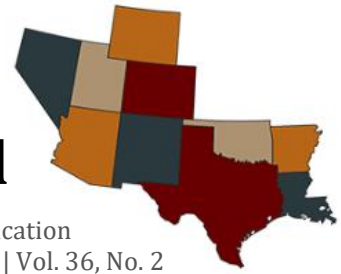


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## The Disappearing Female Candidates: A Framing Analysis of Newspaper Headlines in the 2020 Presidential Election

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This study content analyzed 1,215 headlines from 63 newspapers in the U.S. on presidential candidates from the Iowa Caucuses to Super Tuesday in the 2020 Primary elections. The findings indicate that female candidates receive significantly less coverage than male candidates, which confirm the previous studies of female politicians in the media. However, study results also suggest female candidates are making progress in terms of negative, positive, active, and passive framing in media spaces.

*Keywords: 2020 primary elections, female candidates, male candidates, gay candidate, media framing*

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**F**emale politicians are often portrayed stereotypically in news and media around the world (Loke, Harp & Bachmann, 2011; Schneider & Bos, 2014; Valenzuela & Correa, 2009). Traditionally, women have been positioned as the backups of men, mothers, nurturers, and sexual objects, and men have been the central powers in both macro and micro levels of society socially, politically, and economically (Freedman, 2007).

Women's rise in the higher ladder of politics goes back to the second half of the 20th century. Since the second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, the number of female politicians has dramatically increased, and women have held higher political positions locally and internationally (Zamfirache, 2010). In 2016, Hillary Clinton made history in the U.S. as the first female candidate for the presidency, although she lost in the general election.

As more women have entered the political sphere, including the highest levels, feminist scholars have criticized the news coverage of female politicians in media (Faludi, 2009). A number of studies

have revealed that female candidates can expect less coverage than their male counterparts (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Blackburn, 2018; Kahn, 1994a; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Valenzuela & Correa, 2009). Blackburn's (2018) study revealed that Clinton received less coverage than her republican opponent. The findings echoed a previous study of the 2000 presidential campaign where Elizabeth Dole received less coverage than her male rivals (Aday & Devitt, 2001).

Feminists accuse the media of a preoccupation on their femininity, framing them as passive and naive sexual objects (Robert, 2013). In the past, the coverage largely emphasized gender, appearance, personality rather than their political views and future plans (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Zamfirache, 2010). Other studies have portrayed female candidates as novelties, which has served to trivialize the accomplishments and campaigns (Dastgeer & Hill, 2014; Ross, 2002).

Gender was not the only distinguishing factor in the 2020 democratic candidate field. Pete Buttigieg is one of the first openly-gay candidates to run for the presidency. Less is known about openly-gay politicians and their news coverage, because few studies have focused on this topic. Traditionally, few candidates have identified themselves with the LGBTQ community and some candidates do not reveal their sexual orientation (Doan & Haider-Markel, 2010). Similar to their female counterparts, gay candidates have experienced stereotyping about their sexual identities in their news coverage (Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Golebiowska, 2001, 2002, 2003).

This study is interested in exploring the framing of female vs. male politicians in the U.S. 2020 democratic primary, as well as the framing of an openly-gay candidate. The purpose of this study is to examine how the media perceive female politicians, heterosexual male politicians, and an openly-gay male politician through the lens of newspaper headlines. The study focuses on the top polling democrats between February 3, 2020 and March 3, 2020, a timeline that coincided with the Iowa Caucuses through the Super Tuesday Primary. Six candidates were still viable during the research timeline: Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, and Elizabeth Warren (2020 Democratic Presidential Nomination, 2020). The researchers analyzed 1,215 newspaper headlines from large, medium, and small newspapers across the U.S. This study is important because it advances previous research about gender and media content framing, as well as contributing to the small amount of literature regarding LGBTQ candidates and news coverage.

More specifically, this paper seeks to determine whether male candidates are covered more frequently than female candidates, as previous studies have concluded, in addition to whether they are framed with traditional gender stereotypes. The study also explores whether the candidates are covered with negative, positive, or neutral tones, as well as whether they are covered with active or passive frames. The goal of the study is to contribute to the theoretical knowledge base on gender, sexual orientation, and political news coverage.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The runup to the 2020 presidential election was noteworthy for its diverse and large number of candidates vying for the democratic nomination (2020 Democratic Presidential Nomination, 2020). The campaign began with 28 democrats in the race, including seven people of color: African American (Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, Deval Patrick, and Wayne Messam), Latino (Julián Castro, Richard Ojeda), Asian (Andrew Yang), and Samoan (Tulsi Gabbard). As the race tightened, the top tier candidates were all Caucasian: former Vice President Joe Biden, U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders, former

New York City mayor Mike Bloomberg, two female candidates Senators Amy Klobuchar and Elizabeth Warren, and one openly gay male candidate, Pete Buttigieg, a former mayor in South Bend, Indiana. Historically, news coverage of candidates who defy gender and sexual norms has focused more on aspects of appearance and personal lives and less on issues deemed more masculine in nature, such as the economy and the military. The following sections discuss the coverage of female and LGBTQ politicians in the news media from previous literature.

