

Covering presidential election campaigns: Does reporter gender affect the work lives of correspondents and their reportage?

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Abstract

This content analysis reveals that men and women network news correspondents differed in how they covered 4 presidential elections (1992 - 2004). There were fewer women than men reporters involved in election coverage but on average women reported more stories than men and were tonally tougher watchdogs than men. In terms of framing candidates, male reporters were strongly associated with a masculine approach that emphasizes the competitiveness of campaigns. By contrast, women correspondents employed both more feminine and gender-neutral frames than their male colleagues. These content analysis findings were interpreted against the backdrop of information derived from in-depth interviews with five women reporters who appeared in the sampled content.

Evidence that news is gendered along news worker, content, and audience reception dimensions is growing. Prior research has demonstrated gender variance in who populates newsrooms around the world (Becker, Lauf, & Lowry, 1999; Thiel Stern, 2007; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2007), how news content is framed (Desmond & Danilewicz, 2010; Liebler & Smith, 1997; Piper-Aiken, 1999; Rogers & Thorson, 2003), audience consumption patterns (Pew, 2010; Gibbons, 2003; INMA, 2003;

RTNDA, 1996), and the ways in which audiences gain information from news (Grabe & Kamhawi, 2006) and evaluatively respond to news (Kamhawi & Grabe, 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter, 2007; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2007). Political news reporting, a male bastion according to Beasley and Creedon (1989), is still one of the most neglected areas of journalism study from a gender vantage point. The study reported here enters this area of news work.

Across the spectrum of news beats, political coverage (especially of presidential elections) counts among the most prestigious. With its routinized focus on competition and hierarchy formation, this area of reportage is also known for inviting masculinity in reportage. In fact, this news beat stands accused of being the breeding ground for gender segregation and stereotyping (Fröhlich, 2007; Nicholson, 2007; Thiel Stern, 2007). The content analysis reported here examines gender differences between network news correspondents in covering four U. S. presidential elections (1992 – 2004) against the backdrop of three existing but contradictory models of gender influence in the workplace. This study tests the usefulness of these general models for understanding how women news correspondents might navigate the supposedly masculinized presidential campaign trail. Specifically, the goal is to investigate how structural elements of news operations as well as journalistic self-representation and reportage on candidates might vary across gender. In an attempt to add nuance to the content analysis findings, in-depth interviews were conducted with women correspondents who reported from the campaign trail in the sampled newscasts.

Positioning election reportage in terms of gender and work

Large-scale employment of women is a fairly new phenomenon (Chafe, 1972), often traced to World War II when women constituted an available labor source, mainly for the production of weaponry (Kessler-Harris, 1982; 2007). This sweeping entry of women into the

labor-force produced economic, political, and social consternation (Browne, 1999) with the scholarly by-product of three contradictory models that gained acceptance in studies of gender in the workplace. The discrepancies across these three models point to old ontological fracture lines that extend beyond gender research. The study reported here examined territory at the center of these incompatibilities. To facilitate this discussion, a map that positions the three models in terms of two ontological stances is graphically represented in Figure 1.

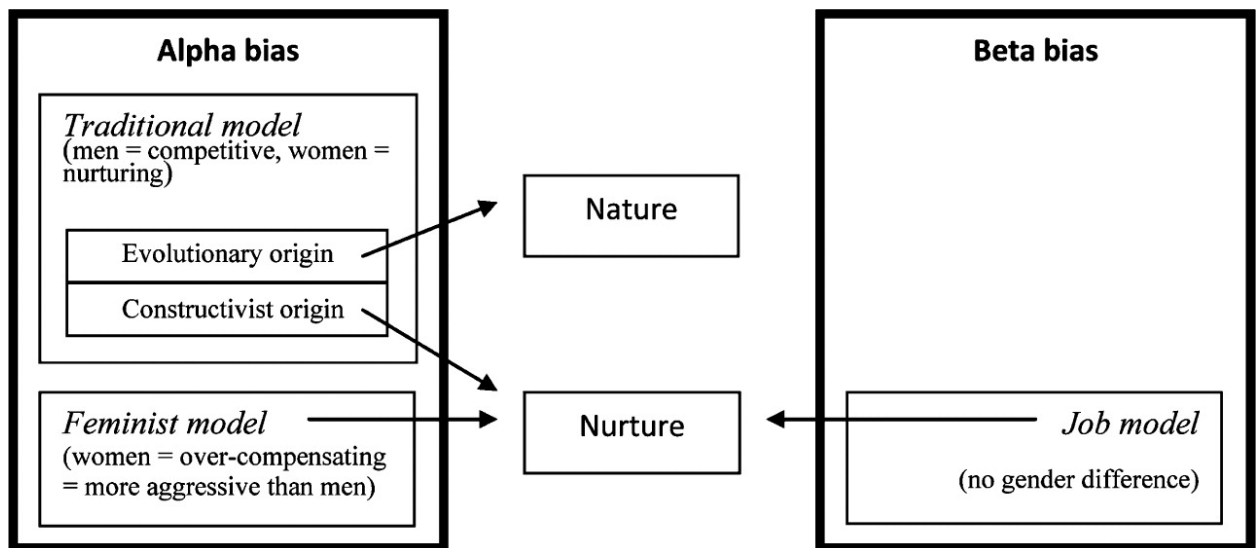


Figure 1 An Ontological Map of Explanatory Models for Gender Influence in Labor

As a way of organizing the large body of gender research, the term *alpha-bias* is generally used in reference to studies that emphasize gender differences over similarities. A complementary term, *beta-bias*, refers to research that tends to highlight gender similarities by paying attention to degrees of gender difference and the limits on this manifestation (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). Alpha-bias underlies the traditional gender model which positions men as assertive, independent, and competitive whereas women are seen as having a high propensity for nurturing, collaborative, and people-oriented behavior (Cook, 1993). Important to

note here is that the traditional model surfaces in both the evolutionary psychology and social constructivist approaches to studying gender. *How* traditional gender roles are acquired is a matter of sharp ontological difference between the two approaches, as shown in Figure 1.

