

Framing Femininity:
Media Coverage of a Tennessee Mayoral Campaign

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In recent years, more women have emerged from both major parties and across all regions and disciplines to make their voices heard in the political arena. Slowly, the number of women in Senate seats and governor's mansions has inched higher, and there is a strong possibility that we will have a female presidential candidate in the next election. In 2007, 87 women are serving in the United States Congress. They hold 16, or 16%, of the 100 Senate seats, and 71, or 16.4%, of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives. In state positions, percentages are slightly higher: in 2007, 76 women fill 24.1% of the 315 available positions in statewide elective executive offices, including governor and lieutenant governor. Additionally, women serve as 23.4% of the 7,382 state legislators in this country (Center for American Women in Politics, Women Officeholders).

Based on popular media sources, the number of women in government positions seems to be rising significantly. However, a simple glance at the demographics of those in elected government positions in America over the past 15 years indicates that this is only partially true. Women have seen noteworthy Congressional gains. For instance, in 1992, dubbed "the year of the woman" by the media, only 32 women served in Congress, including 4 female Senators and 28 female Representatives (Center for American Women in Politics, Women in the U.S. Congress 2007). On the other hand, the percentage of females in state legislatures has remained relatively stagnant. In 1992, 18.4% of the 7,461 state legislators in the United States were women (Center for American Women in Politics, Women in State Legislatures).

Government leadership is still largely a “boys’ club,” and much progress needs to be made for women’s voices to be heard on an equal level. Yet research indicates that it is often difficult to recruit women to run for political office. Women are about 50 percent less likely than men to consider political candidacy. Many believe they are unqualified, or lack confidence in their leadership ability. And female candidates have yet to convince the public of their ability: Most citizens believe that women have a harder time than men becoming elected (Carroll, 2003).

Why do so few members of the public think women can be leaders? Obviously, gender stereotypes continue to be perpetuated, and potential female candidates must continue to navigate around constrained expectations about what a politician is and can be. The media, for example, has been found to typecast women in roles ranging from raging feminist to carpool-mom-turned-congresswoman. Moreover, the fact that the candidate is female is sometimes made a central issue in women’s campaigns (Kahn, 1996; Norris, 1997).

An abundance of research details media coverage of women in Congressional and gubernatorial roles. While this information can prove helpful for those with the resources to seek such positions, there has been little research on how the media affects more localized political elections. For many women, local politics is an accessible way to participate in public office and balance other responsibilities, such as a career or family. Additionally, leadership experience in city-wide or state-wide positions often proves a stepping stone to higher offices. Understanding the most

effective methods of communicating one's position to the media while undermining media stereotypes that may interfere with success is crucial.

Media content and election statistics have often been used to speculate about the relationship between gender, politics, and news coverage, but few studies have thoroughly questioned female politicians themselves. This study examines the interaction between women, politics, and the media through case study research focusing on the individual experience of a female who ran for local political office. Ann Coulter, one of the first serious female candidates for mayor of Chattanooga, Tennessee (population approx. 155,000), ran for office in 2004. Coulter had been involved in the city's business development for some time, and had no previous political experience. She defeated eight candidates in the general election, but because 50% of the vote is required for a win, she was required to participate in a runoff and narrowly lost the race. Information from detailed interviews from Coulter as well as those involved her campaign is used to determine if and to what extent gender may have played a role in this election. Furthermore, for a more multi-dimensional approach, coverage of the election in local newspapers is also evaluated to determine how Coulter was framed in the media.

This case study should offer new insights into the ways in which female politicians might most effectively use the media as a tool to promote a successful campaign in a local election. Although the positions of those interviewed are opinions, and may not reflect the political atmosphere throughout the country, they

provide unique perspectives about attitudes toward female leadership in a conservative mid-sized town.

Review of Literature

Framing Theory

The news media tend to explain ideas through “frames” that help audiences place events and issues within a context they can understand. These frames may be derived from the political culture, which establishes social attitudes, from media sources, or from the “communication strategies of politicians, parties, and social movements” (Norris, 7).

Erving Goffman (1974), who established the methodological foundation for framing theory and analysis, suggested that frames help audiences find, understand, identify, and catalog the enormous amounts of information they are flooded with every day. This may mean emphasizing certain aspects of a story and ignoring other parts in order to relay a coherent message to the public. However, the way the media frame an event can also influence the way people think about and retain the information. Furthermore, “once frames are established...they are institutionalized by news organizations” (Norris, 8).

Goffman also conceived of frames in terms of presentation (Norris, 2). According to Nacos (2005), “Framing can and does affect the news in many ways, for example, in the choice of topics, sources, language, and photographs (436).” Schwalbe (2006) indicates that the frequency and placement of images, as well as

their relation to the context in which they are embedded, communicate a perceived reality.

While news frames can be useful in categorizing and making sense of information, significant details may be omitted or distorted in the information sorting process. As Norris writes, “In general, since news frames can be expected to reflect broader social norms, political minorities challenging the dominant culture are most likely to prove critical of the way they are portrayed” (9). She argues that minorities and females occasionally find themselves being stereotyped or treated differently in order to fit into framing schema. Because gender is a significant part of social identity, it makes sense that gender is referred to throughout the news. Yet the problem with gender frames, she contends, is that they are sometimes used when they are irrelevant. “That is, gender has come to be seen as a relevant peg for the story line whether covering candidates running for office, voters at the ballot box, international leaders, or policy debates about welfare reform, abortion, and affirmative action” (7).

Some of the more common gender-based frames Nacos found in her study of news framing of female candidates include physical appearance, family connection, women’s lib/equality, toughness, and naiveté or being out of touch with reality. She noted that female politicians are extremely aware of the media’s interest in the way they present themselves. In fact, some feel that their appearance is considered more important than their ideas and political positions. For example, Arkansas Senator Blanche Lincoln, who is currently serving her second term, commented last year:

“Now as a woman you realize that if you don’t have on lipstick, there’s gonna be a big issue. Or if you’ve got a run in your panty hose, you know, no one’s gonna take you seriously about the answers that you have to these questions. Well does a man have that problem – no” (Braver). The emphasis placed on the outward characteristics of female politicians differs from the way the news reports about male politicians (Nacos, 438).

Whether or not a potential female politician is married or has children is also often a focus of campaign coverage. Moreover, the language used to describe marital status is often considered to belittle female candidates’ individual identities. For instance, Christine Todd Whitman, former governor of New Jersey, was identified in campaign coverage as “the preppy wife of a multimillionaire investment banker” (Nacos, 440). According to Robson (2000), single women face yet another set of challenges, in that they may be seen as morally suspect and deficient if they lack children.

There are exceptions, however. As Robson notes, Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) has blazed her way around these stereotypes by redefining the notion of family. Through her rhetoric, she has constructed the idea that her constituents are her family. She stated: “We have literally devoted our lives to public service and we look upon the people we represent as part of our extended family. We feel about them personally. That’s why we listen to their concerns and their issues as we would people within our own family” (212).

Terkildsen and Schnell (1997) analyzed the effect of media frames on public opinion, arguing that the media not only reinforced what citizens believed about certain issues, but in fact, persuaded them to think in certain ways. The authors examined stories in weekly news magazines about the women's movement through five frames: sex roles, feminism, political rights, economic rights, and anti-feminism. They hypothesized that framing the women's movement in terms of political rights would have a positive impact on respondents' views on women's rights, but that economic rights, feminism, and anti-feminism frames would have a negative effect.

The researchers found evidence that the way in which an issue was framed has an impact on audience attitudes. Results showed, for instance, that "economic rights and anti-feminism frames had a strong, negative impact on respondents' attitudes toward gender equality, support for women's rights, support for non-traditional gender roles and the frequency with which subjects mentioned women's issues as among the most important issues facing the U.S." However, the researchers were surprised to learn that gender also impacted respondents' attitudes: men were more likely to have a negative attitude about gender equality than women.

To determine the amount and type of coverage female candidates received in gubernatorial elections, Devitt (2002) analyzed newspaper stories on four races. He found that incumbency, not gender, seemed to dictate the amount of coverage that candidates received. However, he also found limited evidence that male and female candidates were covered differently, as females received less issue and more personal coverage than men. Devitt's study also offered support that reporters' gender may be

a factor in this coverage discrepancy. Men wrote 63% of all articles studied, and they wrote “significantly more personal frames for female candidates than for male candidates. In addition, male reporters wrote significantly fewer issue frames for female candidates than for male candidates.” Significantly, the paragraphs written by female reporters did not reveal a gender bias.

According to Kahn (1996), gender stereotyping may be exacerbated by the dearth of female candidates, especially in Senate and gubernatorial races. In these contests media coverage is more prevalent, so gender differences can be seen as “potentially more consequential” (14). On the other hand, she found that races for the House of Representatives, for instance, receive far less news coverage, making gender differences less crucial to reporters.

