

**Gender Differences in Print Media Coverage of Presidential Candidates:
Elizabeth Dole's Bid for the Republican Nomination**

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On October 20, 1999, Elizabeth Dole dropped out of the race for the Republican presidential nomination. Her withdrawal came before the first presidential primary and only six months after she entered the race on March 10, 1999, by announcing the formation of an exploratory committee. While Dole's candidacy was short-lived, it was the longest and most serious bid by a woman for a major party's presidential nomination in the past two decades. The only other woman in recent history to become a contender for a major party's presidential nomination was Congresswoman Pat Schroeder, who considered the possibility of running for the Democratic nomination in 1987 but decided not to seek the nomination after four months of exploration.¹

Dole's six-month candidacy provides a unique opportunity to examine the manner in which the press covers a bid by a woman for the nation's highest office. Despite frequent complaints by political women about gender biases in press coverage (see, for example, Ferraro 1985; Schroeder 1998; Hansen 1994; Witt, Paget, and Matthews 1994), there is surprisingly little research that systematically analyzes press coverage of women candidates in the United States. Most existing research focuses on coverage of women candidates in U.S. Senate and gubernatorial races (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1992; Kahn 1994a; Kahn 1994b; Kahn 1996; Devitt 1999). These studies have consistently found evidence of gender biases in the coverage of candidates for statewide offices. This paper, focusing on newspaper coverage of Elizabeth Dole's presidential bid, examines whether similar gender biases were evident in the early, pre-primary stages of the 2000 presidential race.

Gender biases, if evident in press coverage, are important because they can have electoral consequences. As Kim Kahn has convincingly demonstrated with experimental data, voters' perceptions of female and male candidates are influenced by gender differences in media coverage, resulting in significant disadvantages for women candidates (Kahn 1994a; Kahn 1992; Kahn 1996).

Past Research

Previous research has suggested and investigated a number of ways in which gender bias, stemming from gender role stereotypes pervasive throughout American culture, may be reflected in reporting on women candidates. Many of the gender-related differences in coverage implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) suggest that women are less serious contenders than men in the political arena.

Political women often complain that the press focuses too much on their appearances and personalities and too little on their policy proposals and actions. In her study of press coverage of international heads of state, Pippa Norris found little evidence of gender role stereotyping in terms of appearance, traits, or issues (1997). However, studies of U.S. Senate and gubernatorial candidates suggest that the complaints of political women are not unfounded. Kim Kahn's analysis of newspaper coverage of races in the 1980s found that the press paid more attention to personality traits when covering women candidates for governor (Kahn 1994b; Kahn 1996). Moreover, women candidates received less issue-based coverage than male candidates in races for both the U.S. Senate and governor (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Kahn 1994a; Kahn 1994b; Kahn 1996). In a more recent study of 1998 gubernatorial candidates, James Devitt found that print reporters devoted notably more attention to the personal lives, appearances, and personalities of women than men (Devitt 1999).

The studies by Kahn and Devitt have found other differences in press coverage as well – differences which one might expect to find in coverage of presidential candidates. While both Devitt and Kahn found that female and male gubernatorial candidates received similar amounts of coverage, women senate candidates in Kahn's study received less coverage than men (Kahn 1994a; Kahn 1994b; Kahn 1996; Devitt 1999). In both Devitt's and Kahn's research, women candidates for governor and senate received less issue-related coverage than men (Kahn 1994a; Kahn 1994b; Kahn 1996; Devitt 1999). Kahn also found that women candidates in U.S. Senate races received more coverage related to their viability as candidates and, more specifically, received more negative viability coverage emphasizing their unlikely prospects for victory (Kahn 1994a; Kahn 1994b; Kahn 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991).

In her study of news coverage of women heads of states from different countries, Norris found that gendered news frames were frequently employed (Norris 1997). One of the frames, which recurred in news story after news story about women heads of states, and which one might expect to find used frequently in the case of Elizabeth Dole, was the "first woman" frame, emphasizing the path-breaking nature of the political woman's accomplishment. While the use of frames is an essential part of news reporting practices (Gitlin 1980; Entman 1991; Entman 1993), the employment of a gender-related frame, such as the "first woman" frame, can have negative consequences. As Maria Braden has suggested, "When the news media imply that

women are anomalies in high public office, the public is likely to regard them as bench warmers rather than as an integral part of government” (1996, 2).

Previous research also suggests that the gender of the reporter may affect the coverage which women candidates for high-level office receive although the literature offers somewhat contradictory suggestions about what those effects might be. Kay Mills has argued that the different life experiences of women and men are likely to produce differences in their stories. She has suggested:

This different set of experiences means that some women write or broadcast different elements in stories than some men would write or broadcast about the same events. Men and women may dial their telephones the same way, type on their word processors the same way, and organize their stories similarly, but men and women often see different things while on assignment (1997, 42).

Although these life differences in experiences could potentially lead to significant differences in the stories written by women and men, David Weaver has cautioned against expecting much evidence of gender difference, reminding us that “the newsroom and community environments are stronger influences on journalists’ professional values (and probably on the kind of news content they produce) than is gender, raising the question of whether news coverage is likely to change much as more women enter journalism” (1997, 37). Nevertheless, in his analysis of news stories, Weaver did find some evidence of gender differences, including a great propensity among women journalists to rely on female sources (1997, 39).

Empirical studies of coverage of women candidates have also found differences in the stories written by female and male reporters. Devitt found that women reporters were more likely than their male colleagues to cover women candidates. While women reporters in Devitt’s study were more likely than male reporters to emphasize personal aspects in covering both female and male candidates, male journalists, unlike female journalists, treated female and male candidates differently by more often reporting on personal aspects for female candidates than for male candidates. (Devitt 1999). Kahn found that women reporters gave more attention than their male colleagues to stereotypically female issues (such as education and health care) and were more likely than male reporters to emphasize stereotypical female traits (such as compassion and honesty) in covering women candidates (Kahn 1996, 52-54, 94-97).

