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THE IMPACT OF REPORTER GENDER ON PRINT NEWS COVERAGE OF THE
2008 DOLE-HAGAN U.S. SENATE RACE IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: Journalism and Mass Communications

Under the Supervision of Professor John Bender

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2012

THE IMPACT OF REPORTER GENDER ON PRINT NEWS COVERAGE OF THE
2008 DOLE-HAGAN SENATE RACE IN NORTH CAROLINA

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University of Nebraska, 2012

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Four reporters covered the 2008 U.S. Senate race between Republican incumbent Elizabeth Dole and Democrat challenger Kay Hagan – two male and two female – all of whom worked for the same news organization. This study analyzed the coverage the four reporters produced about the Dole-Hagan race, looking specifically at story structure, topic selection, descriptive language used, tone and source selection. Due to study limitations, no clear relationships were established between reporter gender and the news coverage of the Dole-Hagan race that reporters produced.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband Jeff and son Miles, without whose support and encouragement this project would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my panel of thesis advisors – Professors John Bender, Linda Shipley and Charlyne Berens – for the invaluable feedback they provided throughout the course of this thesis project. A special thank you goes to Dr. Bender for his support, guidance and patience over the past few years. I am also grateful to my sister, Amy, for carefully editing and scrutinizing the final version of this thesis with just a few days' notice, and to my parents for their unconditional faith and love.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

During the 2008 U.S. elections, national media outlets focused much attention on the heated presidential race between Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain. But at the same time, many states across the nation were experiencing tight U.S. Senate races. Of particular interest was the unusual Senate race in North Carolina, which pitted a pair of female candidates exclusively against each other and which turned remarkably nasty: the race between Republican incumbent Elizabeth Dole and a relatively unknown State Senator, Democrat Kay Hagan.

The Dole-Hagan race was particularly noteworthy for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it was unusual for a traditional, Southern state like North Carolina to have a Senate race featuring a female candidate, let alone two female candidates running against each other exclusively. Secondly, as competitive races tend to do, the race took a nasty turn toward the end with Dole trailing Hagan in the polls. In late October 2008, just weeks before the election, Dole launched an advertising campaign attacking Hagan's faith. The "Godless" ads, as they became known, garnered a heavy amount of attention from local, regional and national media organizations, which covered developments in the situation and ensuing public reaction on a near-daily basis until the election took place.

Of particular interest in this race was the media coverage local, regional and national newspapers gave each candidate, especially as the race heated up and during and after the "Godless" ad campaign aired. The sources reporters covering the Dole-Hagan race chose to include in their coverage of the 2008 North Carolina Senate race play an

important role in how the overall coverage may have influenced voters for a variety of reasons, but primarily because research suggests that news content can have a significant impact on voter opinion – and thus behavior at the polling booths (Culbertson et al. 1985, Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006, and others).

Additionally, previous research calls to question whether a relationship exists between reporter gender and the print news coverage they produce, specifically regarding the gender of the sources they select. Some studies have found evidence supporting a direct relationship between reporter gender and the gender of sources selected for their stories; that is, the idea that male reporters covering political races are more likely to use male sources while female reporters are more likely to use female sources in their stories (Zeldes and Fico 2005, Leibler and Smith 1997, Freedman and Fico 2005). These same studies have also shown a relationship between reporter gender and the gender of the source selected to serve as “expert” sources: male sources are more likely to be used as “horse race” or “issues” experts while female sources tend to be used to represent ordinary people in news stories.

However, findings from a 2010 study by Freedman, Fico and Durisin analyzing U.S. Senate races in 2006 contradict these studies. In their analysis of election coverage of the 2006 U.S. Senate races, the study authors proposed several hypotheses, including that: a) female reporters produced a greater proportion of stories with male sources than male reporters, and b) that male sources were more likely than female sources to be used for expert “horse race” and issue commentary in election coverage. In contrast to other studies on the topic of reporter sourcing, Freedman et al. (2010) found that female reporters from the largest newspapers in each state were more likely than male reporters

to use male discretionary sources. Regarding the second hypothesis, though, the study held with previous research that male sources were in fact more likely to be used as horse race and issues experts than female sources in election coverage.

The contradictory nature of research regarding reporter gender on print news coverage prompts questions applicable to coverage given to candidates in U.S. Senate races today: Do female reporters tend to take a different approach than male reporters when it comes to their coverage of the Dole-Hagan race? Does the tone of female and male reporters' stories portray the candidates in a positive, neutral, or negative light? Do male reporters focus more of their stories about the Dole-Hagan race on key political platform issues than female reporters? Does reporter gender influence source selection? Are male reporters more likely than female reporters to select male expert sources, like some studies have shown? Or, is there an inverse relationship, as shown in the findings of Freedman, Fico and Durisin: are female reporters more likely than male reporters to use male sources?

This study explores the relationship between the gender of regional North Carolina newspaper reporters and the coverage they produced about the 2008 Dole-Hagan U.S. Senate race. Because previous research on the topic is mixed, supporting both the possibility that reporters of one gender tend to select sources of the same gender as well as the possibility of an inverse relationship, this study also examines the relationships between the gender of reporters and the gender of the sources they used in their coverage of the 2008 Dole-Hagan race.

CHAPTER 2: Women and Politics

Women running for political office today face a plethora of obstacles that their male counterparts do not. Research has shown that the underlying reasons why American women have not traditionally entered politics are varied but stem from an American society that has not supported women in positions of power or leadership.

Johns Hopkins University professor Erika Falk, an expert on women's political history, cites five primary reasons women historically have been discouraged from entering politics in the United States. In her book *Women for President*, Falk first points to the misconception in American society that women are novel and unnatural in American politics (33) and that they do not win as often as men (41). Second, she argues that American women have not traditionally pursued careers that lead into politics, such as law; and third, that there are few women in the political realm to serve as role models for future female candidates (ibid). Fourth, she notes that women who run for office typically receive less news coverage than men who run for office, and the coverage women receive tends to reinforce certain stereotypes traditionally attributed to women – a point that scholars argue can both hurt and help female candidates (Falk 101). And finally, Falk argues that women tend to have less time to enter politics because of their “double burden”: their roles both at the workplace and at home with their children. Women with children often wait to launch a political career until after their children have left the nest or after they get a divorce, both of which often happen later in life, giving a woman interested in starting a career in politics less time than a traditional male candidate (ibid).

Other scholars support Falk's points. However, women have made tremendous strides over the past few decades in terms of gender equality in the workplace and public office. "The status of women [is] vastly improved over those which existed just a generation ago. The number of women elected to the U.S. Senate, for instance, has increased almost sevenfold in just one decade, from two to thirteen from 1991 to 2001" (Watson 2). Authors Robert Watson and Ann Gordon cite statistics from 2001 that show women experienced record percentages of representation in state legislatures (22 percent), statewide elected executive offices (27 percent), governorships (10 percent) and both houses of Congress (13 percent) (ibid).

But as Falk argues, despite progress made on many forefronts women still experience inequalities in important areas, such as at the workplace where men continue to earn a significantly more on average per year than women. In California in 2010, for instance, women working full time earned 21 percent less than men working full time ("Working Women" California April 2012) while in Massachusetts, women working full time earned 26 percent less than men working full time ("Working Women" Massachusetts April 2012). In an essay discussing the progress female candidates have made in recent years, Watson argues that women still face challenges that prevent them from running for and winning elections. "Women at the dawn of the twenty-first century are facing some of the same issues and challenges as their mothers and grandmothers" including pay equality, abortion rights, access to quality, affordable child care and health care, and sexual harassment, among other factors (Watson 3).

And moreover, Falk finds that press coverage of female candidates today is not much better today than it was in 1872, when the first woman ran for U.S. president.

“With the radical changes that have taken place for women in politics and journalism over the last 130 years, it is significant that the press portrayals of women candidates have not changed more” (151). Falk writes that today “[p]ress coverage is often biased and prejudiced” toward women (14) and male candidates receive more substantive issues-related coverage than female candidates receive (152). Falk’s research also showed the way the news media portrayed female candidates in their coverage is based on long-held gender stereotypes – a pattern that was characterized by the media’s tendency to report on women’s physical appearance, including their bodies and clothing, and emotional nature. Falk also found reporters are less likely to depict women as having viable campaigns (ibid). The end result, Falk argues, is not that media coverage decreases a woman’s chance of winning an election, but decreases the chance that she runs in the first place: “The most important consequence of this is not what most people would expect: that should a woman run, the press would make it less likely for her to win. The most important consequence is that the press coverage may make women less likely to run” (14).

1. Misconceptions about women in politics

Consider the following excerpt from a letter to an editor published in a U.S. newspaper during Margaret Chase Smith’s 1964 bid for the U.S. presidency: “So now women think they are capable of holding the highest office in the land. It's bad enough that we allow these female creatures to operate automobiles. Imagine what would happen if one of them became president! Let's keep the women at home where they belong” (qtd. in Falk 31). This excerpt clearly shows the sexism permeating American society at the time; however, in 1964 this line of thought was not uncommon. One of the most common

misconceptions about women running for office is the perpetuated misconception that women are new to politics, that they are incompetent as leaders and that they do not win as often as men. And while all are falsehoods, these misconceptions continue to plague women running for public office today.

For many years after the Constitution was written in 1787, only white male property owners were allowed to vote. It was not until after World War II, when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was passed in 1919, that women in all states could vote; as such, it may surprise some to learn that women had run for the U.S. presidency years before the country ratified the 19th Amendment. The earliest women to run for president were Victoria Woodhull and Belva Lockwood, who ran in 1872 and 1884, respectively (Falk 8). Though the women ran 12 years apart, both ran during times of intense social dialogue about the role of women in American society, and both were highly qualified to hold the highest executive office in the nation. Woodhull owned a newspaper and was the first female stockbroker on Wall Street; Lockwood was an attorney and a partner in her own firm. She was the first woman to practice law before the U.S. Supreme Court, had campaigned for Horace Greeley, and had written a piece of legislation that Congress passed (ibid). Additionally, she was the owner and administrator of her own private school. A handful of women followed Woodhull and Lockwood: Margaret Chase Smith, the first woman to seek the presidential nomination of the Republican Party, in 1964; Democrat Shirley Chisholm in 1972; New Alliance Party member Lenora Fulani in 1988; Republican Elizabeth Dole, while never officially declaring a candidacy, campaigned for the presidential nomination in 2000; and most recently, Carol Moseley Braun in 2004 and Hillary Clinton in 2008.

But is America ready for a female president? Recent studies indicate yes. Gallup polls gauging public opinion have shown consistent increases in the percentage of Americans who would cast a vote for a female presidential candidate. In a 1937 Gallup poll, 37 percent of respondents said they would vote for a female presidential candidate; the same poll in 1955 showed that about 50 percent of respondents would vote for a woman; while in 1977 and 1996, respectively, 77 percent and 91 percent of respondents said they would vote for a woman if she ran for president.

2. Women do not pursue careers that lead to politics

“Women in the United States are narrowing the pay gap, living longer, and achieving success in heretofore inaccessible leadership positions in medicine, industry, science, diplomacy, entertainment and other sectors of society. ...However, the United States ranks only forty-ninth in the world in terms of percentages of women serving in public office” (Watson 2-3). Moreover, Falk makes a good point in noting that women have served as top leaders in countries around the world, including unexpected places like Turkey, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Thailand, as well as Canada, France and England, “[y]et in the United States, which considers itself the most advanced democracy in the world, no woman has ever held the presidency or vice presidency” (4). Why is that? First and foremost, political scientists researching the topic agree that women have certain disadvantages when it comes to running for and successfully winning political office in the United States – one of them is that women historically have been discouraged from entering fields that typically lead to careers in politics, such as law or political science.

That is not to say that the women in the workplace today experience an identical work environment to that which women working in the 1970s experienced. Indisputably,

women have made significant gains in terms of gender and workplace equality and the sheer number of women in the professional setting. Today, the number of professional women is dramatically higher than just a few decades ago. According to a 2010 report by the U.S. Department of Labor, more women with children are working today and a higher number of women are seeking advanced degrees than ever before (BLS Online Dec. 2010). For example, the number of women ages 25-64 who are in the labor force and who have a college degree roughly tripled from 1970 to 2009 – in 1970, only 11 percent of the women in this age range and in the labor force held college degrees, but this number rose to 39 percent in 2009 (ibid). Additionally, in 2009 women accounted for more than half of the workforce in several major industry sectors, including: financial activities, education and health services, leisure and hospitality services (ibid). The Labor Department report shows that women's earnings, as compared to men's, have also grown over the past few decades. In 1979, women working full time earned approximately 62 percent of what men earned, while in 2009 women earned approximately 80 percent of what men earned.

Recent Labor Department reports support Falk's argument that while women today have made significant strides at the workplace, women do not enter fields that traditionally lead to politics. A 2011 U.S. Department of Labor - Bureau of Labor Statistics report ranking the top 20 leading occupations of employed women in 2010 show that the vast majority of women in the American workforce are either secretaries/administrative assistants or nurses. In 2010, nearly 3 million women worked as secretaries and administrative assistants (96 percent of the total number of men and women working as secretaries and administrative assistants were women), followed by

2.6 million registered nurses, 2.3 million elementary/middle school teachers, 2.3 million cashiers, 1.7 million nursing/psychiatric/home health aides, and 1.7 million waitresses.

The study found that women overwhelmingly outnumbered men in the following occupations: secretaries and administrative assistants (96 percent women); childcare workers (95 percent); receptionists/information clerks and teacher's assistants (both 93 percent); registered nurses (91 percent); bookkeeping/accounting clerks (91 percent); and maid/housekeeping cleaners, elementary/middle school teachers, and nursing/psychiatric/home health aides (all 88 percent).

In a report titled "Spotlight on Statistics" from March 2011, the Labor Department reports that in 1964, about 19 million of the nation's nonfarm employees were women and that the industries that employed the most women were manufacturing; trade, transportation and utilities; and local government. During the 1960s, the report notes, "[M]ore women were employed in manufacturing than in any other industry," while in the 1970s and 1980s, "more women were employed in trade, transportation and utilities than in any other industry." However, by 2010, nearly 65 million held full time jobs, most of which were in education and health services (ibid).

These numbers demonstrate that while the number of women in the workplace continues to rise, the types of work women choose are not necessarily jobs in industries that traditionally lead into politics; therefore, higher numbers of women in the workplace do not directly translate to more women going into politics or running for office.

3. Women have fewer female political role models than men to emulate

American women running for office have significantly fewer female role models than male role models. Fewer women still actually hold powerful public offices in the

United States. It is important to note that women have certainly made a tremendous amount of progress in recent years in terms of running for and successfully gaining powerful public positions. The 2000 presidential election saw a female candidate in the Republican primaries – Elizabeth Dole – while the 2008 presidential election had two high profile candidacies involving women – Hillary Clinton running for the Democratic presidential nomination and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin running for vice president on the Republican presidential ticket. Additionally, three women – first Madeleine Albright for President Bill Clinton, then Condoleezza Rice for President George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton for President Barack Obama – have recently occupied the post of U.S. Secretary of State. Finally, Democratic Representative Nancy Pelosi became the first woman to serve as Speaker of the House when the Democrats took control of the House in 2007, and became the highest ranking female politician in American history as a result (“Nancy Pelosi” *Washington Post*).

But, given the other challenges women face when entering politics, does it really matter that there are fewer women in office than men? Wouldn't any hard-working, committed woman who could overcome all the other obstacles achieve success regardless of the number of women currently in office? Perhaps, but the reason it is imperative to have more women in office is not only to encourage other women to enter politics; it is also equally, if not more, important that their voices are heard. Today women constitute more than 50 percent of the United States population – 50.7 percent in 2009 (“State and County QuickFacts” April 2012) – yet in the 112th Congress there are only 75 women in the House of Representatives compared to 360 men (17 percent) and 17 women in the Senate compared to 83 men (17 percent) (Women in Congress “Historical Data” 2012).

Though this is a far cry from even 50 years ago – in 1961, there were only 18 female Representatives and two female Senators (ibid) – the number of women in American politics continues to be unequal to the percentage of women that constitute the U.S. population.

The importance of having proportionate female representation in American government is evident and has been for many years because issues important to men are not the same as the issues that are important to women. Take, for example, the case of Washington Senator Patty Murray and California Senator Dianne Feinstein, whose perspectives played a critical role in the 1993 Senate debate regarding the Family and Medical Leave bill. As described by Susan Gluck Mezey in a chapter of Cook et al.'s *Year of the Woman: Myths and Realities*, Murray and Feinstein spoke candidly during the debate about the challenges they faced as working mothers. Feinstein recounted the “difficult choices she faced being pregnant and working for the state government,” while “Murray told her Senate colleagues that she was forced to quit her job as an executive secretary when she became pregnant because there were no options for maternity leave” (Cook 258). “These were words that senators were not accustomed to hearing from one of their own,” Mezey wrote, adding that Senate debate often includes letters from constituents and accounts of hardships people “out there” suffered. “But for the ‘Men’s Club’ to hear personal accounts about the problems of women who try to combine work and family is rare” (ibid).

Mezey argues that women play a key role in political decision-making for several reasons. First, she argues that women in public office would further a feminist agenda, promoting “a belief in expanding women’s roles and opportunities,” and addresses issues

that have a direct impact on women, among them: childcare, rape and domestic violence, and improving women's employment opportunities through pay equity, enforcement of sex discrimination laws, and support for reproductive rights (Cook 259). Second, she argues that women "lend a special expertise" in legislating certain public policy areas like education and social services. Third, she believes more women in public office would improve the overall quality of public officials in the United States because there would be a larger pool of qualified people from which to choose. And lastly, more women in the political realm would serve as a more accurate representation of American society (ibid).

4. Female candidates receive less media coverage than male candidates

Historically, women who run for office have difficulties securing media coverage and struggle to create their own legitimacy in the eyes of the media and, thus, the public (Braden 1996, Devitt 1999, Kahn and Goldenberg 1991, Kahn 1994a, Falk 2008). In her book, Falk argues female political candidates tend to get less press coverage than their male counterparts, are treated less seriously, and are often portrayed as new to politics and unnatural in the political world. Perhaps the most interesting questions Falk raises center on the press's role in shaping how female candidates are perceived: When it comes to female candidates, does the press reinforce existing stereotypes and gender roles? Is the way the press covers women in politics advantageous or disadvantageous to them? And finally, could the way the press covers female candidates have an impact on other women's decision to run for office?

Several common threads run through the media coverage of the major female U.S. presidential candidates. Studies, including Falk's, show that the media coverage of female candidates running for U.S. President is different than the coverage given to male

candidates. Though there is not a deep body of knowledge about female politicians in America – mostly because there have been far fewer women running for office than men – researchers are beginning to understand more about the power of the media and its influence on political candidates of both genders today. Braden (1996) found that reporters often ask female politicians questions they do not ask male candidates, describing the women “in ways and with words that emphasize women’s traditional roles” and tending to focus on their outward appearance and behaviors. According to Devitt (1999), newspaper reporters covering gubernatorial candidates devoted significantly more attention to the personal lives, personalities and appearances of women than of men.

Falk agrees with both Braden and Devitt, adding that this type of coverage serves to reinforce dated notions about the “natural” place for a woman: at home with the children and certainly not out running countries. Even as recently as 1964, newspapers like the *Bangor Daily News* wrote editorials implying that women were unnatural in politics and belonged instead at home.

“After noting the dearth of women in public office, the editors wrote, ‘Maybe the great majority of women just aren’t interested in public careers. They don’t have what intellectuals nowadays like to call ‘motivation.’ ...Though women make up a substantial part of the nation’s workforce, only a relatively few hold top jobs...could it be that is because women essentially are mothers and homemakers at heart?’” (Falk 33).

