

Women in Politics

An Evaluation of Electability and Influence of the Media

Hannah Schiller

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Stephen R. Bowers, Ph.D.  
Thesis Chair

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Stephen M. Parke, J.D.  
Committee Member

---

Lynnda S. Beavers, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

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Brenda Ayres, Ph.D.  
Honors Director

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Date

### Abstract

This paper explores the electability of women to higher office. It evaluates voter probability through studies that assess the effect of media attention to a candidate's appearance. Furthermore, the paper studies the media coverage of Governor Sarah Palin's campaign for Vice President. Finally, it includes an evaluation of Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's successful campaign for Prime Minister. Based on the case studies of voter probability, Sarah Palin and Margaret Thatcher, women do face many obstacles to political office, yet women are fully capable of overcoming these obstacles and we will see a woman leader in an executive position on a national level in the United States.

### Women in Politics

The culture of today, especially in the United States, is saturated with the idea of equality. Equality has been fought and died for yet it is still a cause that raises great debate even today. The struggle for equality has taken many different forms. As a nation we have seen the banner for equality over many causes. Battles for equality of race and gender have marked our history. This quest for equality has forever changed the landscape of how we view people in every aspect of life. For example, the women's liberation movement has significantly changed how government, business, and the culture as a whole views women. While the movement has come a long way from simple voter rights, there is much discussion about the equality of women in politics. One question in particular that is of current importance is the question of: "Are women electable to higher office?" While there are no longer legal barriers for women to run for office, a woman has not yet attained a high office such as President or Vice President of the United States. There have been many studies to understand why women have not yet achieved this level. Additionally, understanding what affects electability such as media, exploring current studies of voter probability and studying women who have campaigned for executive offices will help to answer this question of electability.

How women are perceived by the media as well as the general public has a huge effect on a woman's political success. The way the media frames a female candidate is different and it is worth investigating how this affects a woman's campaign. In a sense, it seems their capabilities are more heavily questioned when they are trying to attain a higher office. Specific traits are often presented and perceived as male or female. The way in which the media focuses on and presents these traits to voters affects the overall

image of a candidate. The personal lives of candidate, how they dress, and their families are often a topic discussed by the media. Is there a bias in the media to evaluate women on these topics more heavily than men candidates? Does this focus damage a candidate's campaign? Because women have never received the nomination for President of the United States, potential voter bias is hard to evaluate at this level using election outcome data. Survey data, however, can be used to evaluate the probable support of a woman for higher office. Why is it that the executive roles have not been attained by women? How does media presentation affect a woman's campaign and overall image?

A case study of Sarah Palin and her political career would further demonstrate the power that the media have in shaping how a woman is viewed. As a young woman politician, she ran a successful campaign for governor of Alaska. Her time serving in that office is generally viewed with positivity and looked to as a guide for others.<sup>1</sup> Once she entered the national stage and began her campaign for Vice President, however, her political career was greatly affected. From her first announcement for candidacy, the media focused heavily on her character, family, style, and political stance. Suddenly, the Vice Presidential race was heavily watched and greatly contested. The power of the media today can change the public's view of a person, and it is obvious it greatly affected Palin's race. Was it simply her conservative leanings and outspoken personality that allowed for so much scrutiny? Or are all women who enter the public's eye at an executive level to expect the same treatment?

A successful career to compare to Sarah Palin's career would be that of Margaret Thatcher. While Thatcher ran at a different time and in a different country, she defied the

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1. Fred Barnes, "The Most Popular Governor: Alaska's Sarah Palin is the GOP's Newest Star," *The Weekly Standard* 12, no. 41 (July 2007), accessed March 28, 2014, [www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/013/851orcjq.asp](http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/013/851orcjq.asp).

norm by entering a higher office than ever attained by women of England. She broke the “glass ceiling” of European politics as the first woman to lead the United Kingdom. Her campaign was successful and is therefore worth studying. She led the country for several years but she was also a polarizing personality. Studying how she presented herself to the media and the public can reveal ways in which a woman candidate can successfully attain higher office. Why was Thatcher successful in her campaign? What about her was electable and how did the media affect her campaign? While a few women such as Margaret Thatcher have achieved an executive office, it is still obvious that she is an exception to the norm.

Have we reached true equality as a nation? Is there still a “glass ceiling” in politics today? Are women viewed the same as men in terms of fulfilling an executive position? Are women electable for higher office? A hypothesis can be achieved through studying voter probability as well as studying what affects candidate perception and finally through studying the campaigns of women who have contended for higher office. These questions have yet to be answered; with the number of women in politics on the rise, a woman may yet achieve the office of President or Vice President.