The Data and Hypotheses

Two data sets are used for the content analysis presented in this paper. For both data sets articles were selected from the Major Papers section of Lexis-Nexis, read, and coded.

The first data set is based on a systematic sample consisting of every twenty-fifth story (out of a total of 12,980) in the Major Papers classification of Nexis mentioning one or more of six different contenders for the Republican party nomination for President (Gary Bauer, George W. Bush, Elizabeth Dole, Steve Forbes, Alan Keyes, and John McCain) and published between March 12, 1999 (two days after Elizabeth Dole announced the formation of an exploratory committee) and October 19, 1999 (the day before she withdrew from the race).² This is the period of the campaign during which Elizabeth Dole was a serious contender, and we included in our analysis all Republican candidates who remained in the race at the time of Dole’s withdrawal. We excluded all articles drawn for sample which were published in foreign newspapers, leaving us with a sample of 421 news stories which were published in 40 different major papers throughout the United States. This data set is used to compare the coverage Dole received with that of other candidates.

It quickly became apparent to us that few of the articles in this data set presented in-depth coverage of Elizabeth Dole and her campaign. While we wanted to compare her coverage with that of the other major contenders for the Republican nomination, we also wanted to provide an in-depth and intensive look at Dole’s coverage. Consequently, we compiled a second data set consisting of all articles published between March 11, 1999 (the day after Elizabeth Dole announced the formation of an exploratory committee) and October 24, 1999 (four days after she withdrew from the race) with at least four mentions of Dole.³ We then excluded all articles which were published in foreign newspapers as well as the few articles which fit our search formula but were less than 50% about Dole, leaving us with 155 news stories which were published in 31 different major papers throughout the United States. While these articles were of varying length, most (83.9%) focused entirely or almost entirely (at least three-fourths) on Dole and her campaign.

Our analysis interweaves findings from this data set based on the in-depth articles on Dole with findings from the data set on all the Republican candidates. We use the in-depth Dole data set to identify and document the patterns most evident in the coverage of Elizabeth Dole as a candidate. We then use the multi-candidate data set to compare Dole's coverage to that of the major male contenders for the Republican nomination.

When we examine her coverage relative to that of the other Republican candidates, we expect to find that Dole received less overall coverage than comparable male competitors. Based on the findings of previous research reviewed above, we also expect to find considerable attention devoted to appearance, personality, and personal life in Elizabeth Dole's in-depth coverage. Moreover, we anticipate that we will find more attention devoted to appearance, personality, and personal life in her coverage than in that of her male competitors. We also expect to find much attention devoted to the viability of Dole's campaign with relatively less coverage of issues and her policy proposals. Relative to the other contenders, we expect to find more focus on her viability and less on her issue positions and policy proposals. We anticipate that many of the stories about Dole in the in-depth Dole data set will have employed a "first woman" frame and that a large proportion of the stories will have been written by female reporters and cite female sources for "expert" commentary on her campaign. Finally, we anticipate that more of the stories mentioning Dole will have been written by women reporters, that reporters of both genders will more often have turned to women as sources in stories about Dole, and that women reporters will have been especially likely to use women sources.

In our analysis we also will try to assess something that has not been assessed in previous studies of women candidates for high-level offices and which admittedly involves a more subjective judgment – the tone of the coverage. Our expectation is that some of the most important gender differences in coverage may be more subtle and may involve the differential use of language. Maria Braden has argued, "News coverage of women politicians is not always blatantly sexist, but subtle discrimination persists" (1996, 1). If Braden is correct, then tone and the use of language may be very significant. In assessing tone and language, we have attempted to be as "objective" as possible, developing specific measures for the general tone of the headline and the story and recording specific adjectives that are used to describe Dole and the other candidates. Our expectation is that we will find gender differences on these measures.

Gender Differences in Overall Coverage

Throughout the time period of our analysis, public opinion polls showed Elizabeth Dole consistently running a strong second to George W. Bush, with high favorability ratings. They also showed her beating Al Gore in a hypothetical head-to-head contest in the general election.⁴ Based on her standing in the polls, Dole could have been expected to receive less press coverage than George Bush but more than the other contenders for the Republican nomination.

However, past research on women candidates led us to expect that Elizabeth Dole, as a woman candidate, would receive less coverage than comparable male contenders for the Republican nomination. Thus, we anticipated that Dole would not receive coverage in keeping with her number two standing in the polls. Data from the all-candidate data set confirmed this expectation (Table 1).

George W. Bush was mentioned in 72.9% of all the articles we examined (Table 1). The frequency with which his name was mentioned in these stories is no surprise considering his early anointment as the front-runner by the Republican establishment. John McCain received the second largest amount of overall coverage with 33.0% of articles at least mentioning him in passing. In comparison to Bush and McCain, Elizabeth Dole received relatively less overall coverage. Despite being the second most popular Republican candidate in public opinion polls and a likely winner if matched up against Al Gore during this period, Dole was mentioned in only one out of every five articles, 19.7%. Steve Forbes, Gary Bauer, and Alan Keyes were all mentioned with less frequency (Table 1).⁵

During the early months of the official Republican primary season, McCain was perceived as the major threat to Bush, and if our study had focused on this period of time, it would not seem surprising that he was mentioned in one-third of the articles in our sample and in more stories than Dole. However, our focus was on the pre-primary season, and the political situation for McCain during the spring, summer, and early fall of 1999 was quite different than during the winter and spring of 2000. Dole, not McCain, was running second to Bush in public opinion polls, and McCain was one of many nondescript faces in a crowded candidate field, which

included Dan Quayle, Lamar Alexander, and Patrick Buchanan as well as the above candidates. What, then, explains the inordinate amount of press attention devoted to McCain during this time period?