This and other similar forms of media coverage have historically helped create blockades for women running for office, presenting them with even more difficulty building and maintaining their credibility in the political sphere. As Falk concludes, despite the “striking and important changes...in women’s social and political rights and in attitudes about women in politics,” media coverage has not evolved. “[T]he press has

not changed how it covers women candidates...it is not much better today than it was in 1872” (Falk 14).

But is less coverage good or bad?

A subject that has been the center of debate for researchers studying women running for public office is whether or not existing gender stereotypes have a beneficial or detrimental impact on their campaigns. Indeed, while many researchers acknowledge the media’s important role in political races, there is conflicting information about whether media coverage of women running for office has a positive or negative influence on the overall outcome of their campaigns.

Many researchers agree that overall female politicians receive a significantly smaller amount of media coverage than their male counterparts (Braden 1996, Devitt 1999, Kahn and Goldenberg 1991), which can discourage women from running for office in the first place. Falk agrees, and also argues that a smaller amount of media coverage for women has a detrimental impact on women running for office as it minimizes their exposure to the general public and diminishes their presence in the political community. It is, she writes, an example of the female candidate being out-of-sight, out-of-mind (Falk 101). In her study of eight campaigns of women who ran for U.S. President, Falk found a disparity in the amount of coverage female and male candidates received. “The papers wrote fewer stories and fewer words per story about women than they did about men who had similar credentials and polled about the same. On average the men had about twice as many articles written about them and the articles were 7 percent longer” (ibid).

While she would not make any scientific conclusions about the role gender plays in determining the press coverage a candidate receives, Falk was led “to suspect strongly

that women candidates for president have been at a disadvantage in the amount of press coverage that they received and that sexism affects how much press coverage women candidates garner” (Falk 115).

Other studies analyzing the newspaper coverage of female gubernatorial and U.S. Senate candidates also show that gender plays a role in determining media coverage (Bystrom 2001, 2006; Devitt 1999, Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Kahn 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). When Elizabeth Dole ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 1999, studies found significant differences in the coverage given to her and that given to her male counterparts (Bystrom 1999; Heldman, Carroll and Olson 2000). Braden (1996) found that female political candidates and leaders are often trivialized by the media through the use of “gender-specific terms” and by coverage that emphasizes feminine traits and traditionally female issues while giving less coverage to issues and ideas the candidates themselves raise (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991, Kahn 1994a).

Watson also finds that media coverage of candidates continues to stereotype female candidates based on their gender, and argues that this practice in fact hurts women. “Female candidates for high executive office face perceptual problems from a public that generally fails to view women as being credible on such issues as the economy, budgeting, national security, foreign policy, and other issues deemed important for a president” (Watson 6).

There are, however, some instances where female candidates benefit from the aforementioned “gender-specific” coverage. Kahn (1994b) noted that positive female stereotypes, such as warmth and honesty, can actually work to women’s advantage.

Additionally, Smith's (1997) analysis of newspaper coverage given to U.S. Senate and gubernatorial candidates of both genders in 11 races in 1994 found that men and women received about the same quantity and quality of coverage; and Bystrom, Robertson and Banwart (2001) found that female senatorial and gubernatorial candidates during the 2000 election were the focus of more stories and were mentioned significantly more often than male candidates. Cook also notes that female candidates can potentially benefit by securing votes based solely on their gender from female voters; however, she cautions that while this may be true in some cases, "the effects of party, ideology and incumbency on vote choice are generally greater than the effects of the candidate's sex" (4).

Research shows, though, that when women overcome the obstacles preventing them from seeking political office, neither voter bias against female candidates nor structural bias by party organizations seem to be underlying reasons why there are so few women in American politics. Instead, studies (Ambrosius and Welch 1984, Darcy and Schramm 1977; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1987) "point to the power of incumbency and the relative paucity of women in the candidate pool as the primary explanations for the disproportionately low number of women in office (Cook 257). Thus, Cook concludes, "the numbers of women in office does not appear to be a reflection of purposeful discrimination against women, but rather a function of the normal business of politics" (Cook 257-258).

5. The double burden of career and family

In addition to the barriers women must overcome to first run for then successfully gain office is the challenge of juggling professional and personal responsibilities. With more women entering the workforce and running for public office, the "double burden"

of successfully managing a career and motherhood is something that Falk describes as a significant barrier to entry for women running for office. Watson calls it the “second shift syndrome,” or the fact that working women also had duties beyond their paying job – they also assumed the lion’s share of domestic responsibilities at home, including raising children (3).

Because women have traditionally served as the primary caregivers for their children, either in addition to or in lieu of a career, it has also been more difficult for women to attain high offices that lead to the presidency or a position in the presidential cabinet. Extensive public service is typically required to be elected as President of the United States, but because many women do not start their political careers until after their children have grown, there is less time for them to build a career in politics (Falk 8, Watson 8). In the past, in order to be elected to the presidency “one must have an extensive political career and be serving in such highly visible offices as vice president, governor, or senator... It would appear...that a certain political career is necessary for a realistic run for the office” (Watson 8). And until recently, few women had such experience in public office.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, who has done extensive research into women in politics and the media’s role in their campaigns, believes that “the most significant barrier to a successful candidacy of a woman is the fact that so few occupy the positions that tend to be entryways to the White House” (Watson 45). She, along with Falk, argues that women are not in positions that lead to the presidency to begin with due to American society’s traditional association of femininity with child rearing and housekeeping; this same culture associates masculinity with leadership and public office. These associations

have historically and do in some degree today lead to the belief that women are somehow unnatural or ill-prepared for a position as important as President (Watson 46).

When women run against women

Because historically women have not been as involved in American politics as men, there have been only a handful of instances pitting female candidates against each other; there is, therefore, limited information regarding the factors at play when women are competing against each other for public office. In 1992, however, the Democratic primary in New York involving both female and male candidates in a tight race for one of the state's Senate seats turned into a particularly nasty election.

Craig A. Rimmerman recounts the 1992 New York Democratic Senate primary in a chapter of Cook's *Year of the Woman* titled, "When Women Run Against Women: Double Standards and Vitriol in the New York Primary." In the article, Rimmerman describes the race as a "particularly bitter loss" for the female candidates involved – Geraldine Ferraro and Elizabeth Holtzman – who, along with Al Sharpton, ultimately lost to successful male candidate Robert Abrams.

Deemed the "clear frontrunner" at the onset, Ferraro suffered attacks to her political and personal reputations after a number of scathing articles in the *Village Voice* publication that linked her family to criminal organizations. At the same time, Holtzman used a particularly aggressive advertising strategy in an attempt to undermine Ferraro – a strategy for which she was severely criticized and to which Ferraro responded with her own set of negative advertisements. The rivalry between the two women continued to the end of the campaign, ultimately resulting in unsuccessful candidacies for both. In the wake of the bitter race, Ferraro and Holtzman were both criticized for engaging in such a

vitriolic primary campaign and, according to Rimmerman, “[S]ome feminist leaders even argued that women’s gains nationwide were somehow diminished by the nastiness” of the race (Cook 119).

Rimmerman calls this perspective “short-sighted and unfair” for a number of reasons. First, he argues that “[i]f the New York race is any indication, women are being held to a higher standard than men who campaign for higher office.” The campaign strategy that Holtzman used was similar to those used by many male candidates in the past who were not criticized, or criticized only slightly, as a result. Because she was a woman, however, her tactics seemed severe and aggressive (Cook 119).

Interestingly, Rimmerman concludes his article by predicting that the high visibility of women's campaign and of women’s political action committees (such as EMILY’s List) would result in more competitive female candidates in future national elections. This certainly was true in the 2000 U.S. Presidential election in which Republican Elizabeth Dole and Democrat played a prominent role, and again in the 2008 North Carolina Senate race featuring Dole and Democrat Kay Hagan. “What this means in practice,” Rimmerman predicted forebodingly, “is that we can expect to see a repeat of the New York primary in which one woman candidate attacked the frontrunner, who happened to be a woman, in order to win the nomination” (Cook 119). Sixteen years later in the 2008 North Carolina Senate race, this exact situation materialized with incumbent Dole launching a negative advertising strategy attacking Hagan’s faith in a last-minute attempt to secure the Senate seat.

A new political landscape

Women continue to change the landscape of American politics on a daily basis – sometimes in new ways that the founding fathers of the United States could not have imagined – and engage with voters in new and different ways as well. Perhaps the best example of the changing political landscape – for better or for worse – is former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin. She was a surprise vice presidential nominee on the 2008 Republican presidential ticket who has become an influential voice in American politics today through a number of unconventional ways. Palin, the governor of Alaska in 2008 and prior to that the mayor and city councilwoman of the small town of Wasilla, was chosen as Republican presidential nominee John McCain’s running mate for a number of reasons, but primarily to appeal to the female voter contingency.

When elected as governor of Alaska in 2006, Palin was the youngest person elected to that office and the state’s first female governor (Cooper 2008). Though she resigned from her job as Alaska governor in 2009, she has maintained a near constant presence in American politics by her involvement with the Tea Party movement (Zernike 2010) and through speaking tours, for which she has demanded high fees (Martin 2009), her best-selling autobiographies (Italie 2009), and as a Fox News contributor (Fox News 2010).

But what has perhaps made Palin such a controversial political figure is how she has embraced the media spotlight and blurred the line between her political career and personal drama. Rife with drama, Palin’s personal life has taken center stage since the first day she stepped into the national political realm. Just days after Republican presidential candidate John McCain named her as his running mate in August 2008, she announced that her unwed teenage daughter was pregnant. Even after Palin and McCain

lost the 2008 election to Democrats Barack Obama and Joe Biden, the media continued to cover the drama surrounding Palin's daughter, her daughter's baby and her daughter's on-and-off relationship with the baby's father on a near daily basis.

On top of the events in her personal life that have garnered intense media attention, Palin also embraced a new way of connecting with the American public, social media – and has been both publicly praised and criticized for some of her “tweets” on Twitter. Additionally, Palin continues to direct the spotlight on herself through projects like a reality television show with the network TLC, by serving as a commentator for Fox News, and through a very active talk circuit. While she may be using unconventional methods, Palin is branding herself as among a new generation of American politicians – and in doing so she is also changing the political landscape for both male and female candidates.

CHAPTER 3: Sourcing

Modern journalism primarily centers on the concept of objectivity. Many newsrooms and journalism schools throughout America emphasize objectivity as a core principle of journalism. Indeed, many large news organizations' mottos or slogans include the concept of objectivity or that of fair and balanced reporting. Fox News, for example, frequently mentions its slogan, “We report, you decide,” a phrase that speaks to an assumption of fair and balanced reporting. The slogan leaves the viewer or reader with the impression that the news network presents the facts, and it is up to the audience to make the judgment. The concept of objectivity is integral to the relationship between

journalism and politics because of the potential influence news coverage can have on voter behavior at the polling booth.

The state of being objective is defined as being “uninfluenced by emotions or personal prejudices,” or something that is based on observable phenomenon and presented factually (TheFreeDictionary.com). Additionally, Danish professor Charlotte Wien argues in her article, “Defining Objectivity Within Journalism” (2005), that “[j]ournalism derives a great deal of its legitimacy from the postulate that it is able to present true pictures of reality,” and for that reason, concepts of “truth” and “reality” cannot be separated from that of “objectivity.” Journalism and objectivity, therefore, seem inextricably linked.

However, journalism in the United States has not always been held to specific standards and a relationship between the journalism industry and the concept of objectivity has not always existed. At the time the first American newspapers originated during the colonial days, there was not a system in place for Americans to communicate with each other or learn about what was happening in other parts of the developing country – there was no postal service among the colonies, nor was there a system in place for shipping; therefore, the advent of a way to distribute current news and information on a mass scale was popular. But many newspapers that emerged during the early years of the United States adopted politically-motivated stances, some critical of the new government. Creating and disseminating newspapers in the early days was an expensive endeavor; later, however, with the emergence of the “penny press” in the mid 1830s, newspapers became an affordable business endeavor that could be widely distributed at a low cost to the publisher (Schiller 12).

Early American newspapers did not always contain straightforward or factual information; often the newspapers favored sensational content or content that was skewed to a particular political perspective. For instance, the New York *Sun*, which was founded by Benjamin Day in 1833, featured heavily sensationalized information aimed at the working class population. Historians do not all agree about when, why or how journalism and the notion of objectivity became linked. Historian Dan Schiller argues that objectivity and journalism did not become linked until after the penny press was invented. “[T]he best period in which to study the development of objectivity in American journalism is not that of the rise of the wire services in the latter part of the 19th century, but the period beginning in the 1830s, when the newspaper first ‘was first established as a capitalist institution’” (7).

Schiller continues on to point out that “[j]ournalism historians have tied the emergence of objectivity to the decline in party journalism.” He quotes Frank Luther Mott as saying, “[T]he great change in that public occasioned by the advent of cheap dailies inevitably caused a shift in the news concept,” which gave way to a new standard in journalism: the newspaper’s primary responsibility was “to give its readers the news, and not to support a party or the mercantile class” (ibid). This moment in time represented the beginning of new standards for journalism; however, Schiller notes that while the 1830s may have served as the beginning of the relationship between journalism and objectivity, it took many years for the concept of objectivity to mature (ibid). Author Sloan agrees with Schiller, adding that “[b]y the end of the 19th century, professional standards of accuracy and truthfulness were widely articulated if not always practiced” (263).

In contrast to Schiller's perspective, in his book *Discovering the News* historian Michael Schudson writes that at the turn of the 20th century "there was as much emphasis in leading papers on telling a good story as on getting the facts" (5). Sensationalism, he continues, "was the chief development in newspaper content" and this practice continued into the early 20th century, when "it was uncommon for journalists to see a sharp divide between facts and values" (ibid).

It was not until the early 20th century that official codes of conduct and standards of journalism were introduced to the industry, and it was at this point that some historians believe that objectivity became a primary component of the journalism profession. Author Bruce Evensen, who wrote *The Responsible Reporter*, notes that the notion of objectivity officially became a core part of journalism in the early 1900s, when newspapers were subjected to recurring criticism from the public for being intrusive and unfair. Borrowing the idea from scientists, journalists at the time arrived at the idea that objectivity could be "empirically demonstrable," or tested in a way that would yield black-and-white results. While this idea has since been heavily discounted, Evensen argues that the underlying point concerning objectivity and journalism has not: "That point was and is to get the story right, to be accurate in a mechanical sense, but to be truthful in a broader sense as well" (Evensen 73).

Moreover, during the early 20th century, several notable professional groups, including the Society of Professional Journalists, were established. These institutions, in turn, created codes of conduct for journalists to abide by and general standards for the profession.

These codes typically stressed truth when reporting as a primary canon. Journalists were to be competent and thorough in their professional duties.

They were to avoid editorializing, conflicts of interest, and advertising disguised as news or editorials. They were to fulfill their responsibility to ensure an informed public and thereby strengthen self-government. (Sloan 49-50)

Today many of these organizations' missions center on, among other issues, upholding the professional standards set for journalists nationwide. According to the website of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), the SPJ's core focus as an organization is to support and protect the establishment of a free press; to uphold journalists to their commitment of providing the American people with information that is "accurate, timely, comprehensive and understandable"; to foster excellence among journalists; and to stimulate "high standards and ethical behavior in the practice of journalism" (Society of Professional Journalists Online).

While good in theory, striving for and attaining objectivity tends to be more difficult in practice. Some researchers blame the struggle to attain objectivity in daily journalistic activities as a direct result of the industry's failure to understand the notion of objectivity or to precisely define it (Ryan 2001, Wien 2005). Others argue that it is an unattainable goal – a carrot that can never be reached, even by the most diligent of journalists (MacDougall and Reid 1987). Evensen calls objectivity a "chronically vexing notion" that has been the subject of much misunderstanding and abuse (72), and argues that a better term for "objectivity" is "fair" or "impartial" because these terms are more achievable and are not black-and-white, as being truly "objective" requires a person to be:

Many critics have argued that we can never fully remove ourselves from a scene or a situation and that true objectivity is therefore impossible. The critics are probably right, but journalists who conscientiously try to be honest and fair will probably do a better job than those who give up and no longer try at all (Evensen 73).

Part of the problem with centering the journalism industry upon the idea of objectivity is that among journalists there is a wide divergence in the definition of the term. “Objective journalism is blamed frequently for all sorts of journalistic failures and weaknesses, but the critiques typically are flawed because their authors fail to understand objectivity or to define it precisely” (Ryan 2001). Additionally, some research shows that there is a divergence in what objectivity means to journalists at different levels in the newsroom. “The degree to which journalists claim to be objective appears to be a function of their power and status within the profession,” Soley writes (16). According to Soley, reporters tend to express more disbelief in objectivity than editors or publishers, and that even among reporters there are differences in opinion regarding the relationship between objectivity and journalism today. As support for this argument, he points to journalists Kerry Gruson, a reporter at the *Raleigh News and Observer* in the 1970s, and her father Sydney Gruson, assistant to the publisher at *The New York Times* at the time. Soley quotes Kerry Gruson as insisting that “objectivity is a myth,” while her father rebuts this idea, arguing that “pure objectivity might not exist, but (as a journalist) you have to strive for it anyway.”

In today’s ever-changing media landscape, keeping objectivity – or at least the pursuit of truth – at the core of modern journalism is critical to maintaining an environment of responsible reporting in America. Today, more people are turning away from traditional forms of media, such as newspapers, and instead looking to the Internet as their source of information. A 2010 survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project reveals that 61 percent of Americans report that they get at least some of their news from the Internet, as opposed to 54 percent who say they listen to a radio program

and 50 percent that read a local or national print newspaper (Lenhart et al. 2010). As a result, everyday people are turning into amateur journalists – they start their own blogs and exchange information through social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn; this in turn has created an atmosphere where information – both true and false – spreads rapidly. For professional journalists, this new media environment means it is essential that they continue their commitment to objectivity and fair and balanced reporting for the benefit of the general public.

However, some media experts argue that journalists sometimes use the concept of objectivity to shield themselves from criticism (Soley 17) and that there are systematic environmental and cognitive biases that prevent journalists from ever attaining true objectivity (Shoemaker 1987, Stocking and Gross 1989). For example, gatekeeping bias – or the ideas that journalists play an important role in determining what information constitutes news – has long been considered a significant factor in journalism (White 1950, McCombs and Shaw 1976, D'Alessio and Allen 2000). Other research has been completed on a host of other environmental factors that have a role in the construction of news – including space and time constraints, organizational policies, characteristics of the community and culture in which a journalist works – with some researchers viewing environmental factors as a critical part of how news is constructed (Shoemaker 1987).

But beyond those mentioned, another factor that plays a significant role in journalism – and one that had the potential to play an important role in the Dole-Hagan race – is that of journalists' selection of sources. Some research shows systematic biases in the way journalists choose their sources. Indeed, previous research shows that there are certain demographics of individuals who journalists tend to use more often as sources

than other demographics. For instance, Whitney et al. (1989) and Brown et al. (1987) found that print and broadcast news reporters in the 1980s used government officials more frequently than any other type of source, and also that women rarely appeared as sources in network television news stories. Additionally, these studies found that representatives of civil rights, human rights and labor groups were underrepresented as sources in news media during the 1980s.

More recent research shows that despite strides women have made in recent years, they continue to be underrepresented as sources in the American news media. A report by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in 2010 found that while 44 percent of people interviewed by the media are female, women constitute only one out of five experts interviewed by the media. Additionally, the GMMP report finds that women are portrayed differently from men in the news media: Women appear in photographs nearly one-and-a-half times more than men, their ages are reported on twice as often as men, and “news stories do not represent women in professional or authority roles to the degree they are present.”