Currently in the United States Senate, there are 20 female senators (16 Democrats, 4 Republicans – 20% of 100 seats). In the House of Representatives, there are 79 female representatives (60 Democrats, 19 Republicans – 18.2% of 435 seats).<sup>2</sup> While that might seem like a small percentage, the numbers of women congressional leaders has grown

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2. “Facts,” Eagleton Institute of Politics, accessed January 30, 2014, [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/Congress-Current.php](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/Congress-Current.php).

drastically.<sup>3</sup> In 1940 Margaret Chase Smith was the only women in Congress.<sup>4</sup> She was the first woman to attain a seat in the House and the Senate.<sup>5</sup> For most of her time as Senator, she was the only woman among ninety-five men.<sup>6</sup>

Just as Margaret Thatcher achieved higher office in Europe, a study of countries around the world demonstrates that many women have held executive roles in government. Angela Merkel was elected chancellor in Germany in 2005 as well in 2009. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first woman president in Africa. Helen Clark of New Zealand was one of the world's longest-serving elected female executives. While female representatives have slowly gained representation in the United States Congress, there is yet to be a woman Vice President or President of the United States. Both candidates who have come close, Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, initially had strong campaigns. Yet both campaigns ended with neither woman in office.

According to James Havel, a presidential historian, there have been more than one hundred women who have run for President.<sup>7</sup> Granted, most of them had no legislative experience, many did not have formal campaigns, and even fewer received press coverage.<sup>8</sup> In the 1800s, two women ran for the presidency under the Equal Rights Party.<sup>9</sup> These women ran over a hundred years ago and twenty years apart from each other.

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3. Erica Falk, *Women for President: Media Bias in Eight Campaigns* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2008), 8.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid. 7.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

Victoria Woodhull ran in 1872.<sup>10</sup> She was the first women stockbroker on Wall Street and also owned her own newspaper.<sup>11</sup> Belva Lockwood, who ran in 1884, was the second woman to run for President.<sup>12</sup> Lockwood, an attorney, was also the first woman to practice law in the Supreme Court.<sup>13</sup> She managed her own public school and had drafted a piece of legislation that was passed by Congress.<sup>14</sup>

A name that is more familiar is that of Margaret Chase Smith. Smith was the first women to seek the presidency running under the Republican Party.<sup>15</sup> After serving nine years in House of Representatives and twenty-four years in the Senate, Smith ran in 1964.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, she received twenty-seven delegates but placed third in the popular vote at the convention.<sup>17</sup> The Democrat Party followed suit when Shirley Chisholm ran for the nomination. Chisholm had been a school supervisor in New York, served two years as a New York State legislator, and served two terms in the House of Representatives.<sup>18</sup> In 1988 Lenora Fulani was nominated by the New Alliance Party.<sup>19</sup> Fulani was the first women to be on the ballot in all fifty states and the District of

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10. Falk, *Women for President: Media Bias in Eight Campaigns*, 7.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid. 8.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.



Columbia.<sup>20</sup> A psychologist, Fulani had no legislative experience.<sup>21</sup> Impressively, a third party candidate to receive the closest amount of votes to Fulani was the nominee from the Libertarian Party, Ron Paul.<sup>22</sup>

Another prominent figure in women's political history was Elizabeth Dole. Dole never officially announced her candidacy, but she did campaign for the nomination.<sup>23</sup> Dole was an executive for the Red Cross and served as Secretary of Transportation as well as Secretary of Labor in two different presidential cabinets.<sup>24</sup> The most recent woman to run before Hilary Clinton was Carol Moseley Braun of Chicago.<sup>25</sup> Braun had served as the ambassador to New Zealand during President Clinton's administration, served one term as a U.S. Senator, served two years in the Illinois House of Representatives, and was an assistant U.S. attorney.<sup>26</sup> In 2003 she announced her candidacy to run but dropped from the race before the first primary was held.<sup>27</sup>

Media is one of the main outlets by which voters gather information about a candidate. The media attributes heavily to the image of a candidate by what issues and topics they choose to present. A frequent focus, or frame, used by media in terms of women candidates is the idea of a woman candidate being a novelty. Women who run

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20. Falk, *Women for President: Media Bias in Eight Campaigns*, 8.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.* 11.

