and accepts the dominant ideology and subjectivity of the message produced (Fisk, 1992, p. 292). In the case of the Clinton Internet message, this would be reserved for those who had seen the final episode of *The Sopranos* and had some clue as to the meaning of the message. It was, in fact, an announcement of a campaign song. More than 25,000 people had e-mailed suggestions to the campaign site and the act of choosing the song had become a matter of public discourse.

The secondary purpose of the images was to humanize Hillary Clinton. In the message she was seen as a character from a popular television show and as such identifiable to the masses as somewhat familiar. Clinton presents herself as Americana, a wife, and a mother. She shakes her head at the prospect of daughter Chelsea parallel parking and at husband Bill preferring onion rings instead of the carrot sticks on the table. As the candidate flips through the jukebox selections the song titles are displayed. These are the songs voted on by visitors to her campaign website and are part of the selection process. Husband Bill chimes in with his opinion that a song by the band “Smashmouth” will be the winner.

Everything about this video is designed to make it familiar to the masses, the common folk of the electorate. The setting has been seen before and is

familiar. It portrays the candidate as well as her family in human terms. And it gives the audience some insight into the inner working of a song selection. It works well to humanize the candidate and her family and also requires the viewer to make one more mouse click on the website in order to discover which song has been selected.

Postmodern analysis is almost by definition an oppositional meaning. It is the inherent discarding of authorial intent. It assumes a lack of structure that would be prevalent in the interpretation of this message had the audience not seen the final episode of "The Sopranos." There are also viewers who are not particularly fans of the Hillary Clinton campaign. Since the oppositional meanings are reserved for those who have a direct conflict with the dominant ideology, this gives rise to the oppositional reading of the message.

From this reading, it is clear that a strong, independent woman enters a restaurant first and alone, independent of her family who will join her there later. The setting makes little sense for those viewers who have not seen the final episode of "The Sopranos." Instead, it can be seen as a bit condescending. We are meant to believe that here is a powerful political figure entering a small community diner and blending into the surroundings like a common person. With Journey's "Don't stop believing" playing in the background she takes a booth and shortly husband Bill enters and sits down. His plea for onion rings instead of carrot sticks and her retort of "I'm looking out for you" is an indication that she will pass legislation that is not particularly agreeable to the masses but that she sees as good for the country. Chelsea's attempt at parallel parking could be

interpreted as a political learning curve or even a nod towards her failed driver's license plan for illegal immigrants in her home state of New York. The constant flipping in the jukebox selections could be interpreted as a lack of decision-making ability as well as Bill chiming in with his views.

The character sitting at the counter stands and gives Hillary a glare. She immediately locks eyes with this person and holds an antagonistic stare until the customer passes and breaks the moment. This can be read as the polarizing effect that the Clinton campaign is having on the country whereas the electorate either seems to love her or hate her. Either way, the message being sent is that she will not back down from the confrontation.

Lastly is an examination of possible negotiated meanings. This reading falls somewhere in between of the others. It is generally reserved for those who do share the general ideology of the sender but need to translate the message into a more localized meaning. This would be the case for those who did not see the final episode of the HBO program but are fans of the Hillary campaign.

This reading shows a strong, independent woman entering a diner alone and undisturbed by that fact. She is a leader who can wait for others to join her in her direction. The carrot sticks and the plea for onion rings from Bill Clinton are a metaphor for the healthcare policy concerns of Hillary and the intent to act upon them. The customer at the counter with the glaring stare is meant to be seen as a willingness to defend her views and not back down from opposition.

Lastly, the background music, “Don’t stop believing,” is a message in itself to the Hillary Clinton supporters as if to say that polls don’t matter and everyone should continue to support the campaign.

For these negotiated meaning readers, the setting becomes particularly important. Without being condescending, the candidate is seen as coming from common ground. She is meant to be portrayed as someone who has risen from commonality and has maintained her roots instead of joining the ranks of the elite class of government. This can also be interpreted by the casual style attire of her husband.

What all of these interpretations have in common is the postmodern perspective. We can clearly see the inclusion of certain elements of the postmodern condition such as irony, cultural references, and intertextuality. There is the fact that the message is a direct knock-off of a popular television program, the issue of this being an internet-based message that gets more airplay on television than speeches, and the PoMo element of the duality in meaning of the carrot sticks. Add to this the fact that the winning song is actually from a French Canadian (Celine Dion) and the PoMo elements and ironies continue to pile up.

