DISSERTATION

THE FAILURE EFFECT:

WHY YOU THINK *SHE CAN'T WIN*

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation analyzes how modern media coverage and framing of women political candidates reinforces and sustains what I term the Failure Effect. The Failure Effect is a complex combination of gender-based expectancies and cognitive processes including cultural cognition, motivated reasoning, and pragmatic bias, which are amplified and reinforced by media framing techniques that ultimately disadvantage women candidates. I argue the Failure Effect causes voters to doubt a woman candidate's electability even when she is an otherwise qualified candidate, resulting in voters choosing a man candidate at the ballot box because they believe She Can't Win.

Despite progress toward gender parity in politics, women continue to hold a significantly smaller portion of political offices than men, particularly at the executive level. Investigating this issue, I examine the history of women candidates in the U.S., gender-based social role expectations, journalistic norms, the attention cycle model, and symbolic annihilation in connection with women political candidates. The study conducted considers the impact of commonly used media framing techniques, specifically strategic game frames, on political outcomes and the notions voters may hold about the electability of a woman candidate. This dissertation argues that despite progress, gender parity in politics remains a distant goal. The research question posed in this study yielded results that both supported the argument of the dissertation as well as surprising results that are ripe for future investigation and potentially the

future success of women political candidates. This study asks: How do media frame ideas about executive-level women candidates' electability?

To investigate this question, I examined the framing of news stories in four major national newspapers in the United States and the coverage generated about the six women presidential candidates who ran during the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary. This qualitative thematic analysis found eight primary strategic game frames and several additional sub-frames that were applied to the women candidates. The results of this analysis provide support for the primary argument of this dissertation – the Failure Effect, and how media framing of these candidates causes voters to believe that She Can't Win.

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I first arrived at Colorado State University in the fall of 1998. I was seventeen and from a town of about 7,500 people. My three and a half years as an undergraduate at CSU shaped the course of my entire professional career and for me, it is critical to acknowledge the importance that CSU and the Journalism and Media Communication Department have played in my life. Those who have played an outsized role in that experience include my graduate committee members – Dr. Kris Kodrich, who loves politics as much as I do and whom I have known for 25 years, Dr. David Wolfgang, who taught me to apply my qualitative professional skills to my academic world, Dr. Karrin Vasby Anderson who has written everything I wish I had, and Dr. Julia Khrebtan-Hörhager whose class inspired me and was where she provided me valuable counsel for my first (nearly) published academic paper. I, of course, must also thank my advisor, Dr. Rosa Mikeal Martey, for her vast subject matter expertise, her practical advice, and for pushing me to become a better academic writer and not just a journalistic one. I must also acknowledge Dr. Marilee Long for her support as my life underwent many changes during this program and I worked to continue. Finally, I must recognize JMC Chair emeritus, Mr. Greg Luft, and former CSU Student Media Advisor, Mr. Mario Caballero, both of whom believed in an ambitious kid from a small town, and who have both taken the time to help me find my way more than once between 1998 and 2023.

In some ways, this dissertation is a culmination of many parts of my life. It's been written across states and time zones – at swim meets, in the parking lot of dance practices, and at the karate dojo. For me, this paper is a sort of a culmination of my love of politics, especially presidential politics, that I've had ever since I was a little girl. That is in large part thanks to my

mom, Susan Wheeler, who worked three jobs to raise a kid on her own and told me I could be anyone I wanted to be, maybe even president.

I'd like to dedicate this work to two groups. First, my family. My husband, Jon, who always supports me and whatever goal or idea I come up with, no matter how ambitious or impractical. My daughter, Charlotte, who is more mature and wiser than words can describe, and who identifies and understands the importance of equity better than anyone I know. And finally, my son, Theodore, whose sheer brain power, sense of humor, and true kindness of spirit knows no bounds. Thank you for doing this program with me. I have time for more bike rides now.

The second group I dedicate this work to is the many brave women on which this research is based. May the next generation of women leaders stand on the shoulders of Victoria, Jeannette, Margaret, Shirley, Geraldine, Hillary, Kamala, Kirsten, Amy, Elizabeth, Tulsi, and Marianne. And may the future coverage of these women and our collective daughters be less terrible.

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1.1   Overview and Rationale

Since the dawning of the American experiment, women have been fighting for gender parity in politics. Nearly 250 years after the nation was formed, and more than 100 years after at least some American women were given the right to vote via the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, that struggle for gender parity in politics continues. According to the most recent U.S. Census, women make up approximately 50.8% of the American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Although technically a record number of women were elected and sworn in to make up the 118th U.S. Congress in January of 2023, the overall number of women members of Congress only increased by two over the Congress seated in 2021, and women politicians made up just 27% of that elected political body (Boschma, et. al., 2023 and Blazina & Desilver, 2021). That number represents a 50% increase in the number of women serving in those bodies over the previous decade (Blazina and Desilver, 2021). This data demonstrates both progress and problem. Progress toward gender parity in politics is demonstrably, if not slowly, improving. In addition to that marked growth in overall representation, parity progress is appearing in high elected offices. In 2020, the United States elected its first woman vice president. In 2023, a woman left her post serving multiple terms as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. However, if the core tenet of a representative democracy is to have approximately equal representation in its elected bodies, those numbers framed as marked progress demonstrate that societally this country is perhaps about halfway to achieving gender equality in elected offices in the United States of America. If a democracy is to be a truly representative one, its elected bodies should consist of an approximately equal representation of its general population.

There is a vast body of academic research that investigates multiple potential answers to the question of why the United States has not yet elected a woman to the presidency and to an equitable share of other high-level and executive level offices, including seats in the U.S. Senate and state governorships around the country. There is also investigation into why in general political offices in the country are held by a significantly smaller portion of women than men, despite a long history of qualified women running. That history is critical to the contextual understanding of the plight of women politicians. Victoria Woodhull was the first woman to run for president back in 1872, as a candidate in an election in which she could not vote (Finneman, 2015). Decades later Jeannette Rankin ran for the presidency in 1916, where coverage focused on her appearance and feminine traits (Finneman, 2015). Margaret Chase Smith was the first woman to run for the presidency in the modern media era in 1964, where the media often discussed Chase Smith in terms of her inability to win the election (Finneman, 2015). Shirley Chisholm was the first African American woman to seek the nomination of President from one of the two major political parties (Michals, 2015). Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman nominated as vice presidential candidate on the Democratic Party ticket in 1984 and was followed years later by Sarah Palin who was the first woman nominee for vice president on the Republican Party ticket in 2008 (Finneman, 2015). Hillary Clinton, arguably the most well-known, and most frequently covered woman candidate tried and failed twice to "break that highest and hardest glass ceiling", in 2008 and again in 2016 (Carroll, et. al., 2022). This historical perspective of women candidates is important to consider as the issues this dissertation seeks to examine have a long history of societal expectations and journalistic norms about who a President is and can be, and how candidates are framed by the media coverage they receive. At

its core, this dissertation seeks to explore how modern media coverage and framing of women political candidates helps to reinforce and sustain what I term the Failure Effect.

The Failure Effect is easy to identify once attention is drawn to it. Consider these varied real-world examples that come from different perspectives. In a personal conversation that took place in 2022, in my then home state of North Carolina, a discussion with a man who I know to be a supporter of women's rights told me he couldn't believe the Democratic primary for the state's open U.S. Senate seat had yielded a woman candidate. The primary for the Democratic nomination for the Senate seat was contested, and the top candidates included a successful, young, white, male state senator, and a Black woman who had most recently served as the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court. When I asked why he was surprised that the winning primary candidate was the woman, Cheri Beasley, my friend answered, "Well, there's no way she can win (the general election)." Beasley ultimately lost the 2022 general election to her white, male, Republican opponent (Shivaram, 2022).

Here is another example. In 2020, *The New York Times* reported a story that emerged from the Democratic Presidential Primary Season in which the reporting quoted Democratic Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts saying that Independent Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont had told her in 2018 that he did not think a woman could win the presidency (Herndon & Martin, 2020). Sanders later denied making that remark. Coverage of this alleged event was widespread and notably appears in the coverage analyzed in this study.

It is also important to note that I have also observed the Failure Effect in my own behavior. In 2020, I received a phone call from a woman candidate's primary presidential campaign and the volunteer on the line asked me if I planned to support that woman candidate in the primary. My answer was "no." Shortly after I hung up the phone, this answer gave me pause.

Even though this candidate strongly represented my political beliefs, and I have a personal interest in voting for women candidates, I still chose not to vote for this highly qualified individual, and ultimately voted for a man who was arguably less experienced and qualified instead. "But why?" I asked myself. Because I didn't think she could win. It was a lengthy personal reflection on that experience that led me to ask the questions that led to this dissertation.

It is examples of the Failure Effect, like those noted, that beg the question why? Why do people, even those who expressly want to support a woman candidate, think She Can't Win? The Failure Effect is one explanation of this phenomenon and is a result of a set of complex social expectancies, biases, and cognitive processes that are reinforced by the media and lead voters to not select their preferred candidate based on their perceived electability of that candidate. Conventional political wisdom and academic data dating back to the 1990s argues that when women candidates run for political office, they do in fact win at similar rates as their male counterparts (Bystrom, et. al., 2001, and Bucchianeri, 2018). Clearly, that argument does not fully apply as directly to executive offices like the American Presidency or state governorships, but that data is a more accurate assessment regarding lower-level or representative political offices like the U.S. Congress or in state legislatures where gender representation continues to progress. Meeks finds that the higher the level of office for which a woman runs, the larger the gap for gender labels (Meeks, 2012). Devitt finds that discrepancies do exist in coverage of lower-level races, but the coverage is more balanced compared to political races for executive level offices (Devitt, 2002). More recent academic debate considers the merits of that argument, particularly based on party affiliation with Democratic women overall achieving higher success rates than their Republican counterparts (Bucchianeri, 2018). But objectively, and broadly, at lower-level political offices, women candidates who run do win at similar rates as their male

counterparts. But why not for higher level or executive level offices? This is where one finds the Failure Effect and the belief among American voters that She Can't Win.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation draws on pragmatic bias, motivated reasoning, cultural cognition, gender role expectancy theory, symbolic annihilation, the attention cycle model, and framing theory to argue that modern news coverage of women candidates reinforces societal expectancies that She Can't Win – and subsequently, she doesn't.

Through the development of the Failure Effect, I argue that media coverage merges with society's long-standing biases and stereotypes about the role of the American Presidency and expectancies of who a woman is and who she can be. Those expectancies, weighted in society's definition of woman, combine with the theories of cultural cognition and motivated reasoning to further challenge a woman candidate's path to success. Cultural cognition argues that individuals form beliefs that are reflective of visions of ideal society and prioritize values over facts (Kahan, 2012). Apply the basis of cultural cognition with the theoretical lens of Kunda's motivated reasoning. Kunda argues that individuals often make decisions based on their desirability of the outcome as opposed to an accurate reflection of the evidence (Kunda, 1990). Applied, motivated reasoning is core to understanding why individuals assume She Can't Win, even when she is qualified, reasonable candidate. Individuals are motivated to choose the winning candidate, either because they want to be 'right' or because they are concerned about the alternative or opposing candidate winning. Add to that argument the concept of pragmatic bias which Corbett et. al. (2022), say is the process in which voters withhold support for a woman candidate because they believe success is perceived to be difficult or impossible to achieve (Corbett, et. al., 2022).

The Failure Effect is demonstrated in a real-world example by considering the overall outcome of the 2020 Presidential Election. Democratic voters, who were largely, and strongly

opposed to a second term of President Donald J. Trump, were of course motivated to vote for a candidate who they thought would have a chance to beat the incumbent and, based on the argument posed by the Failure Effect, not the candidate that who was necessarily their first choice. This is a key reason to understanding how the Democratic Party chose and United States voters elected President Joseph R. Biden in 2020. Democrats (correctly) thought Biden, over his vastly more diverse competitors (including candidates of different gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.), could beat incumbent President Donald J. Trump. Biden is an avatar for who the media teaches us a President can and should be, and who Democratic voters deemed to be the winning choice at the ballot box.

The combination of the societal expectancies of the American Presidency, individual cognitive processes, and individual biases are both in part created and reinforced by the way the media frames women candidates. Goffman's explication of the concept of the frame argues that how the media presents information to its audience shapes the reality of that individual and in turn, the frame can both impact the choices that person makes and the beliefs that person holds (Goffman, 1974). This dissertation sought to analyze and understand how the commonly applied, specific political frames of issue, which looks more at policies or topics, and strategic game, which tends to gamify coverage and/or focus on election outcomes, are used in the coverage of women political candidates. The use of these frames ultimately impact voter's perceived viability of said candidates.

To investigate the Failure Effect, I conducted a thematic analysis of news coverage of the women candidates who ran in the 2020 Democratic Primary during the run up to the 2020 United States Presidential Election. I collected the qualitative data from coverage generated by the top four newspapers in the United States in terms of circulation, which included *The New York*

Times, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, and *The Washington Post* (Sheridan, 2022) during the 2020 Democratic Primary election season.

The particular significance of this study lies in what I believe is the identification and explanation of a largely unstudied problem surrounding why voters often do not cast ballots for executive level women candidates even when their politics and/or personal values align with doing so and what role media frames may play in that phenomenon. In a study that is critical to the core of this investigation, Corbett et al., (2022) found that barriers to women's electability can be reduced amongst voters when they understand that women are viable candidates. This study further explicates that finding and offer insights into how modern media framing techniques are shaping and reinforcing the perception of candidate electability with the ultimate hope of providing additional insight that may be useful to both candidates, political campaigns, and journalists in terms of communicating with would-be voters and the broad hope of creating more gender parity in politics and disrupting the biases and expectancies we all bring with us to the voting booth.

1.2   Goal and Research Question

This dissertation seeks to explore how media coverage and framing of political candidates creates, supports, and sustains what I term the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon. The goal of this work is to identify media framing themes applied to women candidates running for U.S. President in the most recent primary election, and then demonstrate how those media frames combine with societal expectancies and an individual's cognitive processes and biases to effect one's notions about the electability of women candidates.

Primary Research Question: How do news media frame ideas about executive-level women candidates' electability?

1.3   Organization of Dissertation

This proposal is broken down into chapters and follows the following outline. Following this introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2 constructs the theoretical framework for this dissertation, reviews the relevant literature, and connected theory. Chapter 3 is the methods section which includes background for the methodological rationale for the qualitative study conducted, an explanation of which media was analyzed, and procedures. Results of the study and discussion of the frames identified are found in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 6 offers conclusions to this study and areas to consider for future research.

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CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Framing Theory

As the field of mass communication research draws from a variety of other social scientific disciplines, it is of interest that one of its core tenents of research, frame analysis, derives from the work of a sociologist, Erving Goffman. In his 1974 work, *Frame Analysis*, Goffman's explication of the concept of the frame argues that how the media presents information to its audience shapes the reality of that individual and in turn, the frame can both impact the choices that person makes and the beliefs that person holds (Goffman, 1974). Goffman further breaks the concept of frame into two primary categories, natural and social frames, both of which help individuals understand the world around them (Goffman, 1974). Goffman argues that natural frameworks exist quite literally, without any social causation, where social frames are created due to the intentions of others and can greatly impact how information is processed and interpreted (Goffman, 1974). Goffman's definition of frame is at its core an argument for the power of media effects – meaning is applied to the frame by journalists (or in 2023 - also content creators), and by the audience itself upon reception and interpretation of the frame.

Perhaps due to its place at the center of the study of mass communication, frame theory, over time, has built a library of definitions and sometimes debate on what exactly a frame is and how it should be employed. After Goffman's initial conceptualization, frame has also been addressed by other critically important media scholars including Tuchman, who notes the frame is used by the media to create reference points for audiences to interpret and discuss public events (Tuchman, 1978, p. ix). Gamson and Modigliani termed the concept 'media frame,' and

argue that it is a "central organizing idea… for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). Entman, who argues that the concept of the frame is the process of applying "selection and salience" in which certain information is selected for communication and then presented in a way that makes it more salient to the receiver (Entman, 1993, p. 51). Entman also posits that studying frame is an exposition of the power of the media content itself and that analysis conducted in such a manner helps to shed light on the influence the transfer of information has on an individual (Entman, 1993). Capella and Jamieson succinctly state that the frame is the way that individuals understand events (Capella & Jamieson, 1997). Reece, Gandy, and Grant argue that the concept of the frame helps people make meaning from the information they consume and the world in which they live (Reece, et al., 2003). D'Angelo uses a more applied definition, describing the frame as a "written, spoken, graphical, or visual message modality that a communicator uses to contextualize a topic, such as a person, event, episode, or issue, within a text transmitted to and received by means of mediation (D'Angelo, 2017, p. 1). Other scholarly expansions on Goffman's original explication of frame include Scheufele's use of the term 'media frame' which argues that the frame is a central organizing idea of a story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events (Scheufele, 1999). Applicable to the topic of this essay, Sheeler and Anderson argue that media frames "are consequential because they shape the ways people understand and participate in democracy" (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013, p. 108). For the purposes of this dissertation, frame is additionally considered as the context in which female political candidates are viewed by voters in terms of her electability.

2.2   Women Presidential Candidates and the Double Bind

There is scholarly debate about how best to discuss the challenges women politicians have faced try on their metaphorical race to the highest office in the land. Secretary Hillary Clinton is known for her remarks about her failed presidential campaigns and failing to break what she called "that highest and hardest glass ceiling," in 2008, and again in 2016 (Carroll, et. al., 2022). But scholars and politicians alike argue that the seemingly never-ending path for a woman to reach the White House is more of a political labyrinth than a glass ceiling because the barriers and challenges presented to women consist of twists and turns that are vastly more a complex and diverse than one remaining transparent barrier (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly, 2012). This labyrinth has had many turns throughout the course of the United States' nearly 250-year history, and the end of the tunnel has not been found… yet.

Historical examples and more modern-day exemplars of women presidential candidates often demonstrate Jamieson's concept of the double bind. Jamieson argues that throughout history, women (and in some cases men), are caught by a series of cultural double binds that prevent women from becoming leaders or from taking roles for which they are well-qualified (Jamieson, 1995). Jamieson argues that the construct of the double bind is about power – in this case between social and institutional norms and a vulnerable class, women (Jamieson, 1995). Jamieson details five double binds women face in western cultures:

- The womb/brain bind: Women can't be good mothers and successful career people at the same time (Jamieson, 1995).

- The silence/shame bind: Women can choose to stay silent and be powerless, or speak up and be shamed (Jamieson, 1995).

- The sameness/difference bind: Women cannot be both the same as men and different as men societally (Jamieson, 1995).

- The femininity/competence bind: If a woman is too feminine, she's seen as incapable. If a woman is too masculine, she's a bitch. In this bind women are either "too" and "not… enough" (Jamieson, 1995).

- The aging/invisibility bind: As women age, they become invisible, where men, as they age, are often seen as wise/credible/etc. (Jamieson, 1995).

There is an additional double bind found in the literature that is of relevance to this dissertation and that women commonly face in society, the Madonna/whore concept. The Madonna/whore dichotomy (MWD) was popularized by concepts found in Sigmund Freud's work in psychology and argues that men may view women as either good and chaste - a Madonna, or bad and promiscuous – a whore (Bareket et. al., 2018). Academic research demonstrates that the MWD is often applied by men to uphold normative gender roles and the overarching concept of the patriarchy (Bareket, et. al., 2018).