Evolutionary psychologists see gender differences as inherent functional mechanisms bearing on the survival of species (Buss, 1991; Christen, 1991; Moir & Jessel, 1991). This perspective exemplifies the nature-centered position in the nature-nurture dualism by viewing inherited traits of contemporary women and men as serving varying but complementary roles in reproduction and social functions which are ultimately conducive to the survival of *Homo sapiens* (Buss, 1991; Hutt, 1972; Shields, 1975). The social constructivist approach, on the other hand, treats traditional gender roles as the product of social learning, favoring nurture-centered explanations for how gender-specific behavior is acquired (Ferree, Lorber, & Hess, 2000; Lorber, 1994; Lorber & Farrell, 1991). Clearly, the difference between evolutionary psychologists and social constructivists is ontological, not the direction of gender-specific behavior predicted by the traditional model. If this model finds support in the study reported here one would expect the presidential election news beat to be densely populated by male reporters and that their reportage would focus on the conflict and competition of campaigning. The traditional model would explain women's lower prominence in the workplace, in general, by lack of attachment to and identification with professional values because they supposedly derive (or learn to derive) their identities and fulfillment from family roles (Aven, Parker & McEvoy, 1993). From this perspective then, women reporters could be projected to enter and excel in the competitive environment of network election news at lower rates than men. Yet, women who do enter this workspace would display feminine traits in performing their work, perhaps showing

preference for reporting positive news (Grabe & Kamhawi, 2006; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003) and doing so with a softer human-interest touch (Creedon, 1989; Steiner, 2007, 2009).

Other theories that emphasize the social environment in shaping behavior charge the traditional model with oversimplification. Within this broad framework some feministⁱ models typically criticize traditional views of gender as “deceptively simple” and reductionist (Steiner, 2007; Wackwitz & Rakow, 2007) but shares its alpha bias by focusing on gender differences. Indeed, these differences are seen as predominantly originating from cultural forces that act as conduits of gender-specific behavior (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998; Ruble & Martin, 1998) shaped all the way down to cognitive levels where gender-based schematic processing occurs (Bem, 1974, 1981; Markus, Crane, Bernstein & Siladi, 1982). Women who enter the work environment encounter the status quo: organizational patriarchy, capitalistic competitiveness, and few female role models. In response, they internalize a masculine value system (often unknowingly) and adopt it as a professional approach to work (Chafe, 1972; Loscocco, 1990; Steiner, 2007; Thiel Stern, 2007). In the face of prejudice women are not only prone to violating traditional female gender expectations, but often over-compensate in doing so. These counter-actions are manifested in displays of ambition, single-mindedness, and assertiveness often described as unmatched by men (Creedon & Cramer, 2007; Phillips, 1991; Ross, 2001; Thiel Stern, 2007). Phillips (1991) calls this jockeying for equal opportunity within patriarchal labor systems--without challenging the structures--domesticated feminism. Melin-Higgins (2004) and Ross (2001) puts the newsroom ethos of journalism squarely within this realm, where women either have to “beat the boys at their own game by becoming more assertive and more macho” (Ross, 2001, p. 535) or move to the periphery and align with other marginalized journalists—those who are part of minority groups. Female election correspondents who have advanced to the network

news level can hardly be described as examples of the retreat response. It is therefore not unreasonable to assess if their reporting styles reflect attempts at beating the boys at their game.

A third view, as is the case with this particular feminist perspective, is built on a nurture-centered ontology. Yet, unlike the feminist model presented here, it emphasizes gender *similarities* and is therefore classified as a beta-bias model (see Figure 1). It relates differences in work behavior to labor experiences. Called the job model, this explanation holds that “the work attitudes of women as well as men are best explained by work-conditions since the job has an impact that supersedes personal characteristics” (Loscocco, 1990, p. 156). From this perspective one would expect little difference between female and male journalists in terms of organizational and professional socialization, and therefore no difference in the way they report.

Gendered newsrooms?

Research on women in the journalism profession reveals that all three models might simultaneously have explanatory power in news work across the world. Women journalists, as their male colleagues, are shaped by professional socialization (Melin-Higgins, 2004; Ross, 2001; Steiner, 2007, 2009; Van Zoonen, 1989). At the same time, there is palpable organizational pressure for journalists to act in traditional gender-stereotypical ways. This top-down heavy-handedness subsequently coaches female journalists to enact feminine traits while performing their work while some of the time they rebel against it.

Surveys and interviews with successful women journalists echo this perspective, showing institutional barriers, including gender-based expectations and standards, subtle discrimination, lower salaries, and few opportunities for promotion (Beasley & Creedon, 1989; Ross, 2001). Moreover, gender segregation underlies news beats: soft news (e.g., health care, education) is assigned to women while hard news (e.g., politics, economics) is assigned to men (Beasley & Creedon, 1989; Desmond & Danilewicz, 2010; Kim, 2006). In line with this research that points

to gendered treatment of women in news organizations and the expectations of the traditional gender model, the first two hypotheses were formulated:

H1a: Fewer women than men network reporters cover presidential elections.

H1b: Women election correspondents will be featured less prominently than men in news content.

While research shows lack of gender balance in prestigious news beat assignments, most studies report few differences between male and female reporters in how they cover news. This gender similarity is supported most clearly in terms of large news organizations (Liebler, & Smith, 1997; Piper-Aiken, 1999; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). In fact, smaller news operations are associated with significant gender variance in sourcing and story tone, consistent with the traditional gender model. Female reporters working in smaller news organizations stereotyped less, used greater diversity of sources, were more likely to employ a human-interest approach in reporting, and wrote more positive stories (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). However, female reporters working at larger newspapers produced stories practically identical to their male colleagues in terms of story tone, topic, and sourcing (Liebler, & Smith, 1997; Piper-Aiken, 1999; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). It appears that female reporters employed in large news operations conform to reigning professional routines, findings consistent with the job model. On the other hand, women employed in smaller news organizations seem to practice journalism in line with the traditional gender model.

Organizational socialization which is described as the course of “learning content and process by which an individual adjusts to a specific role in an organization” (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994) has been documented to occur in news organizations, partly in top to bottom flow, but mainly through a more subtle process of osmosis, as Breed (1955) describes it. This acquisition of professional identity and work routines trumps gender socialization, according to some female journalists. The executive editor of the *Trenton Times*,

Linda Cunningham, addressed this issue head-on during an in-depth interview: “I’m often asked whether women editors approach the news differently from their male counterparts. My answer is, invariably, no. News is news; it has no sex” (Beasley & Creedon, 1989, p. 190).

Absent from existing journalism research is systematic support for the feminist model, which proposes that women overcompensate in a male-dominated line of work by displaying a more masculine reporting style than male colleagues. Ross (2001) and Melin-Higgins and Djerf Pierre (1989), based on in-depth interviews with female journalists in the UK, report that machismo is a survival strategy for women in newsrooms. Yet, there are no studies to support the idea that this behavior finds expression in reporting style.