Postmodernism is seen as a way of knowing the world, one which questions the nature of truth, reason and even reality. This is a relativist position, which denies that there are absolutes in any area of human knowledge. As such, knowledge is socially constructed and reflects the social positions of the informer and informed. Thus we have the various readings from preferred, to negotiated,

to oppositional. This becomes important in the translation of campaign messages since there are evidently many translations. Current campaigns need to be aware of the potential additional reading for the unexpected readings and the confounding ironies can prove to be detrimental to a campaign strategy.

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of the campaign message, and therefore the most postmodern, is the original intent of the scene. The writers of “The Sopranos” portrayed the original family as a well-adjusted, loving, normal American family. This was in complete contradiction to the personality of the lead character. This scene was an attempt to have the viewer develop a sense of sympathy for this family due to the circumstance they faced (Tony being stalked by a hit man). It was designed to develop a sense of compassion and familiarity for the family of a man known as a thief, a killer, and mostly, a mob boss.

This same scene is now being used for the promotion of a political candidate. It is not very difficult to draw some interesting parallels. French critic Lyotard, “defines the postmodern as ‘incredulity towards metanarratives.’ In more chewable usage, ‘postmodern’ refers to a vast maelstrom of trends in architecture, music, literary criticism, political theory and other intellectual and popular currents. These break away from the traditionally ‘modern’ ideas of linear progress, rational control, and one right (usually white, male, European) way of doing things” (Atkisson, para 2).

This is evident in the current American political machine. We now are subjected to campaigns where reality is based on a poll or a television program. Rational control of messages has been given up for placements on YouTube with

the intent of further coverage by the mainstream media. When asked in an interview, “what kind of world gave birth to postmodernism,” Walter Truett Anderson replied, “What I’m suggesting is that human consciousness is continually in contact with the social environment, and that means with the *symbolic* environment. We *need* that desperately, and we have tended to understand that as a need for contact with other people who are pretty much like us.” (Anderson, 1991, para 7).

This is the essence of politics today. Candidates seem to no longer try to represent the electorate from an ivory tower. Now they want to convince the people that they too are the common people, the same as anyone else, and just another person sitting in the diner with their family. This aspect gives rise to how this ad, or announcement, was framed as a news story. This myth of inclusion, or sameness as I referred to it previously, dominates this message as with many others. Unfortunately, these alternative sources of political knowledge (long form ads produced by the campaign, newspaper stories, user-generated content, etc.) also demonstrate no significant dissemination of political issue information relevant to making an informed voting decision.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

If the focus is on a passive electorate, those voters who wait for television news to supply the information necessary for informed decision making, then we have discounted the possibility of searching out information and gaining political knowledge from active sources. One of the more commonplace information sources today is the Internet.

If today's African American and female candidates are electable, assumed by scoring well in the polls, it could be that they are capitalizing on the integration of the "political correctness" of popular culture into the political scene in the United States. While one could make the argument that if earlier runs for the presidency of the United States were a reflection of the times, it still comes down to viability of the candidates and how those candidates are presented. Or represented to the electorate. In 2007, one could witness the true integration of popular culture references into campaigns. One could argue that this phenomenon is nothing new. According to Frank Webster, "in *The Republic*, Plato discusses at length the moral and political consequences of musical pleasure. He distinguishes between the beneficial and detrimental consequences of particular harmonic and rhythmic forms" (p. 35).

But whereas music, images and celebrity usage were at one time used as popular culture identifiers in political communication, the full integration of these artifacts, coupled with the ability to instantly reproduce messages or produce original messages on web sites such as YouTube, has elevated political

messaging directly into the popular culture realm. Gender and race references that are considered unacceptable in mainstream media are commonplace in the extremist world of social media. Voters no longer need to be passively dependent on newscasts for information. Instead, the electorate now has the ability to actively seek out and examine messages repeatedly via the Internet, DVR's, and the 24 hour news cycle. This ability to seek out information allows the electorate to find and internalize information that already fits into their personal ideologies and therefore can be used as reinforcement for previously held biases. Unfortunately, using alternative sources in seeking biases is not always necessary. Likewise, active seeking of political information doesn't always produce useable information that contributes to increased levels of political knowledge.

This study shows that there were more than eighty instances of the terms "Obama" and "African American" used simultaneously in news stories from just one of the networks examined.

In addition, this same network aired more than fifty stories containing the terms "Clinton" and "woman" simultaneously. Often these stories didn't only make a passing mention, but instead made a story out of the fact itself:

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) But some of her female supporters say they do see Clinton's gender playing into the race.

KATE ENGLAND (CLINTON SUPPORTER)

As a woman, they're taking that as a reason to go after her, which is unfortunate because I think they should look at her as a candidate and not look at her gender.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Clinton has said repeatedly she is not running because she's a woman, but because she thinks she's most qualified to be president.