As noted, the concepts of the double bind are pervasive throughout the coverage of women presidential candidates, dating back to the 19th Century. The first woman to run for the presidency was Victoria Woodhull, who in 1872, ran in an election in which she could not vote (Finneman, 2015). Although Woodhull was obviously running to make a political statement and not to win (she had no constitutional rights to vote or hold office), she was billed as a "figure of fun," a "lunatic," "entertaining," and "the devil" by the press of her time and faced significant focus and critique about her family life (Finneman, 2015; Sheeler & Anderson, 2013, p. 22). Decades later Jeannette Rankin ran for the presidency in 1916, where coverage focused on her appearance and feminine traits (Finneman, 2015). Rankin was framed as an "ideal housewife," a "good cook and seamstress," and was essentially the first woman presidential candidate who had her appearance dissected by the media, in Rankin's case, specifically about her "beautiful red hair" (Finneman, 2015).

In the early stages of the modern media era, Margaret Chase Smith ran for the presidency in 1964, where she was commonly ignored by the press and when she did appear in coverage, was often discussed in terms of her inability to win or in the context of her personal life and romantic partner (Finemann, 2015). Interestingly, the coverage of Chase Smith identifies a clear discursive strategy – referring to her "as both tough and womanly at the same time" (Finneman, 2015). The 1984 rhetoric used in the coverage of the first woman to hold the nomination for a major political party, Democratic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro, was similar in tone to that of Chase Smith, including references to double bind qualities. For instance, Ferraro was described as "feisty" and "pushy, but also not threatening" (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, p. 329) an example of the femininity/competence double bind (Jamieson, 1995).

Fast forward more than 150 years from Victoria's Woodhull's original candidacy to the more modern day and it is easy to demonstrate that today's women candidates face similar treatment by the press. Three crucial examples are the most recent female vice-presidential candidates; Sarah Palin, who ran on the Republican ticket in 2008, and Kamala Harris, a Democrat, who in 2020 became the first woman and first woman of color to hold the second highest office in the United States, and the often celebrated and often pilloried Secretary Hillary Clinton who has held elected and non-elected positions ranging from Senator of New York to Secretary of State.

For her part, in 2008, Palin, was a then first-term governor of the State of Alaska, and relative newcomer to the national political scene when she was introduced as Republican Presidential nominee John McCain's running mate (Finneman, 2015). Palin was at once celebritized, criticized, sexually objectified, and celebrated by varied groups of both voters and the media (Finneman, 2015). It is notable that Palin's coverage had commonalities to that of her

predecessors and within the context of the double bind. Consider how critiques of Woodhull's family life were common threads in her press coverage in the 1870s and critiques of Palin's family life, particularly of her children surfaced in the 2000s. Palin shared similarities in the coverage received by Rankin in the 1910s - both had their appearances dissected by the media, particularly regarding each woman's attractiveness (Finneman, 2015).

It is important to note that both Palin and the media had a role in the rhetorical framing and presentation of the candidate. For instance, Palin billed herself as a 'maverick,' and had a habit of recalling masculine frames in reference to herself including use of the words tough, rogue, and non-feminine (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). But Palin also billed herself as a sort of every woman – a matriarch of her family, and mother of five kids, or as Palin described herself, "just an average hockey mom who signed up for the PTA," (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013, p. 100). Or recall perhaps Palin's most famous and often-quoted line from her introduction as a candidate at the Republican National Convention in the summer of 2008, "You know what the difference is between a hockey mom and pit bull? Lipstick!" (Sheeler & Anderson 2013, 101).

For its part, the media often referred to Palin with terms like, "caribou Barbie" a reference to her appearance and her hunting hobby in her home state, and "Valentino Barbie" in reference to her controversial designer wardrobe choices (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, 329). That objectification of Palin also surfaced, not just in verbal media coverage, but in visual coverage as well. For instance, a Reuters Wire Service image of Palin at a campaign rally which was shot from ground-level and behind the candidate and showed only "Palin's legs and black high heels; framed between her legs is a young male supporter" (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, 331).

Palin, like both men and women politicians before her, was critiqued in both the news and popular media for political missteps. A series of poorly handled, high-profile media

interviews shifted the tone of the coverage of Palin from novel maverick to dangerous, unprepared novice which became fodder for late night television (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). It can be argued that the extreme parodies of both Palin and Hillary Clinton on shows like *Saturday Night Live* damaged the credibility of both candidates with Sheeler and Anderson arguing such parody ultimately reinforces the sexist and gendered stereotypes it sought out to critique (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). Scholars Carlin and Winfrey found that during the 2008 campaign media coverage of Palin (and Clinton who lost the Democratic primary during that election cycle), "incorporated gender stereotypes and gendered language that influenced the way both women were viewed" (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, 330). And despite the large narrative arc to how Palin was portrayed, – from Palin the exciting, new, sex object, to Palin the risky, stupid, diva, the overarching message to that narrative was that Palin, the woman, was not qualified for the job in which she was applying.

Kamala Harris, like Sarah Palin in 2008, was a relative newcomer to the national political scene when she ran for the Democratic Party Presidential nomination in 2020, and ultimately became the vice-presidential nominee for the 2020 Democratic Party ticket alongside Joseph R. Biden. Like Palin and other women candidates before her, Harris was framed as a political pioneer, a first woman, or first woman of color candidate (Meeks, 2012; Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). And like those before her, Harris was subject to both sexist and racist media coverage during the 2020 campaign. Harris' coverage focused on everything from her campaign trail shoe choice, Chuck Taylor converse sneakers, (Devaney, 2020) to what was perceived and framed as her overly ambitious persona during the selection process for then candidate Joe Biden's vice-presidential pick (Vitali, 2022). There are multiple instances of Harris being criticized for her ambition in the press, and at one point, she tackled the critiques head on in a press conference

saying, "There will be resistance to your ambition. There will be people who say you are out of your lane. Cause they are burdened by only having the capacity to see what has always been, instead of what can be. But don't you let that burden you" (Vitali, 2022, p. 261). Harris, and her direct rebuke of the 'too ambitious' story line in the press is an example of Jamieson's femininity/competence bind where a woman is seen as both "too..." or "not enough…," particularly compared to her male peers. This instance also serves as an example of the silence/shame bind, where Jamieson argues women are punished for speaking up, but also punished for remaining silent (Jamieson, 1995).

Harris faces the added layer of being a woman of color in the political arena, as both a Black woman and a woman of South Asian heritage, something her predecessors had not faced. Somewhat similarly to the discussions of 'dangerous Palin', Harris faced criticisms in the media about both her race and gender that painted her as "radical, dangerous, and threatening because of her direct challenge to the white male status quo" (Carroll, et al., 2022, p. 43). Reporting on the 2020 race demonstrated there were concerns from the Biden/Harris campaign about Harris being painted as an "angry Black woman" by the Trump/Pence Presidential Campaign (Vitali, 2022). For his part, soon-to-be President Trump regularly attacked Harris by calling into question her citizenship akin to the Barack Obama 'birther' controversy by speculating with comments including "I heard it today, she doesn't even meet the requirements" (Carroll, et al., 2022, p. 44). Trump also used the media via press conferences, fundraising emails, and Twitter to call Harris "nasty" and "horrible" which are arguably terms rooted in both sexism and racism, linking Harris to the angry Black woman trope (Carroll et al., 2022)

Still other data shows that Harris was also sexually objectified. For instance, during the vice-presidential debate between Harris and Mike Pence, Google trends showed increases in

"searches for 'Senator Kamala Harris' alongside 'nude,' 'bathing suit,' and 'bikini'" (Carroll, et al., 2022, p. 43). In literal rhetorical othering, Republican leaders who regularly appeared on television repeatedly mispronounced Harris' first name (Carroll, et al., 2022, p. 44) which likely was meant to bring attention to both her race and gender in terms of Harris being anti-normative. The overarching theme of these representations was that Harris was unusual, unqualified, and unequal, even though her resume, with experience as district attorney of a large jurisdiction, and Attorney General for the State of California, was longer than many of her male competitors (Carroll, et al., 2022).

There is likely no candidate of any gender more covered, dissected, loved, and hated (by both the media and the public) than Secretary Hillary Clinton. Clinton has faced decades of coverage over a variety of public service roles that gave the media the opportunity to apply concepts of the double bind, question and emphasize her (lack of) credibility, and authenticity at various times throughout her lengthy time in the public eye. Like Palin, Harris and her historical predecessors, Clinton was celebritized, celebrated, criticized, and sexually objectified (Parry-Giles, 2014; Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). Unlike Palin, Clinton carried with her into the presidential race a significant political resume with experience as a First Lady, and U.S. Senator prior to the 2008 campaign, and with the additional qualification of Secretary of State by the time she ran for the presidency again in 2016.

Although one could argue Clinton was negatively framed in a variety of ways, perhaps none more so than in terms of her authenticity as a woman and candidate. Clinton's authenticity was often called into question in the wake of her husband's much covered extra-marital affairs and her subsequent run for political office of her own. Parry-Giles traces the inauthentic label Clinton often carries to her run for the U.S. Senate in the state of New York and "her lack of

genuine motive for seeking office as she embarked on a carpetbagging campaign in New York"
(Parry-Giles, 2014, p. 144). Questions of Clinton's authenticity surfaced in a variety of other
ways - regarding her marriage, and her ability to be a candidate in her own right (Parry-Giles,
2014). Clinton was also framed as inauthentic in relationship to her role as a mother. Carlin and
Winfrey argue that Clinton's motherhood, and her engagement of her adult daughter in her
campaign in 2008 were used to create questions about her motives as a candidate which also
supported the inauthentic label (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). Parry-Giles argues that it was
Clinton's attempts to cross from a feminine position of social power (as First Lady) to a
masculine position of political power (as a candidate) that drove her framing in the media as an
inauthentic candidate. It is again critical to consider how Clinton's framing as an inauthentic
candidate was framed in sexist ways – whether through staying in her marriage, her role as a
mother, or her attempts to build her own political career – all frames that one would be hard
pressed to find attached to male candidates.

It is possible that no other societal expectation impacts how women political candidates
are viewed than their personal status as a wife and/or mother. The concept of the maternal wall
argues that gendered societal stereotypes about women who are also mothers persist, particularly
in professional spaces, and that women are often penalized in their career pursuits for having
children (Crosby, et. al., 2004). Discussions of political women candidate's media coverage vary
widely. Often coverage follows the "too much/not enough" double bind (Jamieson, 1995) in
which a candidate is punished for being too attentive to her children and therefore cannot
possibly succeed at the job she is running for, or, conversely, not attentive and engaged enough
and labeled some version of being a bad mother who puts too much attention on their
professional pursuits. Despite their ideological differences, like Clinton, Harris, and Palin have

had their authenticity and credibility called into question with gendered themes and references to their gender and their status as a mother. Carlin and Winfrey found that during the 2008 campaign media coverage of Clinton and Palin "incorporated gender stereotypes and gendered language that influenced the way both women were viewed" (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, 330). It is easy to identify the ways in which Palin was framed in terms of both credibility and authenticity. It can be argued that Palin was often billed in the media coverage as an authentic candidate, some of which was due to the rhetorical framing of the candidate herself. But paired with her own rhetoric endorsing her authenticity and the media's repetition of it, Palin was also criticized for her credibility, sometimes because of her short track record in government, her poorly executed and poorly received press interviews, and at other times questioned about her ability to be a working mother of young children (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). Carlin and Winfrey identify instances of both the media and voters questioning Palin's credibility as a leader due to her responsibilities as a mother (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009). *The New York Times* featured a quote from a mother of two who questioned Palin's ability to "juggle a BlackBerry and a breast pump as vice president" (Carlin and Winfrey, 2009, 333).

Because of her relative newness on the political scene, there is opportunity to expand the academic literature about Vice President Kamala Harris. In comparison to the coverage of Clinton and Palin, Harris's authenticity and credibility is covered in relation to her role as a mother, and her blended family: Harris' husband, first Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff, has two children from a previous marriage, but Harris has no biological children of her own. Harris, in a play on her first name, regularly refers to herself as "Momala" in media interviews and other channels, a nickname she says was given to her by her stepchildren (Summer, 2020). A simple search of Harris' name and 'blended family' yields a large sample of coverage in relation to her

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parental status many of which are stories framed as positive sounding, but inherently gendered headlines, including in *The San Francisco Chronicle*, "Of course Kamala Harris is a Mom" (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2021) and in Vox, "What Kamala Harris's blended family means to women who are childfree by choice" (Munaweera, 2021). Although this sample of headlines does bring attention to the more modern-day definitions of motherhood and its intersection with high-level politics, these headlines also feature the gendered frame with which women candidates continue to face. A similar search of Donald Trump (who has five children with three different women) and 'blended family' yields no results.

2.3   Gender Expectancies and Social Roles

"Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, she just did it backwards and in high heels." - Ann Richards, 45th Governor of the State of Texas (The New York Times, 2006).

Governor Richards' commentary, an analogy about the societal challenges women face, was made nearly forty years ago during a 1988 political speech – but it continues to ring true in 2023, and illustrates the literal obstacles women broadly, and high-level women politicians specifically face. Bauer argues that women political candidates encounter what she coins the "qualifications gap," in which women are required to have vastly stronger, more impressive qualifications, and experiences to run for executive level office than their male counterparts (Bauer, 2020). There are real-world demonstrations of this phenomenon. Consider this the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary and a series of high-profile exchanges between opponents, Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar and then-Mayor of South Bend, Indiana, Pete Buttigieg. On multiple occasions Klobuchar pointed out that she, and her other female competitors in the presidential primary (Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Senator Kamala Harris of California) had significantly more experience than the colloquially known 'Mayor Pete.' In an

interview on CNN, Klobuchar argued, "of the women on the (debate) stage — I'm focusing here on my fellow women Senators, Senator Harris, Senator Warren, and myself. Do I think that we would be standing on that stage if we had the (level of) experience that [Buttigeig] had? No, I don't" (Corasaniti, 2020). Klobuchar and the qualifications gap both argue that the bar for executive level women candidates is set much higher for women than men, and that ultimately voters carry these expectancies when making decisions for whom they plan to vote. I would take Klobuchar's argument a step further and argue that voters assume that Buttigeig is more capable, qualified and/or viable solely based on his gender, because he meets the expectancy of who a President can be from a gender normative perspective.

The qualifications gap also pairs with the shifting standards model. The model suggests that our societal standards shift when comparing men and women (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1994; Biernat & Manis, 1991). In their work, Biernat and Kobrynowicz consider the concept of competence when it comes to gender. This model argues that women are judged against the lower societal standards of competence for women overall, and that men are judged against the relatively higher stands for their gender which ultimately means the evaluations are not comparable. Essentially the researchers argue, what is deemed competent for a woman is inherently lower than what is seen as a competency as a man.

It is important to consider the context in which the qualifications gap and the shifting standards model are rooted - social role theory. Social role theory argues that widely shared gender stereotypes develop from the gendered division of labor and therefore create and perpetuate gender stereotypes (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In western cultures, those gendered stereotypes often associate men with paid work or power (bread-winning), and women with nurturing or communion (mothering) (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Further explored, Koenig and

Eagly find that those gendered stereotypes are often applied to workers occupational roles (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Meeks argues that gender role incongruence creates difficult hurdles for professionals trying to break with traditional gender roles and that this effect clearly applies to women politicians who are seeking what society traditionally sees as a masculine occupation (Meeks, 2012). Falk posits that "western culture associates' leadership with stereotypically masculine characteristics" (Falk, 2008, p. 53). These social expectancies are at the core of the Failure Effect and fuel an individual's understanding of the qualification, competence, and ultimately viability of women candidates.

2.3.1 Cultural Othering, Gender, and the Media Framing of Women Candidates

The culture of gendered, societal expectancies and how that creates the expectancy of who a president or executive level political leader can and should be is clearly reinforced by the media. There is a vast body of academic literature investigating both the history of and the challenge with which women are faced when running for political office. Bligh, et. al., (2012) argue that those factors include a lack of women in the leadership pipeline, tokenism, stereotypes, and media coverage. Much of that body of research focuses on the effects of the way women politicians are framed by that media coverage. Framing of women candidates has been documented since Victoria Woodhull ran for the U.S. presidency in 1872. It is important to note that much of that coverage throughout history is both critical of the woman candidate of the day, and often and at its base positions her as the cultural *other*. Beauvoir argues that in western cultures, men are seen as subjects while women are seen as objects or "others," making women the literal other of man (Beauvoir, 1949). Zevallos writes that the definition of otherness examines how the majority and minority is constructed, and how society is controlled by groups with the greatest political power (Zevallos, ND). Further explained, Zevallos posits that this

exposition of power is demonstrated in Western societies through the binary opposites of gender and "what it means to be a man or a woman" (Zevallos, ND, 5). These social gendered norms of western leadership clearly disadvantage women politicians both through what are gendered media frames, and through patriarchal societal standards of who a leader is and who a leader can be. The legacies of the political othering of women are broad and deeply rooted in American culture and reinforced by both news and popular media. Patriarchy, othering, and the concepts of the double bind are about maintaining power for the majority over the minority (Zevallos, ND).

The United States, a country which has now elected 46 male presidents over the course of its history, has fundamentally gendered the presidency itself as demonstrated through both who it elects and how presidents are portrayed in popular media. Women political candidates face significant challenges when it comes to their framing in news coverage, whether it is through reflection of societal stereotypes, gendered language, framing devices that position women as novel, the strategic game frame, that inherently disadvantages women through its masculinized, metaphorical nature, or the sheer quality and quantity of coverage given to women politicians. However, these cultural norms are reflected not just through the news media, but through popular media as well. The culture of gendered expectancy and politics can be seen in television shows like *The West Wing* (think actor Martin Sheen as a heroic, altruistic leader), to action films like *Air Force One* (and the hyper-masculine actor Harrison Ford). These portrayals contribute to societal understanding of political leadership, and reinforcement of the patriarchal and masculinity-based concept of how the public understands and defines who an American President is – from appearance and behavior, to race and gender (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). These issues even surface in historical accounts of the American Presidency. Take for example the popular, modern historical account of late 20th century US Presidents which genders the

presidency simply by way of its title; *The President's Club: Inside the world's most exclusive fraternity* (Gibbs & Duffy, 2012). These portrayals define, for generation after generation, who a voters should expect and trust as an American President.

These common media frames often reflect societal gender stereotypes which Kanter identified to fit into the categories of seductress or sex object, mother, pet, and iron maiden (Kanter, 1977). And consider how Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, or Kamala Harris fit into your mind's eye of who a woman is or how she is meant to behave. Falk argues that stereotypes applied to coverage of women politicians include emotionality, focuses on family life, and the character of the woman (labels like 'crazy') (Falk, 2008). Bligh, et. al., find that those gender stereotypes play a strong role in the perception of women's leadership abilities (Bligh, et. al., 2012). That finding is reflective of Eagly and Karau's role congruity theory. Eagly and Karau argue that the "perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice including perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman" (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573). Eagly and Karau find consequences to that perception include fewer positive attitudes toward female leaders, challenges for women in obtaining leadership roles, and challenges for women in finding success in those roles if they are obtained (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Perhaps the most enduring, and arguably the most damaging frame commonly applied to women candidates is the novelty or pioneer frame (Falk, 2008; Meeks, 2012, and Sheeler and Anderson, 2013). As noted earlier in this work the concept of a woman running for high office is not new, considering women like Victoria Woodhull have been running for the presidency before they had the right to vote. Since Woodhull's run in 1872, there have been more than a dozen

(counting those who recently ran in the Democratic primary in the 2020 Presidential Election)

other women who could be viewed as "serious candidates" for the office (Falk, 2008, p. 347).