**Table 1:
Proportion of Newspaper Stories Covering Each of the Contenders
for the Republican Nomination**

	Some Mention of Candidate	Candidate Mentioned Only in Passing	1-25% of Article about Candidate	26-100% of Article about Candidate
Gary Bauer	8.8	3.6	3.8	1.4
George W. Bush	72.9	19.2	20.9	32.8
Elizabeth Dole	19.7	5.9	8.8	5.0
Steve Forbes	15.9	3.6	7.8	4.5
Alan Keyes	3.1	1.7	1.4	--
John McCain	33.0	7.6	14.5	10.9

N = 421

A closer look at the type of coverage McCain received provides some clues about why McCain received so much attention. As a Senator, McCain's name surfaced with regard to a number of legislative issues. During the latter part of the time period we examined, especially during August and September of 1999, McCain received an abundance of positive media coverage for his involvement in campaign finance reform. However, even before campaign finance reform legislation became a hotly debated political issue in early fall 1999, McCain was receiving a disproportionate amount of issue coverage compared to the other candidates in the sample. His name could be found in articles covering a variety of public policy topics, including boxing reform, television cable rates, the Kosovo crisis, and the Salt Lake City Olympic committee scandal. McCain seems to have had a Madonna-like ability to understand the pulse of the public and to capitalize on opportunities for press attention, and he used his platform in the Senate to maximize the publicity he received and advance his presidential ambitions.

In addition to examining whether the names of candidates were mentioned in various stories, we examined the proportion of articles in which candidates received some significant amount of attention as a second way to assess the relative coverage they received. In looking at articles in which the candidate was the focus of more than a quarter of the content of the story, Bush again came out overwhelmingly on top with 32.8% of all stories (Table 1). McCain finished second with 10.9%. Dole was covered substantially in about half as many articles, 5.0%, as McCain and received about the same amount of coverage on this measure as Forbes. Thus, in addition to receiving less overall coverage than one might expect for the number two candidate in the Republican primary race, Elizabeth Dole also received less sustained and substantial coverage than one might expect given her standing in the polls.

As a third measure of candidate coverage, we examined the order in which candidates were mentioned in the stories in the multi-candidate sample. Again, Bush and McCain came out on top. Bush was the first (and sometimes only) candidate mentioned in 60.1% of the articles. McCain received first or only mention in 23.3%. Dole was mentioned first in only 8.3% of stories in the sample although she received slightly more first mentions than Forbes (4.8%), Bauer (2.9%), or Keyes (0.7%). We found the same ordering of candidates when we examined the name of the candidate who was mentioned second in these stories.

The appearance of a candidate's name in the headline is an additional measure of the coverage which a candidate receives. A headline not only establishes the prominence of the candidate in the story which follows, but also is sometimes the only part of the article which is actually read. Bush appeared in the headline of one-fifth of all stories in the sample, 20.9%. Neither Dole nor McCain received much attention in headlines; Dole's and McCain's names were mentioned in only 4.0% of all headlines while Forbes was mentioned in 2.6% and Bauer in 1.2%. (Keyes' name did not appear in any of the headlines.)

Thus, on a variety of measures of the relative amount of coverage the Republican presidential contenders received, Dole appears to have been surpassed by Bush and McCain. In most respects Dole's coverage was more similar to that of Forbes, Bauer, and Keyes than to that of Bush and McCain. While Bush's preeminence as the Republican front-runner seems a reasonable enough explanation for his lion's share of the coverage, disproportionate media attention early on no doubt enabled him to retain his lead-dog status. Although Dole was still considered a viable contender by the public and politicians during the time period we examined, that status is not reflected in her coverage. Even more striking is the amount of attention garnered by McCain this early in the race. His status as a Senator, coupled with his status as a presidential candidate, allowed him to make his voice heard on a potpourri of high-profile issues with mostly low congressional priority, almost always with the tag line "presidential hopeful."

Major Focus of Coverage

Two ways in which gender differences might surface in candidate news coverage are in the general topic of the story in which the candidate is mentioned and in the focus of the candidate's specific coverage. These were both coded in the multi-candidate sample. We categorized stories according to their focus on candidate traits or background, issues, horse race, and other subjects. Admittedly, it is difficult to say for sure whether it is better for a candidate to appear in an article about issues, the horse race, candidates' background, or some other topic, but in most cases stories about issues are particularly beneficial to a candidate because they present her or him as substantive and serious.

Bush was most likely to be mentioned in articles that focused on issues (27.3% of the stories in which he is mentioned), followed by articles primarily on horse race coverage (19.3%) and traits or background (11.3%). Similarly, McCain was far more likely to appear in articles about issues (33.6% of the stories in which he is mentioned) than articles about other topics. 17.5% of articles mentioning McCain concentrated on horse race coverage while 4.4% were about traits or background. In contrast, Dole was mentioned more often in articles that focused on horse race coverage (36.1% of the stories that mentioned her), followed by articles about issues (22.9%) and traits or background (6.0%). Forbes, too, was mentioned more often in articles about horse race coverage (41.8% of stories mentioning him) than in articles about issues (17.9%) or traits or background (1.5%).

Despite differences in the general topic of the article in which they were mentioned, differences between Bush and Dole were not immediately apparent when we examined the main focus of each candidate's specific coverage, independent of the overall topic of the article. 27.0% of articles in which Bush was mentioned talked about him in terms of the horse race. A similar proportion of his coverage, 26.2%, focused on issues while 14.5% spoke of his fund-raising prowess. Dole's coverage looked quite similar with 25.6% of her coverage focusing on the horse race, 23.1% concentrating on issues, and 14.1% centering on fund-raising.