KATE SNOW (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) But appealing to women voters...

CLINTON SUPPORTER (FEMALE)

We feel we need a woman in the White House (*World News with Charles Gibson*, November 5, 2007).

In 1972, 18 year-olds could vote for the first time. In the election that followed, 55% of these newly christened voters, eighteen, nineteen, and twenty year-olds actually voted. The number has been decreasing ever since according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (Levine & Lopez, 2002). Perhaps the new campaign strategy of integrating popular culture into the regular campaign rhetoric is an attempt to reinvigorate the young voter.

GRAPHICS: THE KINGMAKERS

DAVID MUIR (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) What we showed you earlier in the broadcast here, just how coveted the voters in Iowa are in these final days before the caucus. But who knew about the college kingmakers who are getting personal visits

from the would-be presidents? Giving whole new meaning to the phrase, big man on campus. Here, again tonight, Jake Tapper.

JAKE TAPPER (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) 20-year-old Atul Nakhasi has been wooed by Hillary and Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Bill Richardson. No Edwards pictures?

ATUL NAKHASI (PRESIDENT

You know, I do have Edwards pictures. I just haven't gotten around to framing them.

JAKE TAPPER (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) As president of the College Democrats at the University of Iowa, he's not just had his picture taken, Nakhasi with some fellow students has had private meetings with candidates, like John Edwards and Joe Biden. An improbable big man on campus as candidates pursue the youth vote.

ATUL NAKHASI (PRESIDENT

The most surreal moment has definitely been my introduction of Hillary and Bill Clinton. And they just erupted like a volcano.

JAKE TAPPER (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) Especially now that he has a souvenir.

ATUL NAKHASI (PRESIDENT

"I'm very grateful. Sincerely, Bill Clinton."

JAKE TAPPER (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Very nice. For the 2004 presidential election, a record 47% of 18-year-olds to 24-year-olds turned out to vote, so candidates are reaching out, especially in these key early states.

JAKE TAPPER (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) Reaching out on MySpace and Facebook. And now, directly contacting student party leaders, such as in New Hampshire, Republican Greg Boguslavsky at Dartmouth College.

GREG BOGUSLAVSKY (DARTHMOUTH COLLEGE)

It's reassuring that the political candidates are engaging the students in the political process.

JAKE TAPPER (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) Boguslavsky got to ride along with John McCain on his way to a Dartmouth town hall meeting.

SENATOR JON MCCAIN (REPUBLICAN)

Nice to see you, Greg.

GREG BOGUSLAVSKY (DARTHMOUTH COLLEGE)

Do you think there's any difference between, you know, my generation kind of the children and grandchildren of the baby-boomers, and your own generation?

SENATOR JON MCCAIN (REPUBLICAN)

I have great confidence in the future of America because I have great confidence in the present young generation.

JAKE TAPPER (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) Why do you think they come here and they kiss your ring?

ATUL NAKHASI (PRESIDENT

You know, the youth is a major constituency group for the Democratic Party. And it's a growing group with growing influence.

JAKE TAPPER (ABC NEWS)

(Voiceover) With Iowa and New Hampshire also serving as swing states for the general election in November, these campus kingmakers may enjoy high-profile attention for at least another two semesters. Jake Tapper, ABC News, Iowa City, Iowa.

DAVID MUIR (ABC NEWS)

(Off-camera) And you can find a lot more on these so-called kingmakers and the campus visits by visiting our website, ABCNEWS.com (*World News Sunday*, December 30, 2007).

Bill Clinton was a notable leader in this regard, that of wooing the youthful voter. In his campaign appearances on television programs he often targeted young voters specifically. Most noteworthy was his appearance on the cable television network, MTV, in which he admitted marijuana use, but without inhaling and the answering of the question; boxers or briefs?

Now we have the age of YouTube, an online video site. Candidates had begun using the Internet in earlier campaigns, but this use was typically limited to issuing of reports, white papers and fundraising on their own websites. Now candidates are using websites with a pre-established popularity, such as the aforementioned YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. There, a candidate can have a

message viewed thousands, if not millions, of times and the costs associated with the message are limited to production costs alone. The Washington Post dubbed the 2008 election cycle as “the YouTube election” because of the sites’ prominence in the campaigns. YouTube was being used by candidates as a means of spreading issue related information and attracting a grassroots following. Political opponents were also using these sites as a means of discrediting the opposing candidate. But more importantly, these sites are chock-full of independently produced amateur videos and messages that contain gender and race biased messaging. Still, while this style of media use is growing in popularity, it has not been established through research as a primary source for political knowledge. Yet, CNN has used YouTube as a source of questions for televised presidential debates.