Yet coverage of these women candidates as the 'first' endures. As recently as 2016, a major U.S.

newspaper called then candidate Hillary Clinton "the first serious female candidate for U.S.

President" (Falk, 2019, p. 347). Sheeler and Anderson argue that the persistence of the pioneer

frame has put women candidates on "a wagon train to nowhere" (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013, 19).

Meeks argues that because of the news values of social significance and deviance (deviance in

this case defined as social norm breaking), novelty labels create the perception that women are

"unusual or simply different within the political arena" (Meeks, 2012, p. 179). The persistent

perception that women political leaders are novel contributes to the core argument of the Failure

Effect and is one of several reasons why you as a voter believe that She Can't Win.

Research demonstrates that coverage of women candidates and politicians is often framed

through gendered language a process in which Falk terms "gender marking" (Falk, 2008, 86).

For example, this practice is demonstrated by referring to women candidates as a 'female

presidential candidate' or 'potential woman president.' Falk argues that men rarely if ever

receive such gendered marking in media coverage (Falk, 2019) In her analysis of media coverage

following the 2016 election, Falk found that the gender of Secretary Hillary Clinton was

mentioned roughly four times as often as her competitor, President Donald Trump (Falk, 2019).

Falk also found some 36,500 references to 'woman candidate' (or some similar version) in 2016

election coverage of Clinton, and literally zero references to 'man candidate' (or some similar

version) in coverage of Trump during the same timeframe (Falk, 2019, 349). The point of this

search being man and president are presumed to be synonymous, while woman and president

need explanation.

Most critical to the investigation proposed by this dissertation is the application of issue frames and the strategic game frame (also called horse race frame in some academic literature). Strategic game frames focus on the winning and losing of the political race, the gamification of the election, and discussions of strategy as opposed to focusing on issues (Falk, 2008). Aalberg defines the application as the "framing of politics as a strategic game which is characterized by a focus on questions related to who is winning and losing, the performance of politicians and parties, and on campaign strategies and tactics" (Aalberg et al., 2011, 163). An additional layer of note when considering the strategic game frame is that the concept of the horse race or strategic game frame is inherently masculine (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013). Research demonstrates that women receive more strategic game frame coverage than men and that coverage focuses more on their viability than the issues that help to inform voters about the positions of the candidate (Falk, 2008). Devitt argues that data across multiple studies shows that this type of coverage may be a critical challenge to women candidates' success because it makes women seem less viable in comparison to their male peers (Devitt, 2002). Van der Pas and Aaldering, find that in that strategic game frame coverage, men are portrayed as more viable than their women competitors (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). Conversely, issue frames in political coverage focus more on policy or actual issues for which a candidate stands (Rhee, 1997). Capella and Jamieson found that news framing has significant effects on voter attitudes about politics. Capella and Jamieson's spiral of cynicism argues that strategic game frame coverage leads to increased cynicism in voters, while issue frame coverage supports voter engagement (Capella & Jamieson, 1997). The increase of cynicism amongst voters also contributes to a person's willingness to vote for a woman candidate; if an individual is cynical about that candidate's chances, the voter will select a different name on the ballot.

Research also finds that women overall see less media coverage than their male counterparts and that coverage is of lesser quality. Carlin and Winfrey argue that the coverage of men and women differs in terms of quality, quantity, and negativity, all which can erode a woman's credibility (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). That lack of quality can be seen in a lack of discussion of important policy issues when it comes to women candidates, and more coverage on trivial frames like appearance, clothing, etc., or in the language used to describe them. For instance, where a man candidate might get called, "Mr. Trump" his woman competitor is often referred to as "Hillary" (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). Throughout her work, Falk echoes these findings, arguing that how the media covers women candidates has not changed much since the 1870s (Falk, 2008), and that coverage of women candidates in the media, specifically in newspapers is both lesser in quantity and more gendered in nature (Falk, 2019). Funk and Coker argue that the way female politicians are discussed in both traditional and new media may contribute to the way individuals evaluate those candidates (Funk & Coker, 2016). The researchers argue that objectification theory, "framing individuals in a way that reduces them to their physical characteristics is detrimental to perceived agency and found that objectifying news commentary impacted voter beliefs about a candidate's credibility and suitability for office" (Funk & Coker 2016, p. 455).

As examined throughout this dissertation, the legacies of the rhetorical, cultural, and social othering of women broadly and women politicians specifically is rooted deeply in American culture and reinforced by both news and popular media. Patriarchy, othering, and the concepts of the double bind, are about maintaining power for the majority over the minority (Zevallos, unknown). Academic literature covers a vast range of reasons why gender parity has been so difficult to achieve in the United States, and one overarching theme emerges. Many

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scholars argue that these gender-based stereotypes are culturally engrained in the U.S. and Western cultures, and that as Anderson writes, there is nothing women politicians have not tried to address this problem; these issues are cultural and not related to the women candidates themselves (Anderson, 2017). Carlin and Winfrey note in their study about sexism in the 2008 Presidential Election that featured both Palin and Clinton, that there is "a level of denial as a society that this (sexism) is a problem" (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009, p. 340). Anderson argues that there is a "female presidentiality paradox" when it comes to putting a woman in America's highest leadership position (Anderson, 2017, p. 132). Anderson posits that when it comes to female presidential candidates in particular, "every woman is the wrong woman – and will be until cultural understanding of the presidency changes" (Anderson, 2017, p. 132).

It is perhaps this argument, that culturally, a woman cannot be the American President, that is at the core of the Failure Effect. Voter belief in women presidential candidate's electability is reinforced through an echo chamber of societal standards and mass media communications. Consider Sanders' concept of the braindead megaphone, which analogizes how a man at a party with a metaphorical megaphone becomes the loudest voice in the room and manages to direct the conversation and behaviors of those attending the party (Sanders, 2007). Sanders applies his argument to the modern mass media and how it both sets the agenda but also the fits into the premise of the core argument of the Failure Effect. The dominant narrative, when exploited by the mass media, whether implicit or explicit, can influence both the level of discourse, and behavior of its audience. Applied to the argument of the Failure Effect, if the presidency is constantly shown and amplified by the media as masculine, or if a woman candidate is always trivialized, or shown as novel, or unviable, eventually that narrative takes hold and effects the behavior of the voting populace through its cultural embeddedness. Author

Jackson Katz writes that the ultimate irony of presidential politics is that "it will be necessary for a woman to win the election and go to work in the Oval Office for us to see just how crucial the presidency has always been in the symbolic architecture of men's cultural dominance" (Carroll, 2022, p. 46). With consideration of Katz's statement, I also argue that when a woman is elected to the office of the American Presidency, that will not equate to equal representation in politics, but rather one less turn to navigate in the political labyrinth, because another woman politician is going to have to win the job again (and again) to prove the first was not a chance occurrence.

2.4   The Role of Journalists

The concept of frame has also been developed in relationship to political coverage created by journalists. Merging frame theory and the role of journalists, Boydston et al., (2013) define political frames as what an individual considers surrounding an issue (Boydston, et al., 2013). Further explored, Gamson and Lasch discuss the media's presentation of political culture into frames and say that frame "suggests a central organizing idea for understanding events related to the issue in question" (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, 398). Gamson and Modigliani also consider the concept and coined the term 'media package,' which they argue consists of a frame that helps both the journalists producing news and individuals who consume it in a way to organize the world around them (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Tuchman argues that journalists help audiences make sense of the world through the creation of frames, and that those frames create a manufactured reality (Tuchman, 1978). Billard argues that as the Fourth Estate, the news media, plays a legitimizing role in society and that the role is so significant the news media is "the primary influence in the political realm and serves as the primary agent of legitimization for communities and their issues" (Billard, 2016, p. 194). Applied to the topic of the journey of women political candidates, it is argued that how journalists frame political candidates can have

a measurable effect on how they are perceived and if they are successful in their respective races. Research shows that the political frame has power and when used can demonstrate implicit bias without necessarily using explicit language, which can set the rules for determining the winner (Reece, et al., 2001). It is also necessary to note that political framing has been shown to impact public opinion and attitude formation which has important implications for understanding the beliefs people hold about women candidates and the actions they may or may not take when they go to cast a vote (Engbers & Fucilla, 2012).

Another area of consideration regarding the role of journalists and the news media's creation of political frames is Hallin's spheres of consensus. Hallin examines media objectivity and posits that there are three different spheres within which the news media tells stories: the sphere of consensus, the sphere of controversy, and the sphere of deviance (Hallin, 1986). Commonly in political reporting, journalists operate within the sphere of controversy, where discourse of multiple sides is featured in the presentation of a particular story or issue. It is within the sphere of controversy where the strategic game frame is commonly found (Hallin, 1986). That matters to women candidates. If journalists must cover or court controversy to maintain audience share, the gamification of elections, of making politics sport, is key to the success of many if not most modern news media outlets.

Three recent studies demonstrate that the media focuses on the strategic game frame in political reporting, and that it likely has an impact on how people behave when they arrive at the ballot box. In a study of the 2016 Presidential Election, Searles and Banda found that the two major party candidates, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump, received more strategic game coverage than issues coverage, or of either of their "scandals" which included stories about Trump's personal behavior, and stories about Clinton's use of a personal email server (Searles &

Banda, 2019). DuBosar, also in a study about the framing of Trump and Clinton during the 2016 election, found that Clinton received less overall coverage than her competitor, that both candidates received significant, but relatively equal amounts of strategic game coverage, and issues coverage, but that Clinton's issue coverage was more frequently associated with what is traditionally defined as women's issues (DuBosar, 2022). Westwood, et al., (2020) found that during the 2016 election the probabilistic (assumption of Clinton as the frontrunner and eventual winner) strategic game frame confused and demoralized voters ultimately suppressing Election Day turnout (Westwood et al., 2020).

In summary, data demonstrates that candidates of both genders primarily receive strategic game coverage, and that strategic game coverage can and does have an impact on how electable voters consider a woman candidate to be, and how they ultimately act when casting their ballot. At its core, the Failure Effect argues that although the gendered nature of the Presidency is embedded in American culture, the United States has been unable to change that overarching narrative in part because the media continues to reinforce the belief that a woman isn't who a President should be and subsequently voters believe She Can't Win.

2.4.1 Contemporary Political Media Coverage

Newspapers are part of the original fabric of American Democracy, with journalism considered a crucial check on the power of government. The longest continuously publishing newspaper in the United States is *The Hartford Courant* which holds an interesting place in this country's history both politically and from a women's history standpoint (ConnecticutHistory.org, 2023). The paper was home to one of the first woman publishers in the U.S. and played a crucial role in the publication of political information throughout the Revolutionary War (ConnecticutHistory.org, 2023). Although today's media environment is

more crowded and moves more quickly than that of the late 1700s, newspapers remain a critical component of the modern political conversation. It is this long-standing, and often outsized, agenda-setting role of newspapers in American political discourse that is key to understanding the core of the question posed in this dissertation.

It is fair to say that the current state of modern political media coverage in the United States is both mixed in terms of quality and vast in terms of quantity. There is a seemingly unending supply of news source choices ranging from traditional newspapers and local television stations to the punditry of cable news channels, and extreme ideologically based websites, to a host of powerful social media platforms that share information, disinformation, and misinformation at a breakneck pace, to podcasts of every political flavor. The amount of news choices available to information consumers today can be both overwhelming and confusing, and often comes with a variety of ideological bias built in that can be challenging for even a well-informed individual to sort through (Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart, 2023).

Regarding the state of political coverage by major media organizations in the United States, the data demonstrates that the results are also mixed. As noted, there is more general political news coverage than ever before, which is arguably both a strength and a weakness. Newsrooms have made progress in terms of diversity, inclusion, and equity of representation amongst its ranks. However, the Center for American Women and Politics reports that although over time political coverage has generally improved in this country in terms of quality measures, many challenges in terms of equity and representation amongst journalists and within the coverage itself remain (Sanbonmatsu, 2016). In one recent study, the Women's Media Center reported that more than 60% of all bylines and on-camera appearances featured men (Sanbonmatsu, 2016). Sanbonmatsu argues that the lack of representation in the news industry

and in newsroom leadership roles contributes to "distorted and biased political coverage" (Sanbonmatsu, 2016). The Media Report to Women found that in 2016 men provided the majority of primetime television commentary during both the Republican and Democratic conventions even when Hillary Clinton was named the first female presidential nominee of a major political party (Media Report to Women, 2016).

Results of academic research show that the state of political media coverage when it comes to women political candidates is also mixed and demonstrates a need for future research because those conflicting results show that media coverage is both neutral and biased. In a 2020 meta-analysis of studies investigating political coverage of men and women candidates, Van der Pas and Aaldering found that there is a lack of gender bias in political coverage in majoritarian electoral systems like that of the United States (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). However, that study also found that women politicians receive more attention and framing applied to stereotypical issue and trait coverage, coverage of appearance and personal life, and generally more negative viability coverage (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). The findings of that meta-study conflicts with the findings of a host of other academic research which show clear gender bias in reporting, particularly regarding women running for executive level offices like state governors or the U.S. Presidency. For instance, Devitt finds that discrepancies of gendered coverage do exist in lower-level or state-level races, but the coverage is more balanced compared to political races for executive level offices (Devitt, 2002). In 2008, Falk, who analyzed media bias over eight separate campaigns, concluded that the media has not changed significantly in terms of how women are covered despite measurable general and social progress in the realm of women's equality (Falk, 2008). A longitudinal study of the coverage of Hillary Clinton from 2000 through 2012 found that women are disadvantaged in the press on a variety of issues,

including the candidate's authenticity (Parry-Giles, 2014). That trend continued through 2016 when a large analysis of print reporting on that year's Presidential Election found that Clinton was largely shortchanged in her coverage during the race against Trump in terms of coverage quantity, story tone and focus (frame) (Media Report to Women, 2016). Recently, Gibbons found that the media perpetuate existing stereotypes and create new ones about women and women of color (Gibbons, 2022).

The way the media frames women candidates impacts both their credibility and electability. Several studies find that men receive a greater quantity of coverage, and that women are discussed in stereotypical ways addressing emotions, family life, appearance, and general biographical information (Falk, 2008; Meeks, 2013). A study from the Columbia Journalism Review examined the subtle word choices – or "adjectives that might seem harmless but have been found by scholars to have gendered associations" (Columbia Journalism Review, 2018). That study found that a woman described with masculine-coded adjectives like 'ambitious' or 'assertive' were found to be seen as ten percent more qualified and seven percent more competent than a woman described with feminine adjectives like 'compassionate' and 'loyal' (Columbia Journalism Review, 2018). Wixom (2021) reports that this form of "subtle sexism" creates unfair coverage of women candidates, harms their chances of winning elections, and threatens the political longevity of women who do manage to win a political seat. Coupled with Falk's findings that men received three times as many positive comments about their viability as their women candidates in political coverage (Falk, 2008), these studies present a compelling argument that not only is coverage in the American news media often gendered, but that it has an impact on the credibility and viability of those women candidates who are already working to balance what is historically severely unbalanced gender representation.

2.4.2 The Attention Cycle Model, and the Symbolic Annihilation of Women

Most regular followers of the mainstream media in the United States have heard of or have a basic understanding of the news cycle, where the story of the day is played on repeat on cable news, or is trending on Twitter, until it's displaced by something else or fades into memory. Downs calls this phenomenon the attention cycle model. Downs argues that when a particular issue is discovered or noticed, a growing amount of attention is paid to it, but once the challenges of that issue are discovered, interest in the issue wanes until it gains attention later (Downs, 1972). Peters and Hogwood (1985) find that the opportunity to effect change regarding a particular policy or issues exists around the peak of the attention cycle model.

Consider the attention cycle model when applied to coverage of a woman running for a high-level political office. In the news cycle, interest in a particular woman candidate(s) might raise the interest and public discourse around gender parity in politics. If that woman candidate loses, interest in gender disparity in political leadership wanes in the subsequent timeframe, either because the election is over, or because voters are discouraged that the woman candidate lost. According to the attention cycle model, the issue goes quiet until the next triggering event, which would likely be another woman candidate running for the office. But based on how elections cycle in the United States, that event is likely years later and the excitement and attention surrounding the issue has waned. This is critical to consider to the overall plight of women candidates because of the downward shifting momentum post-election and lack of attention paid to it. When the issue of gender parity in politics resurfaces several years later, women must reignite the discussion and once again become novel in the eyes of the media.

This cyclical phenomenon is exacerbated by the relative lack of media coverage women candidates receive. In the mid-1970s, researcher George Gerbner introduced the concept of

symbolic annihilation, which he describes as the underrepresentation or lack of representation of a group of people by the media leads that to their essential erasure from the dominant narrative for the purposes of maintaining inequality (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). As previously noted, research demonstrates that women candidates receive less coverage in the U.S. than men do, and that there are fewer women candidates and politicians, which means there is proportionately less coverage of women because there are fewer on whom to report (Tuchman, 1979). This results in a lack of models for women in leadership positions, as explained by symbolic annihilation. Tuchman suggests that the absence of a particular group from a media narrative contributes to stereotypes about that group– in this case, the lack of women candidates in political news coverage strengthens the notion that women are not suited to such leadership positions (Tuchman, 1979). Tuchman also argues this symbolic annihilation leads to the general trivialization of women and their importance in society (Tuchman, 1979). The Failure Effect posits that this symbolic annihilation of women from the political narrative perpetuates the stereotypes of who an elected official can be and ultimately underpins the narrative that She Can't Win and so ultimately, she doesn't.

2.5   Backlash Effect

Societal progress might be mentally visualized by a general upward trajectory on a graph. But Newton's third law of physics notes that "every action has an equal, opposite reaction" (Newton, 1687). It is within that argument that lies the concept of political backlash. Alter and Zurn (2020) argue that backlash politics is based in political contention and reaction which is based in three parts including: a return to a prior social condition, the challenging of dominant scripts, and the condition becoming part of the mainstream public discourse. Altern and Zurn note that when backlash meets with "accelerants including nostalgia, emotional appeals, taboo

breaking, and institutional reshaping, the results can be unpredictable, contagious, transformative, and enduring (Altern & Zurn, 2020, 563). Perhaps the modern and descriptive example of the backlash effect is seen in the candidacy and presidency of Donald J. Trump and the 'Make America Great Again' movement, which academics argue is a reaction to the election of President Barack Obama in 2008 and was coined the "Obama Effect" (McCallister, 2018).

History, however, is marked with examples of political backlash, where progress is made and a reactive result follows, often in relation to gender parity progress. As early as 1893, women in New York State fought against the women's suffrage movement that worked to earn women right the right to vote. That campaign ultimately resulted in the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Goodier, 2012). The key points of the anti-suffrage movement, that giving women the right to vote would disrupt the family unit and women's role in society were also reflected in the themes of the campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment of the 1970s led by conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly (Schmidt, 2020). Those same theses about women's power and place in society can be seen in the plight of women political candidates today. Okimoto and Brescoll (2010) found that women political candidates, who by nature of their career choice are seeking power, found that voting preference for female candidates were negatively impacted by her "power-seeking intention (actual or perceived)" and that men candidates were generally unaffected by their same attempts to seek power because it is assumed to be more normative to their gender. Okimoto and Brescoll argue that the primary reason for this penalty against women candidates is because power violates the societal expectation that women are seen as communal, otherwise defined as sensitive, warm, and caring, and that these expectations support gender bias in politics (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010).