Others suggest that ignoring gender in any race may be detrimental to female candidates. Former Canadian prime minister Kim Campbell blamed her defeat on the media’s disregard for the impact of gender. “New politics, old media...when you’re not a traditional politician, they don’t know what to make of you,” she said (Gidengil and Everitt, 2003). The researchers concluded that conventional news frames have a tendency to treat male candidates as “normal,” reinforcing the notion that women should not be politicians.

In their book *Gender and Candidate Communication*, Bystrom et al. note that as time passes, coverage may be improving for women running in gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races. They cite multiple studies that demonstrate that women receive equal, if not more, coverage, in these campaigns, and that framing of female

candidates was fairer than in previous research. However, the authors still say some differences do occur. For instance, women are more likely to be described in terms of their gender, marital status, and children (19).

Stereotypes of Female Candidates

Many researchers note that the public uses stereotypes to assess political leaders and candidates. In her book *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman*, Kahn (1996) writes that gender expectations lead audiences to develop certain impressions and infer gender-related characteristics about males and females in politics. For instance, male candidates are seen as “stable, aggressive, decisive, tough, and competent,” while women are viewed as “trustworthy, compassionate, honest, and moral” (8).

Dolan (2004) also observed that voters have certain expectations about the interests and expertise of women candidates. Women, she says, are linked to “compassion” issues, such as poverty, health care, the elderly, education, children and family issues, and the environment. Men, on the other hand, are thought to be more concerned with economics, defense, business, crime, and agriculture (65). Herrnson et al (2003) indicated there are significant gender differences in perceptions of candidate aptitude concerning “force and violence” issues like capital punishment or nuclear war, as well as “traditional values” such as attitudes about drug use, homosexuality, and prayer in school. As Dolan notes, these traits become a concern because of the presumed gap between “female” character traits and the capabilities

needed to excel in a political context (64). Additionally, Furthermore, Bystrom et al (2001) determined that when newspapers discussed a candidate's sex, children, or marital status, female candidates were much more likely to be the target of this discussion, reflecting "the double standards still in place in society when evaluating the ability of women to balance their professional and personal/family roles (2009).

According to Dolan, another pervasive stereotype of female candidates is the idea that women are more liberal than men. However, she argues that there is evidence that this perception may in fact be reality, or the public may be reacting to the limited information they receive about women in the media and at campaign events or other public gatherings and come to believe this stereotype (64).

Ironically, research suggests that ideological stereotypes may actually benefit female candidates. Dolan contends, for example, that voters who value social issues may be attracted to female candidates because they believe them to have a strong point of view in this area. More obviously, women candidates are thought to be better at tackling women's issues, such as sexual harassment, abortion, and women's rights (65).

In fact, Herrnson et al (2003) conducted a study to see if women who emphasized gender issues and targeted women voters were more successful at getting elected. They found that female candidates who highlighted issues associated with women and who specifically targeted women's or social groups did benefit from such promotion. However, focusing on women's issues alone or targeting women's

groups alone did not impact the candidates' campaigns. These results suggest that women should use gender as an asset rather than trying to hide it.

Political party may also have an effect on gender stereotypes. For instance, Dolan found that when a female candidate is a Democrat, the stereotypes people hold about her are reinforced by partisan stereotypes, as Democrats are also perceived as being more interested in social issues. Additionally, because sex stereotypes and apparent partisan values conflict when evaluating Republican female candidates, it may more difficult to form a clear evaluation of the individual (80-81).

The notion that female politicians are more focused on so-called women's issues does not appear to originate with the female politicians themselves, according to Niven and Zilber (2001), who reviewed the Web sites of 83 members of the U.S. House of Representatives. They found that the majority of both women and men highlighted their record on women's issues. Additionally, most female politicians did not feature women's issues prominently. These results offer support that the frames used to describe female politicians are in the news media, where the women do not have direct control over their image, contradicts the way they portray themselves.

According to Falk and Kenski (2006), "current events, extant stereotypes, and perceptions of women's and men's strengths" affect the public's perception of the worthiness of women to be elected to public office (2). They conducted a telephone survey of 702 adults to determine whether concerns over terrorism, homeland security, and U.S. involvement in Iraq affected presidential gender preference, and compared it to a post-September 11 survey. Indications that a woman president

would do a better job in handling the issue valued as most important by respondents dropped from 25.3 percent in 1999/2000 to 15.4 percent in September 2003. The drop in acceptance of a woman as president of the U.S., they argued, “demonstrates the way current events and stereotypes interact to create a changing environment for women seeking to achieve high political office” (13)¹.

Dolan’s (2005) research suggests that candidate behavior changes in relation to the sex of his or her opponent (32). For instance, she found that male candidates may manipulate their behavior when competing against women in two ways. They may be cautious about using negative attack strategies so as not to appear to be “bullying” the female, or they may alter their campaign to show greater support for women’s issues.

Dolan admits that isolating the influence of candidate sex in an experimental setting cannot be completely generalized to the real world, where multiple factors affect one’s decision about a candidate. “When using data from real-world elections involving women and men candidates, we see that candidate sex is less central to the evaluations of congressional candidates on a consistent basis than previous work has led us to expect” (83). She continues,

It is not just the presence of a woman candidate that can alter the electoral environment, but instead it is a complex dynamic that includes the presence of women candidates and enough media attention to them and gendered issues to allow voters to become aware of these women and have their predispositions to vote for them activated (136).

¹ In their survey, women were more likely to have a stronger opinion that a woman or a man would do a better job as president; men, on the other hand, were more likely to say that neither gender would be better or that they did not know. Race, education, and political affiliation also proved significant in participant’s responses.

However, several researchers offer additional explanations as to why stereotyping can occur. Ridgeway (2001) explains gender inequality with the expectation states theory, which argues that “gender is deeply entwined with social hierarchy and leadership because the rules for the gender system that are encoded in gender stereotypes contain status beliefs at their core” (637). These status beliefs, or generally accepted cultural norms, connect social significance and skills to one category (for example, men) over another (women). As these beliefs develop further, so do stereotypes concerning the differences between the categories, which leads to increased convictions that one group is better than the other. While Ridgeway acknowledges that perceptions of women have become more positive in recent years, “men are still evaluated more favorably in the socially important area of instrumental competence” (639). These stereotypes are also more strongly enforced “in cooperative, goal-oriented contexts” like the workplace, and this creates gender-based performance expectations (642). For example, the expectation states theory predicts that because men are “supposed to,” they participate more and speak with more confidence. Women, on the other hand, would be less influential in such situations. Furthermore, when a performance task is stereotypically masculine, men will be more assertive; but when the task is stereotypically feminine, women tend to lead more.

Similarly, in their meta-analysis of gender and leadership roles, Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) used gender-role theory and gender-role congruency theory, which basically maintain that people behave according to how they think someone of their sex “should” act. They predicted that when evaluating leadership

positions, overall, men would be seen as better leaders, and their findings supported this hypothesis; however, they also found that the bias against women was much larger in specific circumstances. Specifically, women were seen as less effective when they used traditionally masculine leadership styles. Additionally, males were seen as better leaders in jobs typically associated with men, such as athletics (basketball coach). Ridgeway argues that for these stereotypes to be continually maintained, however, they have to be believed by both the dominant and subordinate groups.

How Female Political Candidates Portray Themselves

Many female political candidates, at least at the statewide and national level, have at least some knowledge of stereotypes for or against females as well as female political candidates and the way in which they are portrayed in the media. Hillary Clinton, when addressing the graduating class at Wellesley College in 1992, commented:

You know the rules are basically as follows: If you don't get married, you're abnormal. If you get married but don't have children, you're a selfish yuppie. If you get married and have children, but work outside the home, you're a bad mother. If you get married and have children, but stay home, you've wasted your education.

Furthermore, as Carroll (2003) indicates, "Male behavior is considered inappropriate for a woman and female behavior typified as caring, compassionate, sensitive, and non-aggressive is inappropriate for a politician. As a consequence women find themselves in a classic double bind" (43).

Because women do not have complete control of how the news media portray them, they must decide whether to combat stereotypes, ignore them completely, or to play up their perceived strengths. For instance, Niven and Zilber (2001) interviewed 59 press secretaries working for both male and female members of the U.S. House of Representatives. When asked about the image they were trying to create for their bosses, secretaries for both genders presented almost the same themes, including effective, hardworking, intelligent, and in touch with the people (156). Notably, press secretaries for females rarely mentioned gender-specific interests.