Conversely, as mentioned earlier, viewers of Comedy Central programming such as *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* consistently score better in levels of high political knowledge, statistically equal with that of newspaper readers. Adding to the irony is Jon Stewart being named the fourth most respected journalist in the country (Pew, 2008).

The issue of political knowledge then, is a question of both content and source. If we assume that most of the electorate is comprised of passive consumers of information, then they (the electorate), are dependent on the programming choices made by news editors of television news programming and those others who are in charge of making content decisions. So while the literature review demonstrates that television is a primary source of political

knowledge, the data demonstrates a limited amount of relevant empirical data about candidates and issues.

The quantitative data demonstrates that issue oriented information can be accessed by viewers but not necessarily devoid of some bias. While direct “race frames” and “gender frames” are relatively controlled by broadcast media, they do exist and therefore the possibility of a priming effect also exists.

Qualitatively, this research demonstrates the pervasiveness of bias in all media and sources of political knowledge. The bias does not hide behind political correctness or some euphemism. Instead, the references to race and gender tend to be rather overt and assumed to be justified by having an interviewee make a biased statement instead of the reporter or used for the purpose of agenda setting by campaigns or in user-generated content. In some cases, like the examples shown in previous sections here, the candidates themselves launch the race or gender frame. Critics of the research will say that examples of this bias were found outside of the scope of the original research plan, like internet sources or advertising. Those critics are simultaneously correct and incorrect. The scope of the research did include alternative sources of political knowledge. They were examined as parts or subjects in news stories whenever possible. The truly disturbing finding of this research though, is the absolute lack of coverage for candidates that the media has established on their own as unelectable. So much of the coverage, by percentage, is based on a horse race frame that the political contest becomes just that: a contest where the electorate is treated like spectators of a game. A passive electorate is more

educated about who is winning and losing and less about why. When research questions 5&6 are addressed, a stark absence of hardly any information related to background or character appears in objective journalism when biased frames are used in a story. And given the relatively frequency of these stories, a potential problem of an uninformed electorate begins to be evident.

We have begun a period of American political upheaval. Barack Obama did win the election, and Hillary Clinton did become Secretary of State after losing the nomination. At no time in American history have we had such race and gender diversity in senior levels of Government. Yet, we should not assume that race, gender and even age discrimination is on the decline because of this.

This dissertation was begun in an exciting time in American presidential politics. We had the oldest candidate, an African American candidate and a female candidate running for the same office simultaneously. By the time this work was completed, the African American candidate had been re-elected, and by the largest margin in contemporary presidential politics. Furthermore, his former female opponent and appointee to head the Department of State, Hillary Clinton, has resigned her post after four successful years and has once again set her sights on a presidential run.

As I watched campaign coverage in the 2012 election cycle, it became evident, with any corroborating data, that race and gender cues were noticeably reduced from the previous cycle. As reported, content analysis of news cycles only prior to the convention were mostly devoid of race and gender references, but yet they existed elsewhere. The blogosphere and sites such as YouTube

were inundated. Obama Girls were user generated but achieving incredible levels of exposure on news magazine television shows, if not evening newscasts.

This study used framing theories, a bit of myth theory, some cultural studies and a bit of social theory in its textual analysis of news coverage of these presidential candidates. Moreover, these theories were a guiding framework, along with a generous supply of “isms” in contemplating what knowledge might be garnered by watching television news coverage of political (presidential) candidates.

Network television news is used as a conduit for information on a national level as opposed to the local nature of an affiliate or a newspaper. But still, while news stories has been shown in this study to be sensitive to racial and gender bias, significant hurdles must still remain in the equality of coverage in these stories. This is evidenced by the under-representation of African American candidates seeking national offices and the challenge of winning enough votes in a majority white district (McDermott, 1998; Philpot & Walton, 2007; Terkildsen, 1993; Terkildsen & Damore, 1999).

Of particular interest is the “racial dualism” hypothesis presented by Terkildsen and Damore (1999) which expounds on the notion that news sources act as racial arbitrators by limiting racial emphasis but also can bring race to the forefront by focusing on a candidate’s race during campaign news stories. Most interesting is the notion that these two phenomenon may be able to co-exist.

The evidence in this paper seems to reflect the idea of co-existence, with a caveat. The opposite ends of the gender/race spectrum were not presented on

traditional news broadcasts but instead, on a combination of political learning sources. There is little argument that the issues of race and gender were topics discussed by the populous, or electorate. But what has not been established is the origin of the frame, or the agenda-setting broadcast (if one does exist) that set these conversations into motion.

This is the origin of a research agenda that I hope will prove productive in the future.

