

EXCERPTED FROM

Hillary Clinton's Race
for the White House:
Gender Politics and
the Media on the
Campaign Trail

Regina G. Lawrence
and Melody Rose

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Introduction: Gender, the Media, and Hillary Clinton

Nobody knew how to run a woman as leader of the free world.
—Gail Sheehy, *Vanity Fair*, August 2008

As Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton suspended her campaign for the Democratic nomination in June 2008, bringing her historic effort to a close, *CBS Evening News* anchor Katie Couric received an award in the name of feminist icon Alice Paul. Couric marked the occasion by observing, “However you feel about her politics, I feel that Senator Clinton received some of the most unfair, hostile coverage I’ve ever seen.” From her vantage point within broadcast news, Couric argued that Clinton’s defeat was rooted in sexism (*Fishbowl.com* 2008). Couric followed these remarks with a video commentary posted on the CBS News website, in which she claimed, “Like her or not, one of the great lessons of Hillary Clinton’s campaign is the continued—and accepted—sexism in American life . . . particularly in the media” (Couric 2008).

Couric’s perceptions were shared by a large number of feminists, Clinton supporters, and others. The Women’s Media Center, for example, posted a video “illustrating the pervasive nature of sexism in the media’s coverage” of Clinton’s campaign and an online petition campaign urging television viewers to “call on the national broadcast news outlets (CNN, FNC, MSNBC, and NBC) to stop treating women as a joke; to stop using inherently gendered language as an insult or criticism; and to ensure that women’s voices are present and accounted for in the national political dialogue” (Women’s Media Center 2008). The National Organization for Women (NOW) assembled an online “Media Hall of Shame,” a video collection of “the most outrageous moments of

sexism from mainstream media's coverage of the 2008 elections," accompanied by a "Misogyny Meter" so viewers could rate each one (National Organization for Women 2008).

Most of Couric's colleagues in the mainstream media denied sexist bias in their coverage of Clinton's campaign, with varying degrees of thoughtfulness. CNN political reporter Candy Crowley claimed that while she saw some sexism in cable news commentary, she hadn't seen it in regular broadcast news coverage. Crowley also noted that it was "hard to know if these attacks [by cable commentators] were being made because [Clinton] was a woman or because she was *this* woman or because, for a long time, she was the front-runner" (Seelye and Bosman 2008, emphasis added). Long-time CBS political correspondent Jeff Greenfield argued that, "Throughout this campaign, people's perception of the press has been in line with what they wanted to happen politically. . . . If my person lost, the press did a bad job" (quoted in *ibid.*). Taking his remarks one step further, MSNBC commentator Keith Olbermann (himself a frequent target of charges of bias against Clinton), added Couric to his "worst people in the world" list, calling it outright "nonsense that Senator Clinton was a victim of pronounced sexism."¹ At the same time, some in the media wondered aloud if perceptions of media bias actually helped Clinton rather than hurt her, particularly among women voters. Some even charged the Clinton campaign with drumming up sexism talk in order to win more votes. Senior vice president of NBC News Phil Griffin, in response to questions about media sexism, charged the Clinton campaign with creating the controversy for political ends: "They were trying to rally a certain demographic, and women were behind it," Griffin contended (Seelye and Bosman 2008).

Ultimately, our argument reflects each of these perspectives to some degree. There is little question that as Clinton's chances of winning the nomination became increasingly remote, her campaign began to talk openly about what it saw as media sexism, and that many Clinton supporters (mostly if not exclusively women) were galvanized by what they saw as unfair treatment of Clinton by national reporters and pundits. Unlike Griffin, though, we maintain that these perceptions were not groundless.

We seek to document in this book the variety of ways that gender stereotypes shaded coverage of Clinton's presidential bid and perhaps wounded her campaign. Our findings lend some credence to charges against the media, particularly to the perspective expressed by Allida M. Black, the director of the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers at George Washington University, who believes that the media "compounded the

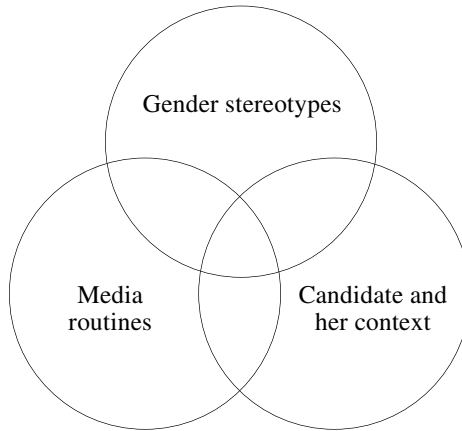
missteps” made by Clinton’s campaign (Seelye and Bosman 2008). But we also illuminate the complexity that Crowley attempts to describe: Much of what Senator Clinton faced from the media was driven by standard news media routines for covering presidential elections, and any effort to indentify “bias” against her must grapple with the fact that those routines have long been applied to other (male) presidential candidates. Media critics must also grapple with Clinton’s own troubled history with the US public and the press.