### **Female Politicians in News Media**

Women have been in the presidential arena since the late 19th century, but the 2020 race is the first time a top-tier openly-gay candidate has run for the presidency. One other openly-gay candidate ran for the office in 2012, political consultant Fred Karger (Good, 2010). Unlike Buttigieg, his campaign was unable to gain traction with voters (Mehta, 2012).

Victoria Woodhull was the first female candidate for president even before women had the right to vote in the U.S (Finneman, 2015). While more than 100 women have run for president since Woodhull's time, only 14 are listed as significant, according to the Center for Women and Politics (Ditonto, 2016). Four of the women named as significant launched campaigns in the past three decades: Michele Bachmann, Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Dole, and Carly Fiorina. Only one, Clinton, received a major party's nomination for president, when she ran as the democratic nominee in the 2016 election against the eventual president, Donald Trump.

For female candidates, six areas of concern have been established regarding news coverage: less coverage overall, more biased and negative coverage, more focus as a "novelty," less focus on certain election issues (such as defense spending), more attention on their physical appearance, and more focus on their personal lives (e.g., Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Ross, 2002; Valenzuela & Correa, 2009; Wasburn & Wasburn, 2011; Zamfirache, 2010).

**Female Candidates Receive Less Coverage.** A number of studies have demonstrated that female candidates receive less campaign coverage than men (Kahn, 1994a; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Valenzuela & Correa, 2009). More specifically, Blackburn (2018) found that Trump received 14% more reporting than Clinton in a study of legacy media coverage during the 2016 campaign. Similarly, Kahn (1994a) found that female candidates in gubernatorial elections received less campaign coverage than men. In Aday and Devitt's (2001) study of the 2000 campaign, not only did Dole receive less coverage, but she was also more frequently paraphrased and quoted less often in contrast to her male opponents. A study of Canadian journalists and candidates found that female politicians were more likely to be quoted and edited in ways that made them sound more aggressive than their actual verbiage (Gidengil & Everitt, 2000).

**Female Candidates Receive More Biased and Negative Coverage.** Female candidates experience another hurdle from media coverage when they run for office: more biased and negative coverage. Female candidates are more likely to be stereotyped by female-centric boundaries than are their male counterparts, leading to more negative than positive media coverage (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). More specifically, reporting focuses on such gender roles as mothers and wives, connecting women to roles of passivity and domesticity (Ross, 2002; van Zoonen, 1994). Ross (2002) in a study of female politicians in Great Britain, South Africa, and Australia, found female politicians were largely depicted with gender boundaries such as motherhood, caregiver, and other traditionally female-oriented roles (Ross, 2002). Kahn (2002) found that media messages portrayed female candidates as less

competitive and less likely to win. Some media messages have gone so far as to communicate that women should not seek political roles (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Kahn & Goldenburg, 1991; Ross, 2002, 2004). Aday and Devitt (2001) argue that such biased media coverage decreases the credibility of female candidates in favor of their male opponents.

**Female Candidates Seen as Novelty.** Female politicians at the highest levels may also be seen by the media as a novelty (Ross, 2002; van Acker, 2003). In one example, 120 women were elected to British Parliament in 1997. On the front pages, along with a photo of the prime minister, they were referred to as “Blair’s Babes,” which Ross (2002) described as an example of the media framing women as “novelties.” Similarly, Dastgeer and Hill (2014) found a female candidate for governor in the state of Texas received treatment as a novelty and celebrity in her campaign. The research focused on news headlines with the finding that Wendy Davis was portrayed frequently using terminology connecting her to stardom-like terminology, such as “drama spotlight,” “star,” and “limelight,” rather than her political expertise. News coverage that portrays female candidates in these ways can trivialize accomplishments in the political sphere (Dastgeer & Hill, 2014).

**Female Candidates Receive Less Focus on Issues deemed “Male”-centric.** Media portrayals of female politicians can often lead to stereotyping of what is considered to be “female” issues, including gender, education, and healthcare topics (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). Male candidates receive more coverage and attention on economic and military issues. This occurs even though female candidates are more likely to make issues the cornerstone of their campaigns (Kahn, 1994b; Kahn & Gordon, 1997). Reinforcements of these stereotypes are important to study in the context of election coverage, because voters themselves are interested in a wide range of topics, including national defense, economy, and crime.

Some of the more recent research focusing on female candidates and issues does forecast that change is coming. In Blackburn’s (2018) study of the Clinton-Trump campaign for president, Clinton was connected more frequently to foreign policy and homeland security issues. However, as a former Secretary of State, former First Lady, and former U.S. Senator, Clinton’s experience was an anomaly in comparison to other similar female candidates.

**Female Candidates Receive More Emphasis on Issues Surrounding Appearance.** Another hurdle that female candidates can expect is an excessive focus on their appearance, personality, attractiveness, and wardrobe (Wasburn & Wasburn, 2011). Van Acker (2003) described that journalists are more likely to comment on female politicians’ “hairstyles, weight, clothes, shoes or glasses,” but not on “men’s beer bellies, suits, size and family roles” (p. 117). Further, “women who are considered feminine will be judged incompetent, and women who are competent, unfeminine” (Jamieson, 1995, p. 16). Overall, women who use a “feminine style” can end up on the negative side of hegemonic masculine images (Parry-Giles & Parry-Giles, 1996).