As a research project, one might consider the null hypotheses and the less than robust results in the research questions to be some misinterpretation of the issue of political knowledge. But there is another explanation.

It is true that the data did not support the hypothesis regarding race or gender being a story frame more often than political issues or standings in the polls. But this is not failure for a study. In point of fact, the lack of evidence is, in itself, an interesting result for this study. These results give rise to a number of new questions about the current sources of American political knowledge. The use of the Internet is growing exponentially and the access to high-speed internet has increased dramatically in the years since the election studied. It would be most interesting to examine how differences in age effect the sourcing of political knowledge in future elections.

As for the question of why the hypothesis was proven false, or null, or at least, lacked statistical strength, the answers could fall within the possibility of newsroom editing for political correctness. Another possibility is that news

sources, when faced with two unique candidates, disregard race and gender preferences in order to concentrate on issues and horse race coverage.

There is also the possibility that news organizations are generally innocent in the reporting of distinguishing characteristics such as race or gender. In this case, the only time one of these issues would be a focus is when a candidate broaches the subject his/her self. Some research has shown that news coverage mentions race only after a candidate plays the “race card” during an interview (Jones & Clemons, 1993). Where ever the data points, it can be assumed that there is rarely a reference to a white-male candidate in the news if that is the only race and gender competing in an election (Terkildsen & Damore, 1999).

I argue that race and gender conversations are the result of conversations started through priming by alternative sources of political knowledge. Jon Stewart and the Daily Show as well as Stephen Colbert with his show, the Colbert Report (no longer aired), are prime sources of political entertainment for a broad demographic. Additionally, Saturday Night Live also offers itself as a source of political knowledge during national campaigns through the use of parody and comic entertainment. I posit that this type of programming has an agenda-setting component of its own and that this is an area where more intensive study is required. Lastly, it will be interesting to carry these findings forward to future elections. As mentioned earlier in this work, newsrooms have been and will be constrained by stylebooks. And while this may mostly restrict the overt gender and race biases in stories, a more subtle form of bias may appear. This will possible be more relevant as broadcast news becomes less of

a reporting of facts and is instead a reporting of an issue as analyzed by a reporter. And as the internet grows as a source of information, political extremism will permeate not only content but the feedback sections of online media sources. This, coupled with social media will have an effect on candidates and elections in coming races.

#### Limitations and Implications for Future Study

As mentioned earlier, this study has opened the door to a number of possibilities for future research. This could be a result of the limitations and constraints that were inadvertently put on this project by the author. As an example, it is conceivable that content of news stories would have been different if a longer time frame had been examined. Should the content analysis extend back to announcement of candidacy, it is very possible that differentiations of candidates would have included race and gender but that topic had run its course by the time period of concern for this study.

Also, a study that included survey data could have shed light on where the conversations of race and gender differences were getting started as the question applies to media. Furthermore, it would have been interesting to discover whether or not these issues were important enough in the electorate to warrant further coverage in the national news media. Unfortunately, the scope of a survey of that magnitude is outside of the financial means for a college student. But as a grant funded project, in cooperation with another organization (such as the Pew Research Center,) it would undoubtedly demonstrate some interesting results to these questions as well as others.

This study has attempted and has succeeded in contributing to the knowledge base concerning political learning. It offers some insight into the sources of race and gender discourse and offers some explanations for alternative sources of political knowledge and the social implications of race and gender differences in national elections. Furthermore, it attempts to explain, or at least demonstrate, the influence that the fledgling field of study concerning user-generated content is having on the electorate. This dissertation is a demonstration of how a focused topic can, and often does, reveal a much broader area of study. This could be considered a goal of the exercise as it becomes a launch pad for a life full of inquiry.

Additionally, this dissertation is an example of the importance of not limiting methodology. Had this been an attempt to discover bias through a quantitative analysis alone, the results would have shown a near complete lack and would have left the reader at a loss for sources of the frame. As a qualitative study alone, we would have not learned of the impact of user-generated content on the Internet and the influence of that content once broadcast in network news stories. Likewise, we would have had no base of comparison of race and gender mentions both overt and subdued.

The results provide significant considerations and implications for campaign staff as well. The results of this study can be used to determine a course of action for campaign messaging that can be controlled when reported upon, unlike that of the traditional news media story. Furthermore, this type of analysis could be used by campaigns to determine which topics to address in

political advertising and which topics to use strategically that will likely be used as subject matter in political news stories for the benefit of the candidate.

This research may be of a significant benefit to journalists as well. Even if biased statements are not intentional, the results demonstrate that they do exist, as well point to the frequency that they appear in broadcast news stories.