2.6 Cultural Cognition

The concept of cultural cognition is rooted in what researchers call the Wildavsky Heuristic. Gastil et al., (2005) explain that the Wildavsky Heuristic is based on the writings of a political scientist, Aaron Wildavsky, who argued that culture and cultural worldviews operate as a fundamental orienting force in the generation of mass public opinion, and that those cultural values do not so much motivate citizens but orient them to what their views on a given subject should be. The authors explicate heuristic in this context to mean "judgmental shortcuts, efficient ways to organize and simplify political choices, efficient in the double sense of requiring relatively little information to execute yet yielding dependable answers even to complex problems of choice" (Gastil, et al., 2005, p. 5). Applied, the researchers argue that although most Americans are unengaged with politics, they rely on cultural cues to create their positions with little mental effort (Gastil, et al., 2005). Further explained the researchers argue that "individual cultural identities influence their political opinions… and serves as the central unifying component of the heuristic formation of political preferences" (Gastil et al., 2005, p. 11). This premise makes a clear argument for why a voter might, for example, be able to identify that 'Republicans favor lower taxes' or 'Democrats support social programs' and choose a political party identity based on that baseline information – it's what individuals believe their self-identified group thinks.

Kahan, et al. (2011) used the concepts identified by the Wildavsky Heuristic to develop the theory of cultural cognition and apply it to a variety of topics, most specifically risk. The theory of cultural cognition suggests that people will interpret evidence, no matter the demonstrable facts or what science tells them, in ways that reinforce their connections to those who share their identified worldview, and what they deem to be an idealized way of life (Kahan,

et al., 2011). Kahan, et al., (2011) also find that people believe "that behavior they and their peers find honorable is socially beneficial and behavior they find base socially detrimental" (Kahan, et. al., 2011, p. 148). Newman, et al., (2018) write that cultural cognition explains that "individuals hold opinions about politically contested issues that are consistent with their cultural way of life – conforming their opinions to how they think society should be organized and to what they perceive are the attitudes of their cultural peers" (Newman, et al., 2018, p. 985). In later research, Kahan additionally argues that in cultural cognition "individuals gravitate toward perceptions of risk that advance the way of life to which they are committed" (Kahan, 2012, p. 728). Kahan, et al., (2017) argue that cultural cognition focuses on "how individuals form beliefs that reflect and reinforce their group commitments" (Kahan, et al., 2017, p. 1).

2.6 Gender Schema Theory and Stereotypes

A key part of the theory of cultural cognition, when applied to the question posed in this dissertation, is to understand the worldviews and the "cultural way of life" that voters may be considering when choosing whether to vote for a woman candidate, particularly regarding gender and gender roles. Gender schema theory argues that from childhood individuals learn about male and female roles from the culture in which they live (Bem, 1982). Bem argues that children learn to align their behavior to those gender norms early on in life and that those behaviors create schema (mental shortcuts) that individuals rely on to process information (Bem, 1982). Paired with that argument is social role theory which posits that widely shared gender stereotypes develop from the gendered division of labor and therefore create and perpetuate gender stereotypes (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In western cultures, those gendered stereotypes often associate men with paid work or power (bread-winning), and women with nurturing or communion (mothering or caregiving) (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Eagly and Diekman argue that the

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challenges and stereotypes women face within a culture develop via the concept of role incongruity theory which posits, "that prejudice often results from the mismatch between beliefs about the attributes typically possessed by members of a social group (that is, their stereotype) and beliefs about the attributes that facilitate success in valued social roles (Eagly & Diekman, 2005, p. 2). Role incongruity is further explored, by Koenig and Eagly who find that those gendered stereotypes are often applied to workers occupational roles (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

These gendered stereotypes have real-world consequences of women in any life station, but research has found that gendered stereotypes and prejudice are not just applied to specific work roles, but specifically to women leaders. Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders argues that the "perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice - including perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman" (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 573). Eagly and Karau find consequences to that perception include fewer positive attitudes toward female leaders, challenges for women in obtaining leadership roles, and challenges for women in finding success in those roles if they are obtained (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Eagly and Karau's argument essentially says people are generally biased about women's ability to obtain leadership roles generally, and if and when they do obtain those roles, women are likely to be judged less favorably because of gender based stereotypes.

What do these societally based biases and stereotypes mean for women presidential candidates? Meeks argues that gender role incongruence creates difficult hurdles for professionals trying to break with traditional gender roles and that this effect clearly applies to women politicians who are seeking what society traditionally sees as a masculine occupation

(Meeks, 2012). Sanbonmatsu argues that voters can use candidate gender as "low information shortcut" in their cognitive processing, and that voters do take gender into account when making vote choices (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 21). Pair that argument with one of the tenents of cultural cognition theory and the original Wildavsky Heuristic – that culture orients individuals to what their views should be (Gastil, 2005), and it can be posited that a portion of the reason citizens don't vote for a woman president is because they cognitively, and potentially subconsciously, rely on gender constructs to make decisions about who an American president can and should be.

2.7   Motivated Reasoning

Another key component to consider when examining the question of why She Can't Win, is the role of motivated reasoning. Kunda argues that motivated reasoning is when individuals make decisions based on the desirability of their outcomes as opposed to an accurate reflection of the evidence (Kunda, 1990). Kunda posits that motivated reasoners are either trying to arrive at the accurate conclusion (to be right), or to arrive at a directional conclusion – essentially what an individual thinks the answer is based on their memories and beliefs (Kunda, 1990). Apply motivated reasoning to the question of this dissertation, and it can be argued that some people may not vote for a woman presidential candidate because they want to be right – to pick the winning candidate, who is literally always a man, and so they believe a woman can't or won't win. Still others may be motivated to not vote for a woman candidate because of their preconceived and culturally reinforced, gendered belief that She Can't Win because of the commonly held and culturally reinforced belief that presidents in the United States of America are men.

Redlawsk takes the concept of motivated reasoning, applies it to political decision making, and argues that affective biases in motivated reasoners lead to lower quality decision

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making (Redlawsk, 2002). Redlawsk argues that counter to beliefs that people rationally consider candidates (and he argues, some do), a motivated reasoner considering a candidate may be driven by a coupling of affect and cognition, the "how-do-I-feel heuristic" regarding decision making (Redlawsk, 2002, p. 1023). Kahan and colleagues (Kahan, et al., 2017) make a similar argument in pairing the cultural cognition thesis with what they term the affect heuristic, which emphasizes the impact of visceral feelings on information processing and argues that affect may reinforce the primary thesis of cultural cognition – the tendency for people to reinforce beliefs based on their group commitments. The researcher argues that a motivated reasoner may "actually increase their support of a positively evaluated candidate upon learning new negatively evaluated information" because of affective bias (Redlawsk, 2002, p. 1021.) This finding supports the core thesis of cultural cognition, which argues that individuals will interpret evidence in ways that reinforce their values over facts (Kahan, 2012). By applying these arguments to voters considering a woman candidate, it can be posited that those with strongly held beliefs about the concept of presidentiality and define it in masculine terms, or those who believe that their cultural worldview or group has strongly held beliefs about presidentiality and who that person can and should be, may ultimately strengthen their interest in voting for a man candidate even when considering a more qualified woman candidate on the ballot.

2.8   Pragmatic Bias

There is another bias to consider in connection with cultural cognition theory, motivated reasoning, and the plight of women candidates. Research concerning the concept of pragmatic bias, which scholars define as "people withholding support for a member of a group because they believe success is difficult or impossible for members of that group to achieve (Corbett, et al., 2022, p. 1). Through a series of studies connected to the 2020 Democratic Primary, Corbett, et

al., found that "voters withheld support for women candidates because they perceived practical barriers to women successfully attaining political leadership positions" (Corbett, et al., 2022, p. 1). In part the pragmatic bias studies argues that people make decisions based on third order beliefs – what an individual believes others think, and ultimately finds that people will vote for a woman candidate if they believe others will also vote for her. This concept supports the cultural cognition thesis that individuals conform their opinions "to what they perceive are the attitudes of their cultural peers" (Newman, et al., 2018, p. 985). In other words, pragmatically speaking, an individual may choose to note vote for a woman simply because they don't think anyone else will. Additionally, the concept of pragmatic bias reflects Kunda's directional motivated reasoning, to arrive at a preconceived belief, in that people may choose to vote for a man over a woman candidate based on their memories or beliefs that doing so is either the correct or socially normative decision (Kunda, 1990).

There is an interesting example to consider about voting behaviors which appeared in a Pew Research study during the 2020 election. The headline of the article reporting the study's results reads "Some Democrats are bothered nominee is an older white man – and they solidly back Biden in November" (Dunn & Kiley, 2020). The article goes onto to detail statistics describing the 2020 Democratic primary field as "one of the most diverse in history with six women, several black, Hispanic and Asian candidates, and the first openly gay contender" (Dunn & Kiley, 2020). The article details the demographics of those voters who reported being concerned about the man who was the nominee at the time, and who became the 46th President of the United States. But the study fails to ask respondents why they are specifically concerned about then-candidate Biden, and the study does not provide in-depth results of who the respondents voted for in the primary. The premise of the headline in part raises the question of

this essay, why didn't these voters choose her when they were given ample opportunity? This dissertation argues that cultural cognition, gender bias, motivated reasoning, and pragmatic bias likely had a role in voters choosing a candidate that was less than their ideal because they thought he could win and that Democratic voters preferred a safe bet over running the risk of a second term of the Trump Presidency.

It is important to note that this work does not attempt to argue that the application of cultural cognition and motivated reasoning to the why She Can't Win phenomenon fully explains the challenges women candidates face in the current cultural and political environment. As covered at length earlier in this dissertation, there are literal decades of research about the challenges women candidates face that demonstrate problems ranging from unequal media coverage to a lack of women in the political leadership pipeline, to structural and cultural inequities. For its part, this work argues that gender bias plays a critical cultural role in why some voters don't choose women candidates. And although there is clear evidence demonstrating that gender biases often have an effect, it is not always the case because there are people who do not carry or employ gender biases in their decision making.

2.9   Research Questions

This research proposal seeks to identify the strategic game frames applied to women candidates who ran for U.S. President during the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary. The overarching research question posed in this study asks:

How do news media frame ideas about executive-level women candidates' electability?

> **RQ1:** What strategic game frames are present in political coverage of the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary in widely read American newspapers?

CHAPTER 3.   METHODS

This study sought to understand the influences on perceptions of women political candidates and their electability in presidential elections. It used a thematic qualitative analysis of candidate news coverage in four major national newspapers with a focus on the framing of news stories about women candidates. The overarching question asks: How do news media frame ideas about executive-level women candidates' electability? Specifically, this study seeks to identify which strategic game frames were applied to women candidates who ran in the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary.

3.1   Theoretical Framework of the Method

This dissertation employed a transformative paradigmatic approach to address key concepts in political and social justice, and specifically this study's focus on gender parity in politics (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The goal of thematic framing analysis is to understand how media effects the audiences which consume it. Fursich posits that because the media play a critical role in modern society, "one of the central tasks of media scholars should be to analyze and interpret what spectrum of reality media allow for" (Fursich, 2009, p. 246). D'Angelo notes that the concept of media frame is critical to how researchers investigate mass communication and that the media framing process itself shapes how an individual considers, interprets, evaluates, and acts on a given topic (D'Angelo, 2017). Scheufele argues that frame setting combines the presented frame, an individual's perception, and the concept of salience into one cognitive process (Schefuele, 1999). It is that process that is critical to the overarching goal of frame analysis - to understand how the information presented and framed by the media is understood, contextualized, and ultimately acted upon by individuals.

A thematic analysis is an appropriate method to investigate media frames which D'Angelo argues work to ensure the objective that "media frames are both valid and reliably detected" (D'Angelo, 2017, p. 6). The goal of qualitative research, Van Dijk argues, is that much of the knowledge in the world, related to both social and political knowledge and beliefs, is created by media consumed on a regular basis and the in-depth analysis of qualitative research is one way to investigate and understand how that knowledge and those beliefs are formed via the produced texts (Van Dijk, 1990). Adding a critical component to that argument, D'Angelo argues that the goal of most qualitative studies is to highlight the "hegemonic conditions that surround the topic and infuse texts" (D'Angelo, 2017, p. 7). In other words, the goal of a qualitative frame analysis is to understand the context in which a frame is produced, and the ideology applied to the construction of that frame while attempting to make meaning of how those frames are interpreted by individuals.

This dissertation employed an open thematic analysis that integrated themes gleaned from the literature with emergent themes discovered through this analysis. Strengths of this approach include its accessibility and systematic approach, its ability to provide a framework for organizing and reporting the researcher's observations, and its ability to be used to analyze any size of data set (Clarke & Braun, 2018). A key strength of thematic analysis is its flexibility (Clarke & Braun, 2018). Weaknesses of this method include potential for subjectivity in the process and resulting data, the time-consuming nature of qualitative analysis, and the potentially limited size of the sample (Clark & Braun, 2018; Lindsay & Pope, 2013).

3.2   Themes and Concepts

This study identified the framing used in stories about women candidates in both the headlines and text of relevant news stories. Although some framing studies only look at the

headline and lede of an article, this study examined the headline, lede and full text of each article identified so that additional nuance could emerge. To begin the study, I first identified themes common in the literature and used qualitative thematic analysis to identify additional patterns that emerged. Initially anticipated primary themes are listed below and were discussed at length in Chapter Two of this dissertation. Anticipated themes included:

- Double binds (Jamieson, 1995)

- Feminine stereotypes (Falk, 2008)

- Gender marking (Falk, 2008)

- Masculine characteristics tied to leadership traits/abilities (Falk, 2008)

- Novelty frame (Falk, 2008; Meek, 2012; Sheeler & Anderson, 2013)

- Othering (Beauvoir, 1949; Zevallos, unknown)

- Role incongruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

- Strategic game frame (Aalberg, et. al., 2011)

As qualitative thematic analysis is most often an emergent research methodology, I anticipated identifying more themes and concepts as the process developed and recorded and analyzed these themes as they emerged.

3.3   Sample

Journalism traditionally, and newspapers as a long-standing medium, are known as the Fourth Estate of democracy, serving as a literal check and balance on government (Tran, 2016). It is that critical role in democracy that creates the need to examine the role newspapers are modernly playing in elections. For this study, I examined the themes and frames applied to the six women candidates who ran for the U.S. Presidency during the 2020 Democratic Primary season. The primary focus of this study examined the content generated by the four newspapers

in the United States with the largest reach both in terms of circulation and online readership

(Sheridan, 2022). These publications are the focus of this investigation because of their wide

circulation, the depth of their political coverage, and the diversity of their political leanings.

According to the Ad Fontes Media Report (2023), none of these publications are known for

hyper-partisanship. In this sample, I analyzed both news and opinion coverage because both

genres set the agenda for how candidates are discussed broadly in society, and because many

consumers of news do not differentiate between news and opinion writing (Miller, 2020). Below

are details on the newspapers in which this study focused. It is important to note that exact

circulation numbers for these publications are difficult to pinpoint in certain circumstances and

the numbers listed should be considered reasonable approximations.

The New York Times

The *New York Times* is a long-standing, widely circulated publication in print and online.

The publication also has a significant digital and social media footprint, as well as a staff of well-

known political reporters. The 2023 Ad Fontes Media Report notes that the *New York Times*

coverage overall leans slightly left of center in terms of political bias (Ad Fontes, 2023). *The*

New York Times was selected as a publication for this study for its longevity, breadth and depth

of political coverage, and its consistent voice and presence in the national political conversation.

Statistics about the NYT include:

- Published since 1851
- 6.37 million paid digital subscribers in Q4 2022 (Statista, 2023)
- Average weekday print publication, 343,000 (Statista, 2023)
- Ownership: Variety of private equity firms (CNN Business, 2023)

USA Today

USA Today was selected for study in this dissertation because of its uniqueness as a

consumer-friendly, readable print publication. The publication is long-standing and retains a

relatively large print readership due to its distribution model. The 2023 Ad Fontes Media Report

notes that *USA Today* leans slightly left of the political center in its coverage. Statistics about

USA Today include:

- Published since 1982
- ~2.0 million paid digital subscribers in 2022 (USA Today, 2023)
- Average weekday print publication, 781,000 (Statista, 2021)
- Ownership: Gannett Company

The Wall Street Journal

The Wall Street Journal brings political and ideological diversity to the pool of

publications being studied, as the Ad Fontes Media Report (2023) lists *The Wall Street Journal*

as a slightly right of political center publication. This publication, which focuses on the coverage

of business, financial, and political news, has a large online footprint, a presence across social

media platforms, and retains a relatively large print circulation. This publication is included in

this study because it adds diversity of political position, and because of its role as a long-standing

voice in the national political conversation. Statistics about *The Wall Street Journal* include:

- Published since 1889
- 2.9 million paid digital subscribers in 2022 (Adweek, 2022)
- Average weekday print publication, 2.0 million (Statista, 2022)
- Ownership: News Corp (Rupert Murdoch and family)

The Washington Post

The Washington Post is largely known on a national scale for its depth of political

reporting, which is why it was included in this study as the hometown newspaper of the nation's

capital and home of the U.S. President. *The Post* is long-standing, has a moderate subscriber

base, and according to the Ad Fontes Media Report (2023), leans slightly left of political center

in its reporting. Statistics about *The Washington Post* include:

- Published since 1877
- ~3.0 million paid digital subscribers in 2022 (Nieman Lab, 2022)

- Average weekday print publication, 159,000 (Statista, 2022)
- Ownership: Nash Holdings (Jeff Bezos)

3.3.1 Data Collection

To obtain the requisite sample for this thematic analysis, I used ProQuest and its U.S. NewsStream Service. ProQuest was selected over other commonly used databases because the service carries full access to all four newspapers targeted for this study, and both online and print versions of stories are easily accessed in the database. For this study, I collected all stories from these publications related to the Democratic Presidential Primary that were published between January 1, 2019, and through April 15, 2020, one week after when then former Vice President Joseph R. Biden became the presumptive nominee for the Democratic Party ticket on April 8, 2020 (Leatherby & Almuhktar, 2020). Although the official primary season did not begin until January 2020, much of the campaigning and the entirety of the Democratic Party primary debate season, which generated large amounts of media coverage, occurred in 2019, hence the extended window in which content was selected for analysis.