We also push beyond the question of media treatment of Hillary Clinton’s candidacy to the larger question concerning what her campaign can teach us about women in presidential politics. There have been so very few women on the US presidential stage that Hillary Clinton’s near-win of the Democratic primary poses a fascinating case study for testing the observations and predictions of the women and politics literature. We find many ways in which that literature was confirmed, but also many ways in which it fell short of predicting the twists and turns of the Clinton campaign—in large part because the “small *n*” problem of limited cases to study has left large gaps in what we know about how women presidential candidates might present themselves to and be received by the media and the public. Rather than simply explain how Clinton lost her bid for the presidency, this book is an effort to build a more complete theory of women, media, and strategy in presidential politics—an effort that begins by sketching a fuller picture of the many factors that formed the context for Hillary Clinton’s presidential bid.

Understanding Clinton’s Context: Three Interlocking Variables

We contend that the story of how Senator Clinton nearly won but ultimately lost the Democratic nomination is not a simple story of media bias or sexism (terms that, we argue below, must be thoughtfully defined), though both may have played roles in her defeat. In the end, the story of her campaign must be understood in terms of three interlocking factors: the role of gender in presidential politics (and therefore the conundrum of running for a masculinized office as a woman), contemporary media norms and routines, and the individual candidate and her particular political context (see Figure 1.1). It is at the interstices of this figurative Venn diagram that Hillary Clinton waged her battle for the presidency, and these three dimensions together create the dynamics within which any woman who would be president must compete. Considering these three sets of interlocking factors allows us to appreci-

Figure 1.1 Three Interlocking Variables for Analyzing Female Presidential Candidacies



ate both the unique institutional and personal characteristics of the 2008 nomination contest as well as more enduring forces in presidential politics and US political culture.

Gender Stereotypes and the Presidency

In significant ways, deeply entrenched cultural attitudes that associate the presidency with masculinity (what scholars of women and politics refer to as “androcentrist” attitudes) indelibly and unavoidably shaped the terrain upon which Clinton forged her campaign. Deeply rooted attitudes about women’s inherent attributes collide with long-held beliefs about the US presidency. For instance, a recent study of news coverage of women presidential candidates that was published shortly before the 2008 primaries began reminds us that “the assumptions that women are emotional and men rational is part of conventional stereotyping,” according to which “natural sexual differences” include “the irrationality of women and the rationality of men” (Falk 2008, 55).² Given the public’s presumed preference for a rational president, this stereotype and others act as a powerful barrier to would-be female presidents.

Sex stereotypes are not immutable barriers to political advancement for women. Noting the strong patterns of support for female candidates expressed in public opinion polls, Falk also argues that “actual polling about women and the presidency indicates that should a woman run for the presidency her sex is unlikely to keep her from office, even though

the press tends to cover women as losers” (Falk 2008, 158). Critics of societal and media sexism sometimes fail to note that although she ultimately fell short of gaining her party’s nomination, Hillary Clinton won more votes than any Democratic presidential contender in US history,³ and that she lost the 2008 primary by a narrow margin.

Yet Clinton’s successes do not negate the power of gender in politics. The backdrop of gender stereotypes creates for women politicians a challenging set of “double binds” in which they must simultaneously defend alternating standards of femininity and credibility in leadership (Jamieson 1995). In presidential politics in particular, these binds tighten, leaving women candidates with a narrowed range of options for how to present themselves to the public. We theorize that a fundamental task of the female presidential hopeful is to design a “gender strategy” that can navigate this troubled terrain.

Media Routines

In presidential elections in particular, the media have become the central conduit connecting voters with the candidates, and media coverage is one of three essential factors (along with money and organization) that shapes the fate of presidential campaigns (Aldrich 1992; Patterson 1994). Clinton’s path toward the White House, like that of every other candidate since at least the 1960s, ran through the newsroom, and she found that path cluttered with media scripts and frames that emphasized her negatives at the expense of her positives—just as many other aspirants to the White House have discovered. In many ways, the media operated according to their own established routines for covering presidential elections, thus treating Hillary Clinton just like one of the boys. In other more subtle respects, however, media coverage drew upon gendered stereotypes, and in some ways held Clinton to a different set of standards than her male counterparts. Thus, in running for president, Hillary Clinton experienced some (though as we will show, not all) of the media “biases” observed in research on media coverage of other women candidates in addition to virtually all of the biases experienced by most male presidential candidates—and some additional media bias owing to her own particular communicative style and troubled history with the press. The resulting negative coverage does not necessarily make the media responsible for Clinton’s loss, but it does raise questions about how different coverage might have affected the outcome of a close nomination contest. Clinton’s media treatment thus underscores the critical task faced by all presidential candidates—and, arguably,

female candidates in particular—of effectively shaping the news about their campaigns.