The study reported here is focused on network news, produced by large news operations known as competitive work environments. Given existing findings on how women in large news operations do not vary from their male colleagues in how they report, the job model is likely to find support in this content analysis. Yet, instead of posing the null hypotheses of no gender difference, two research questions were developed:

RQ1: Are there gender differences in reporter self-presentation?

RQ2: Are there gender differences in reporter framing of presidential candidates?

Methods

Content analysis

Sample. This content analysis examined network newscasts during four presidential elections (1992-2004). The sample frame, as is typical for studies of this kind, stretched from the traditional start of the general election campaign (Labor Day) to the day voters go to the polls (Lichter, 2001; Moriarty & Popovich, 1991). Composite weeks were constructed with a different, randomly selected network (ABC, CBS, NBC) recorded each weekday. This produced a sample

of 178 newscasts—42 each for 1992 and 2004, and 47 for 1996 and 2000. A total of 328 election stories, comprising 795 minutes of material were coded. Network news coverage was chosen for several reasons. It was the most widely used source of presidential campaign information over the course of this 12-year sample frame. Despite declines in network viewership, neither cable nor local television news content is consumed as widely as network news. The audience size of the three networks combined is double that of cable and FOX News combined (Lichter, 2001; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2004). Because of its audience share, network news is a prestigious place of employment for journalists and therefore a good site for observing political correspondents who have advanced to this highly competitive level of employment. Yet, as cable news is growing in operation and prestige it will become an important avenue of analysis in future studies of this kind.

Categories. The individual election correspondent appearing in a campaign story was used as the unit of analysis. Election correspondents were defined as reporters who cover election news from the campaign trail. They are in the field with the candidates and appear on the news in stand-up address to the camera, in exchanges with the anchorperson who is in the studio, and heard in voice-over narration of their reports. Studio anchors (100% male in this sample) were not examined. Campaign stories were defined as those centrally focused on the campaigns of candidates, thus positioning the candidacy of presidential and vice-presidential nominees as pivotal to the narrative. A brief appearance of candidates in stories about election-related issues such as voting machines, voter registration, or congressional debates about campaign finance reform were not coded as campaign stories. Moreover, in 1992, 1996, and 2004 incumbent presidents were candidates. Their presidential appearances from the White House on matters unrelated to campaigning were not treated as campaign stories.

Who covers elections news? Hypothesis 1a predicted that there would be fewer women than men political correspondents in presidential election coverage. To assess the substance of this prediction the gender of each reporter appearing in an election story was recorded as male or

female. Moreover, to keep track of how many individual reporters were assigned to election coverage the name of each reporter appearing in a story was documented.

Reporter prominence. Hypothesis 1b predicted that women political respondents would be featured less prominently than their male counterparts in election stories. To test this hypothesis five categories were devised. First, the number of stories assigned to male and female reporters was recorded. Second, the duration of campaign stories was recorded in seconds. News organizations exercise some control over the time allocated to individual news stories but a reporter's assertiveness in pushing for more airtime can influence their prominence in a newscast. Thus, variation in the average duration of men and women's stories could indicate institutional gender bias or the assertiveness of reporters. Third, the presence or absence of a live satellite link-up with the reporter was coded ("yes" or "no" options within this category). A link-up occurs when a reporter is out on a field assignment and audiovisual contact is established with the anchor in the studio from where he conducts a conversation with the reporter. These live link-ups signal institutional approval of a reporter, as well as journalistic prestige. Again, a reporter's relative forcefulness can make a difference in whether link-ups are accommodated. Fourth, the duration of exchanges between anchors and reporters was recorded from the first mention or visual appearance of the reporter or the first question posed by the anchor to the end of the conversation where the anchor thanks the reporter for the contribution. This type of anchor "interview" with a reporter lends credibility and prestige to the reporter by casting him/her in the role of an expert. Fifth, the position of the reporter's story was coded, using three options: lead story, before the first commercial break, and after the first commercial break. The positioning of stories on news platforms signals importance (Fico & Cote, 1999; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980) and therefore reflects on the prestige of the reporter. The lead story is

broadcast at the top of the newscast, immediately following the program logo and headline promotions and is considered the most important story of the day. All stories that appear before the first commercial break, referred to as the first block, are considered more important than stories appearing in subsequent blocks of airtime between commercials (Nisbett & Ross, 1980).

Self-presentation. While the previously discussed categories cannot disentangle the influence of institutional gender bias from the reporter's assertiveness in negotiating prominent airtime, the following four categories are more clearly located in the realm of reporter control, designed to probe for an answer to Research Question 1.

Journalistic objectivity and the emotional tone of reporting in terms of valence (positive, negative, neutral) as well the level of adversary and aggression in reportage were rated on 3-point semantic differential scales. As a general rule a 2 rating indicated neutrality while the 1 and 3 ratings were used to document noticeable qualities in reportage. Coders were encouraged to be conservative in their judgment and to use the 2 rating if they were uncertain about the clear manifestation of qualities in reportage. These categories recorded the relative masculinity (assertive, aggressive, objective, negative) versus femininity (polite, passive, subjective, positive) in the approach to reportage.

If a reporter was clearly inserting personal opinions, impressions, or evaluations (e.g. first person references) of the candidate or campaign and/or used no sources (or multiple ones from one side) a rating of 1 was used to indicate subjectivity. On the other hand, if the journalist clearly attempted to be impartial, offered multiple positions/sources, and remained professionally detached (e.g., third person voice; report on how sources see the candidate and campaign), a 3 rating was used to indicate an attempt at objectivity. The key was to record noticeable instances of subjectivity and clear attempts at objectivity.

If the reporting, interviewing, or narration was characterized by noticeable toughness in questioning or scrutiny of the candidate, the story was scored 3, indicating adversary in the

watchdog tradition of journalism. This includes confronting a candidate with discrepancy in articulating a stance on an issue, criticism of a plan or policy, re-stating a question if a candidate avoids answering, or noting that a candidate was unavailable or unwilling to comment on an issue. On the other hand, if the reporting was characterized by noticeable politeness, friendliness, or lack of scrutinizing the candidate (e.g. softball questioning), the reportage was scored as a 1 (not adversarial), suggesting the reporter exemplified the much criticized *lapdog* mode of reporting. If neither watchdog nor lapdog qualities were noticeable, the neutral (2 rating) was used.