Boolean searches in NewsStream to identify relevant content included:

- Each candidates' name: Tulsi Gabbard, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Elizabeth Warren, Marianne Williamson
- ("political" OR "politics" OR "election" OR "primary") AND ("gender" OR "sex" OR "women" OR "mother")

For the purposes of this study, stories were defined as:

- A single narrative with a related headline
- Full text that is a minimum of 300 words
- Is either news or opinion coverage

The conducted NewsStream search of these terms yielded 27,360 stories from the four identified source newspapers. It is important to note that the amount of coverage generated by each candidate varied based on the candidate's overall polling popularity and prior status in the

political sphere, as well as length of time each woman continued in the race. For example, Senator Warren was the woman who ran the longest in the 2020 Presidential Democratic Primary (she was also well known when she began running) and therefore she received the most coverage in terms of sheer number of articles produced, which correlates to her high numbers of appearances in the study sample. It is important to note that this study did not consider the previous prominence of the candidates, their longevity in the race overall, or their name recognition and general popularity when they entered the race. Although I did not code and count articles as one might in a content analysis, it is important to acknowledge the numerical breakdown of coverage for each woman candidate as some appear more frequently in the study than others. Search results returned articles in this numerical breakdown:

- Elizabeth Warren – 12,458 articles
- Kamala Harris – 5,837 articles
- Amy Klobuchar – 4,549 articles
- Kirsten Gillibrand – 2,131 articles
- Tulsi Gabbard – 1,673 articles
- Marianne Williamson – 712 articles

The goal of this study was to randomly sample 20 percent of the articles found in this search which resulted in a primary sample of 552 articles. Once the content was fully identified, I downloaded each set of search results into a single Excel spreadsheet that listed publication, date, headline, and a URL to the article itself for later use. At this point, I scrubbed the data for duplicate entries, and eliminated any content that did not fit the study criteria, which primarily consisted of correction type articles that updated minor factual errors and misspellings, or very short daily or evening news brief type articles that did not meet the stated word count. Once I had obtained a scrubbed, organized list, I ran the random number generator tool in Excel to randomly order the study universe and selected the first 552 articles to create the sample studied. At this juncture, I reviewed the selected data to make sure that it was reliable on its face and that

all stories were drawn from the appropriate time frame and targeted publications, that there was a variety of both news and opinion coverage included in the sample, that there was both print and online coverage identified, that there were stories covering each candidate multiple times, and that that there were no major narratives that played out in the media during the primary season missing from the end sample. I then downloaded and saved each article to both Zotero and to a labeled Dropbox file for later reference and record keeping purposes. Additionally, I printed each article, numbered the articles from 1 to 552, and separated the data into sets of 50 for organizational and access purposes. I used the sorted and printed documents to conduct the study and highlighted critical information identified in each printed article. As I read through the articles sampled, I also created a new Word document of notes that listed each article by number assigned, and included the publication, date, headline, applicable quotes, my general analysis and applicability of the story, and any other information I found necessary to identify for the study. I reviewed each article three times. First, when I scrubbed and printed the documents, and then twice more to ensure my analysis of the data was reliable. All data was saved to both Zotero and on my Dropbox account. All created documents including Excel spreadsheets and my analysis in Word documents were also saved to my Dropbox account.

3.4   Trustworthiness of the Proposed Study

Qualitative research is known for its depth of analysis and ability to produce broad understanding. Thomas recommends that to produce reliable, valid results via qualitative analysis, a general inductive approach needs to be applied (Thomas, 2006). That approach includes detailed readings of data to find key themes and frames, and the nuanced examination of the data discovered to establish links between the data and the research question (Thomas, 2006). Several scholars note that the key to quality qualitative research is its truth value (Appleton,

1995) or its trustworthiness and quality demonstrated through its preciseness, consistency, exhaustiveness, and execution (Nowell, et.al., 2017). To ensure the truth value of this qualitative thematic analysis, I focused on credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity.

3.4.1 Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is explained by Korstjens and Moser (2018) as "whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants original views." To enhance credibility in the qualitative study, I have had prolonged engagement with the data to fully master the information and themes presented. I coded the data myself and reviewed it fully twice more. I have also reviewed and discussed the data with a second researcher to create triangulation (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). These practices support the credibility of the data and work to reduce potential bias, patterns of error, or any unintended misperceptions.

3.4.2 Transferability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) explain that transferability of data is about both creating a thick description, as well as understanding the context in which the data is presented. To make sure transferability expectations of the qualitative study is met, I have ensured that context about the themes identified in coverage published by each newspaper is considered. For the purposes of this study, it will also be critical to consider the historical context and events of the time for transferability purposes. These historical events include the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the non-traditional presidency and incumbent candidacy of then President Donald Trump, and the general volatility of the American experience during the primary election period.

3.4.3 Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability are compared to creating an audit trail so that future researchers might duplicate the study and its results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To meet these requirements, and as previously noted, I took careful notes of how and when data was collected and analyzed. I created a systemic, secure, cloud-based, organization system to store the data and results for easy future access and replication. I continue to have possession of these records.

3.4.4 Reflexivity

Ratner argues that qualitative methodology recognizes that "the subjectivity of the researcher is intimately involved in scientific research" and that for those reasons, an investigator should be compelled to reflect on those values and how they may impact the posed research (Ratner, 2002, p. 37). Ebe Kalu (2018) expands upon the definition of subjectivity to include a three-step process of identifying one's own subjectivity which includes answering these questions:

- Who am I?
- What factors informed my beliefs and values?
- How do these beliefs and values impact my research interests?

Upon reflection of these posited questions, and in connection to this proposed study, it is important to note that I am a regular voter who holds generally liberal values. Since childhood, I have had a strong personal interest in American politics and media and hold undergraduate degrees in political science and journalism. I am currently a doctoral candidate focusing my work on political communication, and more specifically the plight of female political candidates in the American media ecosystem. Because gender is a central part of the questions in this study, it is important to note that I am a cisgender woman, am married, and have two young children. I hold personal interest in supporting equity for my gender in both politics and society writ large.

In the spirit of transparency, I must also acknowledge that I have significant experience working with my communities of interest - journalists and politicians. I worked for several years in television news production as a journalist. I have also worked on behalf of a conservative national lobbying organization, in connection with elected officials, and have volunteered with women's rights advocacy groups and Democratic political campaigns. Because of these deeply held personal values and my lived professional experiences and connections, I have taken extra care to consider my positionality when analyzing data and integrating the results of this study.

3.5   Analysis

This study is qualitative in nature and works to identify themes in news framing about women political candidates through an open coding process. After I collected the data, I familiarized myself with the information, and divided the content into categories based on broad themes identified. Next, I created codes to help guide my investigation while also leaving opportunity for additional codes to emerge.

Once the codes were identified, I analyzed them to review, define, categorize, name, and record the data based on theme. Additionally, I worked to identify patterns and concepts that emerged from each publication and from the data overall to make meaning of the coverage and to address both the primary and secondary research question stated in this dissertation. I also highlighted the top two to six examples in each frame identified for use in the written analysis. As a final step, I discussed and analyzed my results with another researcher to ensure my themes and overall analysis are appropriate to both the research questions, data discovered and meaning developed.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: THE FAILURE NARRATIVES

This study sought to understand how today's leading newspapers and the coverage produced by these publications are playing a part in the plight of women political candidates through what I term the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon. To investigate this phenomenon, this study conducted a qualitative thematic analysis to examine the coverage of *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* produced from January 1, 2019, through April 15, 2020, surrounding the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary, and the six women candidates who during that timeframe sought the highest office in American politics. The overarching research question in this study was: How do news media frame ideas about executive-level women candidates' electability? In addition, it focuses on strategic game frames, asking, what strategic game frames are present in political coverage of the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary in widely read American newspapers?

The results chapters discuss the findings of this qualitative thematic analysis and identify eight dominant frames that emerged as well as multiple sub-frames. These eight frames were found across the publications studied, although some of the newspapers in the study demonstrated some frames more often than others. Many of these frames were found at multiple points throughout the time period studied, suggesting that often these frames had a narrative structure, were durable in nature and not short term, and appeared repeatedly throughout the primary election cycle.

This chapter and the next explore each of the eight frames, which are broken into two categories. This chapter discusses what I term the Failure Narratives which are core to the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon. Chapter Five discusses what I term the

Progress Narratives. Each chapter explicates the themes identified, offers supporting examples, and includes discussion of the study's key findings and their relationships to the central research question of this dissertation.

At its core, the Failure Effect argues a complex combination of gender-based expectancies and cognitive processes including cultural cognition, motivated reasoning, and pragmatic bias are amplified and reinforced by media framing techniques that ultimately disadvantage women candidates. The Failure Effect causes voters to doubt a woman candidate's electability even when she is otherwise qualified candidate, resulting in voters choosing a man candidate at the ballot box because the individual believes She Can't Win. The study conducted found a variety of strategic game frames that support the primary argument of the Failure Effect and are broadly titled the Failure Narratives and are detailed in this chapter.

4.1   The She Can't Win Frame

The core argument of this dissertation, the phenomenon in which individuals do not vote for a well-qualified woman candidate with whom they identify politically because the voter believes She Can't Win, was easily discovered throughout the research sample. What I term the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon is at its core an argument about how the media teaches voters what to think about the electability of a particular woman candidate or women candidates in general. Examples of the She Can't Win Frame were found across the newspapers studied, but were primarily found in coverage produced by *The New York Times*. The She Can't Win Frame was found in direct quotes from voters interviewed in articles, to photo captions, to headlines published on front pages.

The headline and photo below are an example taken from the front page of *The New York Times* on August 16, 2019. The article, "Zeal for Warren Tested by Fear She Can't Win," uses

the words "she can't win" in the headline, and the text of the article calls into question both the enthusiasm for Warren as a candidate, and her electability in the 2020 Presidential Race by focusing on voter doubts and hesitations about her candidacy. This article is a literal application of the She Can't Win phenomenon and showcases the core of the Failure Effect.

ELIZABETH FRANTZ FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Senator Elizabeth Warren

Zeal for Warren
Tested by Fear
She Can't Win

Figure 1. *The New York Times* – Article August 16, 2019

Another example taken from *The New York Times* is an article published on July 4, 2019, which was entitled "Six female candidates, one unrelenting refrain." The piece begins by asking women voters from around the country the question, "Do you think a woman could be elected president?" Some interviewed in the article respond with an incredulous response that they are being asked such a question in 2019. Yet others in the piece are quoted saying, "They (voters) love Senator Harris or Senator Warren but are concerned about whether they can win." Another voter remarked, "Honestly, I love Elizabeth Warren, I just worry that we as a society are not ready for that." A third noted regarding Senator Harris, "I don't think she can win. And I'm sorry to have to say that. She is a woman, and she is black." In this instance, the She Can't Win Frame

is again explicitly demonstrated in the text. The frame is also discussed in the terms "one unrelenting refrain" showcasing that the She Can't Win concept is commonplace.

A third example from *The New York Times* published on November 23, 2019, highlights the She Can't Win Frame in both the body of the article, and in the photo caption shown below. This piece, which primarily focused on Senator Harris discusses how she is unlikely to win both because of her gender and her race. Another voter reflects that she won't vote for Senator Harris because of her prosecutorial past, a professional role that is often seen as a positive qualification for men candidates. This is a complex example of the She Can't Win Frame and includes the often-raised gender-based questions about the candidate. This example also reflects Biernat & Kobrynowicz (1994), and Biernat & Manis (1991) call the qualifications gap – that women are held to higher standards then their men counterparts in professional settings. This piece also raises the question of Harris's race and what that means for electability. This piece offers a thorough example of the Failure Effect and demonstrates how these multiple narratives can combine to create a negative notion about the woman candidate amongst would-be voters.

The New York Times

Oakland Reappraises Its Hometown Candidate

Thousands gathered to cheer when Harris joined the race, but the thrill may have waned.

By JENNIFER MEDINA

OAKLAND, Calif. — When Senator Kamala Harris announced her presidential campaign on the steps of City Hall here in January, tens of thousands of people showed up, optimistically cheering for a person they believed could be the first woman — the first black woman — in the White House.

"It was like a party where we all wanted to be," said Louise Bailey, 77, a retired nursing administrator who has lived in Oakland for decades. "I don't know why it doesn't feel like that anymore. I wish I knew why."

Even here, where some affectionately call her an Oakland girl, the celebratory feel of the campaign has evaporated in the last 10 months. Now, Ms. Harris lags in the polls, trailing in fourth place even in her home state of California, where

'She is the real deal and she aligns with many things I believe, but I do struggle with some of her past.'
DANIELLE DRIVER-BELLINO, 33, a black infant health care specialist.

'The top four will be Warren, Sanders, Biden and Harris — but she is not going to win.'
AZIZA JACKSON, 32, left, a freelance writer.

Figure 2. *The New York Times* - Article November 23, 2019

The *Washington Post* published a piece on March 6, 2020, entitled, "As Warren Exits, Gender Issues Rise Anew." This article analyzes what happened to Warren and the other five women candidates who failed to secure the Democratic nomination in 2020. This piece explores the concept of She Can't Win a more subtle way than some of the other examples discovered and includes this quote "For years she (Jennifer Palmeiri, Democratic strategist interviewed for the article) recalled hearing Democrats talk about how they disliked Clinton, but adored Warren. Once Warren was poised to take power, however, new questions arose about whether she lacked some *intangible attribute* needed to win the White House" (emphasis mine). This intangible attribute is her gender-based electability. This is a critical finding in support of the She Can't Win phenomenon and this quote gets at the heart of the lack of understanding around what is causing voters to hesitate and not vote for a woman candidate. The intangible attribute is about her potential to win.

The prevalence of the She Can't Win Frame throughout the sample is clear. The words 'she can't win' appear in literal form in multiple instances across publications. These words matter to the perception individuals have about women candidates generally and serve as a reinforcement of social standards of who an American president can and should be. This idea is reflected in the literature. For example, Corbett et. al., (2021) argue via the concept of pragmatic bias that voters more likely to withhold support of a woman candidate solely based on the belief the she cannot win. Corbett et al., state that pragmatic bias "impedes women's access to political leadership roles" (p. 1).

The She Can't Win Frame is key to understanding the Failure Effect which is in part based in the cognitive processes voters go through when they cast their vote at the ballot box and helps understand in part why executive-level women candidates continue to face challenges

when trying to succeed at the upper echelons of the political sphere. Kahan, et. al., (2008) argue via cultural cognition that individuals form beliefs about society based on what they see as a particular way society should work. If the media is repeatedly questioning whether a woman can win simply on the basis of being a woman, it is reasonable to consider that readers might come to have those same questions.

These discoveries have important implications for public perceptions of political candidates that can be explained by the concept of motivated reasoning. Kunda argues that individuals are motivated to be right about their decisions, sometimes in contradiction to facts or reality (1990). In this instance, voters, who are told by the media that She Can't Win are motivated to align themselves to that belief. To the extent that voting patterns correspond to such beliefs, voters would therefore avoid voting for a woman candidate. As a result, she does not win.

This finding is also critical to understanding the role journalists play when framing stories about women candidates and voter reactions to those stories. Because U.S. journalistic practices prioritize reporting 'both sides' of a story, journalists may feel compelled to ask report on the electability of a woman candidate within what Halin considers the sphere of legitimate controversy (1986) where journalists work to remain neutral and report on both the chances a candidate could win or lose. However, in this case, the traditional 'both sides' reporting in relation to women candidates is detrimental to their plight and is key to the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon.

4.1.1   The She Can't Beat Him Frame

A version of the She Can't Win Frame is the She Can't Beat Him Frame. This frame was often mixed into coverage with the She Can't Win Frame, or sometimes was a standalone

premise in a specific article. The She Can't Beat Him Frame is coverage that suggests voters would consider voting for one of the women candidates, and in this case, those running in 2020 in another time and place, but that they do not believe she can beat a specific man running – here, incumbent President Donald Trump. This reflects the notion that voters do not want to risk voting for a woman candidate at a particular time because they wanted to ensure (in the case of this study) that a Democrat would win. This frame expresses the normative societal standard of a white, male candidate as a safe choice and a key part of the path to Democrats taking back the White House in 2020.

For example, on January 5, 2020, *The Washington Post* posed the question in a story entitled, "Candidates' spat raises delicate question: Can a woman beat Trump?" This article looked at women candidate reactions to voters concerns about their electability based on gender. The piece also includes polling research that shows voters want to vote for a woman, but they are concerned that she will lose because she will not be able to beat Trump. A quote from the story reads, "We're getting stuck in the 'yeah, but can a woman beat Trump? We've been, for 12 months, looking at electability in a really narrow way, and it's caused a huge amount of problems in this primary." This type of coverage highlights and reinforces the primary concept of the Failure Effect and is representative of a journalist reporting 'both sides' of a story to create what Halin called the sphere of legitimate controversy (Halin, 1986). This matters because the media is creating controversy around women candidates that does not often appear in the coverage of man candidates, and in particular, that this controversy is centered around gender as a limitation to beating a specific man. For instance, this study found no commentary or framing suggesting voters were concerned about a man's ability to beat a woman candidate because of his gender.

A *USA Today* piece published on September 10, 2019, examined the She Can't Beat Him frame with the article, "Elizabeth Warren's latest hurdle to the presidency: Democrats' belief women face tougher fight against Trump." This article relies on a *USA Today*/IPSOS poll that shows Democrats believe a woman would have a more difficult time than a man running against Donald Trump. The polling also reflects the argument made in the aforementioned *Washington Post* article that voters say they will vote for a woman but worry others like friends and family will not. This article discusses the societal norm of voting for a white, male candidate, and the historical labyrinth faced by women candidates. This claim stands out in this finding because it references broader societal challenges as opposed to those solely related to the candidate's gender. This finding, and the previous article, reinforce the pragmatic bias argument made by Corbett, et. al., (2002) in which the author's found people are less likely to vote for a woman candidate because they are concerned others will not vote for her and so she can't win.

One of the most explicit and clear examples of this frame was the headline in a January 15, 2020, *USA Today* article, "Who won the debate? Depends on who you think can beat Trump." This opinion piece argues that throughout the primary process it has become apparent that the ability to beat President Trump is more important than any other issue on the table. It discusses how Senators Klobuchar and Warren are running on their ability to beat the incumbent President. This piece attempts to understand how women candidates are working to combat the idea that She Can't Win, but it ultimately reflects the problematic message of the headline by framing the coverage as which of these candidates can beat the incumbent President. This is a classic example of a strategic game framing of an article that is disadvantageous to women candidates is inherently biased against them both because of the nature of strategic game framing

and because the of the societally and historically norms of who an American President can and should be.

Similarly, a *The New York Times* article titled "Dems Face Real Tension Over Whether a Woman Can Beat Trump" from January 6, 2019, overtly framed the race as a gender issue. This piece discusses the misogyny Secretary Clinton faced during the 2016 election and fear over how a woman nominee in 2020 would fare against an incumbent President Trump and his "gender-based" attacks. The lead sentence of the story includes a quote from a woman in Florida who served as a member Democrat National Committee, "Are we ready (for a woman president) in 2020? I really don't think we are." This is critical coverage to consider, in part because although Donald Trump as a candidate is a specific example, he is symbolic of the representation of what American Presidential candidates typically are; white, male, and in the case of Trump, overtly aggressive in his political attacks against his opponents – behavior not generally afforded to women candidates. This type of framing situates the race as one primarily about gender, not about political policy positions or stances on issues.

The She Can't Beat Him Frame is an important theme in the frames identified in this study. This frame is a core component of the She Can't Win phenomenon and the Failure Effect because as the results of this study show, the concern that a woman candidate cannot beat her man opponent are commonplace in the coverage. This is also important to note because the woman candidate's opponent is often a man. It is fair to argue that the unique political environment of 2020, the norm-breaking Presidency of Donald Trump, and the high level of interest in his defeat may have resulted in this frame being more prevalent than it is in other races or timeframes. Future research is needed to determine if its prevalence is unique to this specific context or if it is common in other races in other years.