Research shows patterns of media coverage since at least the late 1960s that have undermined many presidential candidacies (not just those of women). The media's routine "horse race" and "character" based coverage, often markedly negative in tone, was in full display in 2008, and because Hillary Clinton entered the race as the presumed front-runner she received the full brunt of this kind of coverage. While confirming these patterns, our study also illustrates unique hurdles for women who enter the presidential election arena. In particular, while scholars have bemoaned the decline of substantive, issue-oriented coverage and the predominance of horse-race coverage of presidential elections, our study shows how this coverage may be especially tough on female candidacies due to the intertwining of negative horse-race narratives with pointedly gendered themes and expectations.

The Candidate and Her Context

By separating out this third set of variables, we call attention to the unique assets and liabilities with which Clinton approached her run for the presidency and the particular institutional and political factors that shaped her campaign. Hillary Clinton's run for the White House was unique—not just in the obvious fact that she was the most viable female presidential candidate in US history, but in the fact that she was a *particular* female candidate with a particular political history who faced a particular political context. We maintain that though any female presidential candidate will contend with media hurdles and the androcentric expectations of the presidency, each individual female candidate will bring a unique constellation of attributes to that interaction. Hillary Clinton was an unusually well-known and controversial political figure by the time she sought the nation's highest office—and a woman who had already occupied the White House in the role of First Lady. To a certain extent, therefore, Clinton's challenges were not just those faced by women politicians in general, but very specific to Clinton's own personal and political history—challenges exacerbated by strategic and tactical missteps Clinton made throughout her campaign. This reality further complicates any effort to pin Clinton's demise on a single factor.

Moreover, Hillary Clinton faced a political context in 2008 that posed unique challenges to her candidacy, the most obvious of which was the talent, historic qualities, and meteoric rise of her chief rival, Senate colleague Barack Obama (D-IL). It is difficult to overstate the

importance of the Obama candidacy for any conclusions we might draw about women and politics from the 2008 election; had he not entered the 2008 contest, it is quite possible that this book would be exploring the reasons for Hillary Clinton's success in gaining her party's nomination—maybe even the presidency. Indeed, at the beginning of the campaign season in 2007, Obama was a long shot, and Hillary Clinton the one to beat. Delving into the many reasons for Obama's success would take us beyond the scope of this book, so we limit our observation to the simple fact of Obama's enormous personal appeal and his team's considerable political skills. Among other things, as one recent account puts it, “the Obama delegate operation ran circles around the Clinton campaign” (Todd and Gawiser 2009, 15). Not only did the Obama camp out-strategize the Clinton team in terms of winning delegates, they proved masterful at exploiting the fundraising possibilities of the Internet (while effectively tapping into old-fashioned large donations as well [see Green 2008a]). While the Clinton team had raised a formidable early war chest, the money was poorly managed. Indeed, “when Super Tuesday came and went, the Clinton campaign was broke and behind. The Obama campaign was just getting started” (Todd and Gawiser 2009, 15).

Another crucial aspect of Hillary Clinton's context in 2008 was the Democratic Party's nomination rules. As with all elections, the rules of the game profoundly shaped the way the race was won—and lost. Rules are so essential, in fact, that we refer readers who want to better understand the dynamics of the 2008 campaign to the Appendix at the back of the book. For our purpose here, we note several rules that mattered mightily in 2008, including the party's decision to punish Florida and Michigan (states in which Clinton polled well) for holding its primaries early; the Democratic primary calendar that, among other things, lumped an unusually large number of contests together on February 5; and, perhaps most significantly, the party's use of proportional representation for awarding delegates. These rules in effect (if not in intent) worked against Clinton—and her campaign often strategized poorly in response to them—leading more than one observer to note that had the party rules been different, Clinton may have been the 2008 Democratic nominee.

These basic political realities loomed so large in 2008 that it was tempting to dismiss the role of gender in the election altogether, as many a pundit did. But we maintain that gender stereotypes and media routines for covering elections must be taken into account along with these contextual factors when analyzing how Clinton ran and how she lost. These variables are woven together in ways that create an analytical

challenge to the scholar—and presented a significant political challenge for Senator Clinton.

Overview of the Book

The book opens by exploring the three fundamental sets of variables presented above: gendered presidential politics, media routines for covering presidential elections, and the unique characteristics and context of candidate Clinton. Chapter 2 delves into the institutional and cultural structuring of presidential politics—the fundamental terrain that Clinton (as well as her predecessors and successors) must navigate. We document how the traditional pathways to the presidency have not been occupied by women, making Hillary Clinton a truly unique contender, and how gender stereotypes and masculinized images of the presidency continue to shape women's paths to power, particularly by shaping the unspoken “qualifications” for the presidency and a deeply rooted “cult of true womanhood” that limits women's public role. Here we lay out a framework for understanding the gender strategy employed by candidate Clinton and the strategies to be employed by future female presidential candidates as well.