Other findings suggest that female candidates are objectified on the basis of their gender, rather than considered on the basis of their political resumes. The 2008 election provided a backdrop to study top female candidates of both the Republican and Democratic presidential campaigns. In that race, the Republican nominee, John McCain, selected the first female vice-presidential candidate in that party’s history, Sarah Palin. Hillary Clinton also ran that year for the Democratic nomination. Despite being on the opposite side of politics, Carlin and Winfrey (2009) found both women experienced objectification

by media based on their genders from a traditional patriarchal lens. While media glamorized Palin's appearance and wardrobe, they criticized Clinton's less traditionally feminine style.

**Female Candidates Receive More Focus on Personal Lives.** Female politicians are also more likely to have their personal lives scrutinized than their male political rivals (Zamfirache, 2010). In the 2000 race for U.S. president, Elizabeth Dole, George W. Bush, John McCain, and Steve Forbes competed against one another for the republican nomination. In Aday and Devitt's (2001) study of patriarchy and legacy media communication, the findings indicated that newspaper coverage focused more on Dole's personal life, rather than plans and policies in comparison to her male opponents.

### **LGBTQ Politicians in News Media**

Research is limited for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) candidates for a number of reasons. First, a small number of political candidates are openly gay (Golebiowska, 2002; Smith & Haider-Markel, 2002). Second, some candidates are unwilling to reveal their sexual orientation (Doan & Haider-Markel, 2010). Third, the societal stigma of non-heterosexual orientation has been significant. In one extreme example from the late 1970's, a candidate facing rumors of homosexuality called a news conference to swear on a family Bible that he was not gay (Murphy, 2019). Similar to female candidates on the campaign trail, gay candidates also experience disadvantages in coverage, including the perpetuation of stereotypes about sexual orientation (Entman & Rojecki, 2001; Golebiowska, 2001, 2002, 2003).

Although a significant number of studies have been devoted to the role that candidates' gender plays in the political realm, much less is understood about the ways members of the LGBTQ community are evaluated in electoral politics. Studies about candidate stereotyping have largely ignored LGBTQ candidates (Doan & Haider-Markel, 2010). As the first openly-gay candidate running for president in the U.S., research focusing on the Buttigieg campaign will be the first of its kind.

A number of factors arise about candidates in a unique population group, such as those involving sexual orientation. The solo status hypothesis posits that a non-traditional candidate's group membership would gather the most attention in a political media environment (Golebiowska, 2001). Where female candidates were attached to traditionally female-skewing topics such as family and education, LGBTQ candidates "are assumed to care primarily about gay rights issues" (Golebiowska, 2001, p. 539).

Buttigieg's biography may also influence perceptions of his sexual orientation. As a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, regularly invoking his faith on the campaign trail (Pete Buttigieg Fast Facts, 2020), Buttigieg can claim multiple identities as a candidate, including the underrepresented LGBTQ group, as well as identities more traditional and masculine.

### **Framing**

Frames are "schemata of interpretation" that help people to describe realities by "locat(ing), perceive(ing), identify(ing), and label(ling)" the world's events (Gofman, 1974, p. 10). Gitlin (1980) further defined frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse" (p. 7). "Frames describe attributes of news itself," and encourage audiences to think about the news (Entman, 1991, p. 7). Media entities exercise political power in society by making important choices in content, coverage, and word use (Entman, 1991).

More specifically, news frames consist of "keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols, visual images emphasized in a news narrative" (Entman, 1991, p. 7). Frames may also be produced through

use of stock phrases and stereotyped images (Entman, 1993). In political media coverage, words and images are influential, because they can orchestrate the news message in favor or against campaign competitors (Entman, 2004). Furthermore, Chong and Druckman (2007) suggest that frames often convey “exaggerations,” “symbols, endorsements, and links to partisanship and ideology” (p. 111). In these ways, the media constructs reality for voters as they are considering which candidates to support (Carter, 2013).

Headlines are one of the most influential factors in framing effects (Peramunetilleke & Wong, 2002; Tankard, 2001). The headline may be the only content consumed by the reader, and can distort the reader’s memory of the information (Dor, 2003; Ecker, Lewandowsky, Chang, & Pillai, 2014). Further, repetition of the same words and images can activate an audience’s perception toward or against a candidate consciously or unconsciously (Entman, 2004). In print journalism, cues that signifies a word or story’s importance include placement, font size, and color (Carter, 2013).

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Studies have shown that female politicians often receive less coverage compared to their male opponents (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Valenzuela & Correa, 2009) and that their campaigns are taken less seriously by the media (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Kahn, 1994a; Kahn & Goldenburg, 1991; Ross, 2002, 2004).

**H1:** Female candidates received significantly less news coverage than male candidates in newspaper headlines.

There is no study of gender and political candidates’ media coverage of news vs. editorial stories. Hence, the following research questions are posed.