Journalists and broadcast news media professionals can then take special care to eliminate most possibilities of bias appearing in news stories.

In summary, this study has the potential of being relevant to media scholars as well as media professionals. It is a jumping off point for more research that is sure to come following the 2016 election cycle.

A few questions have been answered in this work, but more have been raised. These questions, with any luck, will be the building blocks of a long and enjoyable career.

APPENDIX A  
VANCE STUDY CODE SHEET

\* Required

1. # \_\_\_\_\_ (enter three-digit coder number) \*

- 101
- 102
- 103
- 104
- 105
- 106
- 107
- 108
- 109
- 110

2. Television Network \*

1= NBC, 2=CBS, 3=ABC, 4=FOX

- NBC
- CBS
- ABC
- FOX

3. Date of Broadcast \*

MM/DD

4. Length of story \*

Number of Words listed.

5. Campaign news story \*

- Yes
- No

6. Was the source mentioned \*

Choose Source mentioned

- reporter
- campaign news release
- campaign ad
- Other/none

7. Lead story? \*

Look for clues such as "Let's start things out tonight..." etc.

- Yes
- No
- Unknown

8. Graphics included in story? \*

The story script will say "Graphic" somewhere

- Yes
- No

9. First Candidate name mentioned \*

- Barack Obama
- Hillary Clinton
- John Edwards
- Bill Richardson
- Dennis Kucinich
- Joe Biden
- Mike Gravel
- Christopher Dodd

10. Second candidate name mentioned \*

- Barack Obama
- Hillary Clinton
- John Edwards
- Bill Richardson
- Dennis Kucinich
- Joe Biden
- Mike Gravel

- Christopher Dodd
- None

11. Third candidate name mentioned \*

- Barack Obama
- Hillary Clinton
- John Edwards
- Bill Richardson
- Dennis Kucinich
- Joe Biden
- Mike Gravel
- Christopher Dodd
- None

12. Forth candidate name mentioned \*

- Barack Obama
- Hillary Clinton
- John Edwards
- Bill Richardson
- Dennis Kucinich
- Joe Biden

- Mike Gravel
- Christopher Dodd
- None

13. What was the Primary Story Frame \*

- Issue
- Personal/Personality trait, character, etc.
- Horse Race
- Candidate's Gender
- Candidate's Race

14. What was the Secondary Story Frame \*

- Issue
- Personal/Personality trait, character, etc.
- Horse Race
- Candidate Gender
- Candidate Race
- None

15. What was the Tertiary Story Frame?

- Issue
- Personal/Personality trait, character, etc.

- Horse Race
- Candidate Gender
- Candidate Race
- None

16. Was Poll Data used? \*

- Yes
- No

17. Was the word “leading candidate” used? \*

Include any variation: frontrunner, leader in the polls, etc.

- Yes
- No

18. Were gender references used? \*

Either explicit or implicit

- Yes
- No

19. Were racial references used? \*

Either explicit or implicit

- Yes
- No

20. Gender of the reporter \*

Either the anchor if that was the person delivering the story, or the reporter of it was a live shot or package

- Male
- Female
- Unknown

## APPENDIX B

## CODEBOOK

## Coding Procedures

Access to the newscasts is via Lexis-Nexus broadcast scripts. For the purposes of this study, only the evening news from each of the major networks is necessary. Code only the content of the news story. You are looking for references to items listed on the code sheet. You will be asked to record the presence or absence of some items and the duration of others. The story can be reviewed as many times as necessary in order to provide accurate coding.

Code each news story using an electronic coding sheet. If unsure, consult other coders before scoring a particular section which may be in question.

Here is an explanation for each variable/category.

1. Give the assigned coder a consecutive three-digit number. Ex.: 001, 010, 100.
2. Enter a code for the network broadcast  
1=NBC, 2=CBS, 3=ABC,
3. Enter date of broadcast mm/dd
4. Enter the length of the story (in number of words) as expressed on the story script.
5. Determine if a campaign story exists. If a story mentions anything about the presidential race, it would qualify as a campaign story. If a candidate is mentioned in a story that is unrelated to the campaign, code no.

6. If a story exists, the source could be a different newsroom, a 512K organization, the campaign itself, etc. If the source is mentioned code for the appropriate source or if no source is mentioned enter other/none.