Chapter 3 documents the difficulties that virtually all presidential candidates face—male or female—in gaining and maintaining positive media coverage, and also reviews the literature on media coverage of female candidates for the presidency and other offices. Here we identify three media routines for covering presidential elections that can seriously disadvantage many candidates: the focus on “defining moments,” particularly candidate missteps and gaffes; the focus on the “horse race” and the “game” of elections; and the tendency to write stories conforming to a preestablished “script” for each candidate. Each of these, we will argue, proved decisive to Clinton's campaign, operating on their own and in tandem with gender stereotypes to powerfully shape the public image of her campaign. We also consider the particular media disadvantages faced by female candidates.

Chapter 4 explores the unique personal attributes—or perceived attributes—of Hillary Clinton that have indelibly marked her relationship with the public and the press. Not least among these are widely held perceptions of Clinton as inordinately ambitious and duplicitous, attributes that draw from gendered societal attitudes in general and have stuck (fairly or unfairly) to Hillary Clinton particularly strongly. While political ambition is expected and even desired among male presidential

candidates, ambition in women violates our cultural understanding of “true womanhood” defined by selflessness and service on behalf of others. Female ambition, an attribute that Senator Clinton seems to have plenty of, is therefore culturally problematic. We also explore in this chapter two of the “binds” that have shaped and constrained Clinton’s career: the femininity/competence bind that makes it difficult for women to simultaneously seem leader-like and womanly, and the more Clinton-specific bind of independence/dependence, in which Clinton has struggled with perceptions that she is simultaneously too independent and yet, ultimately, too dependent upon others (her husband in particular) in her quest for power. Finally, we examine her troubled relationship with the national press corps, stemming back to her years as First Lady, and her communicative and press management style, which has hindered her ability to reframe her image with the public.

The next section of the book builds upon the framework presented in the first section, presenting empirical evidence gathered from Clinton campaign materials and interviews with staffers and others, as well as from media coverage of the campaign. Chapter 5 closely examines Hillary Clinton’s messaging to reveal a gender strategy that attempted to negotiate the femininity/competence and equality/difference double binds. On its surface, the campaign emphasized a putatively gender-neutral appeal that Senator Clinton was simply the best person for the job. But, based on the key advisers’ internal predictions of a wave of female voter support, the campaign also deployed gender: first in a sometimes coded appeal to female solidarity, and later in the campaign season, running strongly on a contradictory message of masculine toughness. We also analyze in this chapter the experience/change bind specific to candidate Clinton and the political context of 2008.

In Chapter 6, we analyze media coverage of Clinton’s campaign to assess to what degree she was subject to the biases documented in coverage of other presidential campaigns. Here we present empirical data that provide only limited support to charges of pervasive sexist media treatment of Clinton. Indeed, we find that Clinton avoided the most basic kind of media “bias” by achieving parity in the amount of news coverage she received in comparison to her main Democratic opponent; we also find little evidence of overt and systematic sexist treatment of Clinton in mainstream media coverage. But we also find a clear pattern of greater negativity in coverage of Clinton versus two of her main male competitors, Senator Obama and Senator John McCain (R-AZ); just as consequentially, we find relatively favorable treatment of Senator Obama. We conclude that while explicitly sexist bias was not necessari-

ly widespread in traditional news outlets' coverage, outright sexism was more common in the online world, which also served as an echo chamber in which instances of sexist speech reverberated and took on a life of their own.

If Hillary Clinton overcame some of the media obstacles that have stymied other female candidacies, however, there is evidence of more subtle gendering in coverage of her campaign, little of it helpful to her quest. In Chapter 7, we show that standard media routines for covering presidential elections served candidate Clinton particularly poorly. Most notably, Clinton's decision to remain in the fight until the last primary vote was cast operated against media expectations of quick closure to the primary season. When played out against a background expectation that the nomination "should" be decided early in the campaign season (an expectation that Clinton herself had stoked), her long losing fight against Obama became a consuming focus of campaign coverage, playing perfectly into the media's obsession with the "horse race." Moreover, drawing upon established scripts for covering Hillary Clinton as well as upon deeply rooted notions of proper femininity, the media often portrayed her quest as unsettling and unseemly. Overall, this chapter illustrates the subtly gendered playing field upon which Hillary Clinton had to stage her run for the White House—an analysis we extend in the final chapter, where we consider the lessons learned from the Clinton campaign for the future of women in presidential politics.

