

**What is She Wearing? What is She Saying? Framing Gender and Women Politicians  
Representations<sup>1</sup>**

**Qu'est-ce qu'elle porte? Qu'est-ce qu'elle dit ? Le cadrage du genre et les  
représentations des femmes politiques**

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**Abstract:**

In today's world of politics, issues of personality, style, private life and family values, play an important role when assessing politicians (Corner & Pels 2003). What are the impacts of this context of enhanced personalisation on female politicians? Drawing from works on gender, politics, media, and framing, we intend to answer this question. More specifically, this paper is based on an analysis of discourses of news stories, editorials and columns published in the Canadian printed media on four political leadership races. By presenting the patterns of representations found in these documents, we will shed light on differences in the framing of female and male candidates demonstrate the presence of a double bind for women politicians, and the use of stereotypically masculine terms. News stories generally pay more attention to women's personality and appearance than for their male counterparts. They also focus more on their gender, implicitly suggesting that they are more of a novelty than serious contenders. Finally, we will discuss how these findings influence the political representation of woman and, more globally, the definition of what today's political leaders should be.

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## **Introduction**

In May 2005, Belinda Stronach, deputy of Newmarket-Aurora and star member of the Conservative party, left the latter to join the Liberal Cabinet<sup>2</sup> at the invitation of former Prime Minister Paul Martin. While changing party she also gave up her Conservative boyfriend Peter MacKay. This story got journalists and citizens talking, and a lot of ink was used discussing the party change and the breakup. Mackay was presented as the loser, and Stronach was presented as a bitch and an opportunist, choosing her career before love. Is this story representative of the way media depict women in politics?

The mediatisation of politics is at the heart of your research. More specifically, we focus mainly on personalisation in the media discourses. The central question of this paper is: what are the impacts of this context of enhanced personalisation on female politicians? Drawing from works on gender, politics, media, and framing, we intend to answer this question, based on an analysis of discourses of news stories, editorials and columns published in the Canadian printed media on four political leadership races. In this paper, we will first describe what personalisation is, and our personal approach to this notion. Secondly, we will examine research about women, gender and politics and present their insights on the representations of politics in the media. We will then use the results of a discourse analysis of four political leadership races in Canada involving male and female contenders to illustrate how personalisation and evaluation are closely related. This will also give us the opportunity to test the hypothesis that women are personalised in a different way from their male counterparts and what are the specific criteria's of their evaluation.

## **Spectacularisation and Personalisation in/of Politics**

Representations are important in politics, not only in a political way but at a symbolic level. Leaders represent citizens and citizens themselves consider their politicians in certain ways. As Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross (1996) put it, there is a “notable lacuna in analysis of the other form of representation, the manner in which the mediated presentation of politics is gendered, and its implications for representative democracy at large and specifically for strategies to increase women’s political participation” (p.103). In this paper, we intend to partially fill this lacuna. The ways in which politicians present themselves combined with the narrative descriptions of female and male politicians plays a big role in the perception of politicians in the public sphere. “The media tend not only to focus on leaders and their personalities but also emphasize human stories and personal narratives to make political coverage more appealing. Leaders, for their part, not only adapt but also are active

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<sup>2</sup> She respectively assumed the responsibility of Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal, and Minister responsible for Service Canada while being a Liberal MP.

accomplices in this trend” (Langer 2009: 61). Thus, media and politicians are co-producers in the phenomena of enhanced personalisation and spectacularisation.

Since the end of the 1960s, the phenomena of spectacularisation and personalisation are often criticised by media professionals and politicians (Cardinal, 2005) and by academics (for example, Gingras 2007; Schwartzberg 2009). Overlapping the worlds of politics and popular culture, spectacularisation blurs the formal distinctions between these fields (Street 2000). As a result, the emphasis is put on *human interest*, on an individual perspective while depicting politics, as well as on private life. Personalisation also goes hand in hand with horse race journalism where language used to describe politics is centered on metaphors of war, sports, competition and game (Van Zoonen 2005). For Wahl-Jorgensen (2000), “[b]y using sports as a metaphor for politics, the perpetuation of male dominance in public life is rendered unproblematic” (p. 59).

“In many Western democracies, the emphasis on the personal sphere of leaders seems to have grown into a common and accepted feature of political discourse”, notes Langer (2010). “Parties, politicians, and the media appear happy, and often eager, to reveal all kinds of private details: their parenting style, what music they listen to, and even whether they prefer to wear boxers or briefs” (p. 61). The capacity to offer a “human’ persona” seems to be a prerequisite of political and electoral success and a key marker of contemporary leadership potential (Langer 2010). These practices are presented by this author as the “politicization of private persona”. For her, personality politics is part of personalisation of politics. The latter emphasizes the personality traits related to the political performance (e.g. competence, integrity, as Miller et al. 1986 studied), as well as personal qualities and personal life. The politicization of private persona only includes emphasis only on personal qualities and personal life. The leader is then depicted more as being human. This leader must now perform on three scenes (Van Zoonen 2005 drawing from Corner 2003); the political scene, the public/popular stage and the private life stage. He or she must perform *on* and *across* those scenes in a coherent and authentic way.