It is not surprising, given that reporters have historically been elite white men, that they would also select sources who were elite white men. As Soley puts it, “Reporters, editors, and bureau chiefs of prestige media have much more in common with businessmen, government leaders, and sociologists from Harvard University than with African-American social workers” (22). Previous research supports this idea, showing that the sources journalists most often use in their reports are white males associated with elite institutions (Herman and Chomsky 1988). In explaining this “homogeneity” in sourcing, Soley cites a 1978 survey of journalists that found that most

Washington journalists were white men who were well-educated. At the time of the survey, men outnumbered women by a four-to-one ratio and were more likely to work for high-prestige news organizations. The survey found that the few women who did work for leading news organizations often were assigned low-prestige beats. And fewer than five percent of the reporters were black (Soley 21).

The fact that elite white males are most often used as sources in stories is how Soley justifies his argument that news reports do not, in fact, “mirror” society, as NBC News president Reuven Frank once claimed. At the time of his writing, Soley said women were more than half the U.S. population, African-Americans were 12 percent and labor unions represented nearly 20 percent of the population. Soley argues that news reports using elite white males as primary sources cannot accurately reflect a society in which very few women and individuals from minority groups are used as sources in the news media. “If the media simply mirror societal events, representatives of these groups would appear more frequently in the news than they currently do” (17).

Today, these numbers have changed. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, women still constitute slightly over half of the U.S. population (50.9 percent) (U.S. Census 2010 “Age and Sex Composition”) and the numbers of minorities in the country are rising at a faster pace than the numbers of whites in the country (U.S. Census 2010 “Overview of Race”). However, despite these changes and despite the fact that more women are entering fields traditionally dominated by white men, the variety of sources journalists today use in their stories has changed only minimally over the years (Freedman et al. 2010). This is concerning on a number of levels, but mainly because the way journalists

choose their sources and who they choose is a significant component of newsgathering that can ultimately impact how voters cast their votes.

Bias in the mainstream media

Much like the way American history was shaped by the white men who transcribed their version of events, so too will future generations comprehend the time in which we lived by the stories that are related. Journalists have a unique role in shaping history because the information they communicate to audiences has the potential to alter people's perceptions of the world. In an ideal world, the facts and just the straight facts would be communicated to the general public; however, allegations about bias in the mainstream media have led the American public to discredit the industry as a whole. According to a 2004 study, 53 percent of Americans surveyed agreed with the statement, "I often don't trust what news organizations are saying," while 48 percent agreed with the idea that the people responsible for selecting news content are "out of touch" (Pew Research Center 2004). The same study showed that in 1987, 62 percent of the public believed election coverage was free of partisan bias – a number that dropped to 53 percent in 1996, 48 percent in 2000, and finally 38 percent in 2004. A 2009 Pew study showed the percent of Americans who trust the media at an all time low: 63 percent of respondents believed news reports were often inaccurate while only 29 percent believe that the media "generally get their facts straight." Moreover, 74 percent of respondents said news organizations favor one side or another when reporting and that the news media were often influenced by powerful interests. According to *New York Times* reporter Richard Perez-Pena, these are the lowest percentages recorded for the Pew survey (Perez-Pena 2009).

The influence of framing and agenda-setting on news coverage

Evidence exists indicating that in addition to sourcing, framing and agenda-setting techniques play a significant role in elections (Niven 2003, Kim and McCombs 2007).

According to Fico et al. (2007), “Bias occurs in news reporting...when reporter observation or source selection produces incomplete or atypical perspectives about news topics.” Agenda-setting and framing theories fit into this definition of bias in that both tend to provide perspectives that create a certain impression instead of leaving the audience members to determine their own opinions of the information presented.

Agenda-setting theory speaks to the idea that the media have the power to decide what issues audiences think about, while framing centers on the media’s ability to frame stories in a way that influences how audiences make sense of these issues (Baran and Davis, 2006).

Considerable efforts have been devoted to demonstrating bias in the way issues are framed by the media – for example, studies focused on specific issues like homelessness indicate that the media adopt a liberal perspective for presenting issues (Olasky 1988). The media also tend to frame controversial issues like abortion, civil liberties and gun control using a liberal frame (Olasky 1988; Nelson, Clawson and Oxley 1997; Callaghan and Schnell 2001). In terms of political coverage, however, studies provide evidence supporting the concept that framing and agenda-setting have a significant impact on public opinion.

Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan (2002) advance the concept of “attribute priming,” or mass media’s influence on the general public’s perception of issues. Attribute priming is based on the hypothesis that certain issues emphasized by the media become

significant issues for the public (Kim et al. 2002). Through surveys conducted by telephone to residents living in the Austin, Texas, metropolitan area, Kim and McCombs (2007) tested agenda-setting theory by surveying public awareness and attitudes toward four major party candidates in the 2002 Texas gubernatorial race. Their findings indicate that issues covered positively and negatively by the media are perceived similarly by the public and are significantly related to public opinion regarding political candidates. Kim and McCombs also found that the local paper's agenda in Austin and the public's agenda both strongly centered on the personal qualifications and character of the candidates, rather than on platform issues or professional qualifications.

Tan and Weaver (2007) studied agenda-setting interactions between the media and general public, specifically analyzing the media's relationship with the general public and Congress between 1946 and 2004. The authors examined data derived from *New York Times* coverage, Gallup polls and Congressional hearings between 1946 and 2004 and asked a question pertaining to causality: Who ultimately sets the agenda? For example, do the media influence policy agenda or are the media influenced by policy agenda in the long run? The authors found that a positive relationship between news coverage and public opinion exists, and that the media set the agenda for the public for international and government operation issues. Additionally, Tan and Weaver found decreasing correlations between the public and the media from 1946 to 2004, and conjectured that the declining impact of media might be the result of the increasing number of news outlets.

The influence of sourcing on news coverage

One of the most important components of newsgathering is sourcing – or the sources journalists select for their stories – because of its potential to influence journalists’ understanding of information, and thus its potential to influence readers’ or viewers’ perceptions of a particular story or situation. The relationship between sourcing and news coverage is particularly important when it comes to politics because evidence from previous research supports the idea that news content can have a significant impact on voter opinion and thus voter behavior at the polling booths (Culbertson, Evarts, Stempel and Windhauser 1985; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006). Zoch and Turk (1998) write, “The media of mass communication are among our most powerful social institutions, with the capacity to set the public agenda by attaching salience to particular issues and events they cover.” Lacy and Coulson (2000) also note that “(t)hose who have access to journalists often determine what becomes news.” And in *Deciding What’s News*, author Herbert Gans argues that sources often have a significant influence over journalists’ understanding of the social order. Therefore, sources with access to journalists have the potential to significantly impact the way journalists understand, interpret and relate a story to readers.

Soley uses the term “news shapers” to refer to sources, a term that speaks to the ability of sources to determine, or “shape,” the way a story is presented to readers or viewers. According to Soley, “the primary function of news shapers, according to journalists who use them, is to provide analysis that is comprehensible to readers and viewers” (26). According to this perspective, sources are used to provide inside information and commentary about ideas that are otherwise difficult for the average person to understand. These sources, which the media often term “experts,” boil complex

political issues down to simple ideas that are more manageable for average people to understand. Soley argues that the process of pulling simple messages out of complicated information actually does more harm than good for the American public. He writes that “[t]he passive reception of predigested media messages becomes a substitute for political involvement, while simultaneously creating a world in which politics is an arena reserved exclusively for experts” (ibid) and criticizes news shapers for providing their audiences with a “superficial knowledge” of political information, which renders them “politically immobilized” (27).

Other researchers also highlight the importance of studying the relationship between journalists and their sources because, as Seib et al. (1997) put it, “[i]n many cases, reporters’ stories are only as good as their sources” (101). The way reporters choose their sources, whom they select and why, and whether they grant sources anonymity raises many ethical issues rooted in the fact that sources control the information being shared and oftentimes have a stake in the outcome. “(Sources) are the cornerstone of the existing journalistic method of detecting, acquiring, and verifying news,” and for this reason they “provide a vital link in the chain of information” that is communicated to the general public (Reich 62). The author of the 2009 book, *Sourcing the News: Key Issues in Journalism*, Zvi Reich devoted part of her research to looking at sourcing and the impact it has on coverage, both directly and indirectly. According to Reich, the information exchange between reporter and source can be one-sided, or it can be more of a barter system. Either way, though, the primary role of the source in newsmaking is two-fold: to either provide information to help reporters bring together pieces of the puzzle, or to verify or rebut information (Reich 68).

Relationships between journalists and sources can also be complicated by the type of relationship that develops. “Journalists’ independence can be compromised if they become too friendly with people whom they use as sources or who are subjects of their coverage” (Seib et al. 101), and often journalists make the mistake of relying on a single or a small faction of sources. The problem with the latter issue is that by using a limited pool of sources, journalists are also limiting the perspectives weighing in on their subject matter. And many sources, as Seib et al. note, have ulterior motives. “No matter how knowledgeable they seem, sources usually have their own agendas that might conflict with journalists’ need for honest information” (Seib et al. 103-104).

Discretionary vs. nondiscretionary sources

According to Freedman et al. (2010), two general pools of sources exist from which journalists gather information for election stories: discretionary (or the sources journalists elect to provide the “ordinary person” perspective, and “horse race” and issues experts who provide professional election input) and nondiscretionary (e.g., the candidates themselves or persons they elect to represent their campaigns, such as campaign press secretaries; these sources are considered “partisan” as they have a vested interest in representing a certain viewpoint regarding the election).

Journalists have little control over the nondiscretionary sources to which they have access; they do, however, control the discretionary sources they use in their stories. And, as Freedman, Fico and Durisin explain, commentary from discretionary sources can have a significant impact on election outcomes, particularly when it comes to “expert” sources: “By including nonpartisan experts, reporters widen their coverage beyond a litany of ‘Democrat-says-A, but-Republican-says-B’ comments. In other words, experts

may enable the public to reach better informed conclusions that transcend partisan claims” (Freedman et al. 2010). If there are more male reporters in newsrooms today (ASNE 2009) and if male reporters tend to select male sources (Zeldes and Fico 2005, Leibler and Smith 1997, Freedman and Fico 2005), and if male sources are more frequently used as “horse race” or “issue” experts, then it is logical to deduce that males have more opportunity than females to impact the way candidates are perceived and elections are interpreted.

For these reasons, much previous research has been devoted to analyzing discretionary sources and the role reporter gender plays on the discretionary sources journalists select. Freedman et al. (2010) further divide discretionary sources into three categories: “horse race” experts, or “experts identified by credentials that qualified them to assess the progress and success of campaigns; issue experts, whose institutional affiliation or educational background qualified them to discuss the policy implications of campaign issues; and ordinary citizens who lack ‘horse race’ or issue expertise.”

The reason men are more likely than women to be used as “horse race” or “issue” experts in election coverage can be traced back to many of the same factors that have historically prevented women from entering politics: the lack of female role models in the field, the double burden of family and career, the lack of women entering fields that lead to careers that naturally lead into politics, et cetera. These same factors that serve as barriers to the world of politics for women are the same factors that inhibit them from becoming “horse race” or “issue” experts for political races. Because women continue to be underrepresented in politics, it is understandable that this also means women are underrepresented as “horse race” and “issue” experts in election coverage. And if, as

Freedman et al.'s 2010 study points out, there are more male reporters than female reporters in newsrooms today and if male reporters tend to quote male political "horse race" and "issue" experts, then it is logical that stories appearing in newspaper coverage of political races may include a greater number of male expert sources than female sources.

Previous research supports this theory. According to Freedman and Fico (2005), fewer than 10 percent of the expert sources cited in newspaper coverage of a 2002 gubernatorial campaign were women. More recently, National Public Radio ombudsman Alicia Shepard found a striking gender imbalance among NPR's sources and commentators: of the stations 12 outside commentators who were on air regularly from 2009 to 2010, only one was female (Shepard 2010).

But there are mixed findings regarding the impact of reporter gender on source selection or source gender. Both Shoemaker and Reese (1996) and Len-Rios et al. (2008) found reporter gender had a significant impact on sourcing while Weaver and Whilhoit (1996) and Zoch and Turk (1998) found that female reporters were more likely to quote female sources than were male reporters. Zeldes, Fico and Diddi's 2007 study found that female television reporters at four stations were more likely to use female sources in coverage of a 2002 gubernatorial campaign. Finally, Leibler and Smith found in their 1997 study that men were more likely to appear as experts while women appeared as ordinary people in network television news stories.

Freedman et al. (2010) also found that male sources were more likely than female sources to be used for expert "horse race" and "issues" commentary in election coverage; however, the study diverged from other research on source selection in its findings on the

impact of reporter gender. Unlike previous studies that found female reporters were more likely to select female sources, the study by Freedman et al. of U.S. Senate races in 2006 found that female reporters were more likely to choose male sources rather than female sources for their stories.

Bias and the Dole-Hagan race

National publications like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Time* and *Newsweek* gave little coverage to the Dole-Hagan senatorial race during the months leading up to the 2008 election likely due to a combination of factors, including the fact that they are national news magazines and newspapers, and there was a high profile presidential race happening concurrently; but regional media organizations in North Carolina followed Dole's and Hagan's campaigns closely, providing ample material to analyze for indications of divergences in the coverage given to both candidates. Because a good mix of female and male reporters served as the primary journalists covering the Dole-Hagan race, this project focuses on sourcing and its potential impact on the coverage Dole and Hagan received from local and regional newspapers.

CHAPTER 4: The 2008 Dole-Hagan Race

Before analyzing the coverage Republican Elizabeth Dole and Democrat Kay Hagan received during the 2008 North Carolina U.S. Senate race, it is important to discuss the political and social environment in North Carolina, both historically and at the time of the 2008 race, and to understand the history of each candidate.

History of politics in North Carolina

The modern day political climate in North Carolina is a product of the historical events that have shaped the state and how its residents view politics. Two of the major

historical events in the South that played key roles in the development of North Carolina's present culture, society and political climate were race-based: slavery and the civil rights movement. Though seemingly unrelated, women's rights and the rights of black Americans in the South during the 19th and 20th centuries share commonalities rooted in a society and culture historically dominated by rich white men.

The impact of slavery on Southern society

One of the original 13 colonies, North Carolina played an integral role in both the Revolutionary War in the late 1700s and in the Civil War during the 1860s. And like many Southern states, North Carolina's economy during the 18th and 19th centuries relied heavily on slavery (UNC Libraries "Slavery in North Carolina"). According to the University of North Carolina library website, slavery was part of North Carolina's history since Europeans settled the state in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Though not a key component of the state's economy in the beginning, slavery soon became key to North Carolina's growth and success as the population grew. Slaves in North Carolina performed countless jobs for no pay, including raising crops, carpentry and masonry, construction, sailing and domestic work. However, when the Carolina colonies formally split in 1729 and established North Carolina and South Carolina, a significant portion of the slave population in North Carolina moved to South Carolina to work on the southern colony's extensive plantation system (ibid).

Following the end of the Revolutionary War, the ban on importing slaves to the colonies was lifted and the number of slaves in North Carolina grew tremendously. By 1800, an estimated 140,000 people of African descent lived in North Carolina, a small fraction of whom were free blacks while the majority were slaves working in agricultural

settings (UNC Libraries “Antebellum Slavery”). North Carolina, like many other southern states, passed strict codes limiting slave rights during the colonial era, and these codes continued to be enforced during the Antebellum period. These codes – which forbade blacks, both free and enslaved, to raise their own livestock, carry guns, be taught how to read and write, vote, or attend school – were created out of fear of slave uprisings (ibid). This sentiment would continue to grow leading up to the Civil War, which started in the 1860s when North Carolina’s white population totaled nearly 630,000 and the black population had soared to more than 361,000 (Powell 328).

During the American Civil War, North Carolina seceded from the union with 10 other Southern states. After the Confederates surrendered, ending the war in 1865, some former slaves moved away from North Carolina while others stayed to live and work. Many black North Carolinians also began participating in the state’s government. According to the UNC Library website, 18 African-Americans were elected to the State House of Representatives in 1868, just three years after the war ended. And by the late 1870s, more African Americans living in North Carolina had served in the state Legislature. “These leaders made the first steps in the long civil rights movement that would continue throughout the 19th century and into the 20th century, as North Carolina’s African Americans recovered from the injustices of slavery and fought to ensure their equal rights under the law” (UNC Libraries “Emancipation”).

Slavery played a key role in the development of North Carolina’s political climate; however, as the end of the 1800s drew near North Carolina and its residents moved on from slavery and into a new century. Initially, there was strong opposition to many provisions Congress enacted following the ratification of the Thirteenth

Amendment that abolished slavery, particularly the idea that freed black Americans could have the right to bear arms, marry whites, testify in court and vote (Powell 383). But directly after the Civil War, many Confederates in the South were prohibited from voting, leaving room for a new political movement to gain momentum in the South (UNC Libraries “Changes in Southern Politics – History 1”). Many newly enfranchised African-Americans joined the liberal Republican Party because of Abraham Lincoln and his emancipation efforts (Powell 395). Confederates slowly began re-entering the political world, joining together as a conservative Democratic Party, working to block the U.S. government’s Reconstruction efforts and opposing federal involvement with the individual rights of the states. At this point, the Ku Klux Klan made its debut in southern Tennessee, first intended as a harmless and fun fraternal club composed of Confederate veterans, but soon developing into a raciest movement and spreading to other states (Powell 394).

Through the Compromise of 1877, southern Democrats accepted a Republican victory in the 1876 presidential election in exchange for a certain level of regional autonomy, part of which centered on the ability of the states to establish laws based on race (Powell 406). Labeling the concession a “compromise” was apt, since the decision to allow states the liberty to discriminate based on race planted the seed for segregation between black and white residents in Southern states.

As a country, the United States saw significant political change in the early 20th century, and the state of North Carolina was no exception. But because the South enacted laws mandating the racial segregation of everything from schools and churches to buses and theaters, racial tensions mounted and maintained a constant presence in Southern

politics. As the UNC Library history site notes, “Political and social change in Southern states was directly connected to some of the landmark events of American history, particularly the Civil Rights Movement” (UNC Libraries “Changes in Southern Politics).

Tensions between white and black Americans grew during the first half of the 20th century, intensifying during World War I and World War II, which brought the issue of race in the armed forces to a head. Later during the Cold War, President Harry S. Truman took a strong stance in support of civil rights and in 1947 made it a congressional issue, shocking many and drawing the ire of some of his white southern Democratic supporters (UNC Libraries “Changes in Southern Politics – History 2”). Truman’s stance split the Southern Democrats in 1948, a move that foreshadowed the transition of Southern conservatives from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. It is important to note that while the now-liberal Democratic Party during this era supported the civil rights movement for moral and ethical reasons, Democrats also had something to gain from furthering this movement – securing the votes of African-Americans. Regardless of motive, though, it is clear that the issue of equal rights for Americans of all races divided the nation, and when segregation ended with the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 so began a new era for the South, both socially and politically.

Women’s rights and the South

Throughout the major racial conflicts in North Carolina’s history, women have also struggled for rights against a Southern society steeped in white male supremacy. It can certainly be argued that in a similar way – though on a completely different level than the discrimination black Americans experienced – women in the South also found it difficult to change a culture and society historically dominated by white men. Since the

pre-colonial days in the United States, the South has served as a hub for a more concentrated conservative population; therefore, many advances made for female and black Americans through the centuries were more slowly integrated into Southern culture and society. Additionally, Southern society accepted women's rights efforts more slowly than other parts of the country because the women's movement was considered to be a "staunch ally" of the antislavery movement and therefore served as another threat to white supremacy and the South's traditional pattern of male domination (Bernhard 8).