Theorizing Hillary Clinton

Theorizing about presidential politics has always been somewhat limited by the simple but daunting "small *n*" problem: With so few available cases to analyze (particularly if one focuses on the contemporary presidency), robust theory that can stand up to statistical and logical testing is difficult to build. That problem is significantly compounded for those who study women in presidential politics. With so very few women ever attempting to enter the US presidential stage, the analyst runs the risk of investing particular, idiosyncratic events arising in a few female candidates' experiences with a deeper theoretical meaning than they may really have. Even Susan J. Carroll, veteran scholar of women and politics, doubted at first the scholarly potency of the Clinton race: "After all, she was a single case of a very exceptional woman with an idiosyncratic background as a former first lady" (2009, 2).

The flip side of that problem is to dismiss the theoretical potential

offered by what are necessarily limited and somewhat idiosyncratic events, and to conclude that there is little to learn from an n of one. As we wrote this book, we attempted to avoid the former problem, yet sometimes met with skepticism based in the second. “Hillary Clinton is a bad case for theory-testing,” the argument would go. “Her case is too unique to base any conclusions on; Hillary Clinton is *sui generis*.” We agree, in the sense that treating one female candidate’s experience as evidence of larger trends must be handled very carefully (and we attempt to mitigate that problem by comparing her experience against that of her main male competitors). But we disagree that there is little to learn from Clinton’s quest for the White House, or that she is so unique that no other woman can walk her path. By definition, *any* woman to have reached the milestones of the Clinton candidacy in terms of fame, fundraising, and votes won would have been “too unique.” The problem is not simply a Hillary Clinton problem—it is an indelible fact of US presidential politics, and the next woman to reach and surpass those milestones may well face the same theoretical objections. In the meantime, Clinton’s experiences and those of a handful of other women are the cases that political scientists have to work with.

The small n /unique case problem is intensified in the case of Hillary Clinton because of the quite visceral reactions she seems to evoke. We suspect that for at least some of our skeptics, it was *this* Hillary Clinton problem that made her case seem “too unique”: A woman who has been so reviled for so long by a sector of the public, and treated with milder disdain or bemusement by many more, would seem to be a distorted prism through which to view the general category of women in politics. (The opposite position is passionately argued by some Hillary supporters and women and politics scholars: that her vilification is a quintessential example of what happens to smart, strong women who refuse to fit the cultural mold.) Indeed, along her way toward amassing the formidable political networks and resources that made her historic run for the presidency possible, Hillary Clinton has also made mistakes, and some enemies. To what degree the intense dislike of Hillary Clinton is based on tangible positions she has taken or mistakes she has made, versus personality traits she exhibits (or that are attributed to her), and to what degree it reflects deeper cultural discomfort with ambitious women attaining power, we cannot say. There is perhaps no modern public figure who has evoked more contradictory responses from the public. As analysts, however, we are left with the fact that it is *this* woman who ran for the presidency in 2008 and, in nearly winning it, may have challenged or confirmed existing theories of women and politics.

We therefore argue for the need to build the particularities of individual women's candidacies into a more nuanced theory of women in presidential politics. A woman running for the US presidency, we contend, will face a constellation of challenges (and opportunities) based not only on gender norms and stereotypes and on media routines for covering presidential politics, but also on her own particular set of attributes, assets, and liabilities.

Notes on Language

As with any academic enterprise, this one includes some careful choices regarding language. The first was about "firsts." We became increasingly wary of the uses of the "first female" language so often employed to describe the candidacy of Hillary Rodham Clinton. In point of fact, she isn't the first, but rather the latest in a long effort by women to ascend to the presidency. What is more, as previous research reminds us (Falk 2008; Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005), "first" is often code for "unusual" and thus "not normal." So in this book, when we refer to Clinton's campaign in this regard, we do so fully aware of the problems inherent in the label "first"—problems we try to address with additional adjectives, such as "the first truly viable female candidate for the presidency," or simply by placing the term "first" in quotation marks.

We have thought carefully, too, about how to name our subject. The public and punditry often refer to Hillary Clinton simply by her first name, or in relation to her husband as "Mrs." Clinton. As we explore in later chapters, for Clinton herself there have been strategic advantages and disadvantages to these variations in her name. President Bill Clinton's former press secretary Dee Dee Myers argues that calling her "Hillary" is

breezy and familiar and warms that cool exterior just a touch. It also makes it easier to distinguish her from a former president with the same surname. But at the same time, it does undermine her authority ever so slightly. After all, "Hillary" sounds less formidable than "Senator McCain" or "Governor Romney" or "Mayor Giuliani." (Myers 2008, 46)

For our part, we alternate (for variety's sake) between two primary ways of designating our subject: by her official title (at the time) of "Senator," or simply by her (first and) last name. We also opt at times for the use of "Ms.," because to our contemporary ears, it is a more neutral term than "Mrs.,"; very occasionally, we employ her first name only.