Reporters are often asking tough questions or delivering criticism of candidates in the watchdog mode using a neutral tone. Similarly, they might be in lapdog mode but maintain a more or less neutral tone towards the candidate. Thus, this study also attempted to record the level of tonal aggression on a 3-point scale. If the reporting, interviewing, or narration was clearly combative in tone (e.g., interrupting the candidate during the interview, exasperation/frustration/obtrusiveness in voice tone, non-verbal/facial disapproval), a 3 rating was recorded, whereas instances of noticeable acquiescence/accommodation (e.g., non-verbal compliance such as a nod or an smile in response to the candidate, kowtowing in addressing an incumbent repeatedly as Mr. President) were scored as a 1 on the 3-point scale. If neither outright aggression nor acquiescence was noticeable, the neutral 2 rating was used.

Finally, the valence of reportage was recorded. If the interviewing or narration was upbeat, optimistic, or cheerful a 1 rating was recorded. Descriptions of the exuberance of supporters, large size of the crowd, energy of the candidate in campaigning, or how good a day it was for the candidate's campaign offer some markers of what constituted positive valence in reporting. On the other hand, if the reporting was pessimistic, gloomy, or unenthusiastic in tone the reportage was scored as 3, indicating a negative tone. Descriptions of internal conflict and confusion within the campaign, declining support in public opinion polls, or the candidate's

poor performance at a rally offer indicators of a negative tone. If neither outright cheerfulness nor gloom was noticeable, the neutral 2 rating was used.

Presentation of candidates. Election coverage frames identified by Cappella and Jamieson (1996) were adapted to assess if there is evidence of gender differences in how reporters frame candidates (Research Question 2). Seven identified frames were coded as present in a reporter's story (yes/no options within frame categories) and explicated for underlying masculine, feminine, or gender-neutral dimensions. The Bem (1974) Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ, see Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975), two widely used social psychology measurements of the femininity-masculinity dimension, were employed as tools to conceptualize existing election frames as gendered or gender neutral. It is important to note here that the relative masculinity, femininity, and gender neutrality of candidates are not of interest as much as the reporter's employment of frames that signal gender neutrality or genderedness in reporting. As a check, five journalists were provided with the BSRI and PAQ gender attributes and the codebook definitions of the seven election coverage frames and asked to classify each frame as masculine, feminine, or gender neutral.

The horse race frame presents elections as contests with political winners and losers by detailing the actions taken in pursuit of victory, as opposed to heartfelt decisions based on values and convictions. Poll results with focus on the winner and loser of public support is key to this frame. Both the BSRI and PAQ systems classify competitiveness as a male characteristic, making the horse race frame indicative of masculinity in reporting. Agreement among the five journalists on the masculinity of this frame was 100%.

The public opinion frame captures the public's response to the election and to politics in general. While this frame might include reference to public opinion poll results, the focus is not on who is ahead in the polls as is the case with the horse race frame. Instead, the public's

response to and impressions of the candidates are highlighted. Public opinion about candidate character and trait dimensions (e.g., honesty, trustworthiness, competence in dealing with issues, etc.) is reported rather than who is most likely to win the election. Often, this frame features focus group results and *vox pops* (citizen on the street interviews) about the candidates. Being accommodating to the opinions of ordinary people, this frame is classified as feminine. The following key concepts in the BSRI and PAQ instruments align this frame with a feminine approach to reporting: “sensitive to the opinions/needs of others,” “understanding,” and “aware of others’ feelings/opinions.” Five journalists were in agreement with classifying this frame as feminine.

Policy or issue frame coverage underscores candidate positions on policy matters (e.g., tax reform, the economy, social security, health care, defense, etc.) and may compare and contrast the different issue positions of the leading candidates. Sometimes stories may explain in depth one candidate's position on a policy or issue. Throughout the reporting the focus remains on the substance of the issue, not on its political value for attracting voters or gaining strategic advantage over the opposition. This approach to offering details about precisely where candidates stand on issues and to informing citizens is classified as gender neutral in line with the BRSI defined gender-neutral concepts, “conscientious” and “reliable.” One of five journalists rated this frame as feminine; four rated it as gender neutral.

Character coverage casts the election in terms of the personalities of the candidates. This frame calls on viewers to think about the character of the people running for office, often dwelling on problematic aspects of their integrity, honesty, fidelity, patriotism, or morality. Examples of character coverage include sex scandals (Bill Clinton and Gennifer Flowers), fundraising improprieties (Al Gore at the Buddhist temple), previous arrests (George W. Bush and drunk driving), drug use (Clinton and pot smoking), alleged lying or misrepresentation (Clinton and draft dodging). Character frames could also be positive, such as the war heroics of

George H. Bush, Bob Dole, or John Kerry. A candidate might also be framed as a dedicated father and faithful family man. This coverage, sensitive to the human condition—both in terms of strength and weakness—corresponds with BSRI and PAQ defined feminine traits: “compassionate,” “understanding,” and “considerate.” Five journalists coded this frame unanimously as feminine.

Process coverage emphasizes the underlying mechanics of the campaign, focusing on strategic maneuvers. Process framing addresses the candidate’s schedule, fundraising efforts, the insider game of politics, and often the media’s role in campaigning. Examples of process coverage related to media include fairness in covering the election, exposés on how campaigns attempt to manipulate reporters by staging media events or sidestepping the mainstream news media by using new media formats. Process frames were treated in this study as masculine “analytical” (BSRI) frames that also cohere with reportage that reflects the PAQ masculine trait of revealing inside information and analysis based on “knowing the ways of world.” Five journalists were in full agreement on the gender-neutrality of this frame.

Ideological coverage casts the election as a choice between mostly two sets of ideas or integrated sets of beliefs: liberal versus conservative, moderate versus extreme, progressive versus reactionary. Ideological frames are more abstract than issue frames in that they present a choice between competing worldviews, not variations in policy positions. When Clinton is characterized as a moderate *new Democrat* and George H. Bush as an old-guard cold war warrior conservative, ideological coverage is present. Similarly, if the competing frames of compassionate conservatism (George W. Bush) versus classic liberalism (John Kerry) were present in a campaign story, it would have been coded as ideological framing. Dichotomizing candidates in competing ideological frames signals a masculine approach, in line with the concepts of “taking a stand” and “competition” in both the BSRI and PAQ measures. There was 100% agreement among the five journalists on this classification.