7. Was the story a lead story? Did it appear prior to any other story? Did the script begin with an introduction of the day's events or a welcome statement? If the story preceded any other news story other than the ticklers, code 1=yes, 0=no

8. Graphics refers to any graphs or other visual representation of the race between candidates. This should be something other than the candidate's name or identification of the reporter. It could be a graph of poll data or a political logo. The script will tell if graphics are on the screen during the story. Code 1=yes, 0=no for of graphics

9. First Candidate name mentioned \* Which candidate is mentioned first in the script.

- Barack Obama
- Hillary Clinton
- John Edwards
- Bill Richardson
- Dennis Kucinich
- Joe Biden
- Mike Gravel
- Christopher Dodd

10. Second Candidate name mentioned \* Which candidate is mentioned second (if any)

in the script. Enter none if no other candidates were mentioned.

- Barack Obama
- Hillary Clinton
- John Edwards
- Bill Richardson
- Dennis Kucinich
- Joe Biden
- Mike Gravel
- Christopher Dodd

None

11. Third Candidate name mentioned \* Which candidate is mentioned third (in any) in the script. Enter none if no other candidates were mentioned.

- Barack Obama
- Hillary Clinton
- John Edwards
- Bill Richardson
- Dennis Kucinich
- Joe Biden
- Mike Gravel
- Christopher Dodd
- None

12. Forth Candidate name mentioned \* Which candidate is mentioned forth (in any) in

the script. Enter none if no other candidates were mentioned.

- Barack Obama
- Hillary Clinton
- John Edwards
- Bill Richardson
- Dennis Kucinich
- Joe Biden
- Mike Gravel
- Christopher Dodd
- None

13. What was the primary story frame? Frames of interest include issue frames, Personal trait, horse race frame, candidate gender, or candidate race. Code the first frame that mentions a candidate by name.

Issues can include any position on Healthcare, education, Iraq, etc. If a candidate stand is mentioned in the story it becomes an issue story. List issues mentioned on code sheet. Personal traits can include family status, education, likes/dislikes, financial information, candidate health history, etc. A horse race story emphasizes where a candidate stands in the polls or money raised. If no mention of issues exists and the story is focused on poll data or fundraising.

Gender frames. In this category, one must be aware of any references to gender which are made directly or implied. These are to include references that are typically associated with stereotyped inferences specific to gender. Either explicit or implicit. Race frames used. In this category, one must be aware of any references to race/ethnicity which are made directly or implied. These are to include references that are typically associated with stereotyped inferences specific to race or comments made by third parties.

14. What was the Secondary Story Frame \*. Frames of interest include issue frames, Personal trait, horse race frame, candidate gender, or candidate race. (See descriptions above) Code the first frame that mentions a candidate by name. If no secondary frame is present code "None."

15. What was the Tertiary Story Frame? Frames of interest include issue frames, Personal trait, horse race frame, candidate gender, or candidate race. (See descriptions above) Code the first frame that mentions a candidate by name. If no secondary frame is present code "None."

16. Was Poll Data used? \* Was an outside poll mentioned (US News, Washington Post, etc.)? Code 1=yes, 0=no

17. 17. Was the word "leading candidate" used? \* Include any variation: frontrunner, leader in the polls, etc. Code Yes or no.

18. Were gender references used? \* Either explicit or implicit. Gender references used. In this category, one must be aware of any references to gender which are made directly or implied. These are to include references that are typically associated with stereotyped inferences specific to gender. References can be part of a different type of frame. Y(1) N(0)

19. Were racial references used? \* Either explicit or implicit. Race references used. In this category, one must be aware of any references to race/ethnicity which are made directly or implied. These are to include references that are typically associated with stereotyped inferences specific to race or comments made by third parties. References can be part of a different type of frame. Y(1) N(0)

20. Gender of the reporter \* If identifiable, code for the gender of the reporter of the story. Either the anchor if that was the person delivering the story, or the reporter if it was a live shot or package. Code for Male, Female, or Unknown.

## APPENDIX C

## AD TRANSCRIPT

HILLARY CLINTON, "1984" VIRAL AD

THE AD IS A REMIX OF THE NOW FAMOUS APPLE COMPUTER AD FROM THE 1989 SUPERBOWL. THE ORIGINAL AD WAS INSPIRED BY GEORGE ORWELL'S "1984." INTERESTINGLY, THIS AD NEVER APPEARED IN A PAID TIME SLOT ON COMMERCIAL TELEVISION. INSTEAD, IT WAS PRODUCED INDEPENDENTLY, OUTSIDE OF THE CAMPAIGN, AND UPLOADED ONTO YOUTUBE WHERE IT QUICKLY BECAME VIRAL. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY MANY SHOWINGS ON NEWSCASTS. THE DIALOG AND THE IMAGES OF HILLARY CLINTON ARE TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM HER CANDIDACY ANNOUNCEMENT AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. ALL SOUND EFFECTS ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AMBIENT SOUNDS ASSOCIATED WITH A LARGE GROUP OF PEOPLE GATHERED IN AN INDUSTRIAL-LOOKING ENVIRONMENT (MARCHING SOUNDS, ECHOS, METTALIC SOUNDS, ETC).