Other key terms that will show up repeatedly in this book also require some contextualization, including “media,” “media bias,” and “sexism.” *Sexism* is defined by “the way in which American society systematically overvalues men and undervalues women” (Falk 2008, 155). For our purposes, gender, as opposed to sex, is “the socially constructed meaning given to biological sex, especially sex difference” (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly 1995, 13); it is not biological, but rather a practice of socialization. Gender is a “coherent set of beliefs about what constitutes masculine or feminine” (Ibid., 17). Sexism would be present in media coverage and public discourse whenever candidates are over- or undervalued in accordance with their sex.

In many instances, media coverage of female candidates is not sexist per se, but rather, reflects a reification of gender stereotypes, which “attribute to men and women different tendencies, characteristics, and areas of competence” (Ibid.). The gendering of media discourse is evident whenever we see media criticism of a candidate’s gender attributes—when a candidate is criticized for behaving in a way that is “unfitting” of her sex, or when she (or he) is criticized for behavior that is insufficiently “masculine” for the presidency. Because our culture expects that female = feminine (and analogously, male = masculine), and femininity implies a certain set of assumptions, gender bias is present when the media draw critical attention to a candidate for having either confirmed gender stereotypes (“Clinton is overly emotional”) or having strayed too far from gender norms (“Clinton is aggressive”). Feminism is the systematic effort to debunk sexist practices and gender assumptions.

When we refer to the “media,” we will be talking primarily about the major news outlets, often called the “mainstream media” (“MSM”), which form the core conduit of campaign communications with the public. This includes the nation’s leading print media, such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, and the leading broadcast and cable television news programs, from NBC’s *Evening News*, with its nightly audience of 7 to 9 million, to CNN’s *Situation Room* or MSNBC’s *Hardball*, which garner a far smaller audience. But we will also dip into the fast-paced world of the “new” media, looking for clues as to how the campaign unfolded in the Wild West of the Internet. We are mindful that in the 2008 campaign, more than any election year before, the new media played a central role,⁴ and we identify some of the key themes and moments from the campaign that took on added significance because of how they reverberated in new media venues; in particular, the much greater range of “acceptable” speech online fueled the fires of

anti-Hillary Clinton vitriol and provided Clinton supporters with a wealth of ugly examples of egregious sexism. The Internet therefore figures in our analysis of the images and discourse surrounding Hillary Clinton, while blogs and other Internet sources also helped to drive the mainstream media's focus on particular "key moments" from the campaign that we analyze closely. But we keep our focus in this book mainly on the MSM because they command the largest audiences, because the campaigns themselves still focus primarily on mainstream media venues (press conferences; television, radio, and newspaper interviews; and talk shows, as well as television ads), and because much online content actually derives from the mainstream media.

Media "bias" is a particularly tricky concept, not least because humans are prone to perceive bias in information they disagree with more than in information they agree with (Vallone, Ross, and Lepper 1985; Dalton, Beck, and Huckfeldt 1998). (Research suggests that CBS's Jeff Greenfield, quoted earlier in this chapter as saying "people's perception of the press has been in line with what they wanted to happen politically," is correct about this general tendency, though one suspects that such claims are also a convenient fig leaf for media coverage that *is* biased). Media bias can also be a moving target because "the media" includes so many individuals and organizations across print, broadcast, cable, and the Internet. Moreover, media bias could take several forms: (1) individual news stories or commentators could exhibit sexism or other forms of prejudice; (2) individual news outlets could exhibit a pervasive pattern of prejudice not evident in other news outlets; or (3) pervasive patterns of sexism or other prejudice could be evident across all (or most) news outlets. The third would of course be the most damaging to female candidates, and most disturbing from the point of view of democratic ideals of equal opportunities for all. It is also the least likely to be found, if one assumes at least some diversity of viewpoints among journalists and media commentators. The second and particularly the first pattern, while not welcome from the perspective of feminists, do not necessarily violate democratic norms. If an individual network or newspaper or columnist or commentator makes sexist remarks on a regular basis, those comments may well be balanced out, even overshadowed, by a larger number of feminist comments. And unless a commentator's remarks are particularly hateful, even sexist comments may be defended on freedom of speech grounds.

Biases of the first and second type are also the patterns most likely to be found through casual observation of the media. In an election marked by the historic entrance of a woman onto the stage of presiden-

tial politics, it is probably inevitable that some sexist or otherwise inappropriate comments would be made by some commentators some of the time. But to qualify as “media bias,” something more pervasive must be demonstrated than occasional tasteless or hurtful remarks. To be persuasive, the charge of media bias must rest on evidence more substantial than anecdote: *pervasive* patterns in a *significant portion* of overall media coverage. While we respect the sensitivities of organizations such as the Women’s Media Center, NOW, and others who led the charge against what they perceived as sexist media bias against Hillary Clinton, we aim to provide a more comprehensive view of the treatment Clinton received from the national media.