23. *Ibid.* 9.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

are often labeled “the first” or “the only,” which seems to create and add hype around a woman’s campaign as opposed to a man’s. The *New York Times* published an article about her stating, “A small army of business women angry that one of their own [Elizabeth Dole] – and the first to seek the presidency – was not faring better in a field of men.”<sup>28</sup> The average voter who does not know the history of campaigns may be deceived in thinking a candidate such as Elizabeth Dole is the first women to run for the presidency. This constant framing and reframing of women as a novelty in politics may create an image that is simply not attainable. The pressure to fit everyone’s standard as the ideal female candidate seems to affect women’s campaigns negatively. Author of the book *Big Girls Don’t Cry: the Election that Changed Everything for American Women*, Rebecca Traister, discussed this idea in an interview with U.S. News.<sup>29</sup> Traister was asked, “Are American women waiting for a perfect female candidate?” Her response seems to be completely accurate:

There are a couple of different questions there. The first is: have we set the bar for perfection for a hypothetical female candidate too high? Yes. That's one of the big problems we have to get over. Then there's the identification part, which is the personalization of whoever this mystical woman is going to be—that we're going to be able to cheer her and have a full-hearted connection to her and see ourselves in her. That's something that we really had to come to grips with when Hillary ran. In order to get near that power, she had to change in a lot of ways. But then she ran this unbelievable campaign and many women still didn't support her at the end. But it brought us back down to earth a bit. Palin is doing the same thing by making us realize that actually, if we are ever to imagine getting equal participation, we're going to not just be imagining these perfect figures. We're going to be seeing women in all shapes and sizes, with all kinds of politics. And some of them are going to be smart, and some of them aren't going to be; and some are going to be pure, and some are going to be corrupt. We're going to have

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28. Falk, *Women for President: Media Bias in Eight Campaigns*, 36.

29. Danielle Kurtzleben, “Sarah Palin, Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, and Women in Politics,” *U.S. News & World Report*, (September 2010): 1, accessed January 27, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/807401208?accountid=12085>.

to get used to the fact that women are no more perfect at this than the men who have been doing this for the past couple centuries.<sup>30</sup>

Traister brings to light the fundamental conclusion that women are evaluated differently from men when they run for office. It can be argued that men and women are different, and therefore they should be evaluated differently. Yet the job of a representative does not change based on gender. A politician is a representative of the people and, therefore, candidates should be judged on their ability to lead.

In 2010 the organizations She Should Run, Women's Media Center, and Political Parity partnered together to create the Name It Change it Project. Their goal is to end "sexist and misogynistic coverage" of women by the press.<sup>31</sup> The project calls journalists and bloggers alike to apply their coverage with the reversibility test.<sup>32</sup> This test says that language should be universal when describing women and men. Gloria Steinem, the co-founder of Women's Media Center, stated, "The most workable definition of equality for journalists is reversibility. Don't mention her young children unless you would also mention his, or describe her clothes unless you would describe his..."<sup>33</sup>

In March 2013, Lake Research Partners along with Chesapeake Bay Consulting created and administered a survey to test the impact of media's coverage of appearance on women candidates.<sup>34</sup> The survey included 1500 registered and likely voters.<sup>35</sup> There

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30. Kurtzleben, "Sarah Palin, Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, and Women in Politics," 1.

31. "About Name It. Change It," Name It. Change It, accessed January 27, 2014, <http://www.nameitchangeit.org/pages/about>.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. "An Examination of the Impact of Media Coverage of Women Candidates' Appearance," Name It. Change It, accessed January 27, 2014, [http://wmc.3cdn.net/0d817481d880a7de0a\\_60m6b9yah.pdf](http://wmc.3cdn.net/0d817481d880a7de0a_60m6b9yah.pdf).

was also an oversample of 100 young women voters age 18-35 included.<sup>36</sup> The sample was an online panel and the data were weighted slightly by age, education, race, region and party identification to reflect the actual population.<sup>37</sup> Researchers reported a margin of error of +/- 2.5 and +/- 9.8 for the 100 oversample.<sup>38</sup>

For the survey, a hypothetical congressional election between a male and a female candidate was created. Participants read a short profile of both candidates as well as heard a series of news stories about each. The samples were divided into four groups; the control group heard a description of the female candidate that did not include a description of her appearance. The second group heard a neutral description of her appearance, the third a positive and the last group a negative description. The descriptions were as follows:

Neutral description: “Smith dressed in a brown blouse, black skirt, and modest pumps with a short heel....”

Positive description: “In person, Smith is fit and attractive and looks even younger than her age. At the press conference, smartly turned out in a ruffled jacket, pencil skirt and fashionable high heels....”