4.1.2 The Blame Her Frame

The coverage analyzed in this study also uncovered what I term the Blame Her Frame which faults previous women politicians for the challenges more modern political women face and their eventual losses. In the present study, that blame was placed consistently on Secretary Hillary Clinton for both losing the 2016 Presidential Election for a variety of reasons, and for the difficult plight of both Democrats broadly, and women specifically running for the Presidency in the 2020 Election. The reporting often suggests that the woman cannot win by using the Blame Her Frame to justify why people will not vote for one of the women candidates running in the 2020 Democratic Primary. This finding is critical to the She Can't Win Frame because the coverage associated with the Blame Her Frame is gender-based, representative of the longitudinal coverage of Secretary Clinton, in which she has been blamed for a vast set of issues. The difficulties, mistakes, and issues faced by another woman candidate are used by journalists as justification to suggest that current women candidates cannot win because this other woman candidate did not win previously. The Blame Her Frame raises the consideration that women's performance is tied, by virtue of her gender, to individual past performance or the performance of other women rather than being considered on their own merits, whereas men are more typically judged on their potential as leaders as opposed to prior performance (Player, et. al., 2019). This notion corresponds with social role theory (Eagly and Wood, 2012) and stereotypical, gender-based roles. It is also reflection of what Biernat & Kobrynowicz (1994), and Biernat & Manis (1991) call the qualifications gap which argues that women must be markedly better than men at a given task to achieve equal success. The Blame Her Frame argues that a woman candidate must overcome not only the challenges she faces in her given race, but also the challenges and failures of prior women candidates to beat her man challengers.

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Another way that stories framed coverage of a woman candidate by comparing them to other women was simply by linking them with Secretary Hillary Clinton's presidential run. For example, on January 7, 2020, *The Wall Street Journal* published a piece "Stay Woke, Drop Out: In its wake identity politics leaves a trail of failed Democratic candidates." The lead of this story begins by discussing Secretary Hillary Clinton and her failures in the 2016 Presidential Election. The article says that current Democratic candidates have Clinton to blame for their failures during the 2020 primary season. This piece goes on to cover the public argument between Senators Sanders and Warren where Warren accuses Sanders of saying a woman cannot win the presidency. The writer suggests Warren is using accusations of sexism to advance her campaign and cites what it claims to be a trending Twitter handle #WarrenIsASnake. This coverage is reflective of the concept of the double bind (Jamieson, 1995) in which Warren is confronted with speaking out about unfair treatment but is then labeled a 'snake' for doing so. Women are often faced with these double binds in both life and in media coverage and are often labeled as "too much" or "not enough." This is a particularly challenging bind for women political candidates who can never strike the right balance of 'enoughness' when their man counterparts are never considered "too" anything. Applied, this frame demonstrates that women are tied to the past performance of others, and when women, in this case Warren, disputes the unfairness of the claim, she is punished for it.

A somewhat subtler version of this frame positions women's candidacy within feminist struggles more generally. For example, The *New York Times* published a piece on January 18, 2020, "Taking Feminism to Heart, if not to the Caucuses." This article examines Iowa voter reactions to the primary candidates addressing concerns about a woman not being able to win the election. It ties that anxiety to Hillary Clinton's loss in 2016. It discusses how women who

identify as moderate Democrats in Iowa were particularly hesitant to vote for a woman in 2020 because of what happened to Clinton. A female caucus goer is quoted as saying, "That was one of the problems with the Hillary candidacy, thinking that a woman president would be elected after our first African American president. That was a little too much to ask." This piece manages to both reinforce the She Can't Win Frame, the Blame Her Frame, and merge it with the concept of the backlash effect as applied to election of the United States' first African American President Barack Obama (Alter and Zurn, 2020). This quote is arguing essentially that She Can't Win in 2020 because society has made all the progress it can handle right now by electing President Obama, and it is Hillary's fault we did not make more progress when we had the chance. This type of coverage is particularly disadvantageous to women candidates as they are often framed as pioneers (Sheeler & Anderson 2013), and this type of coverage implies that the wagon train has gone far enough - at least for now. In other words, the progress toward parity is enough and the American electorate cannot handle anymore change at this time. By contextualizing current women candidates within the broader feminist struggle for equality in elections, this version of the Blame Her Frame positions women to continue to set women up to lose – the point of the Failure Effect. If the media continues to position these women with blame of past failures, it inherently positions them to lose.

Finally, blaming other women, and here, a woman and another political figure from a marginalized population, is expressed through implications of gender roles. In a *USA Today* opinion piece from July 15, 2019, entitled "Wanted: 2020 Dem as tough as GOP" the writer argues for a tougher stance from candidates in the 2020 Democratic Primary and largely attacks the Republican Party for the state of the country at the time. However, the writer also blames some of the political environment on decisions made by former President Obama and former

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candidate Clinton. The writer blames President Obama for his "milquetoast responses to the Merrick Garland debacle and Russia's election intrusions" and blames Secretary Clinton for her inability "to overcome the headwinds of Russian interference, James Comey interference, and her own heavy baggage" and argues that in part these failures are in part responsible for the current plight of Democratic candidates. President Obama and Secretary Clinton were surely imperfect in their service, as all politicians are, but the writer positions their failures as reasons current candidates may not be able to win. Consider the reference to Clinton's "heavy baggage" which could reference any number of issues she faced during her long political tenure that is used to Blame Her not only for her own failings, but also for the circumstances she faced. Many of these circumstances were based on her gender, such as her norm-breaking time as First Lady, her activism in that role, and her husband's personal challenges. The Blame Her Frame continues to hold women to different standards than their men counterparts. Men have been losing presidential elections for years, where is the coverage that links modern men candidates to the losses of any of their many predecessors?

The Blame Her Frame can be understood as an extension of Sheeler and Anderson's pioneer frame (2013). This study found that Clinton is often framed as a failed pioneer who is responsible for the situation faced by the women candidates in 2020. The notion suggests that because she tried and failed to be the first, she is responsible for the failures of future women. These failures of past women thus contribute to the narrative that current women cannot win a presidential election. Although until the 2020 Election, there were few women presidential candidates throughout the course of history, their political runs were often framed as historic with a focus on their failures as opposed to the progress each woman made.

Considering the coverage sampled in this study, it is reasonable to speculate that in future elections featuring other women candidates, coverage will focus on the failures on the campaigns of Clinton and the six candidates from the 2020 race. This is a critical learning for journalists as reporting is often cyclical, systematic and is based on historical precedent.

The Blame Her Frame is an example of societal othering (Zevallos, N.D.) of women broadly, and Clinton specifically. References to Clinton throughout a race in which she was not a candidate demonstrate how the treatment of a woman candidate in prior election cycles can carry through to coverage of current candidates. This matters perhaps the most to future women candidates as they embark on their elections – they may need to consider that their campaigns are likely to be tied to the actions of prior women candidates, especially those who, like Clinton, were defeated. This finding is a critical one for scholars because understanding the Blame Her Frame leads us to be able to comprehend what Goffman (1974) considers as the impact of the frame on how it shapes the reality of its audience and how it can impact the choices an individual makes and the beliefs that person holds. The Blame Her Frame saddles women scholars with the frame of loser. The Blame Her Frame raises the question that if the past woman/women can't win, why would the current one fair any differently?

4.2   The Fight Frame

This study found significant use of pugilistic or violent rhetoric in coverage of political candidates of both genders, but especially in the coverage of women. This frame, which I term the Fight Frame, is one in which the premise of a story or the coverage of a candidate is described with language referencing combat, such as attacking, fighting, sparring, or smearing. Several articles featured the phrases 'throw an elbow' or 'landing a punch.' Although the Fight Frame in political coverage is generally well-documented throughout the literature, in the context

of women candidates it takes on an additional meaning around the gender associations with combat and violence. The boxing, combat, and war metaphors often used in this frame are associated with masculinity; when they are used to describe the actions of women, the implications include a gender-incongruency that can reinforce the notion that a woman is not an appropriate, acceptable, or effective candidate because of her gender.

For example, on February 22, 2020, *The Washington Post* published a story titled, "With little now to lose, Warren pulls off gloves and flips on super PAC cash." The headline and the use of the term "pull off the gloves," references a boxing match, implying Warren is engaging in violent combat with her opponents. Boxing is not a sport one typically associates with women athletes. This article argues that Warren made a strategic fundraising change as her status in the polls dropped and she began fighting harder against her Democratic rivals. The author of this piece frames the change as a move in a boxing match, "pulls off gloves." Of note, this piece was published near the time of the Nevada primary and in addition to framing Warren as a pugilist, also applies stereotypical sexualization to her with the line "Everyone loses some of their inhibitions in Las Vegas. Even Elizabeth Warren." The use of violent rhetoric in politics is not new, but it is important to understand its use in relation to women candidates. Traditional social roles of women are as caregivers and nurturers, not fighters, which corresponds to gender stereotypes that separate women from their men counterparts (Eagly and Wood, 2012). It is also reflective of the sameness/difference bind (Jamieson, 1995) in which women are considered anti-normative if they do not conform to gendered standards because women are not meant to be fighters.

Some instances of this frame are extremely explicit. *The New York Times*, on February 21, 2020, published two stories on page A16 that described two leading women candidates as

engaging attacks and even actual weapons. The first story was headlined, "Facing a potential last stand, Warren Unleashes Rhetorical Howitzers." Just below it, the headline read, "Klobuchar Suddenly Rises to Rival Worth Attacking." The first frames Warren as a fighter who had changed her position and began attacking rivals – with the large artillery weapon the Howitzer – to survive in the nomination process. The second article discussed how a sudden rise for Klobuchar in the polls resulted in her being verbally attacked by her opponents. Media coverage of elections commonly applies strategic gamification frames to political races, but when applied to women candidates, there are additional implications about gender norms. Such frames, especially the more violent or pugilistic ones, also suggest a violation of gender norms. The underlying implication of this frame is that women candidates must adopt fighting strategies that are anti-normative to their gender standards to succeed, thus violating not only the principles of civil competition but also of broader appropriate social roles and behavior.

USA Today, on July 28, 2019, ran a story with the headline "Kamala Harris knows how to throw an elbow." This piece describes Harris "dressing down" Joe Biden over the issue of bussing, noting that she has another chance to do so in round two of the Democratic primary debates. The piece positions Harris as both a "fighter" and "survivor of political wars" in her home state of California where she had served as San Francisco District Attorney, California Attorney General, and U.S. Senator. In this case, the Fight Frame is applied to Harris in both a negative and positive light. The application of this framing to Harris is important to note as she is the only woman of color in the race and is reflective of the stereotypical angry Black woman trope (Carroll et al., 2022) that is commonly seen in racist and anti-feminist rhetoric about women of color. The Fight Frame, when applied to Harris, is doubly disadvantaging by applying questions about her gender and race to her position in the race.

The Wall Street Journal published an opinion piece on May 6, 2019, entitled, "The Democratic Primary From Hell." In it, Republican Strategist Karl Rove discusses the "battle" ahead for Democrats running, anticipated "assaults" between candidates and on President Trump, and likens the entire Democratic debate schedule to "televised political wrestling matches." The commentary by Rove, who is known for inflammatory statements, is an interesting visualization for readers because it inherently disadvantages the women candidates who are assumed to be physically smaller than men. As such, a woman would be unlikely to win a "wrestling match" with her male counterparts. Again, this type of language is fundamentally disadvantaging to women candidates and constructs a vision of the Democratic Primary that is dissonant with how people expect women candidates to behave based on societal gender norms.

The Fight Frame is a particular type of strategic game frame which employs rhetoric and metaphors around violent conflict. It is perhaps somewhat surprising that the Fight Frame was common in coverage about women candidates, as it represents a strong departure from societal gender roles for women that position them as mother figures or caregivers. This frame thus creates dissonance with these gendered beliefs, resulting in what Eagly and Diekman call role incongruity (2005). Koenig and Eagly (2012) explain that role incongruity has a negative impact on specific social roles, generating barriers for people who occupy roles incongruous with gender stereotypes. The application of the Fight Frame is inherently disadvantageous for women and reinforces a key argument of the Failure Effect by positioning women as weak in the traditional masculine sense.

4.3   The Stereotypical Woman Frame

A critical component of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon is the application of The Stereotypical Woman Frame. Stereotypical frames were prevalent throughout

the sample and in every publication studied. The results below examine findings that

demonstrate the Stereotypical Woman Frame and its sub-frame, which I term the Self-Gendering

Frame. The Stereotypical Woman Frame applies anti-normative and societal expectations or

standards to women politicians. The Self-Gendering Frame is when candidates and/or their

campaign messaging apply those same stereotypical frames to themselves. These frames are

often then reflected in media coverage and help to build a narrative about a particular woman

candidate. It is of interest to note that although there was a large quantity of stereotypically

gendered coverage throughout the sample, there was less focus on the women's appearances and

attire than what is seen in much of the previous coverage of executive level women candidates.

      The Stereotypical Woman Frame appears throughout the journalistic coverage of the

2020 Democratic Primary and is often reflected using commonly known misogynistic tropes.

Self-help author and candidate Marianne Williamson faced the brunt of such coverage, with her

being framed more than once as 'mystical' or as a 'crazy' woman. Other candidates, including

Senator Amy Klobuchar face framing in traditionally feminine ways like her ability to cook and

make a good midwestern-style casserole. This type of framing is often based in social role theory

which argues that the gendered division of labor creates and perpetuates gendered stereotypes

(Eagly & Wood, 2012). Koenig and Eagly (2014) also found that role incongruity, when

gendered stereotypes are applied to occupational roles, creates a mismatch in terms of what

people think that woman is capable of doing. In other words, these women must be able to

exhibit the traits of both men and women to be considered valid candidates.

      Notably, self-help author Marianne Williamson was not a traditional political candidate

and had held no elected position before running for the Office of the Presidency. The coverage of

Williamson by the media often reflected misogynistic tropes. *The Washington Post*, on June 29,

2019, discusses "The Holistic Approach of Marianne Williamson," and called her a mystic and a "palate cleanser" before embarking on a lengthy description of the attire she wore during the interview. Reflecting the Stereotypical Woman Frame, on July 31, 2019, *USA Today* published an article which attempts to defend Williamson, but repeats the tropes used against Williamson to do so. The headlining piece "Don't mock Marianne Williamson, Dems need her spiritual politics in a dark Trump Era," does defend Williamson and her positions, but it also positions her as someone who's grounding is in spirituality and not the more commonly expected background of policy expertise or political acumen with which men candidates are typically positioned. Additionally, the piece states that Williamson is not actually a "kook" in the lead sentence. Later, the article explains that a commentator critical of the candidate called her a "dangerous whacko," The decision to use this particular quote reinforces the idea of her as a type of mystic, even though the author defends Williamson against this slur. The coverage of Williamson is some of the most gender-stereotypical found in this study, and it is reminiscent of other 'crazy' women tropes that are found throughout political coverage. Women candidates as far back as Victoria Woodhull have been labeled in this way with Woodhull being called a "lunatic" (Finneman, 2015). Falk (2008) also found that women political candidates are frequently subject to gender marking rhetoric with the use of terms like "crazy."

The Stereotypical Woman Frames reinforce the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon through the reverse halo effect. The halo effect is a cognitive process in which an individual takes a positive attribute from a person and applies it to a group of similar persons to create a positive belief about that entire group (Thorndike, 1920). However, the reverse of the halo effect can also be true, where an individual is given negative information about an individual and it is applied to a like group (Forgas & Laham, 2016, 276). For instance, if

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Marianne Williamson is framed as a "crazy" woman or a "whacko," the reverse halo effect would suggest that other women candidates in the race may be the same. Stereotypical coverage for one woman can contribute to stereotypical coverage of all women candidates.

These notions are often expressed in language that is gendered, stereotypical, and damaging. For example, one *The Wall Street Journal* article invokes the idea of the hysterical woman in a headline about Senator Warren on March 23, 2020, "Elizabeth Warren's Ranting Resumes." This piece is critical of Warren's response and position in the wake of the then emerging COVID-19 crisis, further reinforcing the idea that she is unreasonable and emotional – characteristics often assigned to women who do not fulfill traditional gender roles. The writer accuses Warren of "ranting" about the Trump response to the crisis. The article goes on to call Warren's position on COVID-19 response "irresponsible rhetoric" and calls for people to not vote for her based on her response which they frame as an "outburst." This example of the Stereotypical Woman Frame, in which Warren is positioned as a loud, ranting, emotional woman is also reflective of Jamieson's (1995) concept of the double bind where women are placed into no-win situations. In this case, Warren is trapped in a double bind for having a strong position – which is typically expected of political candidates, but then having a response that is "too much." This rhetoric is reflective of both the double bind (Jamieson, 1995) and Stereotypical Woman Frame where women are never able to strike the right balance in how she handles herself and subsequently the societal stereotypes about women are upheld and reinforced.

Another version of the Stereotypical Women frame that emerged was in references to women's abilities in the kitchen. For example, a story from *The New York Times* discussed Senator Klobuchar's ability to cook a popular midwestern dish, calling it a "hot dish campaign." The headline established this clearly: "Hot-Dish Campaign in Casserole Country." This piece

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discusses the midwestern communal meal of "hot dish," a popular casserole topped with tater tots. The piece argues the meal is a symbolic unifier in the political space, particularly in her home region, the Midwest, and that the concept of hot dish is important to Klobuchar's campaign. The piece also offers the recipe for "Amy's Hotdish" (Note that the NYT spells hot dish three different ways in this single article and I reflected their usage in this text.). The hot dish discussion also comes up as part of the political debate in Iowa, with voters quoted as saying "(Senator Elizabeth) Warren isn't having a hot-dish meeting." This study did not uncover any such articles or comparisons being made about any of the 2020 Democratic men candidates and their ability to create communal political cooking dishes.

The Stereotypical Woman frame also appears in the coverage as a sort of caricature of a specific woman candidate that morphs into a media narrative. Largely the candidates were caricaturized in stereotypical ways throughout the sample with Senator Gillibrand as the 'mom.' Senator Klobuchar as the 'bad boss.' Senator Warren as a 'fighter.' Senator Harris as 'angry' or a 'fighter.' Author Williamson appears as the "mystical" woman. Congresswoman Gabbard is interestingly discussed as "the unknown" and notably receives little coverage in the articles found in this sample.

The Washington Post published an interview with Senator Kamala Harris, her sister Maya, and a few family friends, on July 24, 2019, in a traditional journalistic attempt to humanize Harris - discussing her upbringing and family. Both Harris herself, and her sister position the candidate as a fighter. Of Harris, one family friend is quoted as saying "Kamala was very feisty and always fighting. She was always either going to be putting people in prison or going to prison." This reporting caricaturizes Harris by drawing a picture of who the candidate is and positioning her in an angry Black woman style trope. From a framing perspective, this type

of reporting disadvantages Harris, not only by applying stereotypical tropes to the candidate, but by drawing an unflattering and anti-normative picture of her as a fighter and someone who enjoys punishing others.

The caricature that took hold of Senator Amy Klobuchar was that she is a "bad boss." An example is a *USA Today* article from February 26, 2019, read "Amy Klobuchar's Bad Boss Flaws Are Disturbing. Should Dems Write Her Off for 2020?" This piece discusses reports that Klobuchar is angry and abusive to her Senate staff, and that she has too high expectations of those around her. This reporting argues that the Democratic Party should not consider Klobuchar's candidacy because she's angry and has "bad boss" tendencies. This caricature is directly reflective of commonplace women stereotypes in which women who are assertive are billed as aggressive or unreasonable. This frame is also a reflection of Jamieson's (1995) double binds. If Klobuchar is smart, powerful, and strong, it's too much. And if she exhibits these qualities, she cannot be a nurturing person that society expects her to be and is therefore not fit to be a candidate for President. She cannot win.