However, despite the similarity between Bush and Dole in the focus of their coverage, important differences were found in the content of their respective horse-race and fund-raising coverage. Dole's horse-race coverage typically described her as a losing candidate with little chance of gaining the nomination. In contrast, Bush was almost exclusively described as the inevitable victor. Similar to horse-race coverage, most mentions of Dole's fund-raising, in contrast to those for Bush, noted her lack of ability to raise the necessary funds to launch a full-scale presidential campaign. Especially in this race where Republicans were searching early on for a "winner," differences in fund-raising coverage may have adversely influenced Dole's ability to raise more money. Similarly, articles that focused on her inability to raise money may also have helped produce "drop-out rumors," which also were reported in her coverage. As Dole's finance chairman noted, "Nobody wants to give to a candidate they believe is going to pull out of the race" (*Boston Globe*, October 7, 1999).

In contrast to the fairly even focus on issues and horse race in the coverage of Dole and Bush, the majority of McCain coverage focused on issues (47.7%). This no doubt reflected his masterful ability to use his Senate platform to make his voice heard on the popular issues of the day as discussed previously. One-fifth (20.3%) of McCain’s coverage concentrated on the horse race.

Appearance, Personality, and Personal Life

As mentioned above, political women often believe that the press focuses far too much attention on aspects of their appearance, personality, and private lives and too little on their issue agendas. About one of every six stories in our data set of in-depth articles about Elizabeth Dole made reference to Dole’s appearance (Table 2). Although this may not seem a large proportion, one wonders why such references were needed at all. And while most reporters did not comment on how Dole looked, the print press did pay considerable attention to her personality. More than three-fifths of the stories made reference to at least one personality trait (Table 2).

**Table 2:
Proportion of In-Depth Stories about Elizabeth Dole Mentioning
Appearance, Personality Traits, and Aspects of Her Family Life**

	% of Stories
Dress or appearance	16.7
One or more personality traits	61.3
Bob Dole as husband	61.9

N = 155

A similar proportion made reference to the fact that she was the wife of Bob Dole (Table 2). Moreover, 41.3% of the stories made multiple references to Bob Dole, and almost half of all in-depth stories written about Elizabeth Dole, 47.1%, mentioned her relationship to Bob Dole in the first one-third of the story.

In a May 1999 interview with Richard L. Berke of the *New York Times*, Bob Dole said “he wanted to give money to a rival candidate [McCain] who was fighting for much of her support. He conceded that Mrs. Dole’s operation had had growing pains, was slow to raise money early and was only beginning to hit its stride. And while Mr. Dole was hopeful, he allowed that he was by no means certain she would even stay in the race” (*New York Times*, May 17, 1999). Bob Dole’s comments in this interview received considerable publicity, and even weeks later, stories written about Elizabeth Dole’s campaign often made reference to these critical comments. Altogether, 20.2% of the news stories published after Bob Dole’s comments appeared in the *New York Times* (N = 109) called specific attention to the fact that her husband had expressed reservations about Elizabeth Dole’s campaign and support for her opponent, John McCain.

Elizabeth Dole’s “private life” situation is clearly unusual in that she is married to a former presidential candidate. Nevertheless, the repeated references to Bob Dole in article after article may have subtly undermined her independent stature as a presidential candidate in the minds of voters. And the references to Bob Dole’s unsupportive comments about her candidacy, even when those references were critical of Bob Dole’s actions, may have raised questions in the reader’s mind about the viability of her candidacy. After all, how serious a candidate could she really be if even her husband publicly questioned her viability as a contender?

With the multi-candidate sample, we are able to compare mentions of Dole’s appearance and family to those for other Republican candidates. Fewer articles covering Dole in the multi-candidate sample mentioned her appearance than in the Dole-specific sample (7.1% compared to 16.7%). However, her appearance was mentioned more often than that of any of the other candidates. Only 3.3% of articles on Bush, and 3.0% of Forbes’ articles, mentioned the candidate’s appearance. References to dress or appearance appeared in only 0.8% of the articles about McCain.

References to Elizabeth Dole’s family (i.e., mostly Bob Dole) were far less frequent in the stories mentioning Dole in the multi-candidate data set (11.4%) than in the Dole-specific data set (61.9%) where

articles covered Dole’s candidacy in more depth. Just as Dole was unique in having a spouse who ran for the Republican nomination prior to her bid, Bush’s situation was unusual because his father had been President from 1988 to 1992. Consequently, we expected Bush, like Dole, to have a high rate of mentions of his family (i.e., mostly his father) in articles covering his candidacy. As anticipated, 15.1% of articles about Bush mentioned his family. Articles about McCain were notably less likely to refer to his family (4.0%) although, surprisingly, stories about Forbes were about as likely (10.6%) as those about Dole or Bush to mention his family. (Whereas family coverage of Bush and Dole typically mentioned the candidate’s father and spouse, respectively, Forbes’ family coverage tended to mention his wealthy background.)

While much of Dole’s coverage did not focus on her appearance or family, some of the references were very negative. One columnist wrote that Dole’s “public speaking style looks and sounds like Tammy Faye Baker meets the Home Shopping Network” (*Detroit News*, March 12, 1999). Another article mused about her sex life (*Journal of Commerce*, March 15, 1999). Yet another reporter found the subject of her hair-do irresistible: “Fabric... will shine, crinkle, stretch, seem like paper, have a sheer veneer or be tougher than, say, Elizabeth Dole’s hairdo” (*Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1999). These are but a few examples of inappropriate references to Dole’s physicality. Such degrading references to physical appearance or personal life were not found for Dole’s male counterparts.

Issues and Viability

Contrary to the claims of political women who argue that the media more often focus on personality and family than on issue positions and policy proposals, almost as many of the in-depth stories focusing on Elizabeth Dole in the Dole-specific data set (57.4%) mentioned an issue in the campaign as mentioned her husband (61.9%) or a personality trait (61.3%). The five most frequently mentioned issues were gun control (25.2% of all stories), foreign policy and defense (25.2%), education (22.2%), abortion (16.8%), and drugs (16.1%). These were issues on which Dole chose to speak in major public addresses and campaign appearances.