THE SCENE OPENS WITH IMAGES OF AN INDUSTRIAL-LOOKING BUILDING INTERIOR. THE COLORATION IS FALSELY COLORED IN A BLUE TINT TO REINFORCE THE OMINOUS FEELING OF THE AD.

Hillary Clinton's Voice- *"One month ago, I began a conversation with all of you..."*

IMAGE DISSOLVES INTO A STRAIGHT-LINE OF DRONE-LOOKING PEOPLE, ESSENTIALLY MARCHING THROUGH A TUNNEL. MONITORS WITH A "TALKING HEAD" IMAGE OF HILLARY CLINTON LINE THE WALKWAY.

*and so far we haven't stopped talking, and that's really good.*

THERE IS A FLASH OF A YOUNG, BLOND, ATHLETIC WOMAN RUNNING INTO THE AREA (IN TRUE COLOR) FOLLOWED BY A CLOSE-UP ON THE FACE OF ONE OF THE EMOTIONLESS DRONE-TYPE MARCHERS.

*I intend to keep telling you exactly where I stand on all of the issues.*

IMAGES OF THE MARCHERS FROM VARIOUS ANGLES ARE INTERMIXED WITH THE FULL COLOR WOMAN RUNNING AND A GROUP OF STORM-TROOPER-LOOKING THOUGHT POLICE IN PURSUIT OF THE WOMAN.

*I'm looking at how to help you and other people who are hardworking like you...*

THE SHOT CHANGES TO THE LARGE ROOM WHERE THE MARCHERS ARE FILING INTO THEATRE STYLE SEATING WITH THE TALKING HEAD IMAGE OF HILLARY CLINTON BEING SHOWN ON A LARGE SCREEN AT THE FRONT OF THE ROOM.

*and I've really been impressed by how serious people are...*

AGAIN THERE IS THE IMAGE OF THE WOMAN RUNNING TOWARD THE THEATRE WHILE CARRYING A SLEDGEHAMMER. A HARD EDIT CONTINUES SHOWING THE DRONES, THIS TIME PANNING THE ROWS OF STILL EMOTIONLESS VIEWERS OF THE IMAGE OF HILLARY CLINTON SPEAKING ON THE SCREEN.

*because we all need to be part of this discussion if we are all going to be part of the solution. I don't want people who already agree with me. I want honest,...*

THE SHOT CHANGES TO THE WOMAN IN RED SHORTS RUNNING THROUGH THE ISLE, BETWEEN COUNTLESS ROWS OF SEATED, MOTIONLESS DRONE PEOPLE WATCHING THE SCREEN IN THE FRONT OF THE ROOM. CAMERA SHOTS CUT BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN THE WOMAN IN RED SHORTS AND THE PURSUING THOUGHT POLICE.

*experienced, hard-working patriotic people who want to part of a team, the American team.*

NOW THE SHOT IS OF THE WOMAN SPINNING, SWINGING THE SLEDGEHAMMER WHILE THE THOUGHT POLICE ARE STILL IN PURSUIT.

*I hope you've learned a little bit more about what I'm believing and trying to do...*

CLIPS ALTERNATE BETWEEN HILLARY, THE WOMAN SWINGING THE SLEDGEHAMMER AND THE THOUGHT POLICE.

*and really helped this conversation about our country get started.*

AT THIS POINT, THE WOMAN RELEASES THE HAMMER INTO THE AIR AND IT IS SHOWN FLYING TOWARDS THE SCREEN AT THE FRONT OF THE ROOM.

*I hope to keep this conversation going (indiscernible) in November, two thousand and eight.*

THE HAMMER HITS THE SCREEN, RESULTING IN AN EXPLOSION. THE DRONES ARE PANNED AGAIN, THIS TIME WITH MOUTHS GAPPING FROM WHAT THEY HAD JUST WITNESSED.

THE IMAGE FADES TO A WHITE SCREEN AND THE FOLLOWING TEXT SCROLL UP AND STOPS...

*On January 14<sup>th</sup>,  
the Democratic primary  
will begin.  
And you'll see why 2008  
Won't be like "1984."*

WITH THE SOUND OF A HOLLOW ECHO, THE KNOCKOFF IMAGE OF AN 'O'  
APPEARS ON A BLACK SCREEN IN AN ATTEMPT TO PARODY THE APPLE  
COMPUTER LOGO. BELOW IT FADES IN THE WEB ADDRESS  
BARACKOBAMA.COM.

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