A Note on Methodology

The original research presented in this book derives from a number of sources. We collected thousands of pages of documents during the 2008 primary campaign, including news coverage in newspapers, magazines, and television programs; postings in a number of political blogs and other websites; and television and Internet-based advertisements and other campaign communications produced by the Clinton campaign, including her campaign website and regular e-mails to supporters.

Unless otherwise noted, all of the analyses of mainstream news coverage throughout the book are based upon searches of the Nexis news database of coverage appearing in six top news outlets: the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Washington Post*—among the nation’s leading newspapers for political coverage—and the evening news programs of ABC, CBS, and NBC. Focusing primarily on these leading outlets, selected for their regional diversity, audience size, and agenda-setting power with political elites and with other media outlets, allows us to understand how the mainstream media generally covered the campaign (though, as we note below, there were sometimes important differences in coverage across particular news outlets). For the extensive analysis of coverage of Clinton’s campaign featured in Chapters 6 and 7, we constructed a systematic random sample of front-page and prime-time news stories from these six outlets. We also conducted additional news searches on specific moments from the campaign that appear throughout Chapters 5 through 7, in these cases often extending our searches into the realms of cable television and the Internet; specific information about those searches is provided in those chapters.

We also monitored the Internet and blogosphere during the cam-

paigned. The sheer size of the blogosphere makes random sampling impracticable; moreover, we wanted to closely monitor how discourse about Clinton's campaign played out on some of the most heavily trafficked political blogs. So, throughout the campaign, we monitored a set of eleven sites on which discourse about Clinton was likely to be particularly pointed—the conservative blogs we monitored clearly opposed Clinton; the liberal blogs were divided, with some like Daily Kos strongly opposing her, and others like MediaMatters generally supportive; and the feminist blogs were generally very supportive—thereby putting our fingers in some sense on the pulse of heated opinions throughout Clinton's campaign. Given the hyperlinked nature of the Internet, monitoring these blogs (and the online versions of major news organizations such as the *New York Times*) quickly led us to additional online material, and we occasionally include examples from these additional sources throughout the book. Finally, in order to assess how Clinton's campaign presented itself to its supporters and potential supporters, we took cataloged screen shots of the home page www.hillaryclinton.com from the middle of December through Clinton's suspension speech in early June.⁵ We coded the content in terms of the issues mentioned, and looked for changes in the content of the site over time. We describe in further detail in the appropriate chapters the specific methods used to analyze these various sources.

We also wanted to capture a sense of the campaign as it unfolded in real time, looking in particular for key turning points and defining moments for Clinton and her main competitors. We therefore kept voluminous notes on happenings in the campaign, beginning in the fall of 2007 and carrying through the Democratic convention in August 2008. We then matched our notes against the weekly reports produced by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (journalism.org), which are based upon extensive content analysis of the week's news across a large number of news organizations, and the more occasional reports by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (pewresearch.org). These reports allowed us to verify whether our experiential sense of "key moments" in the campaign was born out by objective data on the main topics and themes of news coverage each week. The key moments that arose from this analysis, highlighted in each chapter that follows, serve as a focal point for our qualitative analysis of the campaign.

Finally, we did our best to check our hypotheses about the strategic choices made by the Clinton campaign against the testimony of her campaign staff and others from the world of politics. In many cases personal interviews were not possible, but fortunately, several in-depth profiles of

her campaign, based on interviews with her key staff and advisers, were published in the weeks leading up to and following her exit from the race; we cite from these pieces extensively. We also conducted some personal interviews that contributed significantly to our understanding of this campaign; these interview data are referenced along with all other research materials in the chapters that follow.

The Legacy of the Clinton Campaign and the Future Female Presidency

To summarize, the core argument developed in this book is that Hillary Clinton's bid for the presidency embodied the many challenges that face virtually all would-be female presidents—the troubled landscape of gendered stereotypes in media coverage and political culture, along with the competing pulls of various gendered double binds—as well as challenges faced by virtually all presidential candidates stemming from standard media routines for covering presidential elections. In addition, she faced challenges uniquely her own, stemming from, among other things, her own public history, her long and troubled relationship with the press, and the unique candidacy of Barack Obama.⁶ This tangled web of variables has made it difficult for many observers to isolate the impact of sexism versus other factors on Clinton's failed nomination campaign, and has made public discussion of her campaign fraught with confusion and, in some cases, high emotion.