Negative description: “Smith unfortunately sported a heavy layer of foundation and powder that settled into her forehead lines, creating an unflattering look for an otherwise pretty woman, along with her famous fake tacky nails.”<sup>39</sup>

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35. “An Examination of the Impact of Media Coverage of Women Candidates’ Appearance,” Name It. Change It.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

The findings revealed that any comment or description of the candidate's appearance affected the results.<sup>40</sup> The voters who are most responsive to the appearance descriptions are independent voters.<sup>41</sup> The researches broke down the results to reflect how men, women and young women voted. When there was no mention of appearance, the female candidate led by 2 points among male participants, the vote was split 50-50 with women participants, and the female candidate led by 9 among young women.<sup>42</sup> The second group read a neutral description of the female candidate's appearance. Males in this second group preferred the male candidate 58 to 38.<sup>43</sup> Women preferred the female candidate 53 to 44 but young women preferred the male 49 to 47.<sup>44</sup> When a positive description was included in the description, all gender groups favored the male candidate. Male participants favored the male 58 to 38,<sup>45</sup> women favored the male by 1 point, 49 to 48 and young women preferred the male candidate 48 to 46.<sup>46</sup> In the final group, a negative description of the female's appearance was included. Men favored the male 56 to 40 as well as women 54 to 44. Young women, however, preferred the female 56 to 44.<sup>47</sup>

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40. "An Examination of the Impact of Media Coverage of Women Candidates' Appearance," Name It. Change It.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

There are several things worth noting about these results. First, the female candidate only led among male participants when there was no description of her appearance. Second, a positive description did not aid the female candidate. Men, women and young women who read a positive description still preferred the male candidate. This demonstrates that even when the media comments positively on appearance the description still affects the overall decision of the reader.

The research also included a second segment, which surveyed how preference changed when these gender groups read a response about the media's physical descriptions. Participants read a response by the female candidate as well as Name It. Change It. The comments were as follows:

Female candidate's response: "What I wear or how I choose to wear my hair or nails has no place in the media coverage of my race. However, apparently the media and others have decided that what women wear, how they wear it, and how they decide to do their hair deserves coverage in their news stories rather than our ideas, experiences and vision. My appearance is not news and does not deserve to be covered. Rarely do they cover men in this fashion and by doing so they depict women as less serious and having less to offer voters. I have much to offer my constituents and none of it has to do with my appearance or my fashion choices. This kind of coverage damages our political debate and our democracy and ultimately it hurts how women and young girls see themselves in our society."<sup>48</sup>

Name It. Change It response: "Across American a broad array of organizations and leaders, including The Media Accountability Project critiqued the media coverage made about Jane Smith in her race for elected office. Our prominent leader of The Media Accountability Project said "Often, female candidates are judged based on their appearance, wardrobe, and personality, rather than their qualification." We must end this type of coverage for women candidates. It may not seem like it is harmful, but this media coverage diminishes women's value and the valid views they bring to the table when the coverage focuses on what she wears, rather than what she thinks."<sup>49</sup>

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48. "An Examination of the Impact of Media Coverage of Women Candidates' Appearance," Name It. Change It.

49. Ibid.

After voters read these responses from the female candidate and from Name It. Change It. women, particularly young women, preferred the female candidate. Men still preferred the male candidate but the margin decreased drastically 50 to 46.<sup>50</sup> Women preferred the female 58 to 40, and young women preferred the female 63 to 34.<sup>51</sup>

There are many factors that affect voter trends. Everything from party affiliation, to popularity of a candidate can affect how an individual comes to a conclusion about how he or she will vote. What this study demonstrates, however, is that the discussion by the media of a woman's appearance negatively affects her campaign. Even when a woman's appearance is presented in the affirmative, the coverage affects the result negatively. It is this type of coverage that the groups who created this survey, seek to remove from media.

The most recent woman leader to take the political stage is Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska. When chosen as John McCain's running mate, she became the first Republican female nominee for Vice President. While she did not win the election, she drew attention to the idea of women reaching an executive office. Her strong conservative beliefs and policies stood in contrast with most female political leaders "who overwhelmingly and increasingly hail from the Democratic Party in both state and national politics."<sup>52</sup> Aside from her beliefs, presentation and personality there is no disagreeing with her impact on politics. While women such as Hillary Clinton represent

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50. "An Examination of the Impact of Media Coverage of Women Candidates' Appearance," Name It. Change It.

51. Ibid.

52. M.F. Burn, "The Politics of Palin: Gender in the 2008 Presidential Election," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, University of Minnesota, Order No. 3379347 (2009): 194-n/a, accessed January 29, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304938949?accountid=12085>. (304938949).

the women of the feminist era, Palin represents the post-feminist era for women.<sup>53</sup> Palin grew up reaping the benefits of what the women pioneers had fought for during the feminist movement. This generation has come of age knowing that they could succeed in professional markets. These women have been told they could go to college and be a lawyer, a doctor, or a politician if they so desired.

In terms of women and work, Palin represents more than just one political party or ideology. Women of today, both liberal and conservative, think differently about women and work than the women of past generations. Many conservative women voters have full time jobs and choose not to have children, while some liberal women choose to stay home and raise families. Palin, as a governor as well as a Vice President nominee, represented many conservative and liberal women simultaneously. “Is it Right-wing to go back to work two days after having a baby, as she did while governor? Is it ‘feminist’ to support one’s unwed daughter’s decision to have her baby? Is it liberal or conservative for women to play sports or drive snowmobiles?”<sup>54</sup> Palin not only raises questions of gender in politics but also of party and what it looks like to be a conservative female candidate.