Kahn (1996) analyzed press coverage of male and female candidates running for a variety of positions. Men and women stress different campaign themes, she found, yet “the news media is not equally responsive to their messages” (39). Kahn hypothesized that reporters, just like readers, could have stereotypical beliefs about the viability of a candidate that would affect the way they covered the campaign, and her data indicated that the news media responded better to the agendas of male candidates, and accurately reflected the traits emphasized by male candidates while ignoring those emphasized by female candidates (40-41). In fact, “the news media’s agenda almost mirrors that issued by male candidates in their televised political advertisements” (42). Yet, according to Kahn, this ill treatment is affected by the position for which the candidate is running. While male and female candidates for governor are treated differently by the press, “the gender differences in news coverage in gubernatorial campaigns are neither as consistent nor as dramatic as the gender differences in news patterns found in senate campaigns” (97).

Additionally, Kahn discovered that women tend towards certain strategies when determining how to present their message to the public. For instance, because women are perceived as more honest than male candidates, they are more likely to be featured in their own advertisements. They are also much more likely than men to dress formally in their commercials to convince voters of their legitimacy and professionalism (31).

According to Bystrom et al (2004), female candidates can use the media they can control, namely television and the internet, to influence the way they are portrayed in the news. Reporters often cover political advertising as “part of the campaign dialogue,” and winning female candidates seem to display substantive positive messages. The authors do not suggest eliminating negative advertising, but they do advise female candidates to strike a balance between positive and negative that aims to be positive overall. Additionally, they must balance the “types” of issues they discuss, and display their knowledge of masculine issues like crime and taxes while remaining strong on feminine issues like health care and education (216-217).

While there has been a great deal of investigation concerning the context in which gender is discussed in political campaigns for Congressional or gubernatorial offices, there has been little research conducted to analyze the impact of the interaction of gender and the media in localized races. It is imperative for women beginning their career in politics to understand this interaction, so that they may know what to expect and how to alleviate or combat negative coverage. This case study hopes to examine the frames used to represent the major candidates in Chattanooga’s

2004 mayoral election, and especially its female candidate, Ann Coulter, to determine the focus of the news coverage and observe whether or not gender stereotypes are more or less prevalent. The study will also analyze Coulter's campaign team's views on the coverage and the ways in which they dealt with the press. Finally, suggestions for how females in local campaigns can maximize their image and minimize the impact of the media's "perceived" reality will be discussed.

Method

Procedure

A case study was selected as the most appropriate vehicle for investigating the questions at the center of this study. The structure of a case study offers the opportunity for more intense examination of the themes of the race and of its participants, using multiple sources from personal experiences to quantified data. Furthermore, in this type of study, the researcher can scrutinize a specific event within its natural context: in this case, discussion can revolve around the months leading up to the 2005 mayoral election (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006).

A 1.5 hour long interview was conducted with Ann Coulter in October 2006. Her answers were tape-recorded, and the tape was transcribed for reference purposes. Additionally, Jeff Olingy, Coulter's campaign manager, was interviewed for about an hour at his office at Chattanooga State Community College. His answers were also taped and a transcript of the interview was used in this study. (See Appendix 1 for questions asked.)

Newspaper coverage of the 2005 Chattanooga mayoral campaign was also analyzed. Bystrom et al (2004) indicated that studies show that newspaper articles are a “significant source of information for the electorate” and that voter knowledge increases with exposure to newspaper coverage. Copies of 106 articles in the Chattanooga Times Free Press referencing Ann Coulter and the 2005 Chattanooga mayoral race were obtained from the Chattanooga Public Library. Each article was read and multiple variables were recorded, including: the date of the article, the length of the story (in words and in paragraphs), the title and headline of the story, the dominant sources, the gender of the author, and whether visual images or charts accompanied the article.

Additional factors were analyzed, including dominant frames (if the article was sufficiently long enough to capture coherent frame), whether the article seemed positive, negative, or neutral overall, and whether stereotypes of women were reflected in the story and how. (See Appendix 2 for sample coding sheet). Each article was read through multiple times, first to determine overall connotation and potential frames, and then to specifically analyze sources and how and when the candidates were presented in the article. A “positive” article was defined as an article where Coulter was the dominant source (although other sources may have been included), and there were no statements or suggestions made that could be detrimental to her campaign. Normally, these articles reflected her goals for the city. Positive articles were either accompanied by a positive photograph of Coulter or no photograph at all. A “neutral” article typically reflected the views of all prominent candidates equally

and discussed campaign issues. References to rumors about Coulter or any other candidate were minimal – if they were included at all, they were buried in the story or comprised a sentence or two at most. Additionally, neutral articles were often accompanied by graphs or charts, or positive or neutral photographs of Coulter. Finally, a “negative” article included direct comments or suggestions that could be damaging to Coulter’s campaign, and either no graphic at all or a negative photograph of Coulter. To determine potential frames, key words, story patterns, and visual patterns, as well as quantitative data, were scrutinized. Ten randomly selected articles were read and coded by three others, and intercoder reliability was 90%.

For accessibility reasons, television news coverage and candidates’ advertisements were not analyzed. However, political advertisements created by the candidates were alluded to in several news articles and editorials, offering a small glimpse of the effects of this media.

Election Background

The 2005 Chattanooga mayoral race was seen as wide open because the current Mayor, Bob Corker, was not seeking re-election after his first term in office, choosing instead to run for the U.S. Senate. During his term, violent crime was greatly reduced and 2 billion dollars were invested in some of the city’s poor-performing schools. Additionally, a \$120 million waterfront renovation was installed in downtown Chattanooga, continuing downtown revitalization. Residents hoped the city would continue to move in a positive direction.

Early on, the top three contenders that emerged in the race were Democrats Coulter and Ron Littlefield, a city councilman; and Republican Dan Johnson, a local certified public accountant. Polls revealed that Coulter and Littlefield, especially, had a statistically equal number of votes, but neither had enough votes going into the first election to avoid a run-off. Coulter won the general election, but only received 42% of the vote, which resulted in a second campaign against Littlefield, who had 36% of the vote. Johnson, the third place finisher (with 19%), threw his support to Littlefield after the first election, but the impact of this decision on the election remains unclear. Littlefield ended up winning the run-off with 54% of the vote, while Coulter received 46%.

Results

In general, analysis revealed clear inequities in the newspaper's coverage of Coulter and her opponents. Visual and other framing disparities related to gender may have helped shape the audience's opinion of Coulter and the other candidates. Analysis and interview data from Coulter and her campaign manager supported these findings, but also suggest that gender may not have been the only factor influencing the election.

Coulter's Campaign

Before running for mayor of Chattanooga, Ann Coulter was the executive vice president of RiverCity Co., a nonprofit downtown development firm. She decided to

run in the summer of 2004 for several reasons: timing, the appeal of the office, and the fact that mayoral races in Chattanooga were generally nonpartisan. Additionally, as she had been encouraging other women to act as leaders, she felt that it was her turn to be a role model. “I felt that if the position was there, and it was possibly available to me, that I couldn’t just continue to urge other women to step out there and try for leadership roles if I had the chance and I didn’t do it,” she stated.

Coulter said her own research had shown that women have to be drafted to run for office, and she herself was influenced by friends and members of the community she highly respected. At first it was mentioned to her offhand, she said, but later, when people realized the current mayor would not seek reelection, she began to get phone calls specifically about potential candidacy. She continued:

“Men go out and talk to other people about whether or not they would support them first. That’s one thing. You can wait forever, just wait for people to ask you to run...I think it’s mostly because women and men aren’t used to thinking of women as readily as they are used to thinking of men as elected leaders, so it’s a little bit more of a stretch for a woman to see herself in that position than it is for a man.”

Coulter carefully chose her campaign team. First, she said, she considered “some of the people [who] had urged me to run who were politically savvy, who I knew could help raise money, could open doors to other people for me, who represented broad segments of the community, and people who I felt like I could trust. And then little by little, [I] sorted out who would play what role, whether it would be a full-time helping to organize a door-to-door campaign, or somebody who would come in and lead in fundraising.”

Interestingly, Coulter did not know her campaign manager, Jeff Olingy, very well before the race, but felt she needed a male campaign manager, in particular someone with business experience, to complement what she believed she brought to the table. “I also felt that as a female candidate who was managing my campaign would be more important than if I were a male candidate, because...women have trouble being seen as good managers,” she added.

She also said: “I knew I had to have somebody full time running the campaign, and I didn’t know of anybody that I was really close to in my campaign advisors who was in a position to drop everything they were doing and do that full time day in and day out... I was impressed with what [Jeff] had done, and also knew that he had recently left a position and was not in a real big hurry to figure out what he was doing next... And it turned out it was something he was excited about doing, and he could put that kind of time into it.”