One of the primary questions this frame raises is where is similar coverage of the men candidates? Where is the story about Senator Klobuchar's fellow Midwesterner Pete Buttigieg and his hot dish recipe? Why does the media not question the spirituality of Joe Biden and his ties to the controversial Catholic faith when it is quick to judge the beliefs of Williamson? What about questions regarding the management styles of any of the men candidates? These are examples of the dissonance the Stereotypical Women Frame creates about women candidates in political coverage that reinforce the idea that a woman cannot be President. The Stereotypical Woman Frame is a core component of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win Phenomenon

because these frames continue to teach us that women are not of presidential quality or temperament and therefore cannot win.

4.3.1 The Self-Gendering Frame

A related frame that appeared in the news coverage of women candidates analyzed in this study is what I term the Self-Gendering Frame. Analysis demonstrated that candidates and their campaign messaging sometimes refer explicitly to their feminine gender or stereotypically gendered traits as part of establishing their identity. These Self-Gendering frames sometimes serve as rationales for the candidate's actions or beliefs, or sometimes surfaced in their actions and activities while campaigning. The Self-Gendering Frame emphasizes the gender differences between candidates rather than distancing individuals from gender stereotypes and roles. For instance, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's campaign highlighted her identity as a "young mom" and centered her advocacy for women and family issues in its messaging. Senator Elizabeth Warren billed herself a "fighter," but also hands out cookies at her events. The results of this study show that these self-gendering messages propagated by a candidate or campaign become media narratives and ultimately produce the Self-Gendering Frame.

Coverage of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand is some of the most strongly gendered, in part because of her campaign messaging and strategies. A profile of Senator Gillibrand published in *The Washington Post* on July 14, 2019, started with the reported working out with Gillibrand in a hotel gym and referenced her "now-famous biceps." The article went on to discuss Gillibrand's campaign focused on women's and abortion rights and quotes her discussing her ability to cook for her children in her campaign RV kitchen. At one point the reporter asks Gillibrand if she "deliberately frames her presidency in the context of motherhood because that's the singular kind of female authority almost everyone accepts." Gillibrand does not directly answer the reporter's

question in the published version of the interview, but the reporter speculates what America could be like with a maternal figure as a leader. This type of framing, whether generated by the candidate, the media, or some combination of the two only reinforces gendered stereotypes that are in contrast with the expectations of who can become the American President.

In a similar article, *The New York Times* published a story on January 17, 2019, in which Gillibrand calls herself a "young mom" who is focused on fighting for other people's children. The piece also quotes a stay-at-home-mom who says she thinks Gillibrand could bring "a mother's perspective to the presidency." These discussions of motherhood come both from Gillibrand herself and from journalists' questions and writing. This type of approach to the Self-Gendering Frame that matters to the coverage of Gillibrand because she is framing herself with the societal and traditional definition of who a woman is and can be and inherently disadvantaging the belief in her electability by positioning herself as anti-normative to the office for which she is running.

Another *Washington Post* story reporter discusses Warren positioning herself as a "fighter" at a rally where reporters "munched on butter cookies" with the word 'persist' (an oft-used Warren rallying cry) written on them. It also quotes Warren at a campaign rally saying it was time to "fight back" against the ultra-wealthy members of American society. In that story, the Self-Gendering Frame was combined, almost incongruously, with the Fight Frame: Warren positions herself as both a fighter and a mother, discussing the challenges she faced as a young mother trying to attend law school. Similar narratives appeared in multiple stories examined in this study and resulted in a picture of Warren as both fulfilling and countering gender stereotypes. Future research might consider the effects of mixed framing like what's seen in this coverage on the success of women candidates.

The Self-Gendering Frame implies that the women candidates, and/or their campaigns, apply the gendered stereotype to themselves or to the woman candidate, and then in many cases, this often-stereotypical frame is picked up and reinforced by the media. The finding of this type of frame reflects how much society expects of women of all kinds – whether it's the 'working mom' who is expected to have a successful career, a perfect home, loving husband, beautiful children, and perfect physical appearance. Or the woman political candidate who believes she must be a fighter, muscular, young, and able to whip up a gourmet meal in an RV for her children. This frame showcases that women feel the societal pressure to meet societal expectations of both genders in the political arena – and reinforces how astronomically difficult that is to accomplish. It is particularly critical to consider how women apply these gendered frames to themselves to showcase that they can in fact do it all and participate in creating their own type of double bind where they are both "too" and "not enough" (Jamieson, 1995).

4.4   The Authenticity Frame

In some of the articles examined in the current study, the authenticity of the woman candidate covered is called into question. This frame often addresses the authenticity and likability of the candidate, or if the voters know the 'real person' running for office. *The Washington Post* published a piece on May 18, 2019, headlined, "Have a beer with her? That keg's tapped out." This piece discusses the authenticity and likeability of the 2020 women candidates. At one point, the reporter discusses an exchange with an acquaintance who when asked which woman candidate he preferred replied, "Harris is okay, but Warren's husband won't even have a beer with her." The reporter tries to argue that the women candidates are both authentic and likable despite commonly held impressions. However, despite the premise of the argument in the piece, the reporter in closing writes that Warren has "school marm energy." The

Authenticity Frame in this case creates more dissonance in terms of how an individual sees Warren which reinforces the questions about her likability and authenticity.

On December 4, 2019, *The New York Times*, after the exit of Senator Harris from the race, headlined a piece, "Did we ever know the real Kamala Harris?" The article, a post-exit analysis of a failed campaign, examines her campaign's launch and failures, her promise, and her withdrawal; it directly blames Harris's lack of authenticity for her failure by arguing that voters never really knew the candidate and so she could not and did not win. The application of the Authenticity Frame in this case reinforces the Failure Effect by arguing that Harris was never 'real' and it is her fault that she lost. This application of this frame to Harris is one particularly ripe for future study as she continues to see similar coverage in her time as vice president.

Articles about Senator Gillibrand similarly question her authenticity and who she is as a person and candidate. *The Washington Post*, on May 27, 2019, ran a story, "Gillibrand's challenge: To emerge from a crowded niche." The coverage centers around voters not knowing Gillibrand or being unsure her qualifications. The piece argues that it is this lack of authenticity that plays a role in her being unelectable. Like the coverage of Warren and Harris, the application of the Authenticity Frame in the case of Gillibrand reinforces that women are somehow unknowable, or potentially unlikable, or perhaps just anti-normative enough. This framing raises questions that reinforce the primary argument of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon.

The Authenticity Frame is also seen historically in coverage of women candidates. Researchers Carlin and Winfrey (2009), Parry-Giles (2014), and Sheeler and Anderson (2013), document numerous instances of the Authenticity Frame being applied to modern female political candidates including Secretary Clinton and Governor Palin. It is of note that the

Authenticity Frame is also tied up in the ability for a candidate to be 'likable' which surfaces in many of the examples discovered in this study. For example, is Senator Warren likable? And if she is – is it the 'real' person who is likable? The application of this frame can be seen as misogynistic, as it is most seen in the study sample applied to the women, not the men candidates. In other words, women must be smart, qualified, a good cook and of course also be likable. There is little if any debate about the likability of then President Trump, or future President Biden in general media coverage. The Authenticity Frame also implies a critical consideration that supports the argument of the Failure Effect. The reason women candidates aren't winning? She's not real and 'people' don't like her, so She Can't Win.

4.5   The Anti-Normative Frame

A small number of the articles analyzed in this study had frames that were anti-normative. I argue that the Anti-Normative Frame positions women political candidates in ways that reinforce the idea that she is not who an American President is or should be. The impact of this framing is critical, but I had anticipated that more of this type of framing would exist in the sample and the lack of its presence is arguably a show of progress that the basic concept of a woman president may be becoming more acceptable. However, when the anti-normative frame does appear in the research, and it considers what a woman's candidacy means for the normative standards of the American Presidency. For example, a common question centered around what it might mean for the country to have a man as 'First Gentlemen' in the traditionally First Lady role. Some of the coverage labels the women candidates and their personal situations as "weird."

The *Wall Street Journal* published a piece January 24, 2019, entitled "The weirdness of American politics." In this opinion piece, the writer lists what he perceives as alleged mistakes or campaign slights by women politicians (and one man at the end of the list) and labels them

'weird.' The piece frames many of the women candidates as anti-normative. The writer mocks Senator Warren for drinking a beer in an online campaign video. The writer takes issue with Senator Harris dancing to a song by Cardi B., and says one of Senator Gillibrand's campaign videos is reminiscent of an audition tape for a comic book movie. The piece also calls former Texas Representative Beto O'Rourke a mash up between "Jack Kerouac and an Australian Aboriginal Walkabout" with just the right amount of "weirdness." This piece is full of the Anti-Normative Frame of both the women candidates and O'Rourke. It is also critical of women for engaging in what is generally normal behavior for adults, and likely an attempt to deal with the aforementioned Authenticity Frame to make the candidate 'likable.' Except for the mention of O'Rourke, there are no examples in this sample analyzing if any of the men candidates drank beer in a campaign video or danced to a popular recording artist.

Other Anti-Normative Framing centers around the fact that if a woman were to become President, their spouses would be men, or in the case of Pete Buttigieg and his husband, a gay man. *The Washington Post*, on March 20, 2019, wrote a piece entitled "2020s True Running Mates" and addresses the men as a change in who presidential candidate spouses traditionally have been. It critiques the fact that at this juncture in the race, none had given interviews. The writer discusses candidate Pete Buttigieg's husband, Chasten. It notes that Senator Cory Booker is unmarried. It asks if a First Gentleman Doug Emhoff would be picking out the White House china should Senator Harris win. It positions the entire concept of a first gentlemen as anti-normative by positioning these varied personal situations as opposite of the standard First Lady role where the candidate's female spouse for example is typically expected to host events and select the White House china.

The Wall Street Journal, October 27, 2019, headlines a similar article, "Husbands of 2020 Dem hopefuls find roles on campaign trail; field with historic number of women and first openly gay candidate means largest ever group of male spouses of White House Contenders." The piece discusses the engagement of the men spouses on the campaign trail and their engagement with the race. The coverage of a candidate spouses is somewhat predictable in the sense that the pioneer frame (Sheeler & Anderson, 2013) and positioning these men as 'the first' is applied to the spouses as much of the coverage focuses on the possibility of a first First Gentlemen. This coverage also reinforces that the women candidates are anti-normative because they are all married to men and that if made President, the women candidates may need to fill the roles of both President and First Lady should she be elected. The Anti-Normative Frame positions women candidates as the opposite of what society expects in an executive level leader.

The Anti-Normative Frame is a core component of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon because it sets women candidates up to fail. It is interesting to note that the coverage found in this study was focused on the anti-normative nature of the candidate's spouses – which is likely reflective of both traditional social American standards and the modern debates that continue about gender roles. The way the Anti-Normative Frame is applied in these stories is also an example of what Eagly and Karau define as role incongruity (2002) where an individual's gender and typical societal expectations are a mismatch with their professional role. However, in in this case the role incongruity applies to the women candidates and then also shifts to the expectations of who the partner of an American President can and should be.

The Anti-Normative Frames identified and explicated in this chapter demonstrate how the media continues to apply anti-woman, misogynistic, broadly destructive, and what society views as traditional standards to women political candidates. These framing techniques are a core

component of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon. If the media and society continue to communicate and apply these frames to women, it continues to enforce standards that effect the plight of women politicians and their electability. This frame limits their progress and opportunity, and effects the perceptions voters hold about who an American President can be.

4.6   The No Problem to See Here Frame

What I term the No Problem To See Here Frame is when stories suggest that gender doesn't matter in today's political landscape and society and minimizes what this study demonstrates is a continuing issue in media coverage. The No Problem To See Here Frame identifies coverage that argues that women political candidates do not face unfair challenges, or at least if they did face challenges, they were no more difficult than those faced by the men candidates. This coverage often made the argument, which is at least to some extent accurate, that there is progress being made in terms of equity for women politicians across the American electorate, and that that progress is enough. The argument being that women do in fact win, sometimes. Although this point is true on its face, it is opposed to the premise of this dissertation's argument. It is true, and is noted earlier in this work, that women politicians are winning more frequently, but this occurrence is often based on the success of lower-level political candidates. I argue that progress will be enough when gender parity in elected offices of all levels is reached and sustained over time.

In a *Washington Post* article, "There's no 'this woman' anymore (sic)," published February 11, 2019, the columnist argues that because there are so many women candidates in the 2020 Democratic Primary there is less of an issue with being a woman candidate. The writer posits that because of the sheer number of women candidates, gender matters less than it did in prior elections. It specifically notes that no one is asking if then Speaker of the House of

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Representatives Nancy Pelosi is "likable" because she won her race. The writer argues that all women must do is win and that by winning, women no longer have anything to worry about in terms of gender equity. This frame is a particularly damaging to women candidates and is a core component of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon. By minimizing the clear issues and by arguing progress is parity, journalists and others disadvantage women candidates by failing to acknowledge the many societal and political challenges that still exist in today's political environment.

The New York Times, on January 16, 2020, also reflects the 'Nothing To See Here frame' in the piece "Some wins for the women." This piece argues that over the course of the last roughly seventy years, gender parity progress has been made, which is objectively accurate, but as previously noted paints an incomplete picture of the status of gender parity in politics during the time of this study. The writer of this piece also argues that sexism in politics still exists, but that the environment for women politicians is getting better. The results of this study demonstrate that gendered coverage of women political candidates remains prevalent. The Nothing to See Here framing of women candidates minimizes the gendered coverage like that discovered in this study and makes it appear normative and acceptable.

USA Today addresses the nothing to see here frame in a September 2, 2019, piece, "Celebrate the diverse 2020 Dem candidates and don't fret about electability." The writer argues that Democrats should be proud of the diverse field of candidates running for the presidency, to "disregard gender and ethnicity" and focus on "policies and personality." The premise of this piece states that because the Democratic field for the 2020 nomination is more diverse than before, that there is literally nothing to see here in terms of inequity. This style of Nothing To See Here framing is counter to the findings of this study which clearly shows gendered

representation of women politicians is prevalent. This type of coverage also fails to consider the results of the backlash effect (Alter & Zurn, 2020) which argues that when progress is made, societal regression commonly occurs in response. Arguably, as this piece notes, the diversity of the field is progress, but there is likely to be backlash to that progress that counters the positive effects.

The Nothing To See Here Frame implies that the gender parity progress that has been made over the last several decades is enough – that gender is a non-existent issue, or perhaps a neutral factor in electoral politics in the 2020 race. This framing strategy ignores both the reality of the gendered coverage that commonly exists and the existence of the backlash effect (Alter & Zurn, 2020) where there is a societal reaction to the progress that has been made on a particular issue. I argue that because there was a record number of women candidates who ran in the 2020 Democratic Primary, that there is likely to be a backlash to that progress in future elections. The Nothing To See Here Frame is an anti-feminist argument that posits that the progress made to this point is good enough despite that gender representation remains unequal.

4.7   Summary

The findings of this chapter explicate what I term the Failure Narratives – frames in which the media applies to women candidates that support the core argument of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon. The results of this study find that the media specifically and routinely position women running for high-level political office in disadvantageous ways that effect an individual's notions about a woman's electability. The She Can't Win Frame, the She Can't Beat Him Frame, and the Blame Her Frame present a variety of rationales for which voters might consider that a woman isn't electable based on a variety of circumstances whether traditional gender expectations, her personal attributes, her opponent, or

the failures of past women candidates. The Fight Frame applies pugilistic or violent rhetoric to women candidates that creates dissonance of societal expectations of women candidates. The Stereotypical Woman Frame and the related Self-Gendering Frame apply stereotypical, misogynistic, and traditional beliefs and expectations to women candidates either via the media, or via the candidate and campaign which are then repeated through media coverage. The Authenticity Frame calls into question who the women candidates are and puts weight on the woman's ability to be 'likable.' The Anti-Normative Frame brings attention to the fact that a woman president would be a new occurrence in this country and reinforces traditional beliefs about the presidency itself. The Nothing To See Here Frame minimizes the gendered coverage that is commonplace, as confirmed by the findings of this study, and argues that progress that has not reached parity is enough. These various frames combine to support the core argument of the Failure Effect, that the media positions women candidates in ways that effect beliefs about her electability and subsequently She Can't Win.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: THE PROGESS NARRATIVES

5.1   The Progress Narratives

Not all coverage of women candidates involves framing that can be seen as problematic. In fact, some of the coverage identified in this research sample argued for the opposite of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon, but supports the argument that the media play a critical role in the plight of women politicians. I term these frames the Progress Narratives and identified two primary frames and one sub-frame that fit this general category. The results and discussion of these findings are below.

5.2   The Critical Media Frame

The first frame discovered in this study that positions women candidates in a positive manner is what I term the Critical Media Frame. The Critical Media Frame consists of coverage that examines the role of journalists and the mainstream media in terms of the framing applied to women candidates. This frame is a critical component of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon because much of the Critical Media Frame points out how difficult the mainstream media coverage of women candidates can be and serves as a counter point to many of the Failure Narratives found in this study. The Critical Media Frame addresses the symbolic annihilation of women in the media. It also considers the concept of the double bind, which Jamieson (1995) defines as the impossible situations in which women are placed with no winning choice available (Jamieson, 1995). Some of the critical coverage calls the journalism surrounding women politicians 'lazy,' others talk about the media's 'woman problem' when it comes to covering women political candidates. The following data provides helpful examples of what coverage of women political candidates might look like in a more equitable scenario.

The writer of a *New York Times* piece published January 8, 2019, and headlined "Warren and her party of ideas" calls Warren a serious policy intellectual who is a qualified candidate. The piece lays blame on the broader political media for "lazy journalism" when it comes to covering women politicians and argues that the coverage of these candidates is often biased and trivial. The piece accuses the media of focusing on the need to discuss whether the women candidates are likable. The Critical Media Frame is important to identify as it sends the message to both voters and journalists that much of the information, they are receiving about women candidates is unequal to the coverage afforded to the man candidates.

The Washington Post on June 20, 2019, in a piece titled, "Elizabeth Warren and the double standards for female leaders." This piece analyzes Warren and what it calls the "prove it again" syndrome, which the article defines as a phenomenon where women must win people over repeatedly in attempt to succeed. This article frames Warren in a generally positive light and celebrates her ability to fight the double binds she faces. This article highlights the challenges women candidates often face and serves as a progressive example and a counterpoint to the Failure Narratives identified earlier in this study. This type of framing matters to the countering of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon, which I argue is critical to the working to elect women candidates. Corbett et. al., (2021) found that when voters are presented with more positive messaging about candidates, it can help counter concerns about a woman candidate's electability.

USA Today, February 14, 2020, published a piece entitled, "Amy Klobuchar's surge proves media still has a woman problem." This piece discusses the results of a poll conducted after one of the Democratic Primary Debates where most voters said Senator Klobuchar was the winner of the night, but that most of the news coverage of the debate focused on the "battle of

the bros" and centered around Candidates Biden, Buttigieg and Sanders with little or no mention of Klobuchar's well-regarded performance. The writer also argues that billing Klobuchar's "sudden surge" a "big surprise" is a failure of reporting and that her climb in the primary was predictable because she is an accomplished, experienced politician. The writer argues that the media has a "woman problem" and that women candidates get less coverage and are taken less seriously than their men counterparts. This again is a critical counter argument to the Failure Narratives that may be helpful in the reframing of the notions individuals have about the electability of women candidates.