In the book *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling, A Global Comparison of Women’s Campaigns for Executive Office*, Gina Serignese Woodall, Kim L. Fridkin, and Jill Carle examine the effects of media on Sarah Palin’s race for Vice President. Sarah Palin needed to assert herself as a competent leader. While a candidate tries to create an image that will appeal to voters, the media plays an important role in how a candidate is

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53. A. Applebaum, “The New Superwoman of American Politics: Whether or Not Sarah Palin Wins, Politics Will Never be the same for US Women,” *The Sunday Telegraph* (September 2008), accessed: January 28, 2014. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/309560685?accountid=12085>.

54. Ibid.



presented and have an effect on voters opinions. The study in this book examined how the media “framed her bid for president.”<sup>55</sup> Woodall and her fellow researchers explore the idea that Palin was framed as a novelty. Being a female, vice-presidential candidate added to how she was covered by the media. This “first woman” frame, the authors suggest, may have been the reason for the intense focus by the media on her appearance, family and role as a mother.<sup>56</sup>

The Woodall study began with using Lexis Nexis, a computer-assisted legal research service<sup>57</sup>, to find and gather every news transcript that aired on the major news networks of NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX and CNN that covered Sarah Palin’s campaign.<sup>58</sup> According to their data, the sample of news transcripts included 131 news articles, averaging about 19 paragraphs each.<sup>59</sup> The paragraphs were treated as the unit of analysis within the transcript.<sup>60</sup> The sampling began once John McCain announced Palin as his running mate continuing through Election Day. Television news transcripts were used as opposed to the internet or newspapers because the majority of voters still gather their news from TV.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, the articles were coded by the researchers based on the

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55. Rainbow Murray, ed., *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 93.

56. Ibid.

57. LexisNexis, “About LexisNexis,” accessed March 27, 2014, [www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/about-us/about-us.page](http://www.lexisnexis.com/en-us/about-us/about-us.page).

58. Murray, *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, 93.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid. 94.

61. Murray, *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, 94.

number of times an issue or trait was mentioned as well as the tone of the content.<sup>62</sup> The researchers covered “the quantity of Palin’s coverage, the attention devoted to her family and her appearance, as well as specific issues and traits.”<sup>63</sup>

First, the Woodall study examined the media’s attention to personality traits. The researchers based what qualified as female traits on stereotyping literature.<sup>64</sup> The following traits were classified as female: “honesty, authenticity, family-oriented, religious, honorable, inexperienced, unintelligent, unknowledgeable, weak leader, pretty, victim, nagger, incapable, overly ambitious, maternal, opinionated, sassy and incompetent.”<sup>65</sup> The male traits were: “ambitious, articulate, assertive, dishonest, untrustworthy, experienced, intelligent, strong leader, funny, tough, strong, and fighter.”<sup>66</sup> The researchers found, as expected, that the media, when discussing Sarah Palin, were more likely to focus on female traits as opposed to male traits. Sixty-four percent of trait coverage were focused on female traits, while only 36 percent were male focused.<sup>67</sup> During the campaign 13 percent of the stories described Palin as “family-oriented” or “maternal,” which was three times as often as when she was referred to as aggressive (4%).<sup>68</sup> Even when female candidates concentrate on masculine traits in their own campaign ads and literature, the news media can change the image of female

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62. Ibid.

63. Ibid. 94-95.

64. Ibid. 95.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid. 96.

68. Murray, *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, 106.

candidate by focusing on female traits.<sup>69</sup> This affects the overall frame that is presented to potential voters.

Another interesting aspect of the Woodall study was the examination of the novelty of Palin's campaign. Comparative to her opponent Joe Biden, Palin received a large amount of press attention after the announcement of her candidacy. According to the "Campaign Coverage Index" put together by the PEW Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, 12 percent of all news stories focused on Sarah Palin's being named the vice presidential candidate, while only 6 percent reported about Joe Biden.<sup>70</sup> Over the entire campaign season, coverage of Palin always outpaced coverage of Biden.<sup>71</sup> There were even several weeks when she received more coverage than Senator McCain and Senator Obama.<sup>72</sup> Philo C. Washburn made a similar conclusion in his study titled *Media Coverage of Women in Politics: The Curious Case of Sarah Palin*. After evaluating *Newsweek* and *Time* magazines, Washburn concludes that, "Data show that Palin received considerably more attention than did Biden."<sup>73</sup>

While fashion is a legitimate topic and industry, the coverage of a man's clothing choices and his appearance are far less frequent than that of women. In the Woodall study the researchers counted the amount of times Palin's appearance was mentioned. This

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69. Justin S. Vaughn and Lilly J. Goren, *Women and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics* (Lexington, KY: University Press of KY, 2013), 28.