Olingy did have a great deal of business, organizational, and management expertise and history and knew a lot of people in town, but had no political experience. The campaign staff he put together, however, was an energetic, good-sized team of about 50 to 75 people. “They were all volunteers,” he said, “so a lot of it was asking people to participate, keeping it fun for them to participate, showing them how the community would benefit if they did their jobs well. I learned a lot about patience though. If you get angry, in most cases they’ll say, “take a hike,” and you’ll run them off and you can’t afford to do that.”

According to Coulter, her strategy was “just to win. Just to, you know, reach as many people as I could, to find whatever ways I could to get the message of my campaign out to the public, and to not get caught up in things that didn’t matter ultimately in the race.”

Olingy said as part of the campaign strategy, the team consciously chose not to “focus on the woman thing.” As he explained it, “We portrayed her as a professional, forward-thinking person who understood Chattanooga and its past by all the things she had done, but understood also Chattanooga and the opportunities and the challenges to its future...Early on we said we wanted to appeal to people’s intellects, not to their emotions, and so, whether she was a man or a woman wasn’t something we wanted to bring to the table.”

However, Coulter did have to face additional obstacles in the race because of her gender, Olingy commented. He said:

Chattanooga’s still a small Southern town, so it is in a lot of ways still very conservative. So there’s an element that was... a woman? Mayor? A woman? We’ve never had that before. Cause she was the first serious woman candidate. I think there were concerns out there that she was going to focus primarily on downtown, as her two predecessors were at least perceived to do, and therefore the neighborhoods were going to be slighted. And so, it was interesting because there was the proactive approach that we wanted to take, but then there were also a lot of subterranean elements that were out and about, and you know we always had to deal with those.

When asked if the campaign was successful in portraying Coulter, Olingy said, “Well to the extent we lost, no. To the extent that we came a whole lot closer than anybody ever thought we would, yes.”

Coulter said she thought the major issues of the campaign should have been the future of Chattanooga and how it can compete in a global economy for jobs, talent, and economic development. She also felt there should have been a greater focus on education.

Olingy placed a similar emphasis on the issues at the center of the campaign. “I think if you really had to focus on one it was the future versus the past. And we saw an opportunity to help people understand that the future for Chattanooga and its citizens is a bright one if we are prepared for it. If there are good jobs being recruited to the community. If our population is educated to take those jobs.”

Despite Coulter’s ambition to discuss important issues and get problems solved, she felt that her efforts were thwarted by news media coverage of her campaign. As she said: “Those were the issues with the average person on the street. You could not make them issues in the press. [They] would only write about what I was saying about my opponent and vice versa, not about what I wanted to do.”

“It’s a lot easier, you have to work a lot less to just write about what somebody said about somebody, then if you have to investigate an issue and write about it... I could have been in the newspaper every day, literally, every day in a big way if I had just come out in the most negative way to [talk about] the other candidates,” she continued.

Coulter said she felt that there was a bias against her as a female candidate from the very beginning and that rumors distributed by the other campaigns were unjustly repeated in the newspaper throughout the campaign – namely rumors

questioning her religion and her work with RiverCity, a city-created nonprofit responsible for massive downtown development. She remarked: “My opponents thought to make gender an issue. Comments were published about my hair, my makeup²... one of my opponents, and this was published, called me a “Stepford” candidate.”

According to Coulter, the frames reporters used in their stories further propelled gender stereotypes. She relates:

There was one egregious example [of gender bias]. Absolutely horrific. I’ve never cried in public in my whole public life. 53 years old. I learned a long time ago you don’t do that. Well election night when I’d lost the race there were hundreds of people down there. And I was emotional, but I knew that could happen... I went into this with really open eyes, I mean I knew it was an uphill battle. And so I got up there and made my little talk, and I did not, did not cry. At one point my voice broke, and I mean there was not a tear, no way. And the woman wrote the article in the next day’s paper, she said something like “with tears streaming” [Coulter conceded]. I called her up the next day and said I absolutely [did not cry], and she said, “But I thought I saw you cry” and I said you did not. And the next morning people who were there that night started calling me saying you did not cry. That shows you what [the reporter’s] perception is. She lost, she’s gotta cry. And I never did cry. I still haven’t cried.

Unlike Coulter, overall Olingy did not consider media gender bias to be a significant factor in the race. “I think we were treated fine,” he said. “I think sometimes, I saw it in business, business executives would expect the media to kind of just create a release, do a press release, but that’s not the way the media works...I think in general the newspaper probably was more supportive of Ann. They have to

² Analysis of the newspaper coverage found few direct comments about Coulter’s appearance. However, one opponent did call her a “Stepford’ candidate.”

walk that fine line, but I think her vision was more attuned to what key members of the newspaper management team thought.”

Coulter spent a great deal of time during her campaign going door to door and speaking with Chattanooga residents. At first, she said, people had not heard of her, but “after a time, I’d knock on somebody’s door and they did have a preconceived notion, either through my advertising or through somebody else’s or through word of mouth.”

Consequently, she often had to straighten out rumors about her character circulated in the press and her former employment.

What’s funny is that I got to where I could tell when I needed to say something about [the rumor that I was an atheist]... I’d tell them who I was, and they’d look at me, and they’d say, “Well I think I’ve seen some of your ads and I was just curious...” And I’d know what was coming. They’d say I’d really like to know if you are an atheist, and I’d say, “No ma’am or no sir I’m not. And I really appreciate you giving me a chance to clarify that.” And then they’d go “Whew, glad that’s over with” and then we’d talk. That one was pretty damaging.

Coulter believed that spending time dispelling rumors instead of focusing on Chattanooga and the issues facing it hurt her in the long run. She said: “I mean, if you were put in the position of having to stand in front of people and say I’m not a lesbian, I’m not an atheist, you’ve already lost the campaign. It’s nothing you can prove or not prove. But it plants a seed.”

Coulter also said that she felt pressure to look or act a certain way. “You need to look very businesslike, not long dangly earrings...you just need to look sort of finished and businesslike all the time. You need to hold yourself a certain way, you

need to express a sense of authority but friendliness, because women are just judged a lot more harshly on those kinds of things than men are.”

She continued, “It’s like everything from how you enter a room to how you respond to people one-on-one. You do it with a measure of authority almost, but with certainly, with respect and dignity for the other person.”

However, she added, “Once you’re kind of out there and you’re running for executive positions, people will automatically give you a certain amount of respect. And so you just respond to that.”

As a professional woman, Coulter had experienced enough gender bias throughout her career to recognize and attempt to work around it. She commented: “I have definitely tried to develop some skills for how to deal with it when I see it right in front of me. For example, I’m just real sensitive about either myself or seeing another woman interrupted.”

While Olingy felt that, largely, gender was not a prominent factor in the outcome of the race, he did acknowledge that Coulter’s gender probably mattered more in the run-off, because in the general election a lot of people probably did not take her seriously. A poll published in the *Times Free Press* two days before the run-off election, which showed Coulter ahead, may have mobilized voters who were nervous about the thought of a female mayor.

“I think that [poll] was what did us in,” he said. “I think that there were a lot of people that had said ‘Ain’t no woman, atheist, whatever, will become mayor of Chattanooga’ until they saw that Sunday paper...Something happened those last 72

hours that threw everybody off and I think it was because of that poll. You know, it would have been a much better deal for us actually if that poll would have showed us behind.”

Olingy added, “You’ve got the woman. You’ve got [the rumor about being] an atheist. You’ve got the downtown developer.... I think that if the only negative hurled at her was atheism, she’d have beat it. Problem was, she couldn’t beat woman. Not a whole lot you can do about that one...Any one of those by itself would not have beaten her...the combination of the three I think resulted in her loss.”

Coulter’s opinion of the news media has changed significantly since she ran for mayor. “I was appalled. Really appalled that nobody wants to talk about issues, that they only want to talk about something nasty you’ll say about another candidate or how you would respond to what the other candidate said about you. Even when I would respond with information that they ought to go check they wouldn’t go do it.”

Olingy speculated that support of the press for an intellectual campaign is minimal “because of the economic world we live in.”

I think that the [*Chattanooga Times Free Press*] did as good of a job as a newspaper could have done. I think what you’ve got with a lot of small town newspapers... is you tend to have less reporters and younger reporters. So what happens I think, and I’m not being critical, I’m just being observant, is that it’s like when you and I were on the playground when we were younger. And I’m fighting with you. And we’re not talking to each other. But then you get that third person who runs and says wait till you hear what [he] said about you, and then you have a response and then that person runs back and says hey, [they] are talking about you.... And I think that is a mechanism that is used today in the press to create news. And I don’t think there’s a lot of in-depth reporting because I don’t think [newspapers] can afford to.

Coulter also admits that the race was very involved and a number of factors could have contributed to the final outcome. “I don’t want to give the impression that it was any one element [gender bias or sexism], and I’m sure there are factors that I don’t even understand or realize about it. It was a complex race, and it brought out some of the best and some of the worst in people,” she said. “But I do believe that at the end of the day gender bias was pretty potent. It wasn’t the only factor, though, and it’s a complicated factor on its own.”