During the pre- and post-slavery era in the South, prevailing gender conventions dictated how women could and should behave. Women, particularly elite white women, in the South were held to the ideal of the graceful "southern lady," a myth that through the 18th and 19th centuries held women to the notion that women are fragile and subordinate to men. "[S]outhern men of all classes and races subscribed to a general belief in women's subordination to men, which southern churches, customs, and laws reinforced" (Bernhard 3). Women were "imprisoned" by the ideal of the "southern lady," which Bernhard argues "cast such a long shadow over the identities of southern women" and confined them "within the constraints of their class, race, and gender" (ibid). However, subordination to men translated differently for women depending on their race and class. For instance, prevailing gender conventions did not mean poor white women, non-slaveholding women, or black women lived lives of leisure and elegance, as the ideal southern woman should. Instead, these women might have been expected to perform different types of work than men – though for the majority of black slave women, not even this distinction held (Bernhard 4).

Southern women were also expected to conform to prevailing notions regarding female conduct inside and outside the household, particularly when it came to sexual behaviors. North Carolina, in particular, “exercised more careful and coercive control over white women’s sexual behavior” than northern states, mainly because motherhood was considered to be the noblest calling for southern white women and because white women were considered to be the sources of racial purity in the South (Bynum 2). Court records show that despite promoting marriage as “an ideal social institution” that promised women love, honor and protection, women in North Carolina, as well as other southern states, who suffered abusive and degrading marriages were routinely denied legal separations and divorces. Additionally, the courts handed down harsh punishments to unmarried women who were sexually active, suggesting that “marriage functioned primarily as a mechanism for appropriating women’s reproductive behavior rather than as a means of protecting women” (ibid).

Women’s rights in the 20th century

Despite the tight gender confines placed on women during the 18th and 19th centuries, women’s rights in the South gained momentum in the early 20th century as the women’s suffrage movement grew stronger. According to Bernhard, during the early days of the women’s suffrage efforts, some southerners embraced the idea by justifying it not based on justice for women but because of the innate differences between men and women; in other words, women by nature hold a different perspective from that of men and, therefore, could make valuable contributions to the country if allowed to vote. “Women’s suffrage, in this view, posed no necessary challenge to white supremacy, which it could even serve” (Bernhard 8).

Opponents argued the opposite – that granting women the right to vote would undermine white supremacy by threatening existing gender roles. After the Civil War, fears arose that giving women the right to vote would also mean black Americans should be able to vote. Ultimately, in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited the United States government from denying any citizen the right to vote based on race; this same right was not extended to women until the U.S. government ratified the 19th Amendment in 1920. Still, in the South, “[m]ost white southerners...resisted the fundamental implication of women suffrage, namely that it recognized women as individuals outside the family and thus threatened that basic unit of social order” (ibid).

As the 20th century progressed, increasing numbers of women collectively worked to erode some of the major facets of southern traditionalism by challenging gender, race and class constraints in southern society. This progress was tempered by a number of significant events that turned the nation’s focus outward, including World War I and World War II, then by the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. However, as more women began entering American politics nationwide, attitudes about women in public office began to change in the South.

On a national level, 1992 was dubbed the “Year of the Woman” after 22 female candidates won seats in Congress. That year, the three existing senators – North Dakota’s Jocelyn Burdick, Kansas’ Nancy Kassebaum, and Maryland’s Barbara Mikulski – were joined by four newly elected female Democratic senators: Patty Murray of Washington, Carol Mosely Braun of Illinois, and Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer of California (U.S. Senate “Art and History”). Since then, many more women in both the Democratic and Republican parties have entered – and won – Congressional races across the United

States. By the time of the 2008 U.S. election, 246 women had served in Congress – 158 Democrats and 88 Republicans (U.S. Senate “Women” July 2008). Women have occupied only 35 Senate seats since the first woman elected to the Senate, Rebecca Latimer Felton, served a one-day term. Of the 35 female senators who had served by 2008, 13 were initially appointed and five were initially elected to fill unexpired terms, while nine were chosen to fill vacancies caused by the deaths of their husbands (ibid). By the time of the Dole-Hagan race, women held 16 of the total 100 Senate going into the 2008 election. Of those 16 women, 11 were Democrats and five were Republicans (U.S. Senate “Membership” Sept. 2008). Of those five Republican female senators going into the 2008 election, one was North Carolina Senator Elizabeth Dole.

Elizabeth Dole

Elizabeth Dole was no stranger to politics when she successfully ran for North Carolina’s U.S. Senate seat in 2002. Born Mary Elizabeth Alexander Hanford in Salisbury, North Carolina, Dole grew up in a family that prioritized public service and community involvement. Dole’s first step toward politics started in high school where she ran for school president. At the time, the position of high school president was “pretty much off limits to girls,” Dole wrote in her 1996 memoir with husband, Bob (Dole 52). Her campaign manager at the time compared her to another Elizabeth – Britain’s Queen Elizabeth – and argued that “[m]ore and more the modern world is giving women a big part to play. Boyden [Dole’s high school] must keep pace in this world” (ibid). Dole lost the race but learned a lesson on how to lose, she wrote – “something no one likes but from which most of us can benefit” (ibid). Later, as a freshman at Duke University, Dole wrote in her memoir that she ran for class representative only to be defeated yet again.

This defeat, however, did not deter her from achieving her goals of entering student government; she pushed on until finally winning election as Duke's student government president in 1957.

As previously discussed, despite significant advances in women's rights nationally during the 20th century, women in the South were often still held to traditional Southern standards for conduct and career. Dole, however, was an exception to the rule. Eschewing marriage and family life for higher education and a career, Dole spent many years building an extensive resume. Fresh out of Duke, Dole took a job at Harvard Law School and followed that by attending Oxford and Harvard Law School. After graduating from Harvard in 1965, Dole took a job at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in Washington, D.C., and then became a criminal defense lawyer for a year before diving headfirst into Washington politics.

According to her memoir, out of law school she worked at the White House for President Lyndon B. Johnson administration, then served as deputy assistant for consumer affairs for Johnson's successor, Richard Nixon. In 1975, Dole became a Republican and married fellow Republican Bob Dole (Dole 156). Despite ultimately marrying a Washington politician, she defied expectations by refusing to fade into the background. She speaks eloquently and intelligently – something that was historically not considered socially acceptable for Southern women to do in public. Shortly thereafter, Nixon appointed her to a term on the Federal Trade Commission – a position she temporarily left to help her husband's vice presidential bid when he ran on the 1976 Republican ticket with Gerald Ford. She ultimately left for good in 1979 to campaign for her husband in his 1980 presidential bid.

Over the course of the next decade, Dole writes in her memoir that she served in a variety of roles for President Ronald Reagan, including as director of the White House Office of Public Liaison (1981-1983) and United States Secretary of Transportation (1983-1987), then as the U.S. Labor Secretary for a year under President George H.W. Bush (1989-1990). In 1991, she accepted the position of president of the American Red Cross and spent most of the 1990s at the helm of the organization. She resigned from her post at the American Red Cross in 1999 in order to pursue a presidential bid on the 2000 Republican ticket, but insufficient funding forced her to pull out of the race early.

Studies of the print media coverage Dole received during her failed bid for the Republican presidential nomination suggest that the way journalists framed Dole as a candidate could have significantly impacted the outcome of her bid for the nomination. In short, at least one study found that “Dole did not receive an amount of media coverage consistent with her standing as the number two candidate in the polls” and that “the press paid more attention to Dole’s personality traits and appearance than to the traits and appearance of other candidates” (Heldman, Carroll and Olson 2005). The study suggests that journalists repeatedly framed Dole as a novelty in the race instead of a strong candidate with a good chance of winning, which could have impacted her ultimate bid for the nomination.

Given North Carolina’s history, it is understandable why Elizabeth Dole was the first woman to win a Senate seat in the state. Before Dole was elected in 2002, no other woman had served as a Senator representing North Carolina in the state’s history. Prior to her election to his seat in 2002, Dole’s predecessor, Republican Jesse Helms, served in the Senate for more than 30 years (Biographical Directory of Congress), and before

Helms 22 other male Senators represented North Carolina in Congress. Despite these odds, Dole easily won the GOP primary for Helms' Senate seat. According to her biography on the official Women in Congress website, Dole won 80 percent of the vote against six other candidates in the GOP primary, and then went on to defeat Democratic nominee Erskine Bowles by earning 53 percent of the total vote in the general election (Women in Congress 2011).

While in office, Dole held several committee assignments, including serving on the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, the Select Committee on Aging, and briefly on the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee. Dole's legislative agenda "reflected her background, particularly her humanitarian work" with the Red Cross: she focused much of her efforts on addressing nutrition and hunger issues in North Carolina (ibid).

Kay Hagan

Compared to Dole, much less is known about Hagan; this is largely because she had much less experience in politics and was not a nationally recognized public figure like Dole. Aside from as a youth helping to campaign for her uncle, former Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Lawton Chiles, Hagan did not enter politics until successfully running for North Carolina state senator in 1998. It is clear, however, that she was interested in politics from a young age.

According to her website (www.kayhagan.com), Hagan was born on May 26, 1953, in the small, rural town of Shelby, North Carolina, to parents Joe, a tire salesman, and Jeanette Ruthven, a homemaker. Her first experience with politics was helping her uncle, then-Governor Chiles, place bumper stickers on cars to publicize his candidacy.

Later, she served as an intern at the Capitol in Washington, D.C., operating the elevator that carried senator to and from the Chamber.

With an undergraduate degree from Florida State University and a law degree from Wake Forest University, Hagan embarked on a career in Greensboro, North Carolina, as an attorney for what was then known as North Carolina National Bank (now Bank of America). After having children, Hagan left the bank to be a stay-at-home mother, but stayed involved in community affairs through volunteer work and fundraising for area charities, teaching Sunday school classes and serving as a Girl Scout troop leader. She was also a county manager for Governor Jim Hunt's gubernatorial campaigns in 1992 and 1996.

In 1998, Hagan ran for and was elected to the North Carolina General Assembly, and during her five-term tenure she focused on economic development and education. Some of her other priorities, as described on her campaign website, included investing "in technology and infrastructure to help develop the next century's medicine and jobs," voting "to pass some of the nation's toughest predatory lending laws," and stepping up "to make sure the gaps in underfunded homeland security and federal law enforcement programs were filled." As state senator, Hagan also served as the chairwoman of the Appropriations Committee and Pensions, Retirement & Aging Committee, as well as co-chairwoman of the Budget Committee.

By the time Hagan entered the 2008 North Carolina Senate race she had served in the North Carolina State Senate for 10 years but had nowhere near the political recognition as Dole, who by then had been involved in politics for more than three decades. In stark contrast to Hagan's 10 years in the North Carolina General Assembly,

Dole had a long history of political involvement in Washington, and had served as the secretary of transportation under Reagan, then as the secretary of labor under George H.W. Bush; Dole had also lived in Washington for decades, and had married a politician and campaigned for him during bids for the presidency and vice presidency of the United States. Hagan, on the other hand, had lived most of her life in North Carolina and had very little experience with Washington politics. Dole's close relationship with Washington politics, however, would ultimately harm her bid for re-election.

The political climate in 2008

When Elizabeth Dole ran for Jesse Helms' vacant Senate seat in 2002, the political climate – both nationwide and in North Carolina – was substantially different from the climate when she ran for re-election against Kay Hagan in 2008. In 2002, President George W. Bush was less than two years into his first of two terms and the nation was still reeling from the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. In the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks, Bush experienced the highest approval ratings in the history of Gallup polls ranking public approval of the U.S. president – 90 percent (CBS News 2009). For the next few years, the Bush administration focused on pushing through national security legislation and furthered its efforts to promote the conservative agenda. During the 2002 North Carolina Senate race, Dole leveraged her connections to the Bush administration, enabling her to ride the Republican tide and connect with conservative constituents. In this same election, Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress (FoxNews.com “Republicans” 2002).

But by the time she ran for re-election six years later, the political tides had turned and a variety of factors on both the national and state level converged to create an anti-

Republican, anti-Bush sentiment. By the end of George W. Bush's two terms in 2008, America was seven years deep into the war in Afghanistan and five years into the invasion of Iraq under questionable terms regarding the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (MSNBC Online "CIA"). On top of this, the American economy suffered a crisis in 2008, which culminated in the U.S. government taking over major government-sponsored financial agencies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in September 2008 (Labaton 2008).

By Election Day later that fall, many Americans nationwide were experiencing what many reporters dubbed "Bush fatigue," or frustration with and aversion toward President Bush and his administration. By the end of his presidency, Bush experienced the lowest presidential approval ratings in history, 22 percent – a far cry from public sentiment just six years earlier (CBS News Online 2009). As a result of the country's Bush fatigue, Democratic presidential contender Barack Obama identified swing voting states, including North Carolina, and poured resources into them in an effort to help Democrats running for Congress gain office (Skiba 2008). As a result, the Obama campaign made funding and other resources available to Hagan and other Democratic candidates in North Carolina. The support from the Obama campaign helped Hagan tremendously, particularly when Obama adopted the theme of "change," since "change" for North Carolina supported her candidacy. As *Greensboro News & Record* reporter Mark Binker wrote in an article published on Nov. 5, 2008, "[a]t the same time [as Bush fatigue had set in nationwide], Democratic presidential contender Barack Obama registered thousands of new voters and deployed a ground operation – the likes of which the state had never seen – which helped Hagan."

This anti-Bush, anti-Republican sentiment not only helped Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama win the election (NPR Online), it also influenced elections throughout the nation, leading to a Democratic takeover of both houses of Congress (Steinhauser 2007). This meant that Dole, who had previously aligned herself with the Bush administration, was now in the vulnerable position of being linked with Bush's low approval ratings. Hagan took advantage of the opportunity to make the connection between Bush and Dole throughout her campaign, effectively tying Dole to the anti-Bush sentiment. On her campaign website, Hagan repeatedly referred to the state's and the nation's need to alter the direction Bush had taken in his two terms. The theme of change not only served as a counterpoint to Dole touting her political longevity, but also helped align Hagan's campaign with Democratic presidential nominee Obama's campaign slogan, which centered on change:

“After ten years in Raleigh, Kay is all too familiar with the ways Washington has repeatedly come up short for North Carolina. Today, Washington needs a voice like hers; a voice for the right kind of change, accountability, and an unwavering commitment to keep North Carolina strong and moving forward.” (www.kayhagan.com)

Though aligning herself with Bush had worked for Dole in the past, by the 2008 election many voters were tired of and frustrated with the Bush administration. In a post-election article, Binker argued that the combination of Dole's long political career and North Carolina's history of voting Republican in national elections made her seem like all but invincible. “But,” Binker wrote in a post-election article published Nov. 5, 2008, “Hagan was able to turn Dole's natural advantages as a Washington insider against the incumbent by tapping into voter frustration with the Bush administration.”

Hagan had a number of challenges to overcome when it came to running against Dole. Besides running against a candidate with more than three decades of political experience, Hagan also faced the challenge of defeating an incumbent.

Previous research indicates that incumbency can have a direct impact on how voters cast their votes: in general, incumbents are more likely to be re-elected than they are ousted by challenging candidates (Erikson 1971, Abramowitz 1975, Abramowitz 2004, Schwindt-Bayer 2005, Falk 2010). The thought that incumbents reap the benefit of being in office during a re-election campaign stems from the idea that incumbents can use their office to increase their visibility among the general public and more easily generate campaign funding from their existing base of supporters. As such, this leverage “offers an electoral advantage sufficiently large to make it quite difficult for an incumbent to be defeated in a general election” (Erikson 1971). Moreover, because it is difficult to defeat an incumbent, Congress rarely sees dramatic turnover in the House or Senate. In other words, the “incumbency effect has contributed to the remarkable stability of membership” (Abramowitz 1975).

Perhaps the most significant factor that contributed to Dole’s downfall in the 2008 North Carolina Senate race was her absenteeism. Though born and raised in North Carolina, Dole made Washington her home base for decades. Born in Salisbury, Dole grew up in North Carolina but moved out of state directly after finishing her undergraduate degree. After she married, she settled down permanently in Washington, D.C. Her ties to Washington politics helped her win the North Carolina Senate seat in 2002; however, during her 2008 re-election campaign she was criticized for not often being in North Carolina while serving as senator for the state.

Particularly damaging to her campaign was a media report published in the *Winston-Salem Journal* that in 2006 Dole had spent only 13 days in North Carolina; during that same year, Dole reportedly spent 12 days in 12 different states campaigning for fellow Republicans running for office (Mussenden 2008). When the *Winston-Salem Journal* report was published Hagan seized on the opportunity to criticize Dole for not making North Carolina a priority and published a photo on Hagan's campaign website of Dole's campaign bus, dubbed "Eliza-Bus," bearing a Tennessee license plate. The press release notes that Dole was a registered voter in Kansas for 25 years and that she resided in the Watergate in Washington, D.C. for years. It also quotes Hagan campaign spokesperson Colleen Flanagan as calling Dole "out of touch" (KayHagan.com "Out of Touch").

Something that was not a factor in this race, and rather uniquely, was gender. For the first time in North Carolina history, two women ran against each other for the state's U.S. Senate seat. Historically, women running against men in political races have been placed at a disadvantage for several reasons. In terms of media coverage, female candidates received different coverage than their male counterparts – be it different questions asked during interviews (Braden 1996), the amount of coverage received (Braden 1996, Devitt 1999, Kahn and Goldenberg 1991), gender-specific terms being used to refer to female candidates but not to their male counterparts (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991, Kahn 1994a), or other differences. But because Dole and Hagan were both women running as the GOP and Democratic nominees, respectively, gender did not play a role in either the election coverage or outcome. Though a third challenger, Libertarian Chris Cole, also ran for North Carolina Senate in the race, he was not

considered a serious challenger to Dole or Hagan, and received an insignificant portion of the final vote on Election Day.

Some political experts also believe Dole was overconfident going into the race and that her overconfidence significantly hurt her chances of winning. Barbara Barrett, a reporter who covered the 2008 Dole-Hagan race, wrote in a post-election article published on Nov. 4, 2008, that Dole was expected to win re-election easily and that it would have been “hard for any challenger to overcome the overwhelming name recognition of Dole, who ran for president in 1999 and served in the administrations of five presidents.” But her mistake lay in underestimating Hagan as a serious challenger. “Dole assumed, wrongly, that it wasn’t competitive and that she wouldn’t have a serious opponent,” Barrett quoted UNC political scientist Ted Arrington as saying. “She waited too long to get going” (ibid).

The 2008 North Carolina U.S. Senate race

Initially, Dole was considered the front-runner by a wide margin in the 2008 North Carolina race; however, the distance between the two candidates narrowed dramatically as the election season progressed. A Rasmussen Reports poll from April 10, 2008, showed Dole leading 52 percent to Hagan’s 39 percent (Rasmussen April 2008); the same poll taken on July 15, 2008, showed Dole leading Hagan 54 percent to 43 percent, respectively (ibid). However, a poll published by Survey USA on Sept. 8, 2008, showed the gap between the two candidates narrowing, with Dole leading Hagan 48 percent to 40 percent (SurveyUSA). Just 10 days later, Rasmussen Reports published poll results showing Hagan leading Dole by a margin of 51 percent to 45 percent (Rasmussen 2008). And on Oct. 8, 2008, a Rasmussen Reports poll showed Hagan leading Dole 52

percent to 46 percent (ibid). By Oct. 30, 2008, Hagan led Dole in the polls by six points (ibid) and had collected endorsements from all the major regional newspapers, including the *Greensboro News & Record*, the *Charlotte Observer*, the *Raleigh News & Observer*, and the *Wilmington Star-News* (News-Observers Blogs “Newspaper Endorsements”). On Election Day 2008, Hagan beat Dole, winning 52.7 percent of the vote to Dole’s 44.2 percent, with Libertarian candidate Chris Cole earning 3.1 percent (North Carolina Elections 2008).