70. Murray, *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, 99.

71. Ibid. 100.

72. Ibid.

73. P.C. Wasburn and M.H. Wasburn, "Media Coverage of Women in Politics: The Curious Case of Sarah Palin," *Media, Culture & Society* 33, no.7 (2011): 1027-1041, accessed January 25, 2014, doi: 10.1177/0163443711415744, 1031.

included her physical features, her hairstyle, her clothing and even her glasses.<sup>74</sup> Eighteen percent of the news stories referenced her appearance in some way.<sup>75</sup> Palin's appearance was discussed more than her policy views regarding the environment (2%), energy (10%), education (1%), healthcare (7%), the bank bailout (2%), taxes (8%) or government spending (8%).<sup>76</sup> According to further research, "subjects who view Governor Palin as attractive were far less likely to view her as intelligent and competent for the job..."<sup>77</sup> Based on the material in the Washburn study, coverage of Palin was heavily focused on trivial topics such as her childhood, family, physical appearance and personality.<sup>78</sup> *Newsweek* specifically, devoted 58.2% of its coverage of Palin to the trivial topics listed above; in contrast only 11.9% was devoted to her qualifications, experience, the war in Iraq, or the state of the economy.<sup>79</sup> What these studies demonstrate is that the increased focus by the media on appearance, can take away focus from important issues. The evidence suggests that such coverage by the media on trivial topics can damage a candidate's campaign.<sup>80</sup>

A topic often discussed in terms of women politics is a woman's ability to be a good mother as well as run an executive office. In the media, a man's family is often

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74. Murray, *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, 101.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid. 102.

78. Washburn, "Media Coverage of Women in Politics: The Curious Case of Sarah Palin," 1027-1041.

79. Ibid.

80. Washburn, "Media Coverage of Women in Politics: The Curious Case of Sarah Palin," 1038.

depicted as a source of support for a male candidate while a woman's family is seen as an additional responsibility.<sup>81</sup> Palin is a mother of five and at the time of her campaign; she had a small baby with Down's syndrome. Later in the campaign, it was revealed that her eldest daughter was pregnant out-of-wedlock. It is interesting to note that the McCain-Palin campaign made Palin's motherhood a focal point of her narrative.<sup>82</sup> Like other women political leaders before her, Palin attributed her start in politics to concern for her children and getting involved in her children's school PTA.<sup>83</sup> In terms of numbers, according to the Woodall study, Palin's marital status was mentioned in more than one third (34%) of the stories.<sup>84</sup> Her family was mentioned 26 percent of the time. Comparatively, Palin's ideology was mentioned just as much, at 26 percent. Roughly 8 percent and 5 percent of the news stories brought up Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>85</sup> The campaign tried to use this excessive attention by the media on Palin's family to their advantage: "The hockey mom frame offered voters a narrative in which they could relate to Sarah Palin as an everymom, admire her as a supermom, applaud her maternal values or judge her parenting choices, even while reinforcing her strong conservative, white, working-class appeal."<sup>86</sup> Yet while the campaign tried to use the attention to boost voter appeal, the focus on family by the media was excessive to that of her male counterpart.

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81. Vaughn, *Women and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics*, 29.

82. Ibid. 31.

83. Ibid.

84. Murray, *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, 103.

85. Ibid.

86. Vaughn, *Women and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics*, 34.

What do these studies reveal? First, based on the focus on female traits versus male traits, it seems that the media reinforced gender stereotypes in their coverage of Palin.<sup>87</sup> Second, the amount of focus on her appearance and her “mommy problems” might have led people not to take her campaign seriously.<sup>88</sup> While news reports were focused on her appearance, there was less time spent evaluating her policy stances or capabilities. Framing by the media has a powerful affect on a candidate.<sup>89</sup> Just as the Name It. Change It. voter probability study concluded, media discussion of appearance can and does affect a woman’s campaign.

Comparative to the campaign of Sarah Palin, there have been some success stories in electing women to higher office. Margaret Thatcher was the first woman Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. She was elected 60 years after the first woman Member of Parliament (MP) won a seat in Parliament.<sup>90</sup> While the election system of the United Kingdom is different from that of the United States, there is no arguing that Margaret Thatcher broke a “glass ceiling” when she became Prime Minister. Evaluating her rise to office gives crucial insight into the election of women to higher office.

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87. Murray, *Cracking the highest glass ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women's Campaigns for Executive Office*, 106.