Despite potential gender bias, Coulter recognized that there could be some benefits to being a female candidate, even though these benefits may also come across as stereotypical. She said: “Well, usually it means that male candidates are less likely to attack you, because that’s unchivalrous and people will judge you harshly for that, and some did judge harshly I think, on that aspect. I think in some ways [women] have the potential to be better campaigners, because I think they are just basically more open to all kinds of people, and are used to situations that make you good in a campaign. Women are by and large, the research indicates, seen to be more honest, and more trustworthy with regard to money, than males.”

When asked whether gender matters, Coulter said, “Oh yeah, I think it matters all the time. It’s just a matter of how much it matters I guess.”

News Media Coverage Analysis

Because Ann Coulter was the first serious female candidate for mayor of Chattanooga, it was important that coverage of her in local newspapers be fair and

objective. She and her opponents should have been written about in equal amounts, quoted as objectively as possible, and depicted similarly in a visual way (i.e., in photos, descriptions.) For the most part, *The Chattanooga Times Free Press* remained somewhat unbiased: 57 (or 64%) of articles written about Ms. Coulter and her campaign were coded as neutral. On the other hand, 24 (or 27%) of the articles portrayed Coulter in a negative light. Examples of negative publicity found in the articles include unnecessary coverage of other candidates' attacks on her character and/or negative references to her former job, her religion, or her family life. Furthermore, less than 10% of the articles were coded as biased in favor of Coulter. These articles included pieces about Coulter's entrance into the race and her potential contributions to and goals for the city. (See Appendix 3 for examples.)

A fact that may have been significant relates to the gender of reporters covering her campaign. Analysis revealed that 80 (90%) of the articles were written by males, and 8 (9%) were written by females³. Norris (1997) observes that female reporters are generally more sympathetic toward female candidates as they can "identify with the frustrations, the barriers, and the breakthroughs of women in politics because they have had similar experiences in their own newsrooms" (51).

While most newspaper coverage was neutral or negative, the editorial pages were decidedly positive toward Coulter's campaign. *The Chattanooga Times Free Press* is unique for having two editorial pages in every issue. When the more liberal *Chattanooga Times* and the more conservative *Chattanooga Free Press* merged in

³ One article's author was listed as staff report.

1998, the resulting newspaper retained both liberal and conservative editorial pages. During Coulter's campaign, 17 editorials were written from both sides about the race. Of this number, 11 (65%) were positive, and 6 (35 %) were neutral. No negative editorials about Coulter appeared in the paper.

While the length of a newspaper article does not necessarily influence how much of the article gets read (Freedman and Fico, 2005), longer articles do take up more space, and therefore signify prominence, in a newspaper. It is interesting to note that, on average, longer articles were more negative. In fact, the average length of positive articles was 486.88 words, the average length of neutral articles was 518.70 words, and the average length of negative articles was 17% greater, at 607.49 words.

Another interesting finding was that despite the significant negative coverage Coulter received, overall, slightly more was written about her than any other candidate: 763 paragraphs mentioned or involved Coulter; 714 paragraphs of text were devoted to Ron Littlefield; 349 paragraphs were about Dan Johnson; and 307 paragraphs reported on all of the other candidates in the race. Some paragraphs discussed more than one candidate and were counted for each person discussed, yet the difference in paragraphs written about Coulter and Littlefield amounts to a few stories. The extent of coverage seems to be based on when in the campaign the article was written. Campaign coverage fell into three distinct framing stages: 1) an "introductory," get-to-know the candidates stage (the first 16 articles), 2) a "first campaign" stage (from articles 17-63), and 3) a "run-off" stage (articles 64-106). In the introductory stage, the amount of text devoted to each candidate was almost

equal: Coulter received 55 paragraphs, compared to Littlefield's 54 paragraphs, and Johnson's 48 paragraphs. The other five candidates together received 65 paragraphs of text. However, a clear shift was apparent in the first campaign stage: during this period, 403 paragraphs involved Coulter, compared to 312 paragraphs for Littlefield, 218 paragraphs for Johnson, and 238 paragraphs for the rest of the field. It is important to note that the majority of negative articles about Coulter were published within this time frame. Finally, in the run-off stage, 245 paragraphs are written about Coulter, compared to 283 paragraphs about Littlefield.

The sources used in the articles and editorials are also important. Sources are intrinsic frame indicators, in that they determine the context and interpretation of the story. Furthermore, as Freedman and Fico (2005) argue, people attend to the media to see what others like themselves are doing, and the absence of female sources may discourage female readership. Additionally, information diversity plays an influential role in evaluating the performance of the media. Ann Coulter herself was a dominant source in 56 articles analyzed, and her campaign manager Jeff Olingy was a dominant source in 22 additional stories; one or more of her opponents represented the dominant source in 78 articles, and others, such as strategists, professors, citizens, or city officials, were presented as dominant sources in 39 articles⁴.

Table 1 demonstrates which sources were used in each phase of the mayoral race. Additionally, Table 2 shows which sources were used in articles coded

⁴ These numbers do not add up to the total number of articles and editorials because at times there was more than one dominant source.

negative, positive, and neutral. It is important to note that Olingy was quoted mostly during the first campaign stage, which is when the most negative articles were run.

Placement of newspaper stories denotes the importance the paper places assigns to a story; for instance, front-page news takes precedence over stories on inside pages. Eighteen articles about the race (20%) were placed on page A1, the first page of the first section of the paper; 46 articles (52%) made page B1, the first page of the metro/regional section, 14 articles (16%) appeared on B3, five articles (6%) were placed on B5, and six other articles appeared on miscellaneous other back pages. Significantly, almost 40% of the articles about Coulter appearing on page A1 were coded as negative (See Table 3).

Visual frames also played a pivotal role in the campaign. As Goffman (1974) indicated, visual cues can influence public attitudes toward a person. Ann Coulter was the most-pictured candidate, but only slightly. There were 31 photographs of her published alongside stories, compared to 28 photographs of her opponent Ron Littlefield and 13 photographs of her opponent Dan Johnson. Seventy-one percent of the photos of Littlefield and 65% of the photos of Coulter were coded as positive (a headshot of the candidate smiling, looking at the camera. See Appendix 3). More photos of Coulter (26%) than of Littlefield (18%) were coded as negative (a headshot where the candidate is shown in an unflattering pose. See Appendix 3). Ten percent of the photos of Coulter and Littlefield were coded as neutral (for example, depicting the candidates in a forum setting.) Even more interesting was the time frame in which negative photos appeared in the newspaper. All of the negative photos of Ron

Littlefield were published within the first 25 articles about the race (spread out from July 1, 2004 to Jan. 27, 2005.) However, the negative photos of Ann Coulter were published within articles 39-77, from Feb. 11, 2005 to March 20, 2005, which is right before and during the general election and during the first few weeks of her run-off campaign, in a much more condensed period.

News Media Framing Analysis

Although newspaper articles about the mayoral race are relatively short, several frames and issue cycles related to Coulter were apparent. For instance, while the candidates were frequently introduced by their job title as a gesture of respect, Coulter's former position as an executive at the nonprofit development company RiverCity Co. became an object of controversy, and the paper framed her as a "pawn candidate," someone running as a "front person" for powerful backers. On Feb. 2, 2005, this frame first appeared in an article about a public forum. "Ms. Coulter defended her ties with the RiverCity Co. and said they would not affect her decisions as mayor," the paper stated. The next day, an article appeared on the first page of the paper with the heading, "RiverCity issue heats up race for mayor." The article's sources demeaned Coulter's work at the city-created company, and the story included allegations by one opponent that Coulter was sheltered and groomed by the company as a mayoral candidate. RiverCity was not an "issue" until this article was published, effectively making it an issue. News coverage throughout the rest of the campaign

continually evoked this “pawn candidate” frame, and her opponents were quoted on this “issue,” even well throughout the run-off campaign. A headline on March 19, 2005, for example, read, “Candidates Coulter, Littlefield trade jabs on RiverCity.” An entire story titled, “Johnson perceives conflicts of interest in downtown work” was published on April 5 to rehash the “issue” of Coulter’s former employer, and at this time Johnson was no longer even a candidate. Meanwhile, the paper’s editorials consistently maintained that there were no real issues related to Coulter and the company.