Record coverage refers to the candidate's record (voting or job history) as an important factor in making a vote choice. In other words, this frame suggests to viewers that they should consider official performance as the standard for support. Record coverage may include facts about a candidate's qualifications for office, his voting record in Congress, the Senate, or serving as a Governor. Record coverage may also center on business or military experience and its relevance (or not) to political office. This approach towards offering “truthful” and “reliable” (BSRI) factual information about the candidates’ records is treated as a gender-neutral frame; in line the social psychological measurements. Four of five journalists were in agreement with the gender-neutrality assignment of this frame. One rated it as masculine.

Coding. Two primary coders collected the data while two secondary coders served as reliability checks for the pretest. Category refinement and coder training extended over several weeks. The pre-test produced acceptable agreement among all 4 coders (Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .84$, minimum = .81, maximum = 1.00). A post-hoc reliability check was performed for the two primary coders on 20% of the sample. A high level of agreement was achieved across variables (Krippendorff’s $\alpha = .91$), with a minimum score of .87 and a maximum of 1.

In-depth interviews

The departure point of this study is an interest in how women navigate in a work environment that is traditionally seen as masculine. Thus, following the content analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with female reporters who appeared in the sample. These conversations were an attempt at a more nuanced understanding of insights that the content analysis produced. Investigating how men navigate in this work environment or how men might

perceive women's operation in this work environment is not unimportant. Yet, these are matters to be addressed in future studies.

Recruitment emails were sent to all except one ($n=13$) female reporters, for whom contact information could not be obtained. Five agreed to participate in recorded phone interviews that lasted about 30 minutes. The interviews were transcribed. Questions were designed to probe responses to the content analysis findings.

Findings

Who covers elections news?

Hypothesis 1a, which made the forecast that fewer women than men will report election news was supported. Correspondents appeared in 328 election stories. Of these, 247 (75.3%) were covered by men and 81 (24.6%) by women. Moreover, independent samples t -tests show that men ($M = 1.60$, $SE = .08$) reported significantly ($t(244) = 11.29$, $p < .001$) more stories per broadcast than women ($M = .56$, $SE = .05$). In addition, one-way ANOVA tests for men ($F(3, 123) = 3.83$, $p < .012$) and for women ($F(3, 121) = 4.63$, $p < .004$) reporters on how many stories they reported over time were significant. Thus, for women the number of stories per broadcast decreased over time. In fact, post-hoc Tukey tests confirmed significantly higher averages for 1992 compared to all other election years ($p = .05$). Male-reported stories show a sharp decline followed by a steady increase over time. The decline from 1992 to 1996 was the only significant paired comparison ($p = .05$). These trends are illustrated in Figure 2.

In conversation with women reporters these findings of an over time decline in how many stories they reported provoked mixed responses--from disbelief to sober reflections on the work environment. One of the surprised interviewees chalked the findings up to chance: "...I am a little puzzled. I think that is the luck of the draw." Knowing that our sample frame stretched from

1992 to 2004, she continued, “If you look at the 1996 election cycle in which I was the chief White House correspondent for [network] ...I don’t think you would find that.” Another surprised reporter offered the following explanation: “I don’t think there is anything particularly significant about this. Women are a little bit slower in getting completely immersed in politics as far as coverage goes. Maybe that’s it. But I don’t think there is anything more nefarious than that.” Despite the *over time decline* in how many stories women reporters covered, another interviewee insisted on making it an issue of the distant past: “I wonder if these numbers are skewed towards the earlier years when there was a greater imbalance.”

Historical and structural realities of the workplace formed the basis for responses from two reporters who were *not* surprised by the findings. “Men have been in more prominent positions of reporting for broadcast for a longer amount of time than women have...it is pretty hard to kind of parachute into the election when you haven’t done it before.” Making reference to a book on pack journalism by Timothy Crouse called *Boys on the Bus*, another reporter connected gender inequity in election coverage with the genderedness of the political process itself: “It goes all the way back to the fact that candidates are always surrounded by men and not by strong and powerful women advisors and the White House and the campaign press corps reflect the campaigns.... Women...women were not involved in campaign structures, they were not involved in the White House, they were not White House Press Secretaries and it has been—for years—male institutions. Women are only now beginning to crack it.”

Reporter prominence

Hypothesis 1b predicted that women correspondents would be featured less prominently than their male counterparts in election reportage. This hypothesis was tested along five dimensions. Table 1 summarizes independent samples *t*-test findings for continuous variables.

Fourteen female and 61 male reporters were featured in this data set. On average, an individual woman reported significantly more stories than a man. Following the feminist model, one reporter saw this as the outcome of over-compensation: "...when you're even a slight underdog, you tend to work harder. Maybe that is part of the explanation. Traditionally women have always felt like no matter what they were doing they had to work twice as hard for half as much."