**RQ1:** How differently were male and female candidates covered in the headlines of news vs. opinion/editorial stories?

The media often focus on female politicians’ personal lives, appearance, wardrobe in detail compared to their male opponents and less emphasis on their plans and policies (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Byerly & Ross, 2006; Zamfirache, 2010). Female politicians are often stereotyped for their focus on gender, education, and healthcare issues rather than political, economic, and military issues (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009).

**H2:** The newspaper headlines about male candidates focused significantly more on their policies and plans than the headlines on female candidates.

Based on existing research, female candidates received more negative media coverage than positive, and some media messages even suggest that women should not seek political roles (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Kahn & Goldenburg, 1991; Ross, 2002, 2004).

**H3:** Male candidates were framed significantly in more positive tones than female candidates in newspaper headlines.

**H4:** Male candidates were framed significantly as more active than female candidates in newspaper headlines.

The media emphasize female politicians’ gender roles as mothers and wives, specifically connecting women to roles of passivity and domesticity (Ross, 2002; van Zoonen, 1994). Thus, they are depicted with gender-specific boundaries such as motherhood, caregiver, and other traditionally female-oriented roles (Ross, 2002).

**H5:** Female candidates were framed in more gender stereotypical frames than male candidates in the newspaper headlines.

## METHODS

### Sampling

The sample included all news headlines on the top six Democratic primary election candidates, Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, and Elizabeth Warren, from February 3, 2020 until March 3, 2020. The reason for choosing this time frame was to include all the news from the Iowa caucus to Super Tuesday.

All headlines of the English language newspapers in the United States were included in the sample. The reason for all media outlets is to get a full picture of the media framing instead of only analyzing the dominant ones. The Nexis Uni database was used to retrieve all of the news headlines, searching for each candidate separately. Overall, there were 12,948 headlines in 63 newspapers based on the Nexis Uni database, 9,951 of which were duplicate and 2,997 unique headlines (See Appendix for the list of newspapers included in the sample). The headlines that did not refer to any of the three candidates were excluded from the sample, 1,782 headlines. The final sample (N = 1,215) included all of the headlines that were about the candidates or clearly referred to them.

### Why Headlines?

“News headlines, which are taken as input, contain a summary of the most important news items” (Peramunetilleke & Wong, 2002, p. 131). According to Peramunetilleke and Wong, more attention is paid in word choice or “keywords” and the format of headlines than the story itself (p. 131). Furthermore, headlines are the interpretation of the content of the articles that often contain the gist of the articles (Condit, Ferguson, Kassel, Thadhani, Gooding & Parrott, 2001). Studies show that these frames are uncritically accepted by people as a way of viewing the world (Reese & Lewis, 2009). According to Tankard (2001), headlines consist of strong frames and dominant placements that bring the frames more attention. Most people only read headlines, rather than the entire news stories (Condit et al., 2001). The search terms included: 2020 elections, primary elections, Pete Buttigieg, Bernie Sanders, and Elizabeth Warren, Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg, and Amy Klobuchar.

### Measures

The news headlines were explored for the following elements: Newspaper category, candidate, focus, tone, active/passive, and gender stereotypes. The newspaper category was categorized as top 10 city newspapers, top 100 city newspapers, and small city newspapers (McIntyre, 2017; State of the News Media Methodology, 2019). The candidate category included Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Mix, and other. Mix referred to headlines that included two or more candidates’ names, such as “Buttigieg, Klobuchar and O’Rourke endorse Biden” (Los Angeles Times). Focus referred to the topic of the headline and was categorized as plan and policy, election, personal life, appearance, age, gender, sexual orientation, and other. Tone referred to the negative, neutral, and positive side taken toward or against a candidate. Negative tone included critical words or double-meaning adjectives, terms and “exaggerations,” and questions (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 111) against a candidate. Examples of negative tones included “Bernie Sanders Is

Making a Big Mistake” (The Philadelphia Inquirer)<sup>1</sup> and “Klobuchar likely 5th in Iowa, casting doubt on her viability” (Star Tribune). A neutral tone consisted of words and terms or judgmental phrases and “metaphors” (Entman, 1991, p. 7) that were neither supportive nor against a candidate, such as “Bernie Sanders to hold rally in Richmond Thursday ahead of Super Tuesday” (East Bay Times). Positive tone referred to words and terms or active phrases supportive of a candidate. Examples include “Bernie Sanders can beat Trump; He's 'electable' and keeps showing it” (The Mercury News) and “Key SC Dem: Biden's my guy” (The New York Post). Passive frames referred to framing the candidate in a receiving position, or as submissive or unassertive (“New Hampshire may be her last stand; After finishing third in Iowa, Elizabeth Warren can ill afford another setback” [Los Angeles Times]), while active frames defined a candidate as the doer of an action, having power and control (Goffman, 1974) (“Sanders dominates Nevada caucuses” [Chicago Daily Herald]).

Gender stereotypes referred to all terms that view a candidate’s current political position from his/her gender role and yes and no categories “Sneering at the gay candidate” (The Washington Post). Personal background consisted of all terms related to candidate’s role as mother/father, wife/husband, and his/her past life experiences personally and professionally, such as “Klobuchar's claims about black teen's case draw criticism” (St. Paul Pioneer Press).