A similar pattern is found for Dole in the multi-candidate sample. The most frequently mentioned issue in articles involving Dole was foreign policy (16.7%), followed by gun control (14.6%) and education (10.4%). The top issues for Bush were foreign policy (10.6%), education (9.2%), and the economy (6.9%). One-fourth of articles mentioning McCain (25.4%) focused on foreign policy and 8.8% concentrated on the economy. 10.9% of Forbes’ coverage mentioned foreign policy or the economy. Thus, aside from McCain’s unusual amount of foreign affairs policy coverage, explained by his vocal chastising of President Clinton during the Kosovo crisis, the content of Dole’s issue coverage was comparable to that of her male contenders.

**Table 3:
Proportion of In-Depth Stories about Elizabeth Dole
Mentioning Various Viability Factors**

	% of Stories
Lack of money	41.9
Poor campaigning/campaign problems	34.2
Lack of substance	34.8

N = 155

While issues were mentioned in a majority of the in-depth stories about Dole, large proportions of the stories also raised concerns about her viability as a presidential candidate. Table 3 presents the proportion of stories in the Dole-specific data set that discussed three major aspects related to the viability of her candidacy and campaign. Two-fifths of the articles made reference to her difficulties in raising money, a third mentioned problems in her campaign, and a third criticized her for lacking substance as a candidate.

We also examined whether a candidate’s personal or political substance was questioned and whether her or his campaign management was criticized using the multi-candidate sample. Candidate substance was questioned in a number of ways, ranging from inferences that the candidate was being vague about issue positions to challenges to the candidate’s intelligence. No gender difference was apparent on this measure. Surprisingly, Bush’s substance was questioned more than the other candidates in the race. 13.7% of the articles mentioning Bush accused him of lacking substance compared to 7.6% for Forbes and 5.7% for Dole. Despite his relatively substantial coverage, McCain’s substance was not questioned in any of the articles we examined.

Similarly, gender differences were not apparent in the frequency with which criticisms of the campaign were voiced by journalists. About one-tenth of the articles mentioning Dole (8.6%) were critical of the management of her campaign compared to 7.6% for Forbes, 13.7% for Bush, and 1.6% for McCain. Despite similar amounts of criticism, critiques of Dole’s campaign were often cast in more personal and pejorative terms.

Gender

Reporters had various options from which to choose in dealing with Elizabeth Dole’s gender. They could ignore it and talk about her just as they would talk about a male candidate, they could mention her gender in passing, or they could use her gender as a frame – a hook or a peg – for writing about her candidacy. Most journalists did choose to comment on Dole’s gender; 63.9% of all stories in the in-depth Dole data set made explicit reference to the fact that she was a woman. Moreover, almost half (45.8%) of the in-depth stories employed a “first woman” frame in writing about Elizabeth Dole’s candidacy. Dole was repeatedly described, for example, as “the first woman to wage a serious campaign for President” (*Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1999), as “the most serious female candidate for the nomination of either major party in the nation’s history” (*Omaha World-Herald*, October 21, 1999), and “the first woman to put together a top-tier candidacy for president of the United States” (*Christian Science Monitor*, October 21, 1999). Similarly, Ellen Goodman in a column in the *Boston Globe*, writing about Dole’s withdrawal from the presidential race, observed:

Once the woman routinely described as “the first credible female candidate” bowed out, the focus changed — from whether she was running “as a woman” to whether she lost “as a woman.”... The broadcasts and newspaper stories all described the dropout as “the only woman in the race.” Even the sign in her own headquarters went from “Let’s Make History” to “She Made History” (October 24, 1999).

As mentioned earlier, the problem with the frequent use of the first woman frame, even when it was used in a way that presented Dole as a pioneer, is that it continually reinforced the idea that Dole was a novelty and an anomaly rather than a serious contender for the presidency.

**Table 4:
Proportion of In-Depth Stories about Elizabeth Dole with Various Topics
as the Major Focus of the Article**

	% of Stories
Gender/running as a woman	23.9
Issues	12.3
Traits, personal qualities, background	12.3
Viability: positive	5.2
Viability: negative	5.2
Viability and gender	6.5

N = 155

Table 4, which presents data reflecting the major focus of the in-depth newspaper stories on Elizabeth Dole, offers an additional measure of the role which gender played relative to issues, personal qualities, and viability assessments in the in-depth coverage which Elizabeth Dole received. Dole’s gender was by far the most frequent focus of in-depth stories on Dole, serving as the major focus for almost twice as many stories as any another factor. Issues and personal background/qualities were a major focus for equal proportions of articles. Notable proportions of articles focused on Dole’s viability as a candidate with equal proportions stressing the positive and negative viability of her campaign. In addition, some articles were centered around discussion of both her viability and her gender, often linking the two (e.g., she will have difficulty winning because she is a woman).

Tone

Some of the most interesting and troubling aspects of our findings regarding the in-depth coverage of Dole have to do with the tone of that coverage. We measured tone in three ways. First we looked at the headline for each story to see if it generally conveyed a negative, neutral, or positive image of Dole. Second, we tried to detect and code the general tone of the article. Tone was more obvious in editorials than in news stories, which are supposed to be written in a more neutral or balanced way. But even in some news stories, a pro-Dole or anti-Dole tone was clearly detectable.⁶ Finally, we examined the adjectives and traits that were used in describing Dole. After developing a comprehensive list of those adjectives and traits, we grouped them into positive, neutral, and negative categories.