Hagan’s win shocked many who believed Dole’s experience and name recognition made her virtually invincible. Others were not surprised that Dole lost, particularly after the controversy surrounding Dole’s “Godless” ad campaign in late October 2008. Throughout the race, which MSNBC called “mean-spirited” and “bitter” (MSNBC Online “Hagan”), Hagan and Dole traded barbs and spent millions of campaign dollars on advertising attacking each other’s stances on issues and political and personal reputations. But it was not until Dole broadcast a series of controversial ads implying Hagan did not believe in God that the race drew national attention for its bitter nature.

The “Godless” ad campaign

In late October, Dole aired a television ad in late October that called into question Hagan’s faith. The ads, voiced by a woman but not by Hagan herself, insinuated that Hagan, a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Greensboro and former Sunday school teacher, was “Godless” because she attended a fundraiser held at the home of Woody Kaplan, then an advisory board member the Godless Americans PAC (Bradley 2008). The ad, which is available on YouTube.com at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lf2vDk-4Ag>, says: “A leader of the Godless

Americans PAC recently held a secret fundraiser for Kay Hagan,” showing footage of members of the Godless Americans group discussing atheism. “Godless Americans and Kay Hagan. She hid from cameras. Took godless money” (Bradley 2008). But the most controversial part of the ad comes at the end when a female voice intended to sound like Hagan says, “There is no God.” In reality, the voice belonged to Ellen Johnson, executive director of the Godless Americans PAC (ibid).

Smear campaigns using negative advertisements are not uncommon in political races. And, according to Jason Bivens, associate head of the philosophy and religion department at North Carolina State University, negative advertising campaign attacks are often successful. In an article published on Oct. 30, 2008, after the Dole’s “Godless” ad began airing, *Greensboro News & Record* reporter Binker quotes Bivens as saying, “This kind of divisiveness, fear-mongering for lack of a better term, has a history of success” (Binker 30 Oct. 2008). Bivens went on to cite presidential campaigns in the 1790s and 1800s during which claims of atheism were detrimental to candidates’ chances of winning the election. Religion has served as a wedge issue throughout the 20th and 21st century, Bivens continued, but added that targeting an opponent’s faith is often “a swing for the fences move” (ibid).

In a state with deeply religious communities, though, the act of calling to question a person’s faith was a serious matter. “A lot of voters go to church,” Binker quoted political strategist Gary Pearce as saying in an article published on Oct. 29, 2008. “You can’t run for political office in North Carolina as a ‘Godless American.’” The reaction from North Carolina voters was immediate. Local, regional and even national newspapers picked up the story, interviewing residents, many of whom expressed disappointment and

disgust with the ad campaign. In a letter to the editor published in the *Greensboro News & Record* on Nov. 11, 2008, Winston-Salem resident Laura Myers questions who the “real Godless American” in the race was:

Dole’s ‘Godless’ TV ad implying that Hagan did not believe in God was the most despicable act I have ever seen in political challenges. In my experience, Christians do not behave in such a manner toward one another. ...I also hope Dole will take a look in her mirror and consider who the real Godless American was in this campaign” (Myers 2008).

On the Raleigh *News & Observer*’s blog, many voters posted similar thoughts. Asheville resident Dale Roberts wrote, “How sad to see Elizabeth Dole disgrace herself and sully her own reputation by broadcasting a scurrilous ad attacking Kay Hagan’s religious beliefs. Dole and her campaign staff should be ashamed of themselves” (*News-Observer* Blogs “Opinion Shop”), while Raleigh resident Ed Odom, Jr. wrote, “I thought Dole had more class than that” (*ibid*). Others were more sympathetic to Dole, arguing that they care where politicians get their money – particularly in a state with a highly religious population. “America needs to know what their candidate stands for and where they got their money,” Barrett quoted Dole supporter Blake Jarman as saying in an article published on Nov. 4, 2008. Jarman told Barrett he believed that Dole should have responded more aggressively to Hagan’s attacks earlier in the campaign.

Many newspapers also published editorials criticizing Dole for the negative advertisements and calling for her to immediately stop running them. One such newspaper was the *Greensboro News & Record*, which published an editorial calling the ad campaign “worse than dishonest,” a “low blow,” and “beyond the bounds of acceptable political disagreement” (“Editorial” *Greensboro*). Dole refused to pull the advertisements, resulting in a flurry of letters-to-the-editor in regional newspapers and

even shifting some of the spotlight from the concurrent presidential election in national newspapers like *The Washington Post* (Cizzilla) and *The New York Times* (Caucus), as well as major television networks including ABC News (Bradley) and CNN (CNN Politics Online).

Hagan's campaign did not take Dole's "Godless" ad campaign sitting down. In interviews with reporters, Hagan called the ads "the lowest of the low." "I teach Sunday school. I'm an elder in my church. I go on mission trips. I was raised going to Sunday school and church every week," Binker quoted Hagan as saying in an article published on Oct. 29, 2008. "This is the lowest of the low...I just am shocked by the audacity of Elizabeth Dole taking this kind of action" (ibid). The next day at a press conference in front of her church, Hagan was quoted in an Oct. 30, 2008, Binker article as saying, "I really can't begin to tell you how upset I am. She has attacked my faith, my Christian faith." She later called the ad campaign "a fabricated, pathetic ad" on her website (KayHagan.com 29 Oct. 2008) and in prepared remarks criticized Dole for not upholding her values. "I don't know what things were like when she grew up in North Carolina, but the North Carolina I was raised in would never condone this kind of personal slander," Hagan said. She connected Dole's ad campaign to her relationship with the Bush administration, saying, "She's been in Washington for too long, gotten too close to George Bush and the special interests and this is what she's become" (ibid). Hagan's campaign also sent cease-and-desist documents to Dole's office and home in Salisbury.

In response, Dole defended the ad campaign and told reporters she had no intention of removing them. As quoted by Binker in an Oct. 30, 2008, article, Dole said, "I think Kay Hagan needs to explain to people why she did that, why she would...make

the trip to Boston and go to the home of the founder of the Godless Americans PAC.” A spokesman from the National Republican Senatorial Committee also defended Dole’s ad:

Kay Hagan recently attended a fundraiser held in the home of a founding member of the Godless Americans PAC,” said NRSC Online Communications Director John Randall. “Now Hagan believes it is unfair to associate her with the group even though the soiree raised her thousands of dollars in campaign cash. I guess money is more important to Hagan than principles.(NRSC Online Communications Director John Randall, qtd. in Mooney).

But other Republicans did not agree with Dole’s tactics and voiced opposition to her eleventh-hour re-election strategy. GOP consultant Alex Castellanos told CNN that the ad campaign revealed the Dole campaign’s desperation as Election Day grew closer. “When you’re making ads that say, ‘There is no God,’ it usually means your campaign doesn’t have a prayer,” Castellanos said (Zagaroli 2008). The same article also quotes Republican strategist Ed Rollins, who served as a strategist for Presidents Nixon and Reagan, as saying Dole should “be ashamed of herself”; The Dole campaign “did something desperate, which is so despicable and so unlike Elizabeth Dole that she should be ashamed of herself” (ibid).

The Godless ad aftermath

In the election aftermath, Dole’s campaign continued to deny any wrongdoing. However, after Hagan defeated Dole on Election Day, Dole’s campaign manager admitted that the Godless ad campaign was a “Hail Mary” intended to persuade voters to support Dole. Dole re-election campaign manager Marty Ryall wrote in *Campaigns and Elections* magazine that many people attributed Dole’s defeat to the Godless ad backfire. But “[n]othing could be further from the truth. When a football team is trailing by 7 points and throws a ‘Hail Mary’ on the last play of the game, they don’t lose because they

failed to complete the play, they lose because they were down 7 points and time was running out” (Ryall 2009).

Some political experts quoted in news coverage of the Godless advertisement controversy argued that though Dole was by then trailing Hagan in the polls, the Godless ad campaign may have changed the minds of some undecided voters, resulting in a wider margin of victory for Hagan. *Greensboro News & Record* reporter Binker noted that Dole had been catching up to Hagan in the polls until the Godless ad campaign ran. In an article published on Nov. 5, 2008, Binker quoted Tom Jensen of Public Policy Polling as saying that “much of [Dole’s] crossover support from Democrats fell apart in the days after she went on the air with that message.” “It’s always tempting to throw a hand grenade at the end of a close campaign,” Binker quoted political strategist Gary Pearce as saying in an article published on Oct. 29, 2008. “The question is whether it blows up your opponent or comes back on you.”

In this case, it is clear that the “grenade” came back to blow up Dole. In post-election coverage, many voters expressed disappointment in Dole’s actions, including Tony Hunt, whose comments were published in a Barrett article on Nov. 4, 2008: “I think some of the last advertising by Sen. Dole really hurt her,” said voter Tony Hunt in a post-election article. “It changed some undecided voters.” Barrett quoted other voters as calling the Godless advertising the “nail in the coffin” (ibid). And the damage the Godless ad campaign inflicted upon Dole, both politically and professionally, went far beyond simply losing her seat on the Senate – Dole also suffered damage to her personal and professional reputation as a result of her “Hail Mary.” The public uproar over the ad campaign cast a shadow over Dole, tarnishing her impressive resume and political career.

Even her former colleague, *Washington Post* writer Sally Quinn, lamented, “All those years...of being a high achiever and what she has left now is a soiled reputation that she will never be able to redeem” (Quinn 2008).

CHAPTER 5: Methodology and Findings

The 2008 Dole-Hagan race took place during a busy election season featuring a number of heated political races nationwide, including a presidential race. As such, much of the national media attention was focused on the presidential race for most of the 2008 election season; however, the U.S. Senate race between Dole and Hagan received a significant amount of media attention on the regional level during the fall of 2008 in a number of print newspapers, including the *Greensboro News & Record*, the *Charlotte Observer*, the Raleigh-based *News & Observer*, and the *Wilmington Star-News*, and through stories written by Washington, D.C.-based reporters from McClatchy Newspapers, a larger media organization that owns multiple newspapers (including the *Charlotte Observer* and the Raleigh *News & Observer*). This study explores regional media coverage of the Dole-Hagan race during the fall 2008 election season, looking specifically at the way reporters selected their sources and seeking to determine if a relationship exists between reporter gender and source selection and presentation in news coverage of the race.

Previous research studying the influence of reporter gender on the use of male and female discretionary and non-discretionary sources in print coverage of U.S. Senate races is mixed. While the majority of research indicates that men are more likely to appear as “horse race” and “issues” experts than women, some studies analyzing the existence of a

relationship between reporter gender and source selection have reached contradictory conclusions. The Freedman, Fico and Love study of 2004 U.S. Senate campaigns showed no difference in the number of female or male sources used in stories written by male and female reporters; however, the Freedman and Fico study of 2002 gubernatorial coverage found that female reporters used more female sources than male sources in their stories.

THESIS STATEMENT: The primary thesis statement for this study is that coverage of the Dole-Hagan race was different depending on the reporter's gender.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS: This study advances two research questions:

Q1: Do female reporters tend to take a different approach than male reporters when it comes to their coverage of the Dole-Hagan race? Specifically, in describing the candidates or discussing their campaigns, do the female reporters use more positive language to portray the candidates? Do female reporters more frequently use a narrative structure to paint an approachable image of the candidates than the male reporters? Does the tone of female and male reporters' stories portray the candidates in a positive, neutral, or negative light?

Q2: Do male reporters focus more of their stories about the Dole-Hagan race on key political platform issues than female reporters? Do female reporters tend to focus more on the candidates' families and personal issues than male reporters? (Key issues being defined as issues central to the candidates' platforms or of interest to the North Carolina public.)

METHODOLOGY

This study examined print coverage of the 2008 Dole-Hagan U.S. Senate race published by the largest-circulation daily newspapers in North Carolina. The newspapers included

in this study were chosen based on four assumptions regarding their use of expert sources, outlined in Freedman et al. (2010):

- Assumption 1: Largest-circulation newspapers would inform and influence more voters than smaller-circulation newspapers.
- Assumption 2: Largest-circulation newspapers would have the most staff resources to provide coverage of the race.
- Assumption 3: Because they would have more resources to provide coverage than smaller-circulation newspapers, largest-circulation newspapers would have more depth in source use.
- Assumption 4: Because largest-circulation newspapers have a wider scope of potential influence over readers, their reporters would have greater access to expert and non-expert sources than smaller-circulation newspapers.

At the time of the Dole-Hagan race in fall 2008, the approximate daily circulations of the newspapers selected for this study were 193,600 for the *Charlotte Observer* and 127,100 for the *(Raleigh News & Observer (Wall Street Journal Online))*. (Note: The two female reporters both worked for McClatchy Newspapers, which owns the *Charlotte Observer* and the *Raleigh News & Observer*. Their stories appeared in both newspapers.)

News coverage methodology: Coverage from August 1, 2008, to the day after Election Day (November 5, 2008) was studied. Articles included in the study were obtained through the newspapers' online news archives and the online LexisNexis search engine through the University of Nebraska libraries system. Only news stories about the races that included one or both candidates' names ("Kay Hagan" and "Elizabeth Dole") were used. The term "story" was operationally defined as having three or more paragraphs about the candidates or about the race. The "story" must also have been published in the print edition of the newspaper, not solely online on the newspaper's

website or blog. Excluded were photos and photo captions, editorials, Q&As, advertisements, op-ed and syndicated columns, and letters to the editors.

General story analysis: The stories were analyzed for overall tone using a simple rubric aimed at determining whether the reporters portrayed the candidates in a more favorable or less favorable light. The variables that were considered in determining overall tone were: The story's structure, topics addressed (and which topics received greater and lesser emphasis), and descriptive adverbs and adjectives that were used to describe the candidates.

The structure of each story was noted and entered into a spreadsheet under one of three categories: "inverted pyramid," "narrative" or "other."

- Inverted pyramid: A story structured in conventional journalistic style with the most important factual information in the beginning of the story (i.e., the "who, what, when, where and how"), followed by the information of less importance.
- Narrative: A story structured in a storytelling style intended to capture the reader's attention. This type of structure can take many forms but does not follow a rigid flow of information as does inverted pyramid structure.
- Other: Any story with a structure that does not fit the two aforementioned categories.

After the structure of each story was determined, the topics addressed in each story were noted and topics that received greater or lesser focus in the articles were entered into the spreadsheet. The adverbs or adjectives used to specifically describe the candidates themselves were entered into a spreadsheet and categorized as being used with either a positive or negative connotation; adjectives and adverbs that were determined to be of a more impartial nature were noted as "neither."

The goal of this story analysis is to take an in-depth look at how the reporters created stories that were ultimately consumed by voters in North Carolina and, if possible

to determine from the data collected during this study whether if a relationship exists between reporter gender and their portrayal of the candidates.

Sourcing analysis: The independent variable used was the reporter gender, which was determined by bylines. Per Freedman et al. (2010), ambiguous names and stories without bylines were put into an “indeterminable” category. The other independent variables were the source gender, which was determined using the same process as for reporter gender. Sources were further divided into two categories (per Freedman et al. (2010)):

- Discretionary sources: sources who were selected at the reporter’s discretion and who had no direct relation to the candidates’ campaigns (e.g., voters in the community, political science professors at a university).
- Non-discretionary sources: sources directly related to the candidates’ campaigns (e.g., the candidates themselves, the campaign spokesperson or manager).

Discretionary sources were then again divided into three categories (per Freedman et al. (2010)):

- “Horse race” experts: individuals identified by credentials that qualified them to assess the progress and success of campaigns (e.g., political analysts or pundits).
- “Issue experts”: individuals whose institutional affiliation or educational background qualified them to discuss the policy implications of campaign issues (e.g., political science university professors).
- Ordinary citizens: individuals who lack either “horse race” or “issue” expertise (e.g., voters in the community).

Data derived from the stories in this study were entered onto coding sheets. Sources included in the stories were counted once, regardless of the number of times they were quoted or mentioned. The coding sheets tabulated the overall number of discretionary and non-discretionary sources used in each story and the percentages of sources were calculated by gender. When a source’s gender was unclear, the source was coded into an

“indeterminable” column and was not included in the overall number of sources used. The data were then averaged by gender and then compared (i.e., the average per story of female and male discretionary and non-discretionary sources used by female reporters versus that used by the male reporters).

Personal interview methodology: Seven reporters at North Carolina’s largest-circulation newspapers covered the Dole-Hagan race during the fall 2008 election season: five male and two female reporters. All seven reporters initially expressed interest in participating in the study; however, when follow-up communication to schedule interviews took place only four of the seven reporters agreed to participate. Furthermore, one of the four reporters who agreed to participate would only participate on the condition that her name be withheld from the study. This reporter shall therefore be referred to as “Female Reporter #2” throughout this study. The following reporters participated in phone interviews in January and February, 2011: Jim Morrill, staff writer for the *Charlotte Observer*; Rob Christensen, staff writer for the Raleigh-based *News & Observer*; Barbara Barrett, writer for McClatchy Newspapers, whose work appeared in McClatchy-owned newspapers the *Charlotte Observer* and the *News & Observer*; and finally, Female Reporter #2, writer for McClatchy Newspapers, whose work also appeared in McClatchy-owned newspapers the *Charlotte Observer* and the Raleigh-based *News & Observer*.

The four subjects were asked a list of general interview questions and individual questions specific to each reporter pertaining to their experiences covering the Dole-Hagan race in 2008 (See Appendix for full list of questions). Due to technical issues with the audio recorder during the interviews, the interviews were not taped; however, detailed

notes were transcribed during the phone call and the notes were emailed to the reporters following the interview for approval. The reporters' responses were coded into categories using a with-in case matrix based on the one used by Miles and Huberman (1994). The matrix was used to identify overarching trends or themes in the responses by coding the yes/no questions with "+/-" symbols and leaving space to fill in more concrete details provided by the interviewees.

LIMITATIONS:

This study is limited by the small size of the sample population. Only four of the original seven reporters identified as having provided consistent coverage of the Dole-Hagan race ultimately agreed to participate in this study, limiting the generalizability of the data collected. The reporter identified as "Female Reporter #2" also did not consistently cover the Dole-Hagan race, only providing coverage of the Godless ad controversy because it happened to climax on a weekend when she was one of the few reporters working.

Furthermore, because the interview subjects have been selected in a purposeful manner, any conclusions or findings apply only to the specific respondents selected. Additionally, the findings of this study are limited by the fact that interviews of the reporters in the sample population took place in January and February 2011, more than two years after the Dole-Hagan race took place; thus, many of the reporters' responses to the interview questions may have been different from what actually transpired or what they experienced in covering the race in fall 2008. Some of the reporters also declined to answer some of the questions that were asked.

And finally, the articles derived from the LexisNexis and newspaper website searches were limited by the amount of time that had lapsed between when the data was

collected in early 2011 and when the race took place in late 2008. Some of the articles that were originally identified for inclusion in the study were no longer available online and reporters did not have a reliable method of retrieving missing stories from the newspaper archives.

FINDINGS:

General story analysis: Between August 1, 2008 and the day after Election Day (November 5, 2008), the four main reporters who covered the 2008 Dole-Hagan race for regional newspapers in North Carolina published a total of 22 stories about the race, some which were published in the *Charlotte Observer* and some of which were published in the *Raleigh News & Observer*. *Charlotte Observer* reporter Jim Morrill published the highest number of Dole-Hagan race articles (9), followed by Female Reporter #2 (6), *Raleigh News & Observer* reporter Rob Christensen (4) and McClatchy Newspapers reporter Barbara Barrett (3).