### **Inter-Coder Reliability**

All headlines (N = 1,215) were coded by one of the researchers. To ensure a level of consistency in coding, the other researcher coded slightly over 10% of the sample (n = 121) of the headlines. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) recommend using 10% of the sample to establish inter-coder reliability. Cohen’s kappa was calculated to measure the inter-coder reliability, or the level of agreement between the coders on each variable (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2014). The kappa coefficients were .910 for focus, .839 for tone, .825 for active/passive, and .830 for gender stereotype, which showed high levels of reliability between the coders (Fleiss Levin, & Paik, 2013).

## **Results**

The sample comprised of 1,215 news headlines about the top six Democratic candidates in the 2020 presidential Primary elections. Of these, 748 headlines were from the top 10 city newspapers, 302 headlines from the top 100 city newspapers, and 165 from small city newspapers. Chi-square was used to answer the research question and test the hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 1** predicted significant differences in the amount of news coverage of male vs. female candidates. The hypothesis was supported ( $\chi^2 = 11.303$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < .05$ ) as male candidates received significantly more coverage (83.8%) in all three newspaper categories than female candidates (12.2%).

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<sup>1</sup> The Nexis Uni database retrieved newspaper headlines from philly.com, which is a web publication, published by The Philadelphia Inquirer.



Table 1

*News headlines on 2020 Election Primary Elections of Male vs. Female Candidates*

Gender	Media			Total
	Top 10 City Newspapers	Top 100 City Newspapers	Small City Newspapers	
Male	642 (85.8 %)	237 (78.5%)	139 (84.2%)	1018 (83.8%)
Female	85 (11.4%)	46 (15.2%)	18 (10.9%)	149 (12.2%)
Mix	21 (2.8%)	19 (6.3%)	8 (4.8%)	48 (4.0%)
Total	748	302	165	1215

$$\chi^2 = 11.303, df = 4, p = .023$$

**Research question 1** asked whether there were significant differences in the coverage of male and female candidates in the news vs. editorial stories. There was no significant difference in the male and female candidates' coverage in the news and opinion story headlines ( $\chi^2 = 2.626$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .622$ ). Female candidates had slightly more headlines in the news (83.2%) than male candidates (78.1%) and male candidates had more headlines in the opinion category (20.9%) than female candidates (16.8%).

Table 2

*News vs. Opinion headlines on Male vs. Female Candidates*

News/Opinion	Candidates			Total
	Male	Female	Mix	
News	801 (78.1%)	124 (83.2%)	40 (83.3%)	965 (79.4%)
Opinion	213 (20.9%)	25 (16.8%)	8 (16.7%)	246 (20.2%)
Can't Tell	4 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (0.3%)
Total	1018	149	48	1215

$$\chi^2 = 2.626, df = 4, p = .622$$

**Hypothesis 2** predicted that headlines about male candidates focused significantly more on their policies and plans than the headlines on female candidates. There were significant differences in the coverage of male and female candidates based on focus of the headline ( $\chi^2 = 42.315$ ;  $df = 16$ ;  $p < .000$ ). As Table 3 Shows, the main focus of the headlines for both male and female candidates was on the election (72.2%), professional history (7.6%), and plan and policy (7.3%). The headlines on female candidates focused significantly more on the election (79.8%) than the mixed headlines (66.1%), and the headlines on male candidates (72.4%). The headlines on male candidates focused slightly more on professional history (7.3%) and personal life (6.1) than the headlines on female candidates' professional history (6.3%) and personal life (3.3%). While there were headlines for male candidates on sexual orientation (1.1%), age (0.5%), and appearance (0.9%), for female candidates, the focus was on gender (3.4%) and appearance (1.0%).

Table 3

*Focus of the News Headlines on Male vs. Female Candidates*

Focus	Candidates			Total
	Male	Female	Mix	
Plan and Policy	71 (7.0%)	20 (6.6%)	15 (9.1%)	89 (7.3%)
Election	737 (72.4%)	241 (79.8%)	109 (66.1%)	877 (72.2%)
Professional History	74 (7.3%)	19 (6.3%)	7 (4.2%)	92 (7.6%)
Personal Life	62 (6.1%)	10 (3.3%)	12 (7.3%)	66 (5.4%)
Appearance	9 (0.9%)	3 (1.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (0.7%)
Age	5 (0.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (0.4%)
Gender	3 (0.3%)	5 (3.4%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (0.7%)
Sexual Orientation	11 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.6%)	11 (0.9%)
Other	46 (4.5%)	7 (4.7%)	5 (10.4%)	58 (4.8%)
Total	748	302	165	1215

$$\chi^2 = 42.315, df = 16, p < .000$$

**Hypothesis 3** predicted that female candidates were framed significantly as more negative than positive compared to male candidates in the newspaper headlines. There was no significant difference in the male and female candidates' headlines based on tone ( $\chi^2 = 3.645$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .456$ ) (See Table 4). The female candidate headlines had slightly more neutral (91.9%) and positive (2.7%) than male candidates (91.3% and 2.3%). Male candidates' headlines had slightly more negative tone (6.5%) than the headlines on female candidates (5.4%).