Our findings on tone suggest that Dole and her candidacy were presented in a clearly mixed manner, with both considerable positive sentiment and considerable critical sentiment about her conveyed to the readers of these newspapers. As one might expect, the largest proportion of the headlines about Dole (45.2%) in the Dole-specific data set were neutral, neither positive nor negative toward Dole in tone. However, headlines which were negative in tone (29.7%) slightly outnumbered positive headlines (21.9%).

Similarly, the largest proportion of the articles about Dole (38.7%) in her in-depth coverage were neutral, balanced, or reflected both positive and negative sentiments about Dole. In contrast to headlines, however, a larger proportion of the in-depth articles (35.5%) had a predominantly positive tone (pro-woman or pro-Dole) than had a predominantly negative tone (anti-woman or anti-Dole)(25.8%).

The multi-candidate data set allowed us to compare the tone of candidate mentions in headlines for Dole with those for the other candidates. Bush, Forbes, and Dole each received about the same number of negative headline mentions (ranging from 27% to 29%). Nevertheless, there were important differences among the candidates with the tone of the headlines actually favoring McCain. Although he was mentioned much less often in headlines than Bush, McCain’s mentions were overwhelmingly neutral (61.6%) or positive (27.8%); only 5.6% of headlines mentioning McCain cast him in a negative light. While Dole’s name was mentioned about as often as McCain’s, her mentions were much more likely (29.4%) than McCain’s to be negative. Bush’s headlines were no more likely to be positive (20.2%) than Dole’s (23.5%). However, the fact that Bush was so much more frequently mentioned than Dole means that he received many more positive mentions in headlines, 94, than Dole did, 17.

**Table 5:
Proportion of Traits in In-Depth Stories Used to Describe
Elizabeth Dole^a Which Were Positive, Neutral, and Negative**

	% of Traits
Positive	48.1
Neutral	8.1
Negative	43.8

N = 210

^aUp to three traits were coded per news story.

As mentioned above, more than three-fifths of the in-depth stories in the Dole-specific data set mentioned at least one personality trait, and for each of these stories we coded up to three mentions of different traits. Altogether, we coded 210 references to traits or adjectives describing Dole in the 155 articles we examined. Relatively few of the traits mentioned (e.g., quiet, unhurried, womanly) seemed to us not clearly positive or negative and were coded into the neutral category (Table 5). Most fell into the positive or the negative category. As with overall tone of the article, Dole was described with positive traits and adjectives more often than she was described with negative ones (Table 5). However, the proportion of negative traits and adjectives was quite high. In fact, we may well have erred on the side of overstating the positive references in that several of the traits which we classified as positive because they are valued in society (e.g., polished, charming, sweet, tidy) were not necessarily applied to Elizabeth Dole in a positive way. On the positive side, she was described multiple times, for example, as “chipper,” “poised,” “qualified,” “gracious,” “Oprah-like,” “experienced,” a “trailblazer” or “pioneer,” “polished,” “warm,” and “graceful.” On the negative side, she was described multiple times, for example, as “bitter,” “canned,” “controlled,” a “perfectionist,” “rehearsed,” “scripted,” “choreographed,” “inauthentic,” and “vague.”

In reading through the news stories, two predominant images of Elizabeth Dole emerge. One is the more positive image of the intelligent, hard-working, talented, popular trailblazer while the other is the more negative image of the overly cautious, overly rehearsed, robotic perfectionist who oozes charm but lacks substance. The former image is apparent in this description in the *Washington Post*:

Her campaign doesn't have much money, and it doesn't have a strong organization. It has one strength: Elizabeth Dole, one of the three most-admired women on the planet, according to one Gallup poll. People want to see her. She's famous, an icon and role model (October 17, 1999).

Similarly, an editorial by Rich Hood in the *Kansas City Star*, observed:

Dole has been a super-achiever in everything she has attempted, but in spite of her achievements, her obvious talent and fierce determination, she could not vault to the top of the Republican presidential field.... She is highly articulate.... Dole works hard..., and she would add class and grace to the White House (October 24, 1999).

But in many stories a very different Elizabeth Dole emerges. An opinion piece by Arianna Huffington in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* compared Dole to “a late night infomercial host” who “is plying us with well-rehearsed bromides.” Huffington noted, “She is legendary for her perfectionism—not a hair out of place, not a water pearl out of its string. But it’s a frozen perfection that she represents” (March 17, 1999). The *New York Times* referred to Dole as “a controlled performer and well-known perfectionist” (October 21, 1999). And an editorial by Michael Kramer in the *Daily News* claimed:

Dole was positively awful as a candidate... She rarely if ever gave even a hint of what we expect of leaders, instead following the down-to-the-second script developed by her aides. Combined with her saccharine delivery, the script failed, if only because all who heard her could tell how exactly scripted she was (October 24, 1999).

Finally, Mary McGrory, in a column in the *Washington Post*, noted:

Some men call her a “Stepford wife,” an over-programmed perfectionist. And women from outside the South found her deep-fried effusiveness off-putting—they could not identify with a woman who calls her husband precious, an adjective they might give a baby but never a husband.... Despite her considerable credentials, she brought only a skirt to the proceedings and in the end offered only the novelty of the first serious presidential run by a woman (October 24, 1999).

We also recorded traits and adjectives used to describe candidates in the multi-candidate data set. The proportion of trait references for Dole which were negative was much lower in the multi-candidate data set than in the articles in the Dole-specific data set that focused on Dole in-depth. Only 18.2% of the traits that were used to describe Dole in the multi-candidate data set were negative, compared to 43.8% in the Dole-specific articles. However, the proportion of positive traits was equally high in both data sets – 48.1% for the Dole-specific data set and 52.3% for the multi-candidate data set. Thus, although Dole did not receive a great deal of coverage in the more general articles about the Republican race, these articles were less likely than her in-depth coverage to describe her personality in a negative manner. While Bush received slightly more positive trait coverage than Dole (57% of his references were positive), he also received more negative trait coverage; one-

third (34.7%) of traits used to describe Bush were negative. In contrast to Dole or Bush, McCain's trait coverage was overwhelmingly positive; 81.0% of the traits used to describe McCain were positive and only 1.7% were negative.