In that context, political parties tend to prefer star candidates; they also tend to put the emphasis on the image, personality and private life of their leader. This enhanced mediatisation of political practices is being blamed for society’s individualisation, the loss of political affiliation and celebrity politics. Instead of stigmatising the impacts of this mediatisation, we think that it is important to study the media discourses about political actors. This will offer us a better understanding of the way representations are produced within those discourses. It seems crucial since there are little empirical proofs concerning the evolution of spectacularisation and personalisation, and also since research offers different/varying results while studying those phenomena. Some stipulated that personalisation is in recrudescence (Corner & Pels 2003; Street 2000; Van Zoonen 2005), others were more sceptical about the importance of the phenomena (Rahat & Sheaffer 2007;

Wilke & Reinemann 2001). For the latter, there is little empirical evidence allowing conclusions of an amplifying of personalisation. Moreover, the methods and research design of these studies differ, making generalisation more difficult. By doing a diachronic research about leadership races, we hope to offer a renewed perspective on personalisation. Why are personalisation and spectacularisation important? Mostly because of the agenda-setting role played by the media.

Furthermore, while the spectacularisation and personalisation were growing, the political life of democratic societies also witnessed a major evolution with the increasing number of female elected representatives. The latter combine plural identities. They are career women and often mothers and are, even now, exceptions in the still male dominated world of politics. For Van Zoonen (1998), the personalisation of politics is an “irreversible phenomenon that is part of a more general change in political culture, which includes, among other things, decline party membership and identifications and the loss of binding ideologies” (p. 50). For this author, “[w]ith the personality of politicians coming to the fore, visible personal characteristics will gain even more importance, gender being the most obvious one” (p. 50). In this context, we asked ourselves: Are male and female politicians covered differently? What are the criteria used while this evaluation is made? Which of the three performing scenes – political, public/popular and private - is more important in the evaluation of political actors?

### **Women, Media and Politics: Representations and Framing Gender**

Gender and media coverage is an important yet understudied area of research (Jalalzai, 2006). Furthermore, “[t]here is little available data on gender differences in press coverage of men and women seeking leadership of competitive national political parties” (Trimble 2005: 5; Trimble 2007). In Canada, Trimble as done research about the coverage made by the English speaking print media of some leadership races (a.k.a the Conservatives). In the United States, Aday and Devitt (2001) as well as Heldman, Carroll and Olson (2000), studied the Elizabeth Dole campaign for the Republican Party’s presidential bid. More recently, Lawrence and Rose (2010) published a book about Hillary’s campaign for the presidential bid of the Democratic Party.

Jalalzai (2006) found out that “stories of women politicians often emphasize traditional gender roles” (p. 207). She illustrates that “journalists are more likely to ask women personal questions regarding their marital status and child-care arrangements than men. If women are married with children, they are frequently asked how they expect to balance marriage, motherhood, and politics” (p. 607). Robinson and Saint-Jean (1996) have, for their part, investigated the “symbolic reinforcement role of the media in the representation of Canadian women politicians” (p. 23). They explored the narrative descriptions of female and male politicians in the media from the 1960s to the 1990s. In the first period, before the 1970s,

the focus was on biological descriptions “all of which belittled their social and political contributions” (p. 27). The accent was also on the exceptional status of women politicians. These women were expected to have proper looks and speeches. The 1970s and 1980s were more focused on power as the expectations changed rapidly for women. For the authors, this “transitional narrative” highlights the ideology of feminism, but the connection to women politicians was still an ambivalent one. As new stereotypes emerged, female politicians were described as “superwomen”, “champions” and “members of the gang”. She can do it all: family, career, being well-groomed and competent. For Robinson and Saint-Jean (1996), the 1990s paved the way to a more egalitarian discourse. The media descriptions became more positive, but still discussed in terms of a male and female types of governance.

There is a lot of empirical evidence of gender and personalisation/personality framing in the news, in political campaigns and in citizen assessment of politicians (Miller & al, 1986). Framing is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman 1993: 52). When news stories are personalised, they are centered on people and personal traits, and are less about issues, as Aday and Devitt (2001) illustrates in their research.