Story structure: In terms of story structure, most reporters used the standard journalistic style of inverted pyramid, with the most important information located in the first paragraph. While Morrill, who served as the primary reporter covering the Dole-Hagan race, used the inverted pyramid structure almost exclusively, the other reporters dabbled in a narrative structure, or more storytelling style, of reporting for some of their stories.

Out of the nine stories he wrote about the Dole-Hagan race from August through Election Day, Morrill used a narrative structure only once and for the most part stuck to a very informative style of writing. For instance, in a story about organizations from outside North Carolina funding attack ads during the Dole Hagan race Morrill gets

straight to the point in his lead paragraph: “Outside groups from environmentalist to gun owners have poured more than \$20 million into N.C. campaigns, a record level of spending fueling a surge of attack ads in the state’s top races” (Morrill 23 Oct. 2008).

Rob Christensen, on the other hand, typically used a less formal narrative approach to structuring his stories; his stories included more descriptor words and spun more of a tale for readers to enjoy, rather than just the facts. For example, in a story about Dole finding herself in an unexpectedly competitive race with Hagan, Christensen used a narrative structure and did not get to the point of the article until the third paragraph:

The famous ‘Dole Stroll’ took a decidedly different turn last week.

Republican U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Dole is known for her Oprah-like strolls during speeches to past Republican National Conventions. But Dole skipped last week’s GOP convention in Minnesota, opting instead for a stroll around the shop floor of Advanced Direct, a small Greensboro, N.C., direct-mail firm where she picked up the endorsement of a small business group. The clicketyclack of mailing machines replaced the cheering throngs of delegates.

That’s because this summer has been a wake-up call for Dole. One of the best-known women in American politics, Dole is in an unexpectedly competitive race with Democratic state Sen. Kay Hagan (Christensen 8 Sept. 2008).

Barbara Barrett only wrote three stories about the Dole-Hagan race during the fall of 2008, but two out of the three stories used a narrative structure; her style seemed to lie somewhere along the spectrum between the strictly informative (Morrill) and the narrative (Christensen). Her post-election wrap-up story, for instance, which was published on Nov. 4, 2008, opened with: “For now, Democrat Kay Hagan has all the power and celebrity befitting someone who has just toppled one of America’s most well-known political women. Come January, she’ll have to figure out how to translate her win into action as a freshman in the U.S. Senate.” This lead, which constituted two sentences and was formatted as two paragraphs in the print article, is more of a narrative style than

inverted pyramid – although Barrett used both structures in her coverage. Female Reporter #2 also used a narrative structure a couple of times in her coverage of the Godless ad campaign, but tended to use a more straight-forward inverted pyramid approach in the majority of her stories.

Topics addressed: Because all four reporters who participated in this study were employed by the same organization, there was little if any competition between them. This means that if one reporter jumped on a story, the others would not cover the same story. Therefore, there is a large variation in the topics addressed in each of the reporters' stories. Morrill, who served as the main reporter covering the Dole-Hagan race, provided several stories about campaign finances and outside groups funding attack ads critical of Dole; Christensen filled in when Morrill could not cover a story, and wrote stories on various subjects: one about Dole finding herself in an unexpectedly competitive race, one about Dole defending her native North Carolinian status, one about area store owners being angry because their buildings were featured in a negative ad criticizing Dole, and a story early on in the race about the candidates' differences in energy plans. Barrett only wrote three stories over the course of the race, most of them immediately preceding the election and the following day. And because she was in Charlotte when the Godless ad story broke, Female Reporter #2 wrote most of her stories about the Godless ad controversy.

Topics emphasized or not emphasized: In general, if a reporter covered a topic like money from outside groups that was being used to fund negative ads, the topic emphasized in the ensuing story would be about the groups that were providing the funding. In her coverage of the Godless ad controversy, Female Reporter #2 focused on

Hagan's and voters' reactions to the ads – both of which were important components that spoke to how the ads were perceived as a whole. This type of focus on the topic-at-hand was typical of the coverage of all four reporters who participated in this study, with few exceptions. One of the notable exceptions to this rule was Barrett who, in her post-election coverage of Hagan's win, focused most of her story on Dole losing the election rather than Hagan winning it. But for the vast majority of the Dole-Hagan race coverage, the reporters largely emphasized the primary topics at hand.

The topics that were less emphasized in the reporters' coverage varied depending on the story and there did not seem to be any consistency or trend in the topics that were not emphasized as much. Most topics that were less emphasized provided information that was not critical to the reader's understanding of the story, such as a small mention of Dole's upbringing in a feature story focusing on Hagan, or how much time Hagan had spent in North Carolina in a story about Dole's absenteeism as a Senator.

Descriptive adjectives and adverbs: For the vast majority of stories published about the Dole-Hagan race, the reporters used few if any adjectives or adverbs to describe the candidates or the candidates' actions. The only words that reporters used repeatedly were basic political designations used in reference to Dole's position as North Carolina Senator and Hagan's post as State Senator, and their respective party affiliations. Most often, the reporters would make one initial reference to Dole's and Hagan's party affiliations and political posts, then refer to them only by their last names for the remainder of the story. Morrill, for example, identified the two candidates in the third paragraph of his Oct. 14, 2008, article about Hagan making critical remarks about Dole at an appearance in Charlotte: "Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Kay Hagan on Monday

roundly criticized Republican Sen. Elizabeth Dole as an ineffective lawmaker who's more concerned with lobbyists than North Carolinians."

Hagan and Dole were also characterized frequently as "opponents" or "rivals." Christensen opened a story published Aug. 8, 2008, about the candidates' differences in position over the state's energy plan with, "U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Dole and Democratic rival Kay Hagan both back the 'Gang of 10.' The two rivals in the North Carolina Senate race say..." Later in the story he also mentioned Hagan's position as state Senator in North Carolina.

In the few cases where descriptive adjectives and/or adverbs were used, reporters tended to use positive terms in reference to the candidates, including: Dole "easily defeated a strong Democratic foe" and referring to Hagan as a "veteran state senator" (Christensen 8 Sept. 2008), calling Hagan "genetically energetic" (Morrill 5 Oct. 2008) and writing that Dole was "well-known" (Barrett 4 Nov. 2008). Beyond those few instances, however, the reporters refrained from using adjectives and adverbs to describe the candidates, mainly preferring to use more neutral political identifiers like "U.S. Senator Republican Elizabeth Dole" or "Democratic State Senator Kay Hagan."

Overall tone: With the exception of Female Reporter #2, most of the reporters' stories about the Dole-Hagan race were considered to have an overall neutral tone. Some of the stories, simply because of their subject matter (e.g., the Godless ad controversy, which resulted in a lot of negative coverage about Dole), tended to have a slightly anti-Dole or anti-Hagan sentiment, depending on the story at hand. And because Female Reporter #2 provided the coverage for the Godless ad controversy – a topic that was very controversial and decidedly critical of Dole – most of her stories took on an anti-Dole

sentiment. Many of the sources Female Reporter #2 used in her coverage of the Godless ad controversy, particularly the voters, made remarks that were critical of Dole and few beyond Dole's campaign spokesperson supported Dole or the ad campaign. In an article published on Oct. 31, 2008, Female Reporter #2 cited a number of voters making negative comments about Dole and the Godless ad campaign, such as voter Karen Smith's comment at a Greensboro shopping center: "'I was a Dole fan before this,' said Smith, who said she'd vote for Republican John McCain for president. 'I just think this is a below-the-belt, dirty, nasty way to try to campaign.'" In other articles, Female Reporter #2 used pro-Dole comments from voters to try to offset the really negative comments, but the overall tone of her articles was anti-Dole.

On the other hand, some of the early coverage about the outside groups spending multi-millions on negative ads critical of Dole also took on a slightly anti-Hagan sentiment. Morrill's story about Hagan "bashing" Dole at an appearance in Charlotte also took on a slightly anti-Hagan tone, perhaps because Dole did not in turn respond with critical words about her opponent: "Hagan levied the criticism during a 10-minute speech to several hundred delegates from the N.C. League of Municipalities meeting at the Charlotte Convention Center. Dole, who was not in the room for Hagan's remarks, spoke a few minutes later. She didn't mention her opponent but talked about her record" (Morrill 14 Oct. 2008).

However, with the exception of these few instances, the majority of the coverage that the reporters provided was more neutral in tone, focusing more on the hard facts about the race and balancing comments from both campaigns and voters supporting each side.

Sourcing data analysis:

Discretionary sources: As Table 1 shows, female reporters who covered the Dole-Hagan race used an average of 1.2 female discretionary sources per story and used an average of 2.54 male discretionary sources per story. When calculated into percentages, female reporters used an average of 32 percent female discretionary sources compared to an average of 68 percent male discretionary sources. Male reporters who covered the Dole-Hagan race used an average of 0.47 female discretionary sources per story and an average of 2.40 male discretionary sources per story. When calculated into percentages, male reporters used an average of 16 percent female discretionary sources compared to an average of 84 percent male discretionary sources.

Because of the small sample size and because this data cannot be analyzed using any meaningful statistical analysis, this data cannot be used to draw direct conclusions or be compared to previous research studying the relationship between reporter gender and discretionary source selection. The data seem to suggest, however, that there may be a slight difference in the gender of sources selected for stories by reporters of different genders.

“Horse race” versus “issue” expert sources: As Table 2 (Appendix B) shows, female reporters that covered the Dole-Hagan race used an average of 0.75 female horse race and issue experts per story compared to an average of 2.25 male horse race and issue experts per story. Male reporters that covered the Dole-Hagan race used an average of 0.5 female horse race experts per story compared to an average of 3.5 male horse race experts per story. When calculated into percentages, female reporters used 25 percent female horse race and issue experts per story compared to 75 percent male horse race and issue

experts per story. Male reporters used 12.5 percent female horse race and issue experts per story compared to 87.5 male horse race and issue experts per story.

As before, due to the small sample size and lack of meaningful statistical analysis, these data cannot be used to draw specific conclusions regarding the relationship between reporter gender and horse race or issue expert source selection; however, as before, the data seems to suggest a slight difference in the gender of sources selected for stories by reporters of different genders.

Personal interview analysis: Each of the four reporters that participated in this study provided detailed answers to the interview questions asked. Some of the reporters refrained from responding to certain questions, but in general all four responded to the majority of questions asked. The responses were coded using a matrix outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) and overarching themes were identified based on the responses. Themes were identified if at least three out of the four reporters that participated provided the same or similar responses to questions; if the responses were mixed or unclear, the responses were coded as “no consensus.”

Though only four of the original seven reporters who covered the race consistently participated in the interview process, the reporters shared many common and interesting thoughts about the race coverage, about the candidates and about the state of the journalism profession as a whole. During the personal interview segment of data collection, each reporter was asked to share some personal information about him or herself, including how long he or she has been working in journalism, how he or she became interested in the profession, information about his or her education, the challenges he or she faces as a reporter, how long he or she has covered politics and what

challenges he or she faces as a political beat reporter. Their answers shine a spotlight on the difficulties many reporters today must overcome on a daily basis in order to produce relevant, accurate and meaningful content for a daily newspaper.

Jim Morrill: Thirty-year journalism veteran Jim Morrill signed up for the Peace Corps immediately following college but returned to higher education to pursue a master's degree in journalism from the University of Illinois. Originally from Chicago, he moved to Washington, D.C., after finishing his master's degree to look for freelance work. Morrill took his first job in journalism in 1979 as a beat writer for the *Rock Hill Herald* in South Carolina, and he has been working as a reporter ever since. Morrill said he has always been interested in politics but fell into the political beat by accident. Starting as the part-time city hall and part-time politics reporter for the *Rock Hill Herald*, Morrill took up the political beat exclusively in 1987 after the newspaper's political reporter left.

When asked why he chose journalism as a career, he said, "I had an interest in journalism. I liked to write and thought it would be an interesting business." Thirty years later, Morrill still enjoys writing, working in the newsroom and covering politics. "It's been fun," he said. Today, Morrill is the *Charlotte Observer's* main political reporter and has covered many Congressional races, the first of which was the extremely competitive race between Alex McMillin and D.G. Martin, which was decided by 300 votes. Some of the other races he has covered include the Jesse Helms-Harvey Gantt race in 1996, the 2002 Elizabeth Dole-Erskine Bowles race, the 2004 Richard Burr-Erskine Bowles race and John Edwards' presidential campaigns.

Rob Christensen: Raleigh *News & Observer* political reporter Rob Christensen has spent his entire career as a journalist working for the same newspaper in North Carolina. He attended journalism school at the University of Tennessee. Originally from Pennsylvania, Christensen moved to Raleigh in 1973 to work at the *News & Observer*. Until a few years ago he wrote exclusively for the *News & Observer*, which McClatchy acquired in 1995; however, after McClatchy acquired newspaper giant Knight Ridder (and the Knight Ridder-owned *Charlotte Observer*) in 2006, his work began appearing in both the *News & Observer* and the *Charlotte Observer*, as well as other McClatchy-owned publications. He currently serves as the lead political reporter for the *News & Observer*.

Christensen's experience covering Congressional races in North Carolina extends beyond Morrill's – in fact, he has covered nearly every Senate race in North Carolina since 1978 and was able to list each race and year off the top of his head during the interview segment. The races he has covered include: the 1978 Jesse Helms-John Inghram race, the 1980 Robert Morgan-John East race, the 1984 Jesse Helms-Jim Hunt race, the 1990 Jesse Helms-Harvey Gantt race, the 1992 Terry Sanford-Lauch Faircloth race, the 1996 Jesse Helms-Harvey Gantt rematch, the 1998 John Edwards-Lauch Faircloth race, 2002's Elizabeth Dole versus Erskine Bowles, 2004's Richard Burr versus Erskine Bowles, and finally the Kay Hagan-Elizabeth Dole race in 2008.

When asked about races he has covered involving female candidates, Christensen recalled the 2008 Dole-Hagan race as being one of the most memorable races he has covered for a number of reasons, but primarily because two women ran against each

other in a southern state that has been historically slow to elect women to office.

Christensen said:

North Carolina has been very slow to elect a woman statewide. We didn't really have any female candidates, period, let alone women running against each other. With Elizabeth Dole, she was the first woman elected to a major statewide office in 2002 – and it took a woman who had tremendous credentials to make that breakthrough. She had cabinet positions and had run for president before she even ran for Senate in North Carolina.

Barbara Barrett: McClatchy Newspapers reporter Barbara Barrett entered the field of journalism much later than the two male reporters who participated in this study. Barrett, who attended the University of Missouri School of Journalism for her undergraduate degree, began as a copyeditor and designer in 1993 and moved into general reporting in about 1995. She joined McClatchy Newspapers in 1998 and wrote for the *Raleigh News & Observer* while living in Durham, North Carolina. At the time she covered a wide variety of beats, including urban development, higher education and science, before moving to Washington, D.C., in 2006 to cover politics for the McClatchy bureau there. During the 2008 Dole-Hagan race, Barrett was assigned to write exclusively for the *News & Observer*, serving primarily as the Washington correspondent for North Carolina news and as the back-up regional reporter for Rob Christensen.

Unlike Morrill and Christensen, Barrett had not previously covered any other North Carolina congressional races. Although she recalled possibly having covering political races at the local county commission level, she had not covered any major congressional races because she had only started covering politics in 2006. Like Christensen, Barrett remembers the 2008 Dole-Hagan race as being particularly “fascinating” because two women were running against each other in a southern state. However, she did not feel that covering two female candidates was any different from

covering male candidates. “I don’t know that it was necessarily different to cover two women,” she said. “There were still the same sort of issues. And I wouldn’t say that we discussed women’s issues, necessarily. The economy was a big deal everywhere.”

One thing that Barrett remembers clearly about the 2008 election – both in North Carolina and elsewhere in the United States – was that it was very busy. During the 2008 Dole-Hagan race, Barrett worked primarily in Washington, D.C., but also traveled to North Carolina to cover the races happening there. Additionally, she was covering the presidential primary for McClatchy. “It was an incredibly busy election year,” Barrett recalled.

Female Reporter #2: Though not employed as a journalist any longer, Female Reporter #2 worked for the McClatchy Newspapers for about two years until she was laid off during a workforce reduction in 2009. She studied journalism and political science as an undergraduate at Michigan State University and worked as a political reporter exclusively for 20 years following graduation. During her 20-year career, she worked for the Associated Press, the Detroit News, and finally McClatchy Newspapers.

Having grown up in and spent most of her career in journalism working in Michigan, Female Reporter #2 had little experience covering North Carolina Congressional races. Though she had covered a number of Senate races in the past, most of her experience covering politics was limited to races happening in Michigan. Unlike the other reporters interviewed for this study, Female Reporter #2 had significant experience covering female candidates, including Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow and Reps. Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick and her predecessor Barbara-Rose Collins, among others.

Because she split duties covering North Carolina politics with McClatchy colleague Barbara Barrett, Female Reporter #2 did not consistently cover the Dole-Hagan race during the fall of 2008; in fact, she did not write about the race at all until late October when the Godless ad controversy happened. During the interview, Female Reporter #2 said that in the weeks leading up to the election she was sent to Charlotte to cover the governor's race. The 2008 election was "becoming a bigger deal" in North Carolina "because for the first time in a long time North Carolina was actually going to have a say in the presidential race," she explained. Additionally, she said that a couple of North Carolina Congressmen who had been considered shoo-ins were in danger of losing their seats, like Dole was in danger of losing her Senate seat.

Though the Godless ad story is the type of story that would typically go to Jim Morrill of the *Charlotte Observer*, Female Reporter #2 was in Charlotte when the story broke. "I just happened to be the first one on the story for our newspapers," she explained. "I got tipped off at 7 a.m. one day that this was happening and I just went with it immediately." Morrill, she explained, is the "star" at the *Charlotte Observer* and "can pretty much write whatever he wants. So I would obviously never be writing a story that he either was already writing or had expressed interest in writing."

Overarching trends: A common thread ran through many of the responses given by the reporters interviewed for this study. Based on the personal interviews conducted, the following overarching trends were identified:

1) Challenges reporters faced: Reporters found it challenging to access Elizabeth Dole or get information from her campaign. Reporters also found it a challenging year to cover politics due to the sheer number of tight races taking place combined with reduced numbers of reporters in the newsroom to handle coverage.

2) Story placement: The reporters' stories were published in various locations in the newspapers, depending on the news content of the day. Story placement changed as Election Day drew closer.

3) Source selection: Reporters had no real methodology for selecting discretionary sources; most said they just did their "best" to be fair and get a good mix of sources. In terms of selecting voters as sources, reporters engaged in "man-on-the-street" selection and found voters through polls and at political rallies and polling booths.

4) Coverage planning: Reporters met with their editors or supervisors to determine specific stories and story angles.

5) Access to candidates: All four reporters were able to speak with the candidates at least once during the fall of 2008; most information was culled from and contact was made with campaign managers and spokespeople.

6) Impressions of the candidates: Most reporters had heard of Hagan before the race and thought she was smart but not very experienced. All reporters had heard of Dole before the race and thought she was smart and gracious but uncomfortable and guarded around the press. Most reporters' impressions of the candidates did not change after the race was over.

7) Reporter voting habits: Some of the reporters were registered to vote and some were not. Some reporters voted in the 2008 election and some did not. Most did not vote in the Dole-Hagan race. Reporters do the "best" they can to keep personal opinions from influencing coverage.

8) Newspaper treatment of candidates: All reporters said the candidates were treated equitably by North Carolina newspapers that provided race coverage.

9) Newspaper endorsement: All reporters said endorsements had no impact on the coverage they provided.