The Influence of the Reporter's Gender

Because Dole was a female candidate, one might anticipate that many of the in-depth stories about her would have been written by women reporters, perhaps in part because of the interest of women journalists and perhaps in part because of gender stereotyping in assignments. Whatever the reason, women journalists did, in fact, do much of the writing of in-depth stories about Dole. Of the 131 stories where we were able to ascertain the gender of the reporter, 48.9% of the in-depth stories were written by women. This is a very high proportion for political coverage in major newspapers as is evident from the fact that the proportion of female reporters is notably smaller, 32.0%, in the multi-candidate sample.

**Table 6:
Differences Between Female and Male Reporters in the Proportions of
In-Depth Elizabeth Dole Stories with Various Characteristics**

	Female Reporters % of Stories	Male Reporters % of Stories
Gender as Major Focus of Story	31.3	17.9
Pro-Woman or Pro-Dole Tone	43.8	25.4
Mentioned Bob Dole as Husband	73.4	61.2
Mentioned Dress or Appearance	32.8	6.0
Mentioned Lack of Substance	42.2	34.3
Mentioned Lack of Money	37.5	47.8
Cited Female Expert as Source	20.3	38.8
N =	64	67

There are some clear differences between the stories of female and male reporters in the Dole-specific sample (Table 6). Women reporters were more likely than male reporters to write in-depth stories about Dole in which gender was the major focus of the article. The articles women wrote were more likely to be pro-woman or pro-Dole in tone than articles written by men. However, male reporters (38.2%) were more likely than female reporters (20.3%) to cite women as expert sources (Table 6).⁷

In the multi-candidate sample, reporters of both genders were much less likely than in the Dole-specific sample to cite women as expert sources; only 4.0% of female journalists and 2.4% of male journalists used a woman as their lead source in a story. Gender stereotyping is all too readily apparent here; women may be expert sources on a woman candidate such as Dole, but when it comes to more general election coverage, the "experts" to whom journalists turn, regardless of the gender of the journalist, are overwhelmingly men.

In our Dole-specific sample, women reporters were also more likely to report on the "personal" aspects in their in-depth coverage of Dole (Table 6). They more often than their male colleagues mentioned Dole's husband, Bob, in writing about her, and they were much more likely to mention her dress or appearance. In fact, it appears that male reporters have almost uniformly gotten the message that it is inappropriate to talk about how a woman looks. Finally, women reporters were more likely to criticize Dole for a lack of substance while male reporters were more likely to talk about the financial difficulties her campaign faced (Table 6).

Women reporters in the multi-candidate sample were also more likely to mention Dole's dress or appearance than male reporters (10% compared to 5.4%), and they were more likely to question Dole's substance and campaign management than male reporters. Ten percent of female reporters compared with 5.4% of male reporters raised questions about her lack of substance, and 20.0% of female reporters compared with 5.4% of male reporters criticized the management of her campaign.

Discussion and Conclusions

In a post-mortem piece in *Newsweek* following Elizabeth Dole's withdrawal from the 2000 presidential campaign, journalist Debra Rosenberg observed, "On paper, at least, she was No. 2. In poll after poll, Elizabeth Dole trailed only front-runner George W. Bush in the race for the Republican presidential nomination" (November 1, 1999, p. 41). Rosenberg also reported that Dole had consistently beat Al Gore when pollsters asked voters for whom they would vote if the choice in November 2000 were between these two candidates. Dole publicly attributed her withdrawal from the race to George W. Bush's campaign war chest and her failure to raise comparable amounts of money. However, in light of the findings we have presented in this paper, we cannot help but wonder if Dole might have been able to stay in the race longer had she received more equitable treatment in the press.

Although we did not find differences between Dole and the other Republican contenders on every measure in our analysis, we did find considerable evidence of gender difference. Our findings indicate that Elizabeth Dole received a differential amount of media coverage than the male Republican presidential hopefuls, she received a different type of coverage along gender lines, and her in-depth coverage was decidedly gendered in ways that likely hindered her candidacy. Each of these findings is summarized in turn.

Dole did not receive an amount of media coverage consistent with her standing as the number two candidate throughout the entire time period examined. Both Bush and McCain received more media attention than Dole, which may have played a part in the skyrocketing of McCain's candidacy into legitimacy after Dole's withdrawal from the race in October of 1999. Dole also received less in-depth coverage than Bush or McCain and about the same amount of in-depth coverage as Forbes and Bauer, a finding inconsistent with her public popularity and seemingly inexplicable except in terms of gender bias. Dole also was far less likely than Bush and McCain to be mentioned first or second in news stories about the presidential contenders.

In addition to differences in amount of coverage, we also found differences in the content of the coverage Dole received that are consistent with other research on women candidates and probably can be attributed to her gender. The press paid more attention to Dole's personality traits and appearance than to the traits and appearance of other candidates. A number of the references to Dole's personality and appearance were demeaning and personal, and probably would not be used when describing male candidates for the highest office in the land.

Dole's issue coverage — amount and type — did not differ much from her male counterparts. However, differences were found in the amount and type of horse race coverage she received. Bush and Dole were equally likely to be discussed in terms of the horse race and fund-raising, but the tone of this coverage was overwhelmingly favorable to Bush and almost all negative with regard to Dole. Bush was usually described as the "front-runner" and a skilled fund-raiser. Dole was most often described as candidate lacking fund-raising abilities and a real chance at obtaining the nomination. The negative slant of Dole coverage confirms findings of earlier studies that female candidates receive more negative viability coverage emphasizing their unlikely prospects for victory.