88. Ibid.

89. Vaughn, *Women and the White House: Gender, Popular Culture, and Presidential Politics*, 42.

90. Nina Lakhani, “Margaret Thatcher: How much did The Iron Lady do for the UK’s Women?” *The Independent*, (April 2013), accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/margaret-thatcher-how-much-did-the-iron-lady-do-for-the-uks-women-8564631.html>.

In 1958, at the age of 34, Thatcher won a parliamentary seat in the district of Finchley.<sup>91</sup> The next year she was elected again with 3,500 more votes more than her predecessor.<sup>92</sup> When Thatcher first set foot in Parliament there were only 25 female MPs in the House of Commons.<sup>93</sup> This was a new record for women in Parliament but 25 out of a total 630 members; women were still a small minority. As Thatcher was continuing her rise in power and prominence as a MP, the Labor party had control of parliament. At the time, the Labor Party was focused on tackling the problem of inflation that was threatening the British economy.<sup>94</sup> In 1976, the government had to accept loans from the International Monetary Fund.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, the Labor Party put in place public spending cuts that were not popular among union workers.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the unions had accepted voluntary pay restraints.<sup>97</sup> Prime Minister Callaghan, a leader in the Labor Party, was firm in his decision that the next years pay raises should not exceed 5 percent.<sup>98</sup> Many in his party urged him to increase the pay by at least 8 percent, just above inflation, but Callaghan refused.<sup>99</sup> The result was increased wage demands and a

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91. Robert Pearce. "Margaret Thatcher's Rise to Power," *History Today* (2012), accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.historytoday.com/robert-pearce/margaret-thatchers-rise-power>.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. Ibid.

decrease in the standard of living for many union workers. Strikes were led by low-paid public sector workers that were supported by media hype.<sup>100</sup>

In 1979 a general election was called, and this was a chance for the Conservative party to take back lost ground. It was in this election that Conservatives gained a majority of 43 seats.<sup>101</sup> During this shift in control, Margaret Thatcher at the age of 53 became Prime Minister. Thatcher's rise to Prime Minister was not easy; the Conservative Party was still dysfunctional and divided. The leadership position was hotly contested between herself and popular Conservative MP Edward Heath.<sup>102</sup> Before the vote by conservative MPs, Heath was confident in a victory and Thatcher was hoping for a tie.<sup>103</sup> To everyone's surprise Thatcher took the lead with 130 votes to Heath's 119.<sup>104</sup>

Obviously, the women in Parliament at the time were an exception to the rule that men were always leaders. While today it is more widely accepted for wives and mothers to have full time occupations, at the time of Thatcher, the duty of a married woman was to her husband and children. Much like the campaign of Sarah Palin, Thatcher was questioned on her ability to be a Member of Parliament as well as mother. Thatcher had to convince the public and even Parliament that she could handle a family as well as a country. When she applied to become a parliamentary candidate, she had to appear before

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100. Pearce, "Margaret Thatcher's Rise to Power."

101. Ibid.

102. Allan J. Mayer, *Madam Prime Minister: Margaret Thatcher and Her Rise to Power* (NY: Newsweek Books, 1979), 122.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid.



several selection committees. In her autobiography, she records one of the questions that was asked of her:

With my family commitments, would I have time enough for the constituency? Did I realize how much being a Member of Parliament would keep me away from home? [...] And sometimes more bluntly still: did I really think that I could fulfill my duties as a mother with young children to look after and as an MP?<sup>105</sup>

She records that she felt that the committee had the right to ask her these questions.

What I resented, however, was that beneath some of the criticism I detected a feeling that the House of Commons was not really the right place for a woman anyway. Perhaps some of the men at Selection Committees entertained this prejudice... I was hurt and disappointed by these experiences. They were after all an attack on me not just as a candidate but as a wife and mother. But I refused to be put off by them."<sup>106</sup>

Once the excitement and surprise of Thatcher's victory began to die down, parts of the press and even the Conservative Party expressed that Thatcher's leadership was temporary. Heath, a prominent leader in the Party, referred to her as "that bloody woman" and many wanted to vote her out as soon as possible.<sup>107</sup>

While Thatcher is often associated with masculine adjectives such as "authoritative," "argumentative" and "tough," many also argue she used her femininity to her advantage.<sup>108</sup> "She used her toughness to confound her (male) colleagues, who were not sure how to react, precisely because she was a woman. On the other hand, she also used her feminine charms when necessary."<sup>109</sup> Margaret Thatcher took time to

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105. J. Purvis, "What Was Margaret Thatcher's Legacy for Women?" *Women's History Review* 22, no. 6 (2013): 1014-1018.

106. Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, (HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 94.