10) The Godless ad campaign: Reporters said the Godless ad campaign had a negative impact on Dole's campaign and that the ads were misleading and "over the top." However, reporters also said the ads did not lose the race for Dole.

Challenges reporters faced: Three out of the four reporters interviewed for this study found it more difficult to access Elizabeth Dole than it was to access Kay Hagan.

"[Dole] spent a lot of time in Washington," said Morrill. "I had to go through the campaigns to get to either one of the candidates but I think [Dole] was more guarded. She was less accessible." Morrill added that while it is normal for political campaigns to have

one or two people that serve as media spokespersons, Dole's spokespersons were less accessible than Hagan's. "You would have to call and tell [Dole] what you wanted and maybe [the campaign spokespeople] would get back to you, or maybe they wouldn't."

Rob Christensen agreed with Morrill, and added that while there are always challenges to covering political races 2008 was an exceptional year. "In general, challenges in any election year are you have way too much work and too little time, and that was certainly true in 2008." He went on to explain that in addition to 2008 being a busy political year, "for the first time in decades North Carolina was a very much targeted presidential state, so we had the presidential candidates here frequently." Furthermore, North Carolina held its primary in May, and though according to Christensen the primary "hardly ever matters" in North Carolina, "in 2008 it did matter because the primary fight between [Barack] Obama and [Hillary] Clinton lasted so long," meaning there was a tremendous amount of political attention being placed on North Carolina.

On top of the unusual political climate in North Carolina during the fall of 2008, Christensen said the overall news coverage was impacted by the dwindling newspaper staff at the *Raleigh News & Observer*. Over the past three years, the newspaper has reduced its reporting staff from 240 to 120, meaning that during the 2008 election season there were fewer reporters to cover what turned out to be a very busy political year. "We had a difficult time devoting the resources to the (Dole-Hagan) campaign that we needed in part because the presidential campaign just took up so much time," Christensen said. "We had the candidates and their presidential campaigns here all the time and it meant that we were really spread thin."

Story placement: With little exception, the reporters said that story placement during the Dole-Hagan race largely depended on two factors: a) the news content of the day, and b) how newsworthy their stories were. These two factors are standard variables most newspapers consider in determining story placement. Another standard practice in the daily operations of a newspaper is that editors decide where the stories are ultimately placed, not reporters. Reporters often discuss story placement with their editors and make a case for better placement, but in the end it is the editor's decision. "Editors decide placement," Morrill said. "We [reporters] make suggestions."

Because Barrett and Female Reporter #2 worked from Washington, D.C. for most of the fall of 2008, they did not have access to hard copies of the *Charlotte Observer* or the *Raleigh News & Observer* and therefore declined to comment when asked about story placement. Morrill and Christensen, however, both said their stories were either in the "local" section of the newspaper or on the first few pages for the first part of the election season. As the race heated up their stories moved either to the front page or closer to the front of the paper. "It really depended on what was happening that day," Christensen said. "You have to remember that there were a lot of politics going on at the time so it wasn't just about how close the election was, it was also about what was happening on any given day." When asked if their story locations changed after the Godless ad controversy happened, Morrill said, "Not necessarily, but then again it was closer to the election so there was naturally more interest in the race." But Christensen said the stories about the Godless ad controversy were definitely published to the front page.

Source selection: All four reporters interviewed for this study had similar ways of selecting sources for their stories. The reporters had no real methodology for selecting

discretionary sources; most said they just did their “best” to be fair and get a good mix of sources. As Christensen said, “You cover the campaigns, you talk to some political scientists, you talk to the voters. Beyond that, there’s no method to who you talk to.”

Selecting non-discretionary sources was the same across the board. Since the primary non-discretionary sources for this race were the candidates and their campaigns, reporters went straight to the campaign spokespersons for direct access to the candidates, for information or a response on behalf of the candidates. Morrill and Christensen, who provided more regular coverage of the Dole-Hagan race, were in near-daily communication with the Dole and Hagan campaigns and spoke frequently with the campaign spokespersons. Female Reporter #2 does not consider campaign spokespersons to be good sources for stories – “that’s just someone who is paid to talk to you” – and said she is more of an investigative reporter who prefers using documents to support her stories instead. She does, however, acknowledge that there are certain circumstances in which reporters are sometimes forced to use campaign spokespersons for a story.

The reporters’ methodology for selecting discretionary sources was more complicated. In general, all four reporters said they use the same methodology for selecting sources for political coverage as they do for any other story they might be asked to cover. For issue experts, the reporters would use political science experts like professors at North Carolina universities. Christensen, for instance, cited Steven H. Green, a political science professor at North Carolina State University, who weighed in on how the polls could change if Dole launched a major attack on Hagan. For horse race experts, the reporters cited pundits and other political analysts. Morrill frequently used sources from political watchdog groups like Democracy North Carolina, as well as

organizations like the Campaign Media Analysis Group, which tracks campaign advertising.

Which particular issue and horse race experts reporters selected for each story depended on the information each reporter was seeking for his or her story. For example, Morrill cited the head of the Campaign Media Analysis Group in an Oct. 23, 2008, story about campaign finances (Morrill “Outside Money Fuels Attack Ads). For a story predicting voter behavior at the polls, however, Morrill cited an issue expert to discuss how voters have behaved in the past at North Carolina polls and what may be influencing their votes in the political climate that existed during the fall of 2008.

Reporters also selected voters as sources for stories about the Dole-Hagan race using similar methods. Reporters engaged in “man-on-the-street” selection and found voters through polls and at political rallies and polling booths. Morrill said that for most elections the *Charlotte Observer* conducts a poll and reporters often call some of the people who participated in the poll to see if they would be willing to talk. It was more difficult for Barrett and Female Reporter #2 to access voters since they provided coverage remotely. In general, Barrett said the way she finds voters for her stories is to head out into the community to places where she could find a wide range of people: “Diversity in voters is important to me so I’m looking for background, race, gender, age – those are all important when you’re trying to select voters,” Barrett said. She added that it can be difficult to select voters because some are savvier than others and have opinions on both the candidates and the issues; while others may not know the candidates, necessarily, but they know the issues they care about.

Because Female Reporter #2 was in Charlotte when the Godless ad story broke, she used some voter perspectives in her stories. “Because it was just a few days before the election when [the Godless ad controversy] started and they had early voting in North Carolina, it was super easy to walk up to a voting site and get voters to talk,” she said. Another time, she recalls the editor of a newspaper receiving an online letter to the editor and following up with that person to see if he or she would be interested in providing a voter perspective for her story. Additionally, she has used campaign finance records to find supporters of each candidate. She also agrees with Barrett that not all voters are created equal. “You typically want somebody who is engaged,” she said.

Coverage planning: Reporters could not recall specific meeting with their editors to discuss their approach to the Dole-Hagan race, but all four said it was a standard practice in their organization to meet with editors about campaign coverage both before and during a race. As the primary reporter that covered the Dole-Hagan race, Morrill said he meets with his editor on an ongoing basis to talk about story angles and ideas. “We have meetings all the time,” Morrill said. “We always talk about stories. It’s probably mostly self-directed. I’ll throw out some ideas and editors have ideas. It’s a negotiation and sometimes you do what somebody wants you to do.” For the most part, he came up with his own story ideas – mostly based on developments in the campaign or other information that the editors would not be privy to – and then he would approach his editor with the story idea for approval.

For reporters like Barrett, who worked remotely for most of the Dole-Hagan race, meeting with editors to determine strategy and approach to coverage was essential. “We knew ahead of time that we really wanted to be voter-centric and be in tune with what

voters were interested in,” she said, adding that for this reason her employer sent her to North Carolina several times during the race to get a feel for how voters felt about the candidates. Morrill and Christensen provided most of the day-to-day coverage of the Dole-Hagan race. Barrett did not often come up with or meet with her editors regarding story ideas; more often she provided spot news items that neither Morrill nor Christensen could cover.

Female Reporter #2, who only provided coverage for the Godless ad controversy, recalled having a brief meeting with her editors to determine their approach to coverage, but it was more of a broader approach to general race coverage. Once the Godless ad controversy broke, Female Reporter #2 said that in the interest of getting the scoop, the only meeting she had with her editors to discuss coverage was a brief exchange about the gist of the story. “I just told my editor about the story as soon as she walked in,” Female Reporter #2 said, “and she said go for it.”

Access to candidates: All four reporters were able to speak with the candidates at least once during the fall of 2008, and some of them met with the candidates in person as well. Because Morrill served as the primary reporter for the Dole-Hagan race, he was in near-daily contact with each campaign – whether it was the campaign spokespersons or the candidates themselves. Most of Morrill’s and Christensen’s contact with the Dole and Hagan campaigns took place by phone. Barrett and Female Reporter #2 attended some campaign appearances, however, and spoke with the candidates in person, as well as by phone, a number of times. Hagan was more accessible to reporters than Dole (see “Challenges Reporters Faced” section above for details).

Impressions of the candidates: All of the reporters were familiar with Dole, who by the 2008 race was one of the most well-known female politicians in the U.S. Most of the reporters had heard of Hagan before the race, but were not familiar with her voting record.

In general, the reporters thought Dole was very smart, accomplished and graceful; but they also felt that she was inaccessible, uncomfortable and guarded around the press. “She wanted to know in advance what you wanted to know,” said Female Reporter #2. “She was just not comfortable unless really in control of everything. You could get her on the phone but she was always, always active. There was never any kind of chatting.” Female Reporter #2 also remembers a meeting with Dole when she was first assigned to cover the race; Dole served her little sandwiches on a plate. “She was a very nice, uh, hostess,” Female Reporter #2 recalled. Morrill’s impression of her – before and after the race – was that “she is a very gracious, experienced and articulate person who despite that seemed sort of uncomfortable around the press.” He first covered her during her 2002 U.S. Senate race and had gotten to know her bit by bit since then. Christensen had a similar impression of Dole: “She is very smart, very driven, very intense, very guarded. Everything she says is very programmed. It is hard to get any kind of candid comments out of her.” Barrett had covered Dole since 2006 and said she is “a very friendly person, good to talk to and smart.”

Though most of the reporters had heard of Hagan before the race, none of them were familiar with her personal background or voting record in the state Senate. When she first met Hagan, Female Reporter #2 said she came away from the meeting with the impression that “she was about an inch deep on the issues.” Morrill, who did not

regularly cover state Senate politics, said the 2008 election was his first opportunity to get to know her, and that his general impression was that she was “an able and respected legislator” but not one of the heavy hitters among the Democrats. Christensen knew Hagan from occasionally covering the state legislature and thought of her as smart, driven and a little intense; his impression of Hagan did not change after the race.

Reporters said their impressions of the candidates changed little over the course of the campaign, but for a couple of them the Godless ad controversy slightly altered their views on Dole. For Female Reporter #2, she was disappointed with how Dole handled herself during the last part of the race. “I thought Elizabeth Dole was a little more savvy than she turned out to be in this race,” she said. “She’s like the first woman everything. She has an extensive resume and she’s done a lot for women in politics. ...I believe she really lost the race as opposed to Kay Hagan winning it. She was just a bad candidate.” Despite the Godless ad controversy, Barrett said her opinions of the candidates did not change significantly. “As a reporter, the opinions about where they stand on the issues is more important. I’m more about are they able to answer the questions and do they know what they’re talking about.” Morrill said the race was his first opportunity to cover Hagan, so he got to know her better but said his overall impressions of the candidates did not change.

Reporter voting habits: The voting habits of the four reporters that participated in this study varied widely. Some of them were registered to vote and voted in the 2008 election, and some were not registered and did not vote in the 2008 election. Morrill is an unaffiliated voter in North Carolina; he voted in the 2008 presidential election and in the 2008 Dole-Hagan race. Christensen is registered to vote in North Carolina but as a matter

of personal principle does not vote in elections that he covers. Barrett is an unaffiliated voter in Maryland, where she lives, and is not registered to vote in North Carolina so she did not cast a ballot in the Dole-Hagan race; she did, however, vote in the 2008 presidential race. Female Reporter #2 is not registered with a major party but is registered to vote in Michigan, where she grew up. Like Barrett, she is not registered to vote in North Carolina and therefore did not vote in the Dole-Hagan race; but she did vote absentee for the presidential race.

In terms of keeping their personal political feelings from influencing their coverage, all four reporters say there is no formula for providing completely objective coverage; however, the reporters all agree that it is critical for journalists to do the “best” they can to keep personal opinions of any nature from influencing coverage. “No matter what you write you have to keep the door open with both campaigns,” Morrill said. “I won’t say that I never think one candidate doesn’t have the best position or isn’t being as honest or candid, but I try to give them the benefit of the doubt and bend over backwards to give people their say. We [journalists] have to be in the middle of the road because if we’re not we’re going to lose out and one side might not talk to us.” Added Christensen, “No one’s perfect but over the years you learn not to root for one side or the other.” Part of how he compensates for personal opinions in his coverage is by not casting a vote in elections he covers. “I haven’t voted in a presidential contents in years and years and years,” Christensen said.

For her part, Barrett said that professional journalists are trained early on to be impartial and to be skeptical of any opinion because it is important to understand if a source has a motive in saying something. Female Reporter #2 said keeping her personal

opinions separate from her work as a journalist is not difficult, and that the act of being impartial is probably more difficult for people who are not professional journalists. “You learn right away that you have to report on all sides of the story and that it’s not going to get in the paper if you don’t,” she said.

Newspaper treatment of the candidates: None of the reporters could recall any obvious instances of unfair or inequitable coverage of the Dole-Hagan race that was published in North Carolina newspapers. Christensen said it was difficult to judge other newspapers’ coverage because he does not always follow other newspapers’ stories; however, he does not remember any memorable instances of overtly biased or unfair coverage during the Dole-Hagan race. “The candidates may feel differently but generally when I come out of the campaign the candidates mostly say they feel they got a fair shake.” Barrett reads the coverage other North Carolina media outlets publish online – including local, regional and national newspapers, Associated Press coverage and TV coverage – on an ongoing basis and said she felt that no outlets seemed to favor any particular candidates. Female Reporter #2 did not follow other reporters’ coverage of the Dole-Hagan race so she declined to comment.

Newspaper endorsement: Although the relationship between newspaper endorsement and news coverage is a topic of interest in the journalism profession, all four reporters believe that endorsements have no impact whatsoever on the coverage they provide. “I’ve done this for more than 20 years and our paper endorses candidates in every election,” Morrill said. “Some I might agree with and some I might not. Our coverage is always independent of endorsement.” Christensen agreed with Morrill and added that his newspaper’s editorial philosophy has been liberal since the 1800s and

therefore the newspaper has endorsed Democrats for office for a very long time. Either way, though, he does not feel like the newspaper's history of liberal endorsements has any impact on the political coverage it publishes. "There is a separate editorial board from the newsroom and they're the ones that make the call who they endorse," Christensen said. "I don't think it has any impact on our news coverage."

Because she and Female Reporter #2 provide coverage for the North Carolina newspapers remotely, Barrett believes that endorsement plays no role in her stories. "The newspapers don't usually make endorsements until the week before the race anyway and we [reporters] don't have discussions with the editorial board," she said. "I don't even see the decision until the newspaper comes out – we learn when the readers do."

The Godless ad campaign: The Godless ad campaign surprised many of the reporters who participated in this study and most felt that the ads had a negative impact on Dole's campaign; however, none of them felt that the ads lost the race for Dole. "I think it came after the handwriting was on the wall," Morrill said, adding that it backfired. "Hagan had a good response ad and I think a lot of people felt it [the Godless ad] was below the belt, and beneath Elizabeth Dole." When asked if he thought it helped or hurt either of the candidates, Morrill believes it may have helped Hagan more than it hurt Dole, to the extent that it made her more of a household name both in North Carolina and on a national level.

Christensen also believes that the Godless ad campaign was not a turning point in the race and added that it likely widened the margin of Dole's defeat. "I think it was a desperation move that backfired on her," he said. "It ended up probably costing her a little bit and widening the margin of her loss, but she was already losing the race."

Barrett said that voters felt that Godless ad was misleading and that it had a negative impact on Dole's campaign. Like Morrill and Christensen, she does not believe the ad campaign lost the race for Dole, and said that the fall of 2008 election was different in many ways, but mainly due to the huge influx of money that Democratic organizations poured into helping elect Hagan to office.

Female Reporter #2, who provided most of the Godless ad controversy coverage for McClatchy Newspapers, the *Charlotte Observer* and the *Raleigh News & Observer*, said the ad campaign may not have been a turning point in the race, necessarily, but "it was certainly the most interesting thing that happened." She felt that the ad controversy definitely had a negative impact on Dole's campaign because, among other things, voters in North Carolina had come to view Dole as the epitome of Southern grace. "Even though she held powerful positions that men had, she was considered to be a graceful southern woman," Female Reporter #2 said. "And to do something like that was so awful, so hideous." She added that attacking a person's faith in a deeply religious state like North Carolina is "really bad," and that as someone who grew up there, Dole understood that. "It was a very negative thing for (Dole) to do," Female Reporter #2 said.

CHAPTER 6: Discussion and Conclusions

This study attempted to determine if there was a difference in regional newspaper coverage of the 2008 Dole-Hagan race depending on the reporter's gender. Due to this study's small sample size and lack of meaningful statistical evidence to support the findings, no specific conclusions can be made beyond saying that based on an analysis of the stories and personal interviews with the reporters there are differences in the coverage; these differences in coverage do not, however, appear to be based on the

gender of the reporter. Therefore, the thesis statement that there are gender-based differences in the coverage is not supported.

General story analysis: Study limitations noted, the qualitative analysis of the stories reporters wrote about the Dole-Hagan race yields some interesting information about each reporter's journalistic style.

In terms of story structure, two of the four journalists (one male and one female reporter) used the classic inverted pyramid structure almost exclusively, while one male reporter mostly used a narrative style and one female reporter used a style that blended the inverted pyramid and narrative styles. The reporters who mostly used inverted pyramid also used narrative for some of the stories, and the reporters who used a narrative style would also write stories with an inverted pyramid structure. There is, therefore, no clear pattern to support any differences in choice of story structure based on reporter gender. Any differences that may exist are likely due to the reporters' personal preferences and writing style.

As with story structure, there is no obvious gender-based trend among the topics reporters chose to focus on in their coverage of the Dole-Hagan race, or in the adverbs and adjectives reporters used to describe the candidates.

The topics reporters highlighted in their stories were important components of the story at hand – voter reaction to the Godless ad campaign, for example, was something Female Reporter #2 emphasized in her coverage of the controversy because it was an important part of how voters might react at the polling booths on Election Day. Any topics that were less emphasized in the coverage did not seem to be of any significant

consequence – Dole’s upbringing, for instance, in a story primarily about Hagan’s personal history.

That the reporters all worked for the same organization was a significant limitation in determining whether there were differences in the topic selection based on reporter gender; working for the same organization meant that there was no competition for stories and it reduced the overall quantity of stories that were included in the sample. Additionally, because Jim Morrill served as the primary political reporter assigned to the Dole-Hagan race, he had more discretion than the other reporters regarding the story topic he wrote about, and often wrote about the candidates’ stances on campaign platform issues, leaving some of the race spot news to the other reporters; as a result, the findings of the story analyses are that one male reporter focused more of his stories on key campaign platform issues but it is highly unlikely that this is due to his gender, and more likely that it is due to a lack of competition among the reporters.

Furthermore, with little exception, reporters refrained from using descriptive adjectives and adverbs; this may be due to the fact that standards for professional journalism today stress objective and unbiased reporting, telling all sides of a story and giving each candidate in a race equal treatment. Using anything besides neutral terms for a candidate puts the reporter at risk for portraying candidates in a biased manner. Regardless of why the reporters chose not to include many descriptive adjectives or adverbs, there does not seem to be a pattern that indicates a relationship between descriptive language and reporter gender.