The intensive, in-depth coverage Dole received in articles focused entirely or almost entirely on her also was gendered in ways that may have impaired her candidacy. Journalists repeatedly framed Dole as the "first woman" to be a serious presidential candidate and focused on her gender more than any other aspect of her candidacy, suggesting implicitly, if not explicitly, that she was a novelty in the race rather than a strong contender with a good chance of winning.

Dole also was discussed in negative terms in much of her in-depth coverage, but in less obvious ways. Sears et. al. (1997) comprehensively describe the concept of "symbolic racism" which they argue has replaced overt racism. Instead of showing open prejudice, discrimination is now cloaked in other terms, such as describing African Americans as lazy or undeserving. As with racism, it is no longer as socially acceptable as

it once was to practice overt sexism (although similar to racism, notable exceptions exist), so sexism has become more subtle. Although we were not able to test directly for the existence of “symbolic sexism”— i.e., cloaked descriptions that really represent sexism, we believe symbolic sexism may well have been at play in media coverage of Dole. In describing her, article after article recycled the same adjectives: scripted, rehearsed, robotic, controlled. She was frequently characterized as lacking substance because of perceived deficiencies in her attention to issues or her prior experience. While all candidates should expect to be examined under a microscope when they seek the highest office in the land, Dole’s character and her substance were questioned to such a degree and in such critical ways that it is hard to imagine that gender biases were not at play.

All told, it is clear that Elizabeth Dole’s candidacy was covered differently in the media in a number of different ways due to her gender. However, the actual impact of this gendered coverage on her candidacy is not known. Would Dole have stayed in the race longer had her media coverage been more equitable? Probably, as the relationship between perceived viability and ability to raise money are closely related, and rumors circulated in the media about her withdrawal eroded her image as a serious candidate. Also, the unusual level and positive nature of McCain’s coverage helped him go from a relatively unknown candidate to almost stealing the nomination from Bush and his formidable campaign establishment. Did gender biases in media coverage prevent Dole from obtaining her party’s nomination? Probably not. In this rather unusual primary, George W. Bush was able to raise huge sums of money early on in the primary race and easily received the party’s blessing at the national and state levels.

The strong backing Bush received from the party establishment certainly helps to account for the high level of media coverage he received as well as eventual emergence as the party’s nominee. In contrast, McCain’s ability to emerge from the field of candidates as the most serious challenger to Bush is perhaps at least partially related to the overwhelmingly positive coverage and strong support he received from the media. Unlike Bush and McCain, Dole had neither strong support from her party nor particularly favorable coverage in the media, contributing to a short-lived candidacy despite her popularity with the public.

Notes

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1. Prior to Schroeder, the last bids for a major party's nomination for the presidency were made by Shirley Chisholm, a Democrat, in 1972, and Margaret Chase Smith, a Republican, in 1964. See Braden 1996; Chisholm 1973; and Sherman 2000.
2. The exact search formula we used was: George W. Bush or Elizabeth Dole or Steve Forbes or John McCain or Alan Keyes or Gary Bauer and date aft 3/11/1999 and date bef 10/20/1999. So that we did not artificially inflate the coverage of Dole's campaign relative to that of the other candidates, we chose the dates in such a way as to exclude day-after coverage of the announcement of Dole's exploratory committee as well as coverage of her withdrawal from the race. We wanted the coverage of Dole and the other candidates to be as comparable as possible.
3. The exact search formula we used was: hlead(Elizabeth w/4 Dole) and atl 4(Elizabeth and Dole) and date aft 3/10/1999 and date bef 10/25/1999. Because we were interested in intensive coverage, we picked dates to include coverage of the announcement of Dole's exploratory committee as well as most coverage of her withdrawal from the race.
4. From a high of 24% of support among Republican voters in April 1999 to a low of 8% in June 1999 (which rebounded to 13% by August), Dole was always ahead of every contender except for Bush. During the time period examined, McCain and Forbes never received more than 6% support among potential Republican voters (Gallup Organization, September 16, 1999). Public support for Dole was so widespread that in August 1999 when the public was asked which of the seven Republican candidates should stay in the race for the nomination, 77% said that Dole should stay in, second only to Bush with 96%. Forbes was third with 55% saying he should stay in the race (Gallup Organization, October 20, 1999). Shortly after announcing the formation of her exploratory committee, Gallup published results of a public opinion poll showing that 75% of the general population had a favorable impression of Elizabeth Dole compared to 69% who reported the same for George W. Bush (Gallup Organization, March 10, 1999). Along with high favorability ratings, Dole scored ahead of Bush and Gore on a number of specific items. More people were likely to report that Dole shares their values (69%) than Bush (58%) or Gore (56%). They were also more likely to report that Dole is someone they would be proud to have as president (68% compared to 63% for Bush and 53% for Gore). Seven in ten adults (71%) reported that Dole was inspiring compared to 55% who said the same about Bush and 35% who reported that Gore was inspiring. Americans were also more likely to believe that she cares about the needs of people like them, generally agrees with them on issues they care about and is not a typical politician compared to Bush and Gore. In fact, when asked about nine personal traits and qualities, Dole scored higher in the positive direction than Bush or Gore on six items (Gallup Organization, March 17, 1999).
5. Because so few articles say anything about Bauer or Keyes, they are included only in the section of our analysis focusing on overall coverage and are dropped from the analysis in subsequent sections.
6. We coded a headline or article as positive in tone if, in our judgment, the headline or story gave an overall positive impression and the average reader was likely to feel more positive toward the candidate after reading the headline or story. We coded a headline or article as negative if the story conveyed an overall critical impression of the candidate or conveyed the candidate as a likely loser and thus was likely to leave the average reader feeling more negative toward the candidate after reading the headline or story.
7. For this measure we coded the gender of only the first source cited in each news story.

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