Table 4

*Tone of the News Headlines on Male vs. Female Candidates*

Tone	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Mix	
Positive	23 (2.3%)	4 (2.7%)	1 (2.1%)	28 (2.3%)
Negative	66 (6.5%)	8 (5.4%)	0 (0.0%)	74 (6.1%)
Neutral	929 (91.3%)	137 (91.9%)	47 (97.9%)	1113 (91.6%)
Total	1018	149	48	1215

$$\chi^2 = 3.645, df = 4, p = .456$$

**Hypothesis 4** assumed that female candidates were framed significantly more as passive than active compared to male candidates. The hypothesis was not supported as there were no significant differences

among male and female candidates' headline on active/passive framing ( $\chi^2 = 8.774$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .067$ ). As Table 5 shows, female candidates were framed as both more active (49%) and passive (18.8%), than male candidates (44.2%) and (13.2%), but the difference is near significant.

Table 5  
*Active/Passive Frames in the News Headlines on Male vs. Female Candidates*

Active/Passive	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Mix	
Active	450 (44.2%)	73 (49.0%)	26 (54.2%)	549 (45.2%)
Passive	134 (13.2%)	28 (18.8%)	5 (10.4%)	167 (13.7%)
Can't Tell	434 (42.6%)	48 (32.2%)	17 (35.4%)	499 (41.1%)
Total	1018	149	48	1215

$$\chi^2 = 8.774, df = 4, p = .067$$

**Hypothesis 5** predicted that female candidates were framed in more stereotypical frames than male candidates in the headlines. The hypothesis was not supported, because the differences among male and female candidates' headline on gender stereotypes were not significant ( $\chi^2 = .452$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p = .798$ ). More than 99% of the news headlines for both female and male candidates did not have any gender stereotypes in them (See Table 6).

Table 6  
*Gender Stereotypes in the News Headlines on Male vs. Female Candidates*

Gender Stereotypes	Gender			Total
	Male	Female	Mix	
Yes	4 (0.4%)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (0.4%)
No	1014 (99.6%)	148 (99.3%)	48 (100%)	1210 (99.6%)
Total	1018	149	48	1215

$$\chi^2 = .452, df = 4, p = .798$$

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

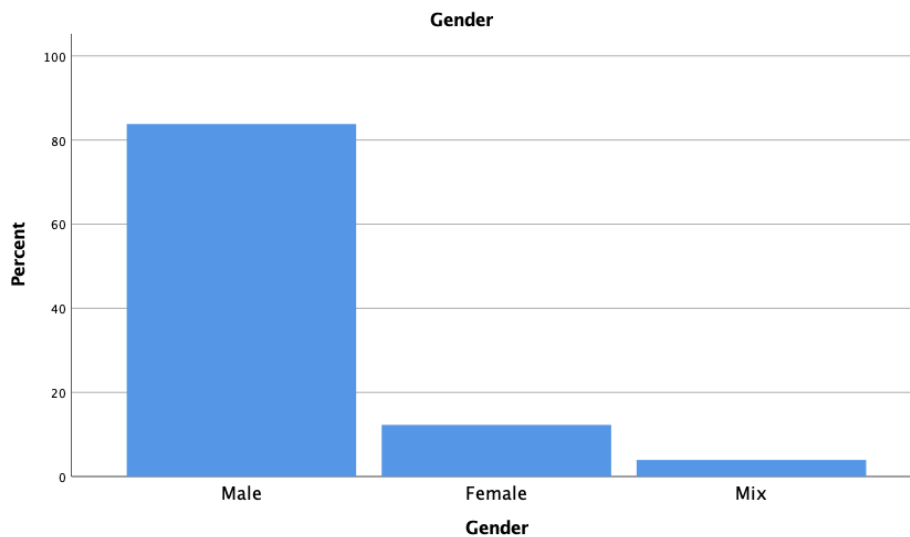
This study analyzed how male and female candidates were framed in U.S. newspaper headlines during the 2020 primary elections. Headlines contribute significantly to media framing effects, because the headline is often the only content consumed by the reader (Dor, 2003; Ecker, Lewandowsky, Chang, & Pillai, 2014; Peramunetilleke & Wong, 2002; Tankard, 2001). The main findings of the study are discussed below.

First, the female candidates virtually disappeared from newspaper headlines during the study timeline - they were only covered in 12.3% of the news headlines in comparison to 83.8% for the male candidates (see Figure 1). This supports the findings of previous studies where both female presidential

candidates (Clinton and Dole) and gubernatorial candidates receive less coverage than males (Blackburn, 2018; Gidengil & Everitt, 2000; Kahn, 1994a; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Valenzuela & Correa, 2009). This is significant because Elizabeth Warren had been tied in voter preference with Joe Biden in the fall of 2019, but by the time of caucuses and primary elections, her name was rarely mentioned in headlines in comparison to her male counterparts (2020 Democratic Presidential Nomination, 2020). Both Buttigieg and Klobuchar were on the rise during the February caucuses and primaries in Iowa and New Hampshire, but her name was rarely mentioned in headlines during that time period.