Perhaps more troubling was another frame that appeared throughout newspaper coverage of the campaign – that of Coulter as “unethical” or “having bad morals.” The first article of the first campaign stage, published on Jan. 6, 2005, reported on a poll asking how respondents would feel if their mayor were an atheist, presumably referring to Coulter, as no other candidate had been accused. Coulter maintained her Christianity in this article as well as in another article published Feb. 5, despite the fact that the paper acknowledged, “It’s still unclear who was behind the survey.” On Feb. 12 and Feb. 15 articles about anonymous fliers supposedly distributed in neighborhoods by “a group of private citizens” questioning whether Coulter was an atheist were published, and discussion of her religion continued. Specifically, an article written Feb. 27 stated that, “Ms. Coulter also has had to defend herself against accusations that she is an atheist.” In print, Coulter repeatedly accused Ron Littlefield of creating the “poll” and circulating the fliers. During the run-off campaign, however, discussion about Coulter’s religion tapered off. In one article,

Littlefield called Coulter's pollsters unethical, but for the most part, questions about her ethics and morals were limited to the second framing stage.

Another frame through which Coulter was portrayed relates to the issue of campaign funding, creating the idea that Coulter was only supported by the elite, or "big money." In an article published on Nov. 16, 2004, a report on a fundraising reception held by Coulter mentioned that the invitation list included eight "prominent" families as supporters, while Coulter's opponents were quoted as seeking support from the "general public." An article titled, "Coulter biggest spender in election" appeared on Feb. 23, 2005. While this headline may have been considered neutral in some contexts, here it functioned to reinforce the "big money" frame set up earlier. Furthermore, it included quotes by opponents such as "it would be 'unfortunate' if Ms. Coulter is using her money lead to try to buy her way into the mayor's office." A later article published on Feb. 25, 2005 stated that Coulter raised a good deal of money outside the city, and opponents indicated this to be acceptable. Yet the next day, another article suggested that these same opponents questioned the donations. This frame did not appear in the run-off framing stage.

Finally, from the beginning, the stories published about the campaign created a sense of "girl versus the good ole' boys." This frame emerged on Feb. 23, 2005 in an article headlined, "Johnson attacks Coulter, Littlefield." In the article, Johnson made comments about the financial plans his opponents had for the city. Yet several paragraphs later, a sentence reads, "Mr. Littlefield responded after the forum, not by retaliating against Mr. Johnson, but by attacking Ms. Coulter." Throughout

subsequent articles, Littlefield and Johnson refrained from attacking each other, while consistently attacking Coulter. Later on, Littlefield was heavily quoted degrading RiverCity, and a few days later, Johnson also offered a similar critique. The opponents also questioned where Coulter's campaign funds came from and criticized her advertising. During the run-off stage, Johnson publicly threw his support to Littlefield, and from then on, the pair were quoted in the paper accusing Coulter of everything from "hypocrisy" (March 3, 2005), to "conflicts of interest" (April 5, 2005).

One aspect of Coulter's campaign that the paper avoided was that of appearance. Coulter was rarely, if ever, described in terms of her looks, even though she indicated that she felt she had to look polished at all times. This is contradictory to many studies analyzing gender coverage in the media, and while it is a positive step, it is interesting that her looks were strictly avoided when so many other aspects of her character were criticized. Perhaps, because the race was local, Coulter's "look" was not as important as her agenda. On the other hand, many of the attacks against her were filtered through her male opponents, and they may have felt that attacking Coulter's appearance would make them seem overtly sexist, thus turning off potential voters.

Discussion

While Coulter was a strong candidate with a plethora of experience suiting her for the position of mayor of Chattanooga, she ultimately conceded to her opponent

Ron Littlefield after a run-off, even after she won the general election. The results of this study indicate that in this particular local race, gender still matters. Data and anecdotal evidence suggest that the way Ann Coulter was framed by the news media may have been a factor in her loss. Furthermore, news frames depicting Coulter as a pawn, questioning her ethics and financial support, and pitting her against “the good ole boys” were extremely harmful because she was consistently forced to correct these rumors and put aside her actual agenda. However, some decisions made by the Coulter campaign may also have been damaging.

Terkildsen and Schnell (1997) observe that “the true power of the media lies in telling the public what issues to think about, as well as how to think about those issues” (885). Editorials published on both the liberal and conservative sides of the *Times Free Press* editorial pages repeatedly noted that there was no conflict of interest between Coulter and RiverCity, the firm she worked for that was created by the city for the purpose of downtown development. In contrast, the news pages consistently framed a he-said, she-said battle between the candidates concerning her former position at the company. This frame is significant because, according to researchers, news frame influence is intensified when the audience is unfamiliar with the issues (Zucker, 1978; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987.) Too few facts were published about RiverCity to place Coulter’s opponents’ accusations in context, and without that context, Coulter was relegated to a defensive position. Because she was constantly responding to these accusations, she was unable to push her agenda, which

ultimately may have helped the other candidates. Coulter also felt the newspaper's focus on RiverCity to have been unnecessary and damaging. As she stated:

By and large, people like RiverCity. They don't all know what it is, but they associate it with things happening downtown, and they don't see it as somebody's money pot. They don't. But, the press, without really doing their own work on that, would just repeat whatever the other candidate said. I mean, when I walked door to door, that really was my best judge of how people were viewing me and viewing downtown. They love...what's happened [downtown], and appreciate it.

Traditionally, candidates who have been more active in politics or who have held elected positions are more likely than newcomers to have greater access to the money necessary to campaign (Carroll, 2003). However, this study found that Coulter's business support allowed her to raise funds, quickly increase her name recognition, and become an extremely strong challenger. This was a clear advantage for her coming into the race and one that her opponents often tried to downplay by suggesting that her extensive contributions stemmed from the city's rich and powerful elite. For a woman, especially, to have the most financial support was remarkable and should have been an asset, yet the newspaper's suggestion that only "big money" was behind her undoubtedly affected readers' opinions of what it meant to raise the most funds.

According to Norris (1997), "Sex stereotypes lead people to view women as possessing expressive strengths (such as being emotional, understanding, gentle, warm, compassionate)" (61). Yet results showed that news frames regarding Coulter's morals and ethical standards undermined these potentially positive stereotypes. If Coulter had any advantage over the other candidates because of

citizens' predisposed notions of what it meant to be a female candidate, this advantage was eroded by news framing of the campaign, particularly the "unethical" and "pawn candidate" frames, which questioned her trustworthiness, a trait typically associated with femininity (Kahn, 131) Furthermore, because Coulter chose not to emphasize the fact that she was a female, these negative news frames may have been even more influential.

Whether Coulter's isolation from the other candidates was created by the media or emphasized by her opponents, coverage often seemed to pit her – as the only female candidate – against her male opponents. Yet Kahn (1996) notes that if the press differentiates between male and female candidates in their coverage, "these differences will affect voters' views of the candidates, thereby influencing the electability of women candidates" (11). Littlefield and Coulter, both Democrats, would appear to have had more in common than Littlefield and Johnson, a strongly conservative Republican; yet from the start Littlefield and Johnson attacked Coulter and not each other. Moreover, the media seemed eager to focus on this phenomenon, reflecting and reinforcing Coulter's isolationism. The two may have felt that Coulter was a more formidable opponent and thought they needed to attack in any way they could; however, the type of attacks against her (i.e, personal attacks on her character) seem to suggest some degree of gender influence at work. Because women are seen as gentler and more emotional (Kahn, 6), and as Coulter said, weaker leaders and managers, it may have seemed easier for the male candidates to attack her rather than each other. Whatever the motivation, this strategy paid off in the end when Johnson

publicly asked his supporters to cast their votes for Littlefield, thus helping him in the run-off.

While descriptive comments about Coulter's physical appearance were not present in the news articles, the choice of photos of the candidates at certain points certainly communicated perceived differences in the candidates' importance and abilities. When looking at an article, readers are automatically drawn to photos and other visual elements and can instantly judge what they think about the candidate from these images. Again, negative photos of Littlefield showed up only at the beginning of the campaign, while negative photos of Coulter were published at the most crucial times in the race. It would be interesting to determine why the positive picture of Coulter that appeared in the first framing stage was replaced by much of the race with a negative one, but the timing of the negative photo of her hardly seems impartial.

News coverage of the campaign was mediocre at best, with too little emphasis on issues and too many prominent negative articles about Coulter. The placement of a large percentage of negative articles on page A1, as the results of this study show, is also telling, because this suggests that the snide comments traded by Coulter and her opponents were considered more important by news editors than how best to move the city forward. Petty rivalries should be omitted from news pages, and something is wrong if no one wants to talk about the issues.