107. Purvis, "What Was Margaret Thatcher's Legacy for Women?" 1014-1018.

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.

concentrate on her appearance. Gordon Reece, a former television producer, was put in charge of her image. Her hairstyle was changed, her clothes were replaced, and her voice was thought too shrill. So she took voice lessons. Just as the Palin studies confirmed, the image of the candidate is an important aspect of any politician's campaign. Thatcher took this into consideration as she created a frame for the public and the media.

Alan Clark, a conservative MP who was also known as a womanizer, noted that he was distracted by her ankles when she would speak.<sup>110</sup> The French President Françoise Mitterrand once noted that Thatcher had “the eyes of Caligula and the mouth of Marilyn Monroe.”<sup>111</sup> While her image was an important part of her campaign, Thatcher did not use her position to promote women to seats of authority. The Leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Young, was the only woman to hold office under her.<sup>112</sup>

This leads feminist critics to comment that Thatcher was not a supporter of the feminist movement.<sup>113</sup> Some say she never focused on women's issues such as child care, health care and education.<sup>114</sup> While this accusation is true, the reason for her purposeful distinguishment from the movement seems obvious. Thatcher's image that she created was one that demonstrated her rise from humble beginnings to great achievements in

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110. Purvis, “What Was Margaret Thatcher's Legacy for Women?” 1014-1018.

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.

113. Anneke Ribberink, “Gender Politics with Margaret Thatcher: Vulnerability and Toughness,” *Gender Forum: An Internet Journal for Gender Studies* 30, (2010), accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.genderforum.org/issues/de-voted/gender-politics-with-margaret-thatcher>.

114. Cathy Young, “How Margaret Thatcher Advanced Women's Liberation,” *Reason.com Free Minds and Free Markets*. (April 2013), accessed January 30, 2014, <http://reason.com/archives/2013/04/20/how-margaret-thatcher-advanced-womens-li>.

rank.<sup>115</sup> Instead of protesting and using inequality as a reason to elect women, Thatcher concentrated on merit and hard-work to prove she deserved a seat not because she was a woman but because she was a politician. Obviously, as a member of the Conservative Party, she would not promote welfare type initiatives. Yet she cannot be pigeonholed as a strict conservative. Thatcher supported abortion rights, stating that “one of the worst things anyone can do in this world is to bring an unwanted child into it...”<sup>116</sup> Thatcher was in favor of the ordination of women in the Anglican Church.<sup>117</sup> Yet at the same time she did not support government programs for day cares, which angered feminists.<sup>118</sup>

Thatcher focused much of her attention on her politics. Thatcherism, the term named after her, refers to her economic policies and mission to make Britain great. Thatcherism wasn't simply whatever she did during her time as Prime Minister.<sup>119</sup> She knew she did not invent Thatcherism, “she merely rediscovered it...”<sup>120</sup> It was not her focus on feminine traits or a feminist agenda that made Margaret Thatcher successful. It was her focus on political issues such as economics. She came along at a crucial time in British history and “perceived as did many of her contemporaries—that Britain was in

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115. Ribberink, “Gender Politics with Margaret Thatcher: Vulnerability and Toughness.”

116. Young, “How Margaret Thatcher Advanced Women’s Liberation.”

117. Ibid.

118. Ibid.

119. Claire Berlinski, *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 115.

120. Ibid.

decline.... She perceived too that socialism was not—as widely believed—irreversible.”<sup>121</sup>

Thatcher once commented that she did not think a woman would become Prime Minister in her lifetime. She might have been bluffing, but she might have truly believed this. Yet she lived to become the first woman Prime Minister. It is only a matter of time till the United States will have a woman Vice President or a President. It seems that it will take a certain kind of woman to take this position. Following the example of Margaret Thatcher, she will have to come along during a time of political change, when the people are looking for something new. Palin ran during a time where her ideology was not held by the majority.

Second, like Margaret Thatcher, this woman will have to take serious pains to control and display an image that people will relate to but respect. As studies have revealed, the media evaluation takes a serious toll on the image of a female candidate. This woman will have to be aware that she will be evaluated differently. Like Thatcher, her focus will need to be on the pressing topics of the time. It seems that focusing on feminine qualities or women’s issues does not aid women candidate. She will have to appease extreme feminists by simply being a woman leader. At the same time, she should not lean too far left and lose the middle electorate.

Equality has been reached, but is still in the process of being proven. Women across the globe have taken leadership positions of businesses and governments. Each has proven that it is completely possible for a woman to lead and lead well. As this study has revealed, the rise to power is different and arguably more difficult for a woman. This does not mean, however, that a woman will not reach the White House. Whether she is a

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121. Berlinski, *There is No Alternative: Why Margaret Thatcher Matters*, 115.

“pit-bull with lipstick” or an “Iron Lady,” she will have to prove herself first and foremost as a leader and secondly as a woman leader.

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