Figure 1

*Male and Female Candidates on 2020 Primary Elections in Newspaper Headlines*



Second, the news headlines focused more on the election, than on plan and policy for both male and female candidates. Election headlines were defined as content focusing on the race and elements surrounding competition between candidates. Examples include “Sanders dominates Nevada Caucuses” (Chicago Daily Herald), “Biden grabs his 1st win of 2020 race, Former VP rolls to victory in SC ahead of Super Tuesday” (Newport News Daily Press), and “ELECTION 2020; Surging Klobuchar hopes to ‘surprise the country’” (Los Angeles Times).

Only 7.3% of the headlines focused on plan and policy (7% for male candidates and 6.6% for female candidates) illustrating the headline focus on the candidate horse race, rather than issue-oriented content. Examples include “Warren asks Fed nominee to clarify policy stances” (Ottumwa Courier), “‘Medicare for all’ could slow Sanders’ momentum in Nev.” (The Philadelphia Inquirer), and “Amy Klobuchar, other White House hopefuls target Trump on coronavirus response” (St. Paul Pioneer Press). These findings echo more recent studies, where Clinton was connected more frequently to homeland security and foreign policy issues than others who had been stereotyped with more traditionally female-centric issues, such as healthcare and education (Blackburn, 2018; Carlin & Winfrey, 2009; Kahn, 1994b; Kahn & Gordon, 1997).

The news headlines focused slightly more on male candidates’ professional history, personal life, and age than female candidates, while in the categories of appearance and gender the headlines focused

slightly more on the female candidates (see Table 3). Examples of headlines focusing on professional history include “Bloomberg's stop-and-frisk stance faces fresh scrutiny” (Hartford Courant). Headlines that categorized personal life were exemplified by “The Politics of Covering Your Boss, the Candidate” (The New York Times) and age: “An Energy Check on Joe” (The New York Times). Examples of appearance include “Facts Matter: Trump's comment about Bloomberg's height falls short” (Chicago Daily Herald) and gender: “Dem voters still doubt female nominee can win” (Telegraph Herald) and “They Saw Themselves in Elizabeth Warren. So What Do They See Now?” (The New York Times).

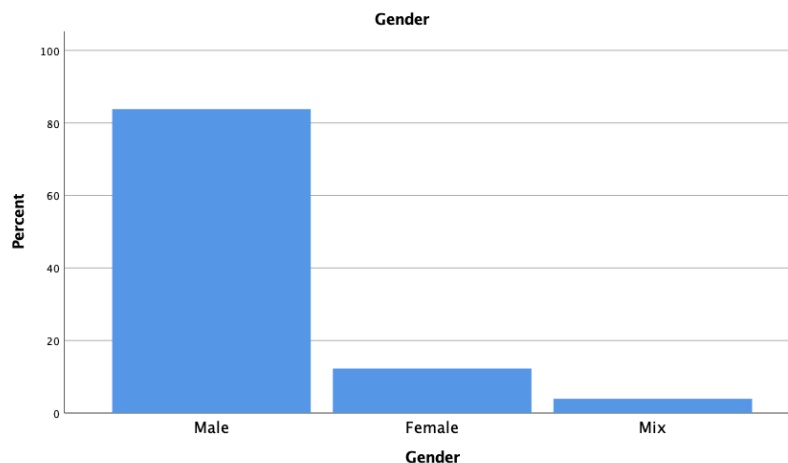
The slight headline emphasis on gender and appearance for female candidates in comparison with male candidates supports previous studies, where female candidates could expect excessive focus on their appearance (Jamieson, 1995; Van Acker, 2003; Wasburn & Wasburn, 2011). However, these findings suggest the gap appears to be narrowing. One possible explanation is that the current U.S. president has popularized insulting rhetoric for his rivals, including males (Winberg, 2017). A number of the negative headlines regarding candidate appearance stemmed from comments Trump had made about Bloomberg: “Mini Mike' vs. 'carnival-barking clown' Don” (The New York Post) and “Bloomberg: He’s taller than Trump says he is” (Chicago Daily Herald).

This study was also interested in the headline coverage of the highest profile openly-gay candidate to seek the U.S. presidency, Pete Buttigieg. A small number of headlines alluded to Buttigieg’s sexual orientation (1.1%). Examples of those headlines included: “Pete's gay-kid stunt is an outrage” (New York Post), “Buttigieg rebuts criticism of sexuality” (Chicago Daily Herald), and “Trump surrogates take aim at Buttigieg's sexual identity” (The Washington Post).

The third broad category in the study was portrayal of negative and passive frames for female candidates. The data reveals a sign of progress for the democratic female presidential candidates in 2020 (see also Tables 4 and 5). Overall, more than 90% of the headlines had neutral tones (see Figure 2). For both male and female candidates overall, the headlines portrayed a more negative (6.1%) than positive tone (2.3%), with the majority neutral (91.6%). Male candidates were framed slightly more negatively than the females (6.5% to 5.4%). These results suggest that stereotypical coverage of female candidates may be slowly fading.

Figure 2

*Tone of News Headlines on 2020 Primary Elections in Newspaper Headlines*



Headlines that fit the coding protocol for the positive category include: “Like an Old Testament prophet, Bernie Sanders leads the way” (Salt Lake Tribune), “Warren swings and hits” (New York Times), “Joe Biden has won South Carolina in a big revival before Super Tuesday” (The Philadelphia Inquirer). Headlines with a negative tone included: “After disappointing start, Warren campaign at a crossroads” (The Washington Post), “Late Start and Missteps Hobbled Biden in Iowa” (New York Times), and “Klobuchar likely 5th in Iowa, casting doubt on her viability (Star Tribune). A number of the negative headlines came from the opinion-related content, where headline writers had more freedom to paraphrase editorials and letters to the editor.