This book to some degree challenges assumptions of the women and politics literature. Women and politics scholars have tended to agree with Falk that

given that women candidates are rare, that society tends to look through a gendered lens, and that news norms put a premium on novelty, it is very likely that when a reporter or assignment editor approaches a race in which there is a woman candidate . . . [they] are likely to view any woman candidate *qua woman*. (2008, 74, emphasis added)

While this is arguably true, it is also likely that experienced national reporters would subject a female presidential hopeful (particularly one as formidable as Clinton) to the same coverage they bring to all candidates—coverage focused on the candidates' standing in the polls, coverage focused on the candidates' gaffes and missteps and personalities more than their policy proposals, coverage decisively framed by notions of which candidates are likely to win and lose. We find that in many

respects, Clinton was covered not just “qua woman” but also “qua *front-runner*”—an advantage she held going in to the election that rather quickly became a disadvantage in terms of the tone of her coverage, particularly as she performed less well in many early primaries than it was assumed she would. Moreover, media coverage approached Clinton very much as a *particular* woman, an individual with a well-established (and not always positive) public image. Indeed, Hillary Clinton’s highly unusual combination of professional bona fides with a long and controversial history in the public eye made her quite unlike the women candidates imagined in much of the women and politics literature, and subjected her to her own unique double binds.

Moreover, the women and politics literature may not fully account for Hillary Clinton’s specific case because it did not contemplate the implications of a female “first” who was also a former First Lady, and because it could not have imagined that the first woman to come near the presidency would have to battle against the most viable and talented African American candidate in history. The consequence of these contextual features was great, not just for Clinton’s fortunes, but for theorizing about women and politics. For example, Clinton’s decision to forgo the explicit mantle of running as a woman was in part as a response to Barack Obama’s sudden surge early in the election season, on the assumption that race would trump gender in the public imagination (Green 2008a). Our analysis suggests that this intuition (if not necessarily the response) was correct, for the media treated issues of race and gender at times very differently, in ways that fundamentally disadvantaged Clinton and, it must be said, advantaged Senator Obama.

Ultimately, however, the lessons learned here are not necessarily “bad” ones for students of women and politics. From Hillary Clinton’s run for the White House, we learn a great deal about the possibilities as well as the constraints on women’s political advancement. As Clinton biographer Gail Collins (2008d) wrote the day after Clinton suspended her campaign,

Over the past months, Clinton has seemed haunted by the image of the “nice girl” who gives up the fight because she’s afraid the boys will be angry if they don’t get their way. She told people she would never, ever say: “I’m the girl, I give up.” She would never let her daughter, or anybody else’s daughter, think that she quit because things got too tough.

And she never did. Nobody is ever again going to question whether it’s possible for a woman to go toe-to-toe with the toughest male candidate in a race for president of the United States. Or whether a woman could be strong enough to serve as commander in chief.

Her campaign didn't resolve whether a woman who seems tough enough to run the military can also seem likable enough to get elected. But she helped pave the way. . . . By the end of those 54 primaries and caucuses, Hillary had made a woman running for president seem normal.

Notes

1. See "Olberman Names Katie Couric as 'Worst Person in the World,'" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWmizWPFqc (viewed June 13, 2009).

2. We are mindful that the lingering vestiges of these deeply rooted attitudes do not monopolize contemporary US political culture. Rather, women strive for professional and political gains on terrain shaped by both vestigial sexism and the contemporary gains of feminism. Falk contends that despite many changes in politics and culture over the past 130 years, "for the most part . . . our traditional assumptions about women and men are still very much a part of our culture" (2008, 55). However, she also contends that there may be "a movement toward a more complex cognitive structure of gender roles, in which women in traditionally men's fields are associated with different stereotypes. More androgynous archetypes may be developing in the culture, which ultimately could help women appear more competent in the political sphere" (Ibid., 73). In addition to expecting that the media and the public will rely upon and reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, we should also look for signs of these "more complex cognitive structures."

3. As Clinton famously claimed in her concession speech in June of 2008, her candidacy had put "18 million cracks in the highest, hardest glass ceiling." Her claim of winning that number of votes, disputed by the Obama camp, rests on the full inclusion of her votes in Florida, where Obama had not campaigned, and Michigan, where Obama was not even on the ballot.

4. There is little doubt that new media are one of the key ways that young voters in particular interacted with this election, both in how they accessed mainstream media content such as candidate speeches and interviews, and in how they accessed the campaigns via social networking sites like Facebook (see for example Pew Research Center for the People and the Press 2008a; Stelter 2008a).

5. The Clinton website has since been cleansed of its campaign content, and so throughout the book, where we cite a specific Clinton website link, we note the date we accessed it.

6. No book can do everything, however, and this one is no exception. This is not, for example, an in-depth examination of the prospects for Republican versus Democratic women who may seek the presidency. Though there may be important lessons in the Clinton campaign for the role of partisanship in female presidential bids, that effort is beyond our scope, and we assume that future studies will look directly at the role party played in this process.