How a candidate interacts with the media is crucial because it shapes the power a candidate has over voter opinion, as well as the credibility the audience

attributes to a candidate. Strong, direct quotes from the candidates obviously seem more powerful than indirect quotes. As the results show, Olingy was often the dominant source in articles in which Coulter was being attacked by her opponents. It seems imperative for a woman to defend herself against attacks in the media. With a strong, direct defense – or even offense – she can take the power from her accusers, re-assert herself, and present herself as a strong and viable opponent. Allowing Olingy to comment on personal attacks against her may not have been the best choice, particularly in view of stereotypes that depict women as unable to “take the heat.” Her hesitance to face her attackers directly may have made Coulter appear weaker than the other candidates in this regard, particularly because she had to be defended by her male campaign manager and did not speak for herself. This method of “speaking out” in the media may have also made Coulter seem less accessible or hard for the audience to identify with. In contrast, her opponents tended to talk more directly with reporters, and used press conferences and other events to get their opinions in the paper in a more prominent fashion.

Even Coulter noticed the dearth of female reporters covering the election; to have more well-rounded coverage, it is essential to have both males and females covering the race. Norris (1997) suggests, however, that gender aside, journalists must work within the constraints of the news organization for which they work and realize organizational, occupational, and audience expectations (38). This seems ironic when examining Coulter’s race, however, because the political voice of the paper, the editorial pages, reflected an entirely different perspective of the race than

the news coverage. As the results of this study show, even editorials endorsing Coulter's opponents were objective in their analyses. However, the idea of what constitutes news does seem to be changing, and the he-said, she-said battles depicted in the news coverage of this election reflect today's media frenzy over gossip and drama. Yet as Carroll and Schrieber (1997) note, because more localized papers "tend to be less professional than the major papers, they may be more likely than the major papers to exhibit biases such as treating women less seriously than men" (Norris, 1997).

Coulter mentioned that she had hoped to be a role model to women by running for mayor. By acting as a pioneer by positioning herself as the first serious female candidate, she lacked role models to guide her campaign in Chattanooga, which has never had a female (or minority) mayor. It is helpful to be able to examine the experiences of those in similar situations, to learn from their successes and failures. However, there is hope that an increase in female role models will smooth the road for future female candidates. Coulter has definitely provided that for women in this area. As Olingy remarked: "I think [Chattanooga] gets more ready [for a female mayor] every day. I think she paved the way, she showed the community that a woman could be a serious candidate."

Olingy said that he did not believe Coulter's gender overtly cost her the election. However, he remarked that some Chattanoogaans may have more traditional views and would not vote for a female leader. As he stated:

There's a tug of war going on in Chattanooga between a segment of the population that's fearful of the future because they are undereducated and

under-compensated, and then there's a segment of the population that is excited about the future because they feel like they've got the tools to take advantage of...20 years ago you would have seen that past looking group to be much larger. I think 20 years from now you'll see the forward thinking group to have eclipsed because of educational attainment, affluence, things like that. Right now I think these groups are evenly matched. I think now as you get more college educated people, more affluent people [in the area], they are going to be more open to a woman candidate.

Even the Coulter campaign team indicated that it was probably not beneficial to have both a candidate and a campaign manager with so little political experience.

Olingy remarked that time had been wasted trying to figure out what steps to take.

Additionally, while Coulter herself was probably more visible in the neighborhoods,

Olingy said that Littlefield had "feet on the ground in every precinct" reporting back to him, and Coulter's team lacked that broad-based support and accountability.

Littlefield also had teams throughout the city that transported people to the polls, and his campaign team proved more effective in physically moving people to vote.

According to Olingy, Coulter's dearth of political experience may have also affected how she ran her campaign. While the experienced candidates realized that attacking their opponents improved their chances, Coulter's determination to take the intellectual high road may have hurt her in the end, because it left her defending herself instead of focusing on her agenda. She said when she went door-to-door, she spent a good deal of time dispelling rumors, which indicates that attacks against her were reaching the public. Her team showed reluctance to challenge comments made about Coulter until too late. Olingy said that although Coulter's team eventually put out one commercial that he considered negative, "We didn't want to do any negative

advertising. And [we] held that for a considerable period of time, against the advice of people who were more politically astute...We just both felt strongly about that.”

While Olingy’s business and management experience and Coulter’s strong vision for the city obviously helped her campaign, political experience would probably have helped her campaign to handle some of its greater challenges, such as negative attacks. Additionally, while Coulter did seem to have a well-developed campaign agenda outlined, she said her strategy was, again, “just to win.” Moreover, the team chose not to reference or take advantage of the fact that Coulter was female. A different strategy recognizing or even celebrating Coulter’s gender and the fact that she was a serious, professional candidate might have mobilized additional voters.

Coulter’s reluctance to make references to her gender represents, in part, what several researchers refer to as the femininity/competence double bind (Robson, 2000; Bystrom et al, 2001; Gidengil and Everitt, 2003). Basically, female candidates are automatically considered less qualified, poor leaders and managers, and too timid or emotional for political leadership because of their gender, yet when they do try to assert themselves or use aggressive campaign techniques, they are criticized for stepping outside their traditional role. In Coulter’s case, it seemed like she tried to prevent her gender from being mentioned in order to avoid these issues, yet by ignoring a critical aspect of her personality, in a way she almost drew more attention to it.

Limitations

This study attempts to discern whether the frames used in the coverage of the most recent Chattanooga mayoral campaign demonstrate gender effects, but some limitations may impact research results. Carroll (2003) writes that time constraints can limit the perspectives of those involved in a political campaign, because participants run the risk of evaluating their decisions “through the lens of ‘revisionist’ history” (56). Interviews with Coulter and Olingy were conducted over a year after the race ended, and there is some chance that they have forgotten certain details or that time has influenced their opinion on issues surrounding the race.

Additionally, the other prominent candidates, Ron Littlefield and Dan Johnson, were not interviewed for this study. Because the purpose of the study was to analyze newspaper coverage of a local female political candidate, Coulter and her campaign manager were interviewed to enhance analysis of reasons for the coverage and to offer guidance as to what a potential local female candidate could do to better represent herself in print media. It was decided that interviewing the other candidates would not greatly further this specific purpose.

Another limitation in this study is its focus on newspapers rather than on multimedia sources. However, several television debates were covered by the newspaper, and campaign commercials were also described and discussed in the newspaper. Coulter noted that television advertising, cost-wise, was the best option for her to relay her message, and this may prove true for candidates in similar positions in local races. Furthermore, the differences between portrayals of female

candidates in video format versus print may offer important contrasts of which these candidates should be aware.

In reference to television, Bystrom et al (2004) indicate that “it appears that women candidates may be most successful running a positive or mixed-message campaign emphasizing mostly feminine or a balance of feminine and masculine image traits” (109). They also assert that the Internet is very underutilized by female candidates and that females are presented “with fewer disadvantages than traditional video and news presentations of their messages” (169-170). The impact of television and the Internet on local political campaigns should be explored in order to determine potential benefits for female candidates.

In this particular local political race, gender still mattered, but is Chattanooga now ready for a female mayor? Olingy believes so. “It just might be,” he said. Coulter was an important candidate in the history of the town, and her sound goals and intellectual method of campaigning were admirable. She showed local women that they can be leaders, and changed a lot of people’s ideas about what a mayor is supposed to be.

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Table 1

*Dominant Sources Used in Newspaper Coverage of the 2004 Chattanooga Mayoral**Race, by Phase*

	Coulter	Opponent	Olingy	Others
Intro phase	7	10	1	5
First campaign	25	39	14	16
Run-off	24	29	7	18
Total	56	78	22	39

Table 2

Dominant Sources Used in Newspaper Coverage of the 2004 Chattanooga Mayoral

Race, by Connotation of Article

	Coulter	Opponent	Olingy	Others
Negative	16	24	12	6
Positive	7	6	1	13
Neutral	33	48	9	20
Total	56	78	22	39

Table 3

*Placement of Newspaper Articles about the 2004-2005 Chattanooga Mayoral Race,
by Page and Connotation of Article*

	A1	B1	B3	B5	Op/Ed/Other
Negative	7 (38.89%)	12 (26.09%)	5 (35.71%)	5 (100%)	0
Positive	1 (5.56%)	4 (8.70%)	2 (14.29%)	0	12
					(52.17%)
Neutral	10 (55.56%)	30 (65.23%)	7 (50.0%)	0	11
					(47.83%)
Total	18 (100%)	46 (100%)	14 (100%)	5 (100%)	23 (100%)