The role of journalists as the Fourth Estate of American Democracy has always been and will hopefully remain a critical part of the checks and balances of our intricate and often fragile seeming system. The Critical Media Frame is an example of that role of journalism manifesting in certain stories, typically opinion coverage. This critical media coverage, often a re-framing of the question of how women political candidates are covered, can create a counter narrative to the Failure Frames, even if the amount of such coverage is small. If the Failure Frames can have a negative effect on an individual's perceptions and beliefs, then the reverse must be true. Framing women political candidates as electable, and calling into question the problematic, gender-based coverage that contributes to the Failure Effect may help create more positive associations about women candidate's electability.

5.3   The She Can Win Frame

The media does, on some occasions, frame women's chances for victory in a positive manner. Some of this type of coverage argues for the electability of women candidates, rather than treating it with suspicion. Some coverage tackles the She Can't Win phenomenon directly, and encourages voters to let go of their concerns about the electability of women candidates.

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One such instance of the She Can Win Frame was printed in *The Washington Post* on February 14, 2020, and titled, "You like Amy Klobuchar? Don't let doubts creep in." This opinion piece argues that people should remember that they have previously and likely still do like Senator Klobuchar as a candidate. The writer argues that Klobuchar is a qualified candidate, and that she is electable. Notably, this headline is reflective of a unique type of double bind (Jamieson, 1995). The journalist is encouraging readers to be open minded and consider what Klobuchar has to offer on her merits but is also reinforcing the negative that you may have doubts. In this case Klobuchar is both qualified, and then again, maybe not. This type of framing matters because it both serves as an example of what progressive coverage might look like and provides another counter argument to the Failure Effect argument by addressing the questions individuals have about a woman candidate's electability.

The Washington Post also published a piece arguing for the electability of women candidates on June 11, 2019, with the headline, "You want to know who is electable?" This article argues that not only are women electable, but that they were elected "in droves" in 2018 across local, state, and Congressional level elections. The piece argues that the women in the 2020 Democratic Primary are "running circles" around their male competitors and that one of the women should be the party nominee. This piece is a strong example of the She Can Win Frame and makes a fact-based argument about how women can and do win and that the slate of women presidential candidates should be given full consideration based on their merits and not their gender.

5.3.1 The Inspiring Woman Frame

Another type of positive framing in coverage of women candidates that is a subset of the She Can Win Frame is what I term The Inspiring Woman Frame. The Inspiring Woman Frame

appears in stories by positioning a woman as a positive influence on the election, it celebrates the gender diversity of a given race, and it acknowledges the impact women made on the election itself while supporting the argument that ultimately, she can win. In this sample, the Inspiring Woman Frame acknowledges the general progressiveness of the 2020 Democratic Primary and the candidates overall and what that meant to the field and gender parity progress.

The March 18, 2019, edition of *The New York Times* headlines a story, "Men say yes to a woman on the ticket." This piece argues that men, including the men candidates running in the 2020 Democratic Primary, are supportive of having a woman on the ticket whether as President or Vice-President. This piece argues that being a woman candidate in the 2020 race was an advantage that would result in a woman being on the 2020 Democratic Presidential Ticket. With the selection and election of then Senator Kamala Harris as the first woman vice president in 2020, this argument proved accurate.

The Washington Post, June 28, 2019, published, "The undeniable impact of women on the debate stage." This article puts a positive frame on the three women, Senators Klobuchar and Warren, and Representative Gabbard who appeared in the debate. The piece discusses the women's clothing – in the sense that for once their fashion choices did not matter to their performance and each woman appeared in different clothing. It also celebrates the positive contributions these women made in the debate whether on policy or in terms of correcting their male counterparts in real time. This piece identifies true progress in both the debate itself and its subsequent coverage. As the literature notes, political women and their appearances have been (and continue to be) a critical part of the media's coverage of individual candidacies. If these women appeared in attire of their choosing, with little issue or consequence to the judgement of

their performance, that is both inspiring and a representation of true progress in political coverage and electoral gender parity.

The She Can Win Frame and the related Inspiring Woman Frame demonstrate that mainstream media outlets do occasionally position women in a positive manner that supports the belief that the woman candidate is electable. These frames also demonstrate the power of journalists and their ability to frame women candidates in a less gender-based manner. This type of positive framing reflects Corbett et. al.'s (2021) finding. Researchers found that when people believe social progress is possible and believe that others are also willing to act toward that collective goal, people are more likely to adopt that progressive behavior. If I think you will vote for her, then I am more likely to vote for her as well, because maybe she can win.

5.4   Summary

The Progress Narratives identified in this chapter include the Critical Media Frame, the She Can Win Frame, and the related Inspiring Woman Frame. The identification of these frames serves several purposes. First, these examples show what constructive reporting on women politicians might look like in a less gender-based environment. Second, these frames may serve as examples to women politicians and their campaigns and demonstrate what types of coverage might be the most advantageous to their electoral goals. Finally, I argue that the occurrence of these frames demonstrates at least some progress in the coverage of women political candidates.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

Gendered representations of the U.S. Presidency are commonplace among the American cultural zeitgeist. One example is the recently defunct quadrennial cookie bake-off between the typically women spouses of leading presidential candidates which was sponsored by the print publication *Family Circle* (Heil, 2020). It is perhaps ironic that the cookie contest, and *Family Circle*, ceased to exist around the same time that the six women featured in this study ran in the Democratic Primary for the U.S. Presidency. It is important to remember and contextualize these seemingly innocuous cultural traditions because they are not. One of my first personal memories of women in politics is from a 1992 summer camp experience involving Family Circle's cookie bake-off. I remember me and my camp mates being divided into two teams where we created the chocolate chip cookie recipes of then First Lady Barbara Bush and the then First Lady of Arkansas, and wife of the eventual victor, Hillary Clinton. One of my first introductions to presidential politics was inherently gendered. It was nearly thirty more years from my personal interaction with this contest before this tradition ceased to exist. It is these long-held, societal traditions and norms that are supported by the media that continue to contribute to the lack of gender parity in the United States.

If a representative democracy is to be truly equal, its elected members should be an approximate reflection of its population. Yet, nearly 250 years after the founding of the United States of America, this country has yet to elect a woman president. Despite qualified candidates, general progress toward gender parity in parts of society and at other levels of politics, we have, as Secretary Hillary Clinton said, "Failed to crack that highest and hardest glass ceiling" (Nelson,

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2016). The premise of this dissertation sought to understand what I term the Failure Effect and understand how this contributes to the belief held by voters that *she can't win.*

The Failure Effect argues that the coverage generated by the media merges with society's long-standing biases and stereotypes about the role of the American Presidency and expectancies of who a woman is and who she can be. Those expectancies, weighted in society's definition of woman, combine with the theories of cultural cognition and motivated reasoning to further challenge a woman candidate's path to success. Cultural cognition argues that individuals form beliefs that are reflective of visions of ideal society and prioritize values over facts (Kahan, 2012). Apply the basis of cultural cognition the theoretical lens of Kunda's motivated reasoning. Kunda argues that individuals often make decisions based on their desirability of the outcome as opposed to an accurate reflection of the evidence (Kunda, 1990). Applied, motivated reasoning is core to understanding why individuals assume She Can't Win, even when she is a qualified, reasonable candidate. Individuals are motivated to choose the winning candidate, either because they want to be 'right' or because they are concerned about the alternative or opposing candidate winning. Add to that argument the concept of pragmatic bias which Corbett et. al. (2022), say is the process in which voters withhold support for a woman candidate because they believe success is perceived to be difficult or impossible to achieve (Corbett, et. al., 2022).

The overarching research question for this dissertation was: How do news media frame ideas about executive-level women candidates' electability?

This project used a qualitative thematic analysis to answer this sub-research question.

RQ1: What strategic game frames are present in political coverage of the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary in widely read American newspapers?

The qualitative thematic analysis conducted in this research study examined the coverage of the six women candidates who ran for the Democratic Presidential nomination during the

2020 Election Cycle. None of the women candidates were successful. This study examined 552 articles, a 20 percent sample of the identified universe of articles published by *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* between January 1, 2019, and April 15, 2020, when then former Vice-President Joe Biden secured the Democratic nomination for the 2020 Election and the Democratic Primary was effectively over. The articles sampled in this study drew from both news and opinion coverage. As readers generally do not distinguish between news and opinion when consuming information (Miller, 2020), it was important to analyze both styles of articles to capture a complete understanding of how women candidates are framed across the newspapers studied. The results of this study show that gendered framing exists across both opinion and news coverage and that both styles contribute to the negative ramifications posited in The Failure Effect by reinforcing societal norms and questions about electability. The analysis in this study revealed eight primary frames and several sub-frames that I divided into two large categories.

I termed the first category of frames the *Failure Narratives*. These frames are often based in strategic game framing that is gendered, stereotypical, and contributes to notions that a woman candidate cannot win. The first frame identified in this study is The She Can't Win Frame and it contains two sub-frames, The She Can't Beat Him Frame, and The Blame Her Frame. This category of framing demonstrates that the media's application of the concept of She Can't Win to women candidates both raises questions about and reinforces doubts the electability of a woman candidate and that said electability is based on her gender. This category of frames extends the disadvantageous framing past questions about a woman candidate's electability and contextualizes it in terms of a woman's ability to beat her man opponent, or burdens the modernly running woman candidate with the failures of past women candidates. These frames

and applications of electability or blame do not surface in coverage of men candidates which reinforces the argument that this type of framing is inherently gendered.

The Fight Frame identified in this research frames women candidates in ways that are incongruous to their societal roles and expectations (Eagly & Diekman, 2005; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). This application creates dissonance about women candidate's ability to lead through the application of the violent or pugilistic rhetoric identified in The Fight Frame. The application of The Fight Frame to women candidates is newer and more striking in the face of the traditional societal norms women are expected to uphold. The Fight Frame brings attention to the fact that women are traditionally considered to be caregivers and nurturers as opposed to fighters or leaders. The incongruous nature of this frame is disadvantaging to women candidates and causes dissonance about her abilities and place in an executive level election.

The Stereotypical Woman Frame is a reinforcement of gendered traditional standards of the roles of women in society and qualities associated with being a woman. The identification of this frame, and the sheer volume of it uncovered in this study highlights the narrative that the media applies to women candidates and how it perpetuates stereotypical beliefs. This study's findings demonstrate how the media plays a role in perpetuating many of these misogynistic and sexist ideas that persist throughout a society which often believes it has progressed past concerns about gender equity.

The Authenticity Frame disadvantages women candidates because of the intangible attributes it applies to the politician. This finding of this frame reinforces that women are held to a higher standard of performance than their man counterparts and that often the standards women are expected to meet are both impossible to define and impossible to attain. This study found that

The Authenticity Frame is inherently gendered as there is generally no coverage questioning the likability of a man candidate or his authenticity.

The No Problem To See Here Frame identified in this study brings attention to the challenges that exist in post-feminist worldviews that gender parity progress is enough. The No Problem To See Here Frame highlights that there are still serious gapes in gender parity in the political realm and that equity remains elusive. The anti-feminist rhetoric identified in The No Problem To See Here Frame continues to perpetuate in the mainstream media, and that this type of framing contributes to the continued systemic disadvantaging of women candidates by the media.

The second category of frames identified in this study are what I termed *Progress Narratives*. The Progress Narratives include two primary frames, and one sub-frame. The Critical Media Frame appeared in this study when the media put a critical lens on its own coverage and brought attention to the inequitable frames that were produced. The second piece of the Progress Narrative, The She Can Win Frame, appeared in this study as just that – coverage that highlighted the successes, potential and electability of the women candidates. The Inspiring Woman sub-frame in this study uncovered articles that positioned women in positive, issues-based framing that made her appear as a legitimate and electable candidate. These frames identify counter narratives that highlight the ways that the Failure Narratives contribute to systematic barriers for women candidates. Essentially, the Progress Narratives exist because of the Failure Narratives and the relationship between these two types of framing highlights the disadvantageous framing that is pervasive in modern newspaper coverage which was discovered during this research study.

This study uncovered several broad findings that are important to the furtherance of the study of how women politicians are represented in the media and what that might mean for

gender equity in politics. First, The Failure Narratives identified in this study demonstrate that how the media frames women candidates uphold a set of gendered standards of who an American President can be while simultaneously reinforcing to voters that *she* has not and will not meet those masculine standards and therefore cannot be president. The findings of this study demonstrate that the framing of these candidates reinforce the concept of The Failure Narratives and this study found that these frames were pervasive, consistent, and durable across the sample studied. This project demonstrates that narratives in news coverage about the electability of women candidates put women candidates at a disadvantage by creating dissonance between political leadership and women's expected gender roles, by reinforcing traditional associations with feminine characteristics and abilities, by questioning if their position in politics is genuine or appropriate, and by undermining objections or critiques to gendered treatment.

Second, and in contrast to popular belief, this study demonstrates that media coverage of women candidates has not improved over time. The media frames of 2020 are a modern version of the stories of Victoria Woodhull, the 'lunatic,' or Jeannette Rankin, and her admirable feminine traits (Finneman, 2015). Anderson (2017) argues that for instance, Hillary Clinton, dubbed a "presidential pioneer" and "campaign queen" during her two failed runs at the presidency, continued to face a unique political double bind as a first-timer/front-runner. Anderson argues that the continued use of the pioneer frame and the first-timer/front-runner double bind serves as an advantage for men candidates like Former President Barack Obama (the first African American President) or Former President Donald Trump (who many termed an "outsider" for his lack of political experience) (Anderson, 2017). These frames do not advantage women candidates and position them as unqualified and anti-normative.

Finally, this study demonstrates that the way the media frames women political candidates adds more complexity to the perpetual political labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007) women are forced to negotiate. Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that women's paths to executive leadership positions is a complex journey of twists, turns and dead ends, as opposed to an ultimate barrier like a glass ceiling that must be broken. This study demonstrates the media framing of these candidates creates the walls of the metaphorical labyrinth which prohibits women from finding their way through the tunnel to the White House. She Can't win? That is a dead end. The Fight Frame? An unexpected twist and turn. Stereotypical woman frames? A circuitous route to which there is no counter argument. For these high-level political women, there is no proverbial light at the end of the tunnel, just a continuing series of traditional societal norms and disadvantaging gendered media coverage to negotiate through that I argue leads to the belief the core argument of the Failure Effect and the belief that She Can't Win.

Unlike other major, developed democracies like Great Britain, India, Germany, Finland, and many others, the United States has not elected a woman president. The U.S. also falls crucially short in the representation of women in other executive level offices including governorships and members of the U.S. Senate. Critics and supporters of feminism alike point to progress, and arguably, there is some progress in terms of gender parity at certain levels of elected office in the United States. But progress is not parity, and that lack of parity is prevalent on a regular basis in American society. Consider the remarks of former CNN lead anchor Don Lemon in February 2023 about the lone woman Republican Presidential Candidate Nikki Haley of South Carolina. Haley, who has a significant political resume including serving as Governor of the State of South Carolina and serving as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations in the Trump Administration (Burnett, 2023). During a discussion about the ages of former President

Trump (76) and current President Biden (80) and their mental competency, Lemon remarked

about Haley (51), ""Nikki Haley is not in her prime, sorry. A woman is considered to be in her

prime in her 20s, 30s and maybe her 40s. If you Google, 'when is a woman in her prime,' it'll say

20s, 30s, and 40s. ... I'm not saying I agree with that, so I think she has to be careful about saying

that (politicians aren't in their prime)" (Brisco, 2023). Lemon eventually lost his role on CNN

due in part to these remarks. However, if a prominent man can make these comments about a

woman candidate on live national television in the year 2023, we are at a great distance from true

gender parity in this country.

 The argument presented in this dissertation, what I term the Failure Effect and the She

Can't Win phenomenon is a critical finding for political journalists, political campaigns, men and

women candidates, and American voters and should serve as an inflection and educational point.

Journalists, as the Fourth Estate of American Democracy, have a duty to examine the coverage

they produce and adjust their standards and procedures to ensure said coverage is equitable.

Clearly, journalists need more support and education in terms of how to appropriately cover and

frame women candidates. Political campaigns and candidates need to examine how their

messages effect electability, and how they might work to combat the Failure Effect. Voters, as

Corbett et. al., (2021) found, are more likely to cast their ballot for a qualified woman if they

believe she can win, and they need access to information that provides that reassurance.

 I also believe it is prudent to note that despite my experience as journalist, public

relations professional, my academic training, and my very high level of consumption of a wide

variety of political news, I was surprised by the lack of quality of the reporting discovered in this

study. On a personal level, I found the quality of the coverage disappointing. On a professional

level, I found is shocking. Consider the Don Lemon example from CNN. It might be easy to

write that occurrence off as an anomaly, the bad behavior of one person. But that type of rhetoric, belief reinforcement, and general sexism and misogyny was found throughout the large sample of news coverage identified in this study. I posit that these findings reinforce the argument of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon and demonstrate that these effects are real, pervasive, and durable.

6.1   Study Limitations

All research studies have limitations. One primary limitation of this study was that it was limited to an approximately 15-month sample of articles published in four newspapers. Clearly, a massive universe of media exists and the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon may or may not exist in these arenas in the manner uncovered by the current analysis. It is also important to consider that most Americans base their beliefs on more than one source of information, whether journalistic, personal, or otherwise, and that those beliefs, perceptions and ultimately voting behaviors are influenced by more than just newspaper coverage analyzed in this study. Therefore, although a study such as this one can identify the patterns in coverage of these candidates, it cannot draw conclusions about how, specifically, such frames may influence readers' perceptions and beliefs about the candidates and the utility of voting for them. Future research examining the effects of the frames identified here on audiences is needed to determine the extent of their impact.

6.1.1   Inferences Limitations

This dissertation assumes that there is a reason voters do not vote for qualified women candidates when given the opportunity to do so. Dissenters to the argument laid out in this study may point to general progress in gender parity both in society and in politics and perhaps say that time or other factors will resolve these issues. And although on many levels, gender parity has

and continues to improve, this country has not reached equal representation in any sector, whether in corporate boardrooms or at most levels of political office. Consider, after we have a first woman president, this country will still need to elect a second, and then a third, and then a 46th, before we reach anything resembling gender equity at the highest levels of American leadership.

6.2 Future Recommendations

There is much potential for future research based on the premise of the Failure Effect and the She Can't Win phenomenon. One major avenue of exploration would be to apply the general construction of this study to other types of media. What are the effects of social media frames on women candidate's electability? Cable news? There are multiple choices to consider. A second option to improve and expand this concept in the future would be to conduct an experiment to measure and compare the effects between exposures of different types of content and even media type on which candidate a voter chose in an experimental setting. Finally, I believe this study would be interesting to apply to future elections. Consider the impending 2024 primary election and how the media is covering the lone Republican woman in the race, former South Carolina Governor and United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley. What does coverage look like with a single woman candidate? Does her Republican party affiliation change the framing of her coverage? A study such like the one conducted in this dissertation may also produce fruitful results if conducted on a larger scale or over a longer timeframe to gain an even greater depth of the effects of framing on women political candidates.

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