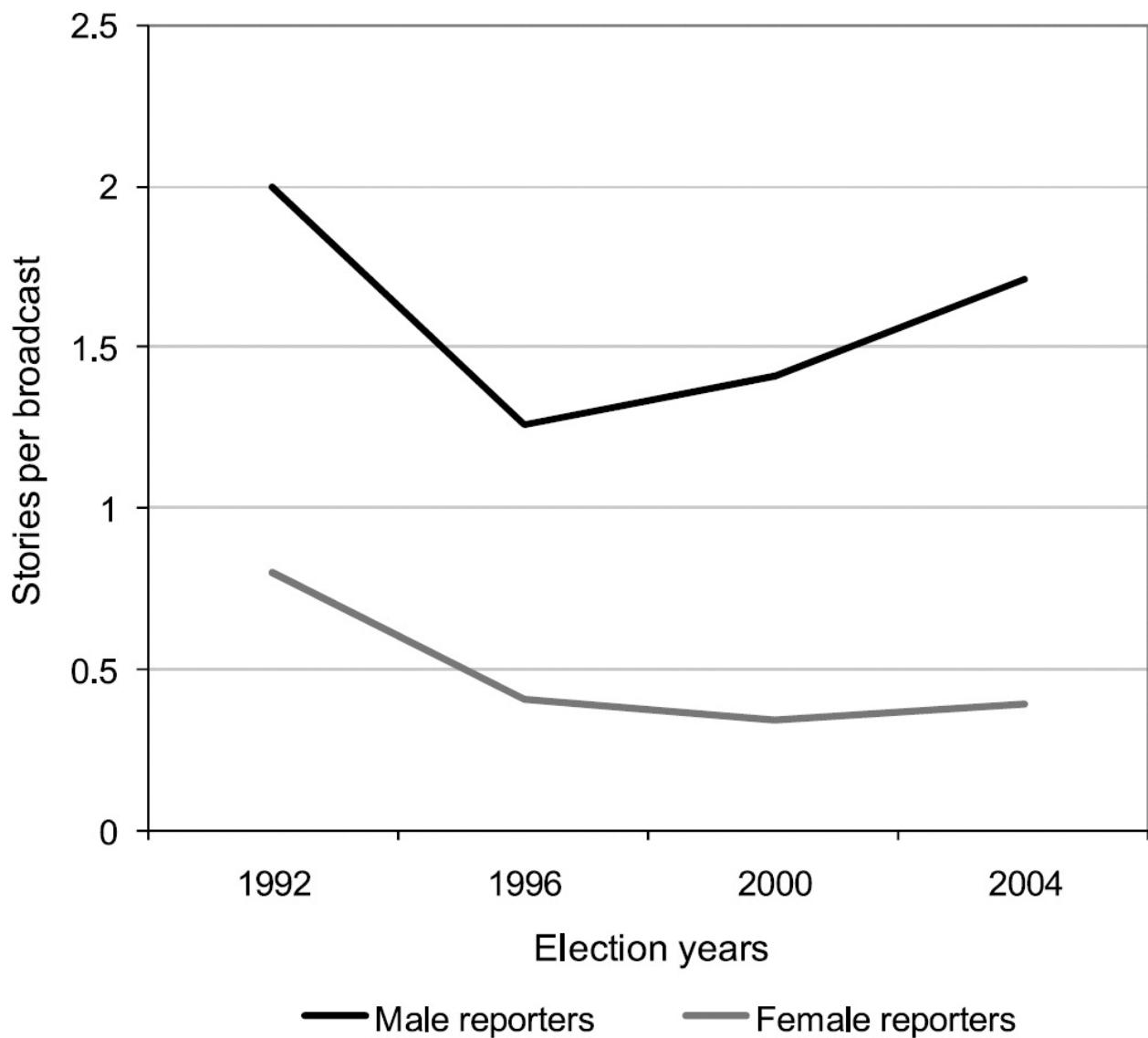


Figure 2 Over Time Shifts in Number of Stories Reported by Men and Women Reporters

Table 1
T-Test Results for Gender Comparisons

Variable	Men		Women		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>			
Institutional influence							
Number of stories	4.05	.01	5.79	.04	326.00	2.94	.004
Story duration	138.31	42.28	151.62	43.29	326.00	-2.44	.015
Anchor exchange duration	66.77	48.56	18.5	3.53	25.53	4.90	.001
Reporter self-presentation							
Objectivity	1.72	.56	1.80	.62	326.00	-1.05	.29
Adversary	2.17	.57	2.35	.55	326.00	-2.45	.01
Aggression	2.06	.33	2.17	.44	111.31	-2.17	.03
Emotional tone	2.12	.58	2.18	.57	326.00	-1.91	.36

Note: Duration presented in seconds. Objectivity, adversary, aggression, and emotional tone were measured on a 3-point scale.

Women's stories were significantly longer than men's. Interviewees consistently identified executive producers as having the last say on story durations and described the process of advocating for more airtime as "an ongoing struggle...", "negotiations" or "arguments." But it might be premature to conclude, in support of the feminist model, that women reporters received more airtime through tough negotiations. Indeed, another outlook surfaced from the interviews. Longer stories are traditionally softer in angle than leading hard news. These are the stories women are more often assigned to do and they are accommodated later in newscasts. A follow-up ANOVA test of duration across masculine and feminine framed stories showed that stories with an exclusively feminine frame was significantly longer than stories with masculine frames only, $F(2, 388) = 9.76, p < .001$. Post-hoc Tukey tests confirmed that the exclusively masculinely framed stories ($M = 117.11, SE = 3.90$) were also significantly ($p < .008$) shorter than exclusively femininely framed stories ($M = 146.11, SE = 12.26$) and stories that contained both types ($M = 141.60, SE = 4.30$) of gendered frames ($p < .001$).

While a Chi-square test showed that there was equity in how often stories reported by men (54.3%; $n = 134$) and women (53.1%; $n = 43$) were featured before the first commercial break, a larger portion of women's (33.3%) than men's (26.7%) appeared less prominently, after the first commercial break. Closer inspection show that women exceeded (observed=27, expected=23) while men fell short of (observed $n=66$, expected $n=70$) statistical projections. Perhaps most striking, male reported stories (19%) were more likely to lead newscasts than women's (13.6%). In line with the emerging pattern men had more lead stories (observed=47, expected=43.7) while women were short of expectation (observed=11, expected=14.3). While the overall Chi-square test on this cross-tabulation was not statistically significant, $X^2 (2, N = 328) = 2.00, p < .372$, the general pattern of findings was mentioned to interviewees, which prompted responses of institutional gender bias. "To be honest, I think that in my days there was a certain placating of women to give them the lesser candidates and for the network to still be able to say 'well, we still have women out on the campaign trail.' They just happen not to be covering the most viable candidates." The reporter further explained how candidate assignments influence story placement. Appointed to cover what she described as a "B candidate" during the 2000 election, her "... stories did not get on the air very much. Or when it did, it was not in the first block. And you really couldn't argue with that decision. You know, the news editor is supposed to go with what is perceived as the most important candidate." This insight is perhaps more relevant to a study of the primaries than the final stretch of the election. Yet, a follow-up analysis of candidates for the two major parties (Democrat, Republican) versus vice-presidential and independent candidates confirm that women were assigned to cover significantly, $X^2 (1, N = 533) = 4.01, p < .045$, more minor and fewer presidential candidates. Minor candidates appeared in 21% of women's and 13.8% men's stories whereas 86.2% of men's and 79% of women's stories featured a major presidential candidate.