Appendix 1: Sample Questions for Ann Coulter

1. When, why did you decide to run?
2. What was your background?
3. Have you always been interested in local politics?
4. Who encouraged you to run? Who did you seek advice from? Were people supportive?
5. How did you form your campaign team – consciously pick a male manager?
6. What were your major “issues” as a mayoral candidate? Noticed weren’t really “gender” issues....why?
7. What were your primary methods of campaigning? How was this received? Lean toward a specific media?
8. What was your campaign strategy? How did you feel you had to characterize yourself?
9. Did you use television ads, newspaper, etc?
10. Could you talk a little about “attack” ads used in the campaign? Talk about the language used.....
11. How were you treated by newspaper reporters? What did they seem to focus on?
12. Do you feel that your campaign message was reflected in newspaper stories written about you? Why/why not?
13. Did you think discussions of “attack” ads and name-calling in the newspaper was fair, accurate? Why was this focused upon so often?
14. Good deal of time spent defending yourself instead of promoting issues...how did this affect?
15. Other politicians’ attitudes toward you? Why?
16. How about television? Radio?
17. Was most of the media you talked with male/female? Did the gender of the reporter seem to make a difference?
18. Did you feel you were held to a different standard? How so?
19. “Groomed by RiverCity” versus independent thinker....gender related?
20. Who did you receive the most support from? Who did the other candidates seem to receive the most support from?
21. Who were you attempting to target? Who did you seem to reach?
22. How prominent was your gender in your campaign? How did you use your gender? General election vs runoff?
23. Influence of Dan Johnson’s votes....
24. Talk a little about Af-Am vote?
25. What would you do differently next time?
26. Do you think the issues, the region, made a difference?
27. What were the advantages of being a female and running for mayor? Disadvantages?
28. Is Chattanooga ready for a female mayor?
29. Would you run for mayor again?
30. In a runoff – gender matters....? How was the runoff different?
31. How would you describe the political environment of Chattanooga? Who is voting?

Appendix 2: Sample Coding Sheet

Coding Sheet

Date: _____ Section: _____ No. of words: _____
 Title/Headline: _____ Publication: _____
 Connotation: positive negative neutral
 Subject of article: _____

Paragraph Coulter first mentioned: # of Coulter paragraphs:
 Paragraph Littlefield first mentioned: # of Littlefield paragraphs:
 Paragraph Johnson first mentioned: # of Johnson paragraphs:
 Paragraph others first mentioned: # of paragraphs about others:

Primary frame:

Addtl frames:

Dominant source: candidate opponent campaign manager other:

How are they identified? (title, gender, etc):

How is Coulter identified:

How does article depict/reflect candidate?

Stereotypes used? (i.e., men stronger, women weaker, etc):

Gender of author M F

Lead:

Persuasive devices used?: Y N

Comparisons:

Concrete details (stats, facts):

Visual images of Coulter of others
 chart/graph

Comments:

How Coulter is quoted: D ID NC NA

How others are quoted: D ID NC NA

Appendix 3: Sample Articles

Neutrally coded article

Race to succeed Corker begins

TFF 7-1-2004 p. A6

BY DUANE W. GANG
STAFF WRITER

Now the jockeying begins.

With Mayor Bob Corker's decision Wednesday not to seek re-election, those interested in succeeding him must contemplate their own future.

They have until noon on Dec. 16, the deadline to qualify for the March 1 city election.

City Councilman Ron Littlefield, who ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1993, all but declared his candidacy Wednesday.

"I was geared up and ready to go for another term on the council," Mr. Littlefield said. "I will have to rethink very quickly. I will have to say, in all likelihood, I will be a candidate to succeed him."

Councilman John "Duke" Franklin Jr. said he also is eyeing his options.

"Certainly, I have considered possibly running for mayor at some point," he said. "I certainly will give it some thought. It is real, real early in the game now."

Councilman Yusuf Hakeem, whose name has been mentioned as a possible candidate, has ruled out a mayoral bid. He said the job is appealing and believes he could be effective but that now is not the right time.

Outside the council, those said to be considering a mayoral bid include Carter Street Corp. Chairman Jimmy Hudson. The Chattanooga native is a former Repub-

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Sept. 17:** First day mayoral candidates can pick up qualifying papers
- **Dec. 16:** Deadline to qualify
- **Dec. 23:** Deadline to withdraw from the city election
- **March 1:** City election
- **April 12:** Runoff election if no candidate garners a majority of votes

lican member of the state House who represented Knoxville.

Ann Coulter, executive vice president of RiverCity, the downtown development firm, also is said to be considering a run. Ms.

Coulter, whose name emerged Wednesday, declined comment.

Mr. Corker said he made his decision Wednesday to give those wanting to succeed him time to decide whether to run for mayor.

"I don't think there is any one way to define a great leader for this community," Mr. Corker said.

But he said he hopes whoever succeeds him is a person willing to take risks and do the "right thing day in and day out."

"I look forward to working with the next mayor, in whatever capacity, to make this city better," he said.

E-mail Duane W. Gang at dgang@timesfreepress.com

Positively coded article feature-ing positively coded picture of Ann Coulter

Coulter announces bid to become mayor

TFP 12-2-2004 p. B1

By DORIE TURNER
STAFF WRITER

Ann Coulter formally announced her candidacy for Chattanooga mayor Wednesday, one day after she stepped down as executive vice president of the RiverCity Co.

"I think I have the right mixture of quality experience and vision to take Chattanooga forward to where it needs to go," Ms. Coulter said in a news conference at the Hamilton County Election Commission before turning in the necessary paperwork to run. "My office is now the streets and neighborhoods of Chattanooga."



Ann Coulter

She said her campaign will focus on three areas — jobs, education and neighborhoods. The city needs to have more "family-wage jobs" and to continue to build strong neighborhoods, she said.

Ms. Coulter said she would work with the Hamilton County Commission to make sure "every child in Chattanooga is a successful learner."

Her campaign manager, Jeff Olingy, declined to say how much money the campaign has raised so far.

Ms. Coulter, a native Chattanooga, has worked in both city and county government. She was executive director of the Regional Planning Agency

PERSONAL GLANCE

- **Name:** Ann Coulter
- **Age:** 51
- **Occupation:** Former executive vice president with RiverCity Co.
- **Home:** North Chattanooga

and director of the city Office of Economic and Community Development.

Other candidates for the mayor's job include Chattanooga City Councilman Ron Littlefield and local accountant Dan Johnson, who is co-founder of Blood Assurance. The deadline to file is noon on Dec. 16.

Chattanooga Mayor Bob Corker is not running for a second four-year term. He will leave office in April as the city's \$120 million 21st Century Waterfront Plan nears completion.

RiverCity, a nonprofit downtown development firm, is overseeing the waterfront project.

Other candidates who have picked up qualifying papers or who have qualified are Robert Hamilton, of Melinda Drive; Karl D. Epperson, of M.L. King Boulevard; Angela Clark, of Campbell Street; and Richard Secrest, of Atlanta Drive in Hixson. Both Eddie Eubanks Jr. and Thomas E. Smith II, who ran for mayor in 2001, have picked up papers.

So far, nine people have picked up qualifying petitions, and eight have qualified for the mayor's race.

The mayor is paid \$129,951 a year.

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Negatively coded article featuring positively coded picture of Ron Littlefield and negatively coded picture of Ann Coulter

Littlefield calls Coulter poll unethical

TFP 3-12-2005 p. B1

By HERMAN WANG
STAFF WRITER

Chattanooga mayoral candidate Ron Littlefield on Friday called a poll being conducted by rival candidate Ann Coulter's campaign "a negative push poll" that is "unethical at best."

The poll asks respondents their opinions on issues about



both candidates, but Mr. Littlefield said the questions include false accusations about him.

"We started getting calls from people about a Washington polling firm that was asking questions with an unusual spin to them," Mr. Littlefield said.

Ms. Coulter acknowledged that her campaign has polled potential voters in the city over the last few days but denied that it was a push



Ron Littlefield



Ann Coulter

poll. Push polls are a form of negative campaigning "designed to change opinions, not measure them," according to the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

"We have professional pollsters, and we have conducted every poll in a professional way," Ms. Coulter said. "This is just another Ron Littlefield unjustified attack."

Ms. Coulter and Mr. Littlefield

were the top finishers in an eight-person field in the March 1 mayoral election. They will face each other in an April 12 runoff.

According to notes about the survey that Mr. Littlefield said came from supporters, pollsters asked respondents how they felt about Mr. Littlefield leaving Walker County \$2 million in debt when he was planning director there.

Mr. Littlefield said the debt was from a countywide bond referendum that had nothing to do with him or the planning department. He said the bond was supported by a half-cent sales tax that voters passed in a referendum.

"The things they are alleging about me is false information," he said.

Ms. Coulter's Florida-based pollster, David Beattie, defended the poll's questions as factual and denied that it was a push poll. Mr.

EARLY VOTING

Early voting begins March 23 and runs through April 7. Polls will be open Monday through Saturday, with the exception of March 25 for Good Friday. Voters may cast ballots at the following locations:

■ **Northgate Mall and Brainerd Recreation Center** — daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

■ **Election Commission** — daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.; April 5-7 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Beattie said the survey was conducted for research and to gauge the community's mood. He said his firm used a Washington, D.C.-based phone bank to place the calls.

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