The research also looked at the portrayal of candidates as active, passive, or neither. The data revealed that Warren and Klobuchar were portrayed as both more active (49%) and more passive (18.8%) than the male candidates (44.2%, 13.2%), although the differences were not statistically significant (see Table 5). Previous research has connected female politicians to roles of domesticity and passivity (Ross, 2002; van Zoonen, 1994), but this study demonstrates that in the 2020 race female candidates have a more complex portrayal by headline writers. Active headline frames include: “Warren's Camp Rejected 'You Win, I Lose' Politics; It Has Not Worked Out” (New York Times), Buttigieg rebuts criticism of sexuality (Chicago Daily Herald), and “Reeling Biden goes on attack” (Los Angeles Times). Examples of passive headline coverage include: “Gleeful Don hits 'woeful' Bloomberg” (Daily News), “Bernie Sanders pranked by Russians” (Dubuque Telegraph Herald), and “Bloomberg’s Debate Downer” (The New York Times).

Only 5 headlines portrayed gender stereotypes, four of which were about Buttigieg and one about Warren. Those headlines were: “Pete's gay-kid stunt is an outrage” (The New York Post), “Buttigieg rebuts criticism of sexuality” (Chicago Daily Herald), “Sneering at the gay candidate” (The Washington Post), “After early success, a historic candidacy faces a much steeper hurdle” (The Christian Science Monitor). These results suggest progress for the female candidates, that contrary to previous studies (e.g., Ross, 2002; van Zoonen, 1994) the female candidates are not portrayed with gender stereotypes. However, Buttigieg, as an openly gay candidate did see some headline coverage, albeit a small number, that focused on his sexual orientation. Few studies exist on LGBTQ candidates who have run for office. More study is needed to understand media frames surrounding these political figures.

In sum, this study contributes to research about politicians and political candidates in the media, in particular, female and gay politicians. The findings show that the portrayal of female politicians in the media is making progress compared to the past as they are framed in more positive, active, and less stereotypical ways (Blackburn, 2018; Gidengil & Everitt, 2000; Kahn, 1994b; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Valenzuela & Correa, 2009). However, gay politicians still receive biased coverage focusing on their sexual orientation. Furthermore, age, health, and appearance attract more media attention for older male candidates.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite the significant contributions to media research on political candidates, this study has several limitations. First, this study only analyzed news headlines of newspapers in the U.S. Future research can future expand the scope of the sample into headlines in the electronic and online media. Second, this study examined the portrayal of 2020 primary election candidates in news headlines. Future research can analyze full news stories in the media on these candidates. Third, the study included word

frames in the headlines on the 2020 primary election candidates. Future research can include visual images and explore the visual framing of these candidates in the media. Finally, the study is one snapshot in time. Further research would benefit from a longer timeline of analysis. This would potentially deepen the understanding of why the female candidates received less headline emphasis than their male opponents and whether this was a phenomenon of the entire election cycle.

Female political candidates in the U.S. can see the ceiling, but the glass has been hard to break. While these findings are cautiously optimistic for women politicians in the 2020 presidential cycle in terms of gender stereotyping and overall framing, significant concerns remain. The data illustrate that candidates Klobuchar and Warren “disappeared” from newspaper headline coverage during one of the most crucial points of the campaign. It is unknown how these absences affected the final election results. There are words written on the glass ceiling; it just does not include their names.

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## Appendix

The list of 63 Newspapers Included in the Sample Ordered based on the Number of Unique Headlines

The New York Post	Star Tribune
The New York Times	The Bakersfield Californian
The Washington Post	The Beaumont Enterprise
The Los Angeles Times	The Blade
USA Today	The Brunswick News
The Chicago Daily Herald	The Christian Science Monitor
The Philadelphia Inquirer	The Day
Telegraph Herald	The Decatur Daily
The East Bay Times	The Free Lance-Star
The Mercury News	The Huntsville Item
The Salt Lake Tribune	The Joplin Globe
Daily News	The Keene Sentinel
St. Paul Pioneer Press	The Meridian Star
The Hartford Courant	The Monitor
The Advertising Age	The Newberry Observer
Aiken Standard	The News Courier
American Banker	The News-Sentinel
Beaver County Times	The Norman Transcript
Bluefield Daily Telegraph	The Post-Star
Carroll County Times	The Press Democrat
Clay Center Dispatch	The Press-Republican
Columbia Daily	The Pueblo Chieftain
Connecticut Post	The Register Guard
Daily press	The Salem News
Enid News & Eagle	The Telegraph
Investor's Business Daily	The Times
Lockport Union-Sun & Journal	The Times and Democrat
News-Topic	The Times-Tribune
Ottumwa Courier	The Union Daily
Palo Alto Daily News	The Wilson Daily
Post-Bulletin	Waterloo Courier
Springfield News-Sun	

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