Men (33.6%) and women (33.3%) were equally likely to report live from the campaign trail. Yet, in only two cases did the anchor engage in live on-air exchanges with female compared to 26 exchanges with male reporters. A Chi-square test on this cross-tabulation was statistically significant, $X^2(1, N = 328) = 5.07, p < .024$. Moreover, the duration of the exchanges support Hypothesis 1b. Anchors talked significantly longer to male than female reporters. Again, interviewees responded with striking dissimilarity to this finding, producing some of the most flavorful retorts: “So what? You seem to be assuming a consciousness of gender here. I just don’t think it’s particularly prominent...” Another reporter, when prompted to elaborate on an initial response of “I’m not surprised by that at all” disclosed the following institutional gender bias: “I think that over the years there has been a tendency to give more credibility to male reporters offering the same information...and sometimes that information is not even all that original. I think there has been an old boys’ network among anchors and correspondents and executives.”

Overall, the five content analysis variables suggest gender equity in reporter prominence: two showed more prominence of men (lead stories, anchor exchanges), two indicated more prominence of women (longer and more stories), and another variable revealed gender equity in reporter prominence (live link-ups). Yet, in-depth interviews with reporters provided information to question an even playing field. Indeed, institutional maneuvers favorable to male reporters came to light. Assigning men to major candidates facilitates more prominent placement of their work in newscasts and justifies exchanges with anchors. Quantity and length of stories – variables in which women emerged stronger than men – turns out to be questionable indicators of institutional support. In fact, longer stories are by professional journalistic tradition human interest centered and featured late in the program to make room for shorter hard news stories at the all-important top of the broadcast. Women reporters disclosed this structural barrier and recounted taking on more work as a way to prove themselves in the workplace. The information

derived from interviews therefore impedes the dismissal of institutional gender bias, as the content analysis findings would have it.

Reporter self-representation

Research Question 1 prompted investigation of the professional model, which negates gender differences in how work is performed. As summarized in Table 1, male and female reporters differed significantly on two variables that recorded self-representation. Women were more adversarial and aggressive than men in reportage, suggesting that they might be tougher watchdogs than men and offering some support for the feminist model. In line with the finding that women take the watchdog function seriously, one reporter emphasized political skepticism and the ability "...to challenge them and not take things at face value" as core sensibilities for covering presidential candidates.

At the same time, there were no gender differences for the other two self-presentation variables, objectivity and emotional valence. It is reasonable to argue that professional socialization on an enduring journalistic (1) code of conduct (objectivity) and (2) news value (negativity) might be driving the similarities between men and women on these two dimensions.

Reporter coverage of candidates

To further examine if the professional model found support in this study's data set, Research Question 2 asked for gender comparisons in reportage. Contrary to expectation, several gender differences emerged, offering tentative support for the traditional gender model. Male reporters were more likely than their female colleagues to apply masculine frames. The horse race frame, focused on competitiveness, was detected in 78.9% ($n=247$) of stories reported by men versus 69.1% ($n=81$) of stories reported by women, $X^2(1, N = 328) = 3.27, p < .050$. Moreover, process coverage, emphasizing the competitive strategies of campaigns, was present in 12.1% of men's compared to 7.4% of women's stories, $X^2(1, N = 328) = 1.40, p < .164$. The

polarizing ideological frame was present in 15.8 % of stories reported by men. Women reporters employed this frame in 9.9% of their stories, $X^2 (1, N = 328) = 1.74, p < .126$. Horse-race coverage was certainly not a favorite among female interviewees, as one put it, “Horse-race is all anybody likes to do. Way too much coverage of the horse-race.”

Character and public opinion frames were explicated as feminine approaches to coverage. Character framing was present in 32.1% of stories reported by women compared to 25.1% by men, $X^2 (1, N = 328) = 1.52, p < .138$. The public opinion frame was present at close to equal levels in stories by men (18.6%) and women (17.3%), $X^2 (1, N = 328) = .073, p < .465$.

The two gender-neutral frames, issue and record coverage, were both employed more often by women than men. In fact, 44.4% of women’s versus 38.9% of men’s stories featured issue coverage. At the same time, 18.5% of stories reported by women and 13% reported by men employed the record coverage frame. The interviewed reporters consistently expressed preferences for in-depth coverage of issue stories. Indeed, a public service sensibility emerged from their responses: “I like to report issues in depth...and take very seriously my responsibility to help people better understand the candidate before they vote, not afterwards.” Another reporter pointed to the array of issues—from war to healthcare—that the “...person who is elected president is going to have to deal with.” And added that issues “...should be what’s most important for my audience and that’s what I liked to cover the most.”

Few of the Chi-square tests on individual frames produced statistically significant findings. Yet, when they were collapsed into the larger conceptual gender frames (masculine, feminine, gender neutral) significant patterns emerged. Men (88.3%) used masculine frames significantly, $X^2 (1, N = 328) = 6.7, p < .010$, more than women (76.5%). Women (48.1%) used the feminine frame more than men (40.5%), but not at a statistically significant level, $X^2 (1, N = 328) = 1.47, p < .140$. As far as the gender neutral frame goes, women (55.6%) used it more than men (45.7%), at a close to statistically significant level, $X^2 (1, N = 328) = 2.35, p < .080$. Thus,

as Figure 3 shows, gender differences are more pronounced on masculine than feminine frame use. Also noteworthy is that women used gender-neutral frames more often than men. Taken together, these findings of gender differences do not inspire confidence in the null hypothesis scenario associated with the job model. Instead the findings offer some support of the traditional model, especially in terms of men's masculine frame use.

Discussion

The bulk of gender differences reported here are rooted in institutional bias, unfavorable to women and reminiscent of network news reporter, Linda Ellerbee's (1986) assessment—some 30 years ago—that news corporations are hesitant to put “the broads into broadcasting.” Compared to male colleagues women were practically overlooked for live link-up conversations with anchors—that, despite the fact that they were as likely as men to report live from the campaign trail. Live on-air exchanges between anchors and reporters, even though they typically last a few seconds, lend prominence and prestige to reporters. Most important, these are potent symbolic displays in defining a reporter as an expert—someone knowledgeable enough to be “interviewed” by the anchor. Beyond their relative invisibility in exchanges with anchors, women's stories were also less likely to be leading newscasts and a larger portion of their stories was featured after the first commercial break than was the case for men.