The final part of the Dole-Hagan coverage that was analyzed for gender-based patterns was tone. The vast majority of stories were neutral in tone, meaning there was no

true indication that any of the aforementioned story components – structure, topic selection, or descriptive language – combined to create stories blatantly supportive or critical of a particular candidate. In the few instances that some of the stories were deemed to be negative, the subject matter at hand was inherently negative – the Godless ad controversy, which struck a sensitive chord with many North Carolina voters. Under the circumstances, it may have been difficult for the reporter to produce a neutral story with so many enraged and disappointed voters (who were subsequently used as sources in the story). As before, because the reporters of both genders produced stories that were almost exclusively neutral in tone, there is insufficient evidence to support the thesis statement that there were differences in coverage due to gender.

Because no clear patterns in the story analyses could be identified, the research questions can be answered as follows:

Q1: Do female reporters tend to take a different approach than male reporters when it comes to their coverage of the Dole-Hagan race? Specifically, in describing the candidates or discussing their campaigns, do the female reporters use more positive language to portray the candidates? Do female reporters more frequently use a narrative structure to paint an approachable image of the candidates than the male reporters? Does the tone of female and male reporters' stories portray the candidates in a positive, neutral, or negative light?

A1: Based on the story analysis conducted, there is insufficient evidence to support any differences in coverage due to gender in terms of general approach to coverage, describing or discussing the candidates' campaigns, using structure to create paint an approachable image of the candidates, or the tone of the stories.

Q2: Do male reporters focus more of their stories about the Dole-Hagan race on key political platform issues than female reporters? Do female reporters tend to focus more on the candidates' families and personal issues than male reporters? (Key issues being defined as issues central to the candidates' platforms or of interest to the North Carolina public.)

A2: Based on the story analysis conducted, there is insufficient evidence to support any gender-based differences in the topics that were addressed in the stories.

Sourcing analysis: Due to the small sample size and the study's other limitations, the findings of the sourcing analysis comparing the number of female and male discretionary sources reporters used in their coverage yields no statistically meaningful data. A cross-analysis of data collected for this study shows that the two female reporters that participated in the study were more likely than the two male reporters to use female discretionary sources in their stories, but not by much. In general, reporters of both genders showed a higher likelihood of selecting a greater number of male discretionary sources than female discretionary sources; however, when it came to source selection, female reporters were more likely than male reporters to use a higher percentage of female sources.

The finding that male discretionary sources were used in general more frequently than female discretionary sources can likely be attributed to the fact that the pool of professional horse race and issue experts reporters can choose from was predominately made up of men; there are fewer women than men working as professional horse race or issue experts. As noted earlier, there are many reasons why men are more likely than women to be used as horse race or issue experts in election coverage. As Johns Hopkins

University professor Erika Falk explains, these are many reasons that explain why there are typically more men than women in the pool of horse race and issue experts, most of which can be traced back to many of the same factors that have historically prevented women from entering politics and related fields: the lack of female role models in the field, the double burden of family and career, the lack of women entering fields that lead to careers in fields that naturally lead into politics, et cetera.

Moreover, the factors that serve as barriers to women entering politics can also inhibit them from becoming horse race or issues experts for political races. It is therefore logical that because fewer women populate the field of horse race and issue experts, reporters of either gender would likely use more male discretionary sources than female discretionary sources in their coverage. Therefore, in this study, the higher general percentage of male horse race and issue experts used by reporters is likely due to the skewed proportion of male-to-female sources in the pool of horse race and issue experts available to reporters, and less likely due to any sort of systematic biases or gender discrimination existing among reporters that covered this race.

The relationship between sourcing and news coverage is particularly important when it comes to politics because evidence from previous research supports the idea that news content can have a significant impact on voter opinion and thus voter behavior at the polling booths (Culbertson et al. 1985, Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006). Lacy and Coulson (2000) found that sources who have access to journalists wield a significant amount of power over what “becomes news.” That finding is also noted by author Herbert Gans in *Deciding What’s News*; he argues that sources oftentimes have a significant influence over journalists’ understanding of society. Sources, therefore, have

the power to influence the way journalists understand and interpret a story, and also impact the way the story is presented to readers. The published story, in turn, has the potential to influence the way voters behave at the polling booth. Thus, source selection in journalism is an inherently important component of how modern society operates.

Personal interview analysis: Among the broad themes identified during the personal interviews with reporters was that reporters felt that Dole was a difficult candidate to access and acted guarded, and that the reason Dole lost was less because Hagan was a stronger candidate, and more because the political tide was shifting on a national level. During the fall of 2008, then-President Bush was experiencing the worst ratings ever among Americans. This would not have been so bad for Republicans like Elizabeth Dole, except that when Dole initially ran for Senate in 2002 she rode in on the coattails of Bush, whose popularity among Americans was at an all-time high following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Additionally, according to reporter Rob Christensen, when Dole ran in 2002 the major issue of interest to the North Carolina public was national security. In 2008, however, national security was not at the forefront of American concerns – at the time, the economy was the most important issue. “A lot of things had gone wrong for [Dole] from 2002 to 2008,” Christensen said, “and [by 2008] the whole political climate had changed.”

The reporters interviewed also attributed Hagan’s steady rise in the polls to the millions of dollars that the Democratic National Campaign (DNC) poured into advertising to help Hagan after identifying North Carolina as a key “swing state” for then-Democratic Party presidential nominee Barack Obama. According to the four reporters interviewed, the influx of cash helped Hagan tremendously. As reporter Rob

Christensen said, this influx of cash was the “great equalizer” for Hagan because without it Dole would have greatly outspent her. The millions of dollars of DNC advertising “made Hagan competitive” with Dole, who had at that point spent decades in politics and was a household name in North Carolina and on a national scale, he said.

Another factor that may have helped even the playing field between Dole and Hagan was the fact that both candidates were female. For better or for worse, instead of being treated as a “novelty,” as she had during her bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000 (Heldman et al. 2005), Dole was in a competitive race against another female candidate. As a result, any reason either candidate could benefit from running as a woman were eliminated. “Running against another woman really neutralized that as an issue,” said Female Reporter #2. What really hurt Dole in this race, she added, was that her primary residence was in Washington, D.C., instead of North Carolina and the negative advertising that the DNC funded in the early stages of the race. “I think she lost for reasons that were gender-neutral,” Female Reporter #2 said.

The final conclusion derived from the personal interviews with reporters who covered the Dole-Hagan race is the idea that, while perhaps a disgraceful and uncharacteristically below-the-belt maneuver on Dole’s part, the “Godless” ad campaign did not represent a turning point in the race and had little impact on the race at all. Reporters recall that the voters they interviewed expressed disappointment in Dole for her role in the ad campaign. Dole, who had developed a reputation as a poised and successful Southern woman, never publically admitted that the ad campaign was a failure and in fact may have cost her votes on Election Day. According to Dole’s re-election campaign manager Marty Ryall, many in the media were quick to blame the failed ad campaign for

Dole losing the race. But a few months after the election, Ryall wrote an op-ed for *Campaigns and Elections* magazine clarifying the situation, and said nothing could be further from the truth. In a piece titled, “Our Hail Mary Pass,” Ryall wrote, “When a football team is trailing by 7 points and throws a ‘Hail Mary’ on the last play of the game, they don’t lose because they failed to complete the play, they lose because they were 7 points down and time was running out.” Still, the ad campaign did more harm than good for Dole, whose impressive resume and political career were tarnished. A former colleague summed it up by writing, “All those years...of being a high achiever and what she has left now is a soiled reputation that she will never be able to redeem” (Quinn 2008).

Discussion: Several challenges significantly limit the findings of this study. As previously noted, the sample for this study was extremely small and selected in a purposive manner, and therefore the findings are only applicable to the four reporters who participated. Additionally, because only four of the seven reporters identified as key players in the regional North Carolina Dole-Hagan race coverage ultimately participated in the study, the findings cannot be used to draw generalized conclusions about regional newspaper coverage of the Dole-Hagan race, and can only be applied to the reporters themselves or to the newspapers in which the reporters’ stories appeared (namely, the *Charlotte Observer* and the Raleigh-based *News & Observer*).

An interesting complication to this study concerns the ownership of the newspapers involved in this study. In 2006, California-based McClatchy-Tribune Newspapers acquired Knight-Ridder, then the owner of both the *Charlotte Observer* and the Raleigh *News-Observer*. The two female reporters who participated in this study

worked for the parent organization, McClatchy. The female reporters were based in Washington, D.C. during the Dole-Hagan race and their stories appeared in both the *Charlotte Observer* and the *Raleigh News-Observer*, depending on which newspaper was interested in publishing their stories. Meanwhile, the two male reporters who participated in this study worked for the individual newspapers and wrote almost exclusively for their respective publications.

Because of the acquisition and the addition of the two McClatchy reporters, there was far less competition for stories among the reporters who participated in the study. According to the reporters' testimony in the personal interviews, oftentimes the four reporters who participated in the study acted more as a team instead of as competing reporters; therefore, there was a smaller quantity of newspaper articles from which to choose for this study and there was less variety in the coverage as well. Google searches for coverage of the Dole-Hagan race confirm this assertion. Among the four reporters who participated in this study, there was very little if any crossover in the stories they wrote regarding the Dole-Hagan race.

Additionally, before the Dole-Hagan race heated up during the fall of 2008, the McClatchy organization underwent a workforce reduction that reduced the number of reporters available to provide coverage of the many races happening in the country and in North Carolina specifically at the time. This meant that the reporters that were not laid off absorbed many of the stories their former counterparts had managed and they did not have as much time or as many resources to report on the Dole-Hagan race. Moreover, because there were many other competitive political races happening in North Carolina at the same time, the reporters were stretched thinly and could not devote themselves

exclusively to covering the Dole-Hagan race. Accordingly, the overall quantity of coverage given to the Dole-Hagan race was reduced.

Newspapers like the *Charlotte Observer* and *Raleigh News & Observer* are facing the same challenges nationwide as more readers turn to the Internet as their primary source of news. Since the Dole-Hagan race took place during the fall of 2008, the *Charlotte Observer's* Monday through Friday newspaper circulation has dropped dramatically from 210,600 (Village Scribe 2008) to 155,500 (Washburn 2011). Likewise, the Monday through Friday newspaper circulation of the *Raleigh News & Observer* has declined from approximately 176,000 (Thomas 2008) to 134,500 (Washburn 2011). Because of this, newspapers are battling each other for a dwindling population of readers and face mounting pressures to produce content on a 24/7 news cycle. This never-ending news cycle places a tremendous amount of pressure on reporters, as well, who often feel torn between reporting the truth and being the first to break the story.

Competing for readers has also changed the way newspapers – and other news organizations worldwide – present information. Conflict and scandal drive news values in today's news organizations. The idea of a conflict bias is further illustrated in a *Newsweek* article from 2008, which points to the media's seemingly endless appetite for conflict:

The mainstream media...are prejudiced, but not ideologically. The press's real bias is for conflict. Editors, even ones who marched in antiwar demonstrations during the Vietnam era, have a weakness for war, the ultimate conflict. Inveterate gossips and snoops, journalists also share a yen for scandal, preferably sexual. But mostly they are looking for narratives that reveal something of character. It is the human drama that most compels our attention (Thomas 2008).

Consider the investigations into Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., where newspapers have been shuttered (Robinson 2011), people fired and prison threatened for those involved with the phone hacking and police bribery practices (BBC News 2011). Under Murdoch's leadership, news outlets owned by News Corp. have set aside objectivity, fairness, and the pursuit of truth and justice – all values that form the foundation of journalism – in order to stir up scandal and sell newspapers. This thirst for conflict explains why the “Godless” ad campaign garnered so much attention in a race that Hagan had already nearly secured. It also explains why some national media outlets picked up the story during a presidential election that dominated most national political coverage.

In conclusion, a variety of factors combined to form the coverage that reporters produced for the Dole-Hagan race, but any differences in coverage that exist cannot be attributed to the gender of the reporter. Further research to determine if a relationship exists between reporter gender and source gender would benefit by expanding the study to include a larger number of reporters and, in turn, a larger sample of stories. Additionally, a similar study would benefit through the facilitation of a quantitative content analysis, which would yield statistically relevant data and help researchers draw more exact conclusions regarding gender-based differences in coverage.

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APPENDIX: List of interview questions for reporters

Personal questions

1. How many years have you been a reporter?
2. What is your background as a journalist? (That is, for which other newspapers have you worked and how many years did you work there?)
3. How long have you covered politics? Do you cover politics exclusively or do you have an additional beat?
4. What would you say is the most difficult thing about being a political reporter?
5. Do you have formal training in journalism? If so, from where?
6. Where were you living at the time you covered the Dole/Hagan race? (If outside North Carolina, have you ever lived in North Carolina?) How long had you lived there?
7. Have you previously covered other North Carolina Senate political races? If so, which ones? When?
8. Have you previously covered political races involving female candidates? If so, which ones? When?
9. What was your first assignment covering the Dole-Hagan race?

Coverage-related questions

1. Did you face any challenges when you were covering the race? (If so, what were they?)
2. Where in the paper were most of your stories about the Dole-Hagan race printed? Who decided where your stories about the race were placed? Did you have a say in the ultimate placement of your stories?
3. Did the location of your stories in the newspaper change as election day drew closer?
4. Did the location of your stories in the newspaper change after Dole launched her controversial "Godless" ad campaign?
5. How did you go about selecting your discretionary sources for your stories? Did you have a specific methodology or criteria? Did your supervisor have any influence over which sources you used?
6. When you used voters as sources, how did you select them?
7. How did you decide your terms of reference (i.e., "Bob Dole's wife" or "Republican incumbent" for Dole, "Democratic state senator" for Hagan)?
8. Before or during the race, did you ever have a meeting with your editor regarding the Dole-Hagan race to determine how coverage would be proceed?

9. Were you assigned stories to cover or did you come up with your own stories? Were you assigned specific angles or did you determine the angle based on the information you found (from sources, etc.)?
10. Were you ever able to speak directly with either of the candidates during your coverage of the race? (If so, who and for what story?) Where did you get information about Hagan and Dole (spokespersons? Other sources?)? Was one campaign more accessible to you as a member of the media (if so, which one)?
11. Had you heard of Kay Hagan before the 2008 election? What was your general impression of her before you started reporting on the race?
12. Elizabeth Dole was currently serving as Senator during the 2008 race. What was your general impression of her before you started reporting on the race?
13. Did your impressions of either candidate change as the election progressed?
14. Are you registered with any particular party in North Carolina or elsewhere? Did you vote in the 2008 election? Did you vote for a candidate in the Dole-Hagan race?
15. As a professional journalist covering political races, how do you keep your personal opinion of the candidate from influencing your coverage of the candidate?
16. Do you feel other newspapers treated both candidates equitably? (If yes, which ones?) Do you feel your own newspaper treated both candidates equitably? (If yes, on what basis did you come to that conclusion?)
17. Your newspaper endorsed Democrat Kay Hagan for Senate. Do you feel the endorsement changed the way you reported on the race? (Why or why not?)
18. Was there a single incident that you can identify as the turning point in the race? (If so, when did it happen and what was your personal reaction? What was your reaction as a reporter?)
19. How did you personally feel about Dole's "Godless" ad campaign? Did you feel the ads were fair to Hagan? (Why or why not?)
20. Do you feel Dole's "Godless" ad campaign had a positive or negative impact on her campaign? (Why?)
21. Do you think the "Godless" ad campaign lost the race for Dole? (Why or why not?)
22. Overall, do you think media coverage of the Dole-Hagan race helped or hurt either of the candidates? (Why or why not?)
23. Do you think media coverage played a significant role in the outcome of the election? (Why or why not?)
24. Were there other factors that played a larger role than media coverage? (If so, please specify.)
25. What were the challenges, if any, you faced as you were covering the Dole-Hagan race?
26. Did you feel that covering female politicians was different from covering male politicians? (How and why?)

Individual questions for reporters

Jim Morrill (Charlotte Observer)

1. I see you contributed to a few articles about Dole's "Godless" ads, but didn't write any outright, even after you covered the Dole-Hagan race regularly. Did your editor make the decision not to assign you these stories or was there some other reason you didn't write them?

2. A lot of your stories about the race focus on the money involved with the race. Did you feel that the campaign finances were an important part of the race? Why? Were you assigned these stories or did you come up with them on your own?
3. What would you say your goal was in covering the Dole-Hagan race?

Rob Christensen (Raleigh News & Observer)

1. You wrote several stories about the Dole-Hagan race. Were you covering this race exclusively for the News Observer or was there another reporter who also covered the race? I notice you wrote a few stories with reporter Ryan Teague Beckwith that covered a variety of different topics – how often did you do these joint reports and how did you choose your subject matter? Did your editor have any say? What was Ryan's role in the newsroom?
2. What would you say your goal was in covering the Dole-Hagan race?

Barbara Barrett (McClatchy Newspapers)

1. Your stories appear in a number of newspapers owned by McClatchy. How does McClatchy decide where your stories appear? Does the same story appear in different newspapers or do you write unique stories for individual newspapers? In your coverage of the Dole-Hagan race, which newspaper did you work appear in most frequently?
2. You're based in Washington, DC, right? Do you feel this helps or limits your ability to report on issues in North Carolina? Do you feel it helps you write more impartially about the issues?
3. You and Female Reporter #2 seemed to split coverage of the Dole-Hagan race, with Lisa doing a lot of the reporting on Dole's "Godless" ad campaign drama. You, however, wrote the main two stories about Hagan's win on Election Day. How did you two split up your reporting duties, or did your editor do it for you? Did this make it difficult for you or otherwise impact your coverage, not having been involved with covering one of the biggest controversies in the race?
4. What would you say your goal was in covering the Dole-Hagan race?

Female Reporter #2 (McClatchy Newspapers)

1. Your stories appear in a number of newspapers owned by McClatchy. How does McClatchy decide where your stories appear? Does the same story appear in different newspapers or do you write unique stories for individual newspapers? In your coverage of the Dole-Hagan race, which newspaper did you work appear in most frequently?
2. Where are you based? Do you go out into the field a lot to conduct your interviews or do most of them by phone?
3. You and Barbara Barrett seemed to split coverage of the Dole-Hagan race, with Barbara doing most of the race reporting and you filling in occasionally. You, for example, wrote most of the coverage relating to the "Godless" ad campaign in October 2008. How did you two split up your reporting duties, or did your editor do it for you? Did this make it difficult for you or otherwise impact your coverage, not writing about the race on a regular basis?

4. Once in awhile you worked with other reporters at McClatchy-owned newspapers for your stories, including Rob Christensen from the News & Observer. How did you decide when to work with another reporter and when to do the story alone? Did your editor assign you to work together? Did working with other reporters make reporting easier or more difficult?
5. What would you say your goal was in covering the Dole-Hagan race?

TABLES

Table 1: Discretionary source data by reporter gender

| Reporter Gender | Average number of female discretionary sources used per story | Average number of male discretionary sources used per story | Percentage of female discretionary sources used per story | Percentage of male discretionary sources used per story |
|------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Male | 0.47 | 2.40 | 16.38% | 83.62% |
| Female | 1.20 | 2.54 | 32.09% | 67.91% |

Table 2: Horse race/issue expert data by reporter gender

| Reporter Gender | Average number of female horse race/issue experts used per story | Average number of male horse race/issue experts used per story | Percentage of female horse race/issue experts used per story | Percentage of male horse race/issue experts used per story |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 0.50 | 3.5 | 12.5% | 87.5% |
| Female | 0.75 | 2.25 | 25% | 75% |