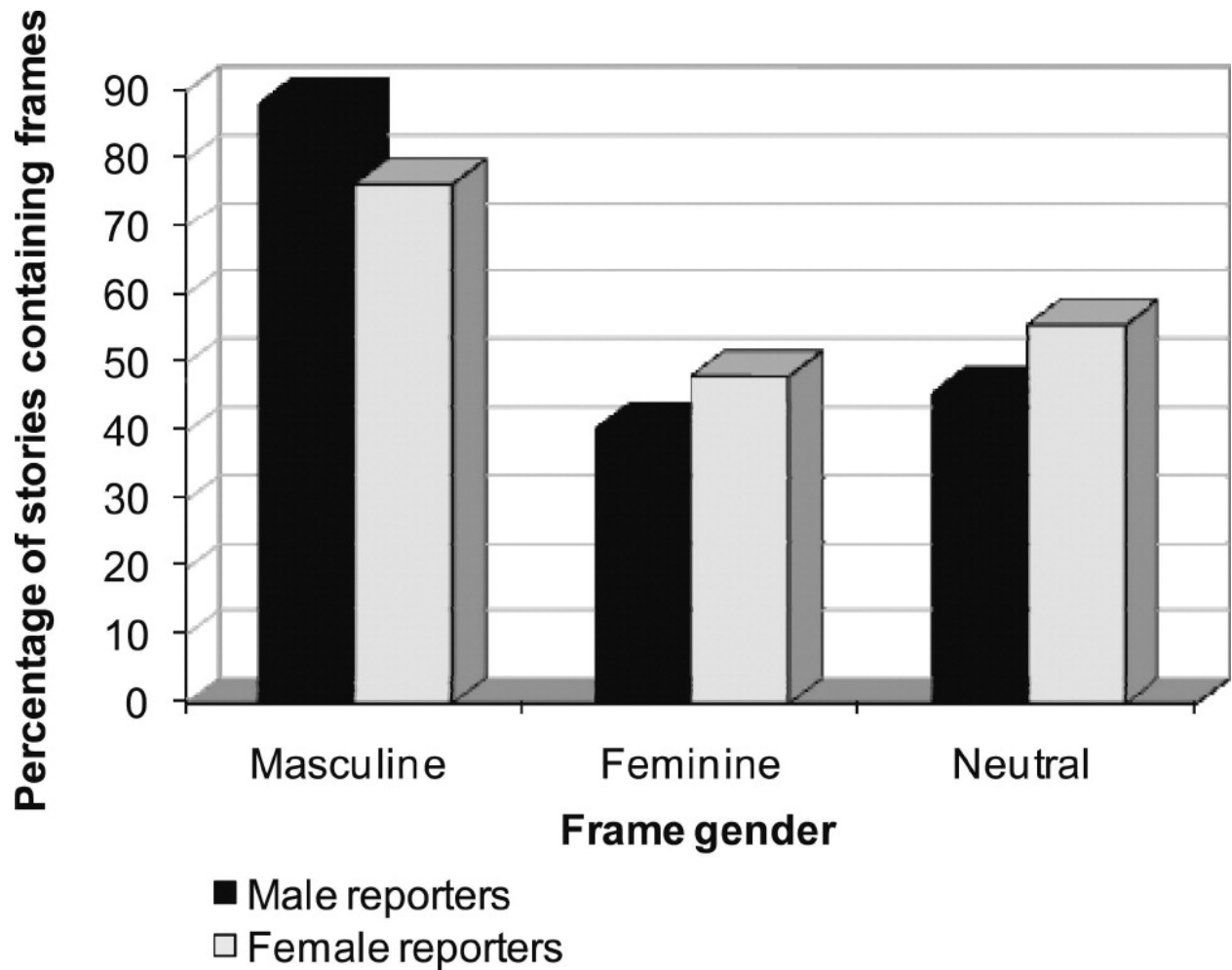


Figure 3 Gendered Framing in Men and Women's Reportage

In-depth interviews provided context and nuance for the content analysis findings and deepen the evidence of an institutionally-curated uneven playing field. When a woman reporter (who reached the pinnacle of prestige after 42 years in the profession) emphatically states, “there is *not* gender equity in newsrooms,” content analysis findings along similar lines gain weight. At the same time, two women reporters disputed gender inequity in the election beat. Our findings to the contrary surprised them.

Men outnumbered women reporters at a ratio of 4.5 to one. Reporters consistently said that gender equity is improving. One reporter identified the multiplication of news media outlets — not institutional reform — as the driving force: “We don’t have three monolithic networks

anymore. There are so many platforms, cable, the blogosphere. You know the Internet made a huge difference. Giving women access, giving women a platform.” Despite optimism, there were several references to “the glass ceiling” at upper management levels of news corporations: “Until we have women in charge, equity is never gonna exist.”

If news organizations fall short on supporting gender equity it is perhaps not surprising that men and women varied in how they did their work during four presidential elections. Indeed, beta bias hypotheses, predicting no gender differences along the lines of the job model, found little support in this data set. Yet, while gender variance emerged along several dimensions there is not consistent support for either of the two alpha bias models. Specifically, women who have excelled in journalism—to the extent that they were assigned to cover presidential campaigns for network news—do not neatly fit the feminist model’s prediction of over-compensated assertiveness. Neither do these women display a wholesale nurturing approach to their work.

Evidence of the traditional model emerged mostly from how women presented *others*—in this case how they framed candidates and the election process. As Figure 3 graphically demonstrates, women reporters—despite generously employing masculine frames—were less likely than their male colleagues to do so. At the same time, as the traditional model would forecast, women were more likely to employ feminine human-interest approaches to coverage than men. More often though women used gender-neutral frames and they used them more often than men. It seems that male reporters featured in this data set are a better fit for the traditional gender model than their female coworkers. It is also noteworthy that there were no differences between men and women reporters in terms of objectivity or the tonal valence of their reporting. If the traditional gender model were fully deployed in women’s reportage, evidence of a more subjective and positive approach than men would have emerged. The data offer no such evidence.

The liberal feminist model conjecture that women behave assertively in a male-dominated work environment to counter gender discrimination found limited support in our study--particular to dimensions of their *self-representation* in reportage. Indeed, women emerged as tougher journalistic watchdogs than men. Moreover, they managed to report (on average) more stories than their male colleagues, revealing their willingness and skill to navigate large workloads.

The results offer a glance at the complexities of gender performance in a highly competitive work environment. More women candidates are entering the political landscape in the United States and women voters seem to become more energized about political participation. Fully entrusting women with reporting election news would certainly not hurt the momentum toward gender-uniform political participation. Taking stock of how gender played out in coverage of the 1992 to 2004 elections offers a small point of traction in understanding the impediments and potentials for this to be realized.

Note

¹Cited studies use the term “feminist model” despite the multiplicity of feminist approaches. The use of the term, “feminist model” lines up closely with the liberal feminist position. See van Zoonen (1989).

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