Research tends to show that the private life of male and female politicians plays an important role in their media depiction. Some studies show that women are less visible in news reports (see Carroll & Schreiber 1997, Heldman, Carroll & Olson 2005, Norris, 1997 Kahn 1992, for example). Others proved the opposite; female politicians get more media attention (Bystrom & al., 2004, Lawrence & Rose 2010, Trimble 2007). Research states that news stories generally pay more attention to women’s personality and appearance than for their male counterparts. Moreover, some researchers have proven that a lot of weight is put on the candidate’s gender (Heldman, Carroll & Olsen 2005), implicitly suggesting that they are more of a novelty than serious contenders (Dewitt 1999, Van Acker 1999; Trimble, Treiberg & Girard 2010). Politics is often framed in masculine terms “supporting male as the norm” (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross 1996: 112). Furthermore, for Wahl-Jorgensen (2000), “[b]ecause all representations of candidates are centrally occupied with making them look presidential, statements about the candidate and his masculinity become, by extension, statements about the institution of the presidency” (p. 7), in a similar way, Trimble (2005) states that: “political leadership is a ‘historical constituted and gendered performance’, and remains, in Canada as elsewhere, a male preserve” (p. 5).

### **Methodological approach**

To answer these questions, we conducted a qualitative and quantitative content/discourse analysis of news stories published in national newspapers in Quebec (*L'Actualité*, *La Presse*, *Le*

*Devoir, Le Droit, Le Soleil, Le Nouvelliste* and *Voir*) on four political party leadership races: the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 1989, the Progressive Conservative Party (PC) in 1993, the Conservative Party (PC) in 2004, and the Parti Québécois (PQ) race in 2005. Leadership races, as any other type of elections, are spectacularised and personalised events, as the media tend to offer *horse race* coverage of them. Every candidate is scrutinized and evaluated by the party, the press, the militants and the citizens. As Trimble (2007) notes, “leadership races offer a rare opportunity to compare media coverage of male and female candidates for a powerful political leadership position in the context of [...] different competitive scenarios” (p. 972). This was the case for our races, as two of them included women who emerged victorious and became leaders of their party.

In this study, the news stories are considered as cultural artefacts playing an active part in constructing social reality. They are also considered as barometers of socio-cultural changes (Fairclough 1995, Page 2003), presenting what is the appropriate role to play in the public sphere (Templin 1999, Tremblay & Bélanger 1993). Several criteria guided the selection of the texts chosen for this study. We selected news stories not only published during the leadership races, but also those written up to one month prior to the race. We chose races with one female candidate that had good chances to win. The stories collected from the *Eureka* data base for Canadian newspapers had to focus on the candidates, giving them visibility, and had to contain more than 500 words. We kept only the stories about the three frontrunners (based on the surveys) for a total of 272 texts.

**Figure 1: Political leadership races selected for our study**

Party leadership races	Period of the race	Names of the candidates
New Democratic Party (NDP)	August 30 to December 15, 1989	Dave Barrette
		Phil Edmonston
		<b>Audrey McLaughlin*</b>
Progressive Conservative Party (PC)	March 1st to June 15, 1993	<b>Kim Campbell</b>
		Jean Charest
Conservative Party (PC)	December 1st to march 22, 2004	Tony Clement
		<b>Stephen Harper</b>
		Belinda Stronach
Parti Québécois (PQ)	July 15 to November 17 2005	<b>André Boisclair</b>
		Richard Legendre
		Pauline Marois

\* Bold characters indicate the name of the winner of the leadership race.

News stories were coded based on several criteria. We looked at the ways the performances on the political and private scene played a part in the personalisation and evaluation processes. Following Langer (2010), we also studied the visibility of private life by counting the number of times it was mentioned in the news stories and the importance that it took in the evaluation of the leadership potential of candidates. We also focused our attention on the ways in which the qualities (and lack thereof) were used to assess the candidate potential to be a good leader.

## **Findings**

### ***Significance of the Personalisation Frame***

The personalisation frame was important for all the candidates in the races studied. For the NPD leadership race of 1989, the personalisation and evaluations were mostly based on the candidates' political life. 76 per cent of Dave Barrett's evaluations were based on his political performances. 24 per cent of his evaluations were focused on his personal life. In this case, the articles mostly highlighted the fact that he was Jewish and did not speak French<sup>3</sup>. For Phil Edmonston, the ratio was 67 per cent for political life and 33 per cent for private life. The female candidate, Audrey McLaughlin, got a slightly lower political evaluation rate, with 61 per cent of her evaluations based on that scene, and 39 per cent of her evaluations focused on her private life. In this case, the assessments were, for the most part, negative. The question of McLaughlin's origins (her birth place being in Ontario, and the fact that her electoral district was in Yukon) was, above all, the center of attention. The stories also stressed that her divorce made her an unreliable person.

In 1993, when Jean Charest ran against Kim Campbell for the leadership of the Conservative Party, 52 per cent of his evaluations were based on the political scene as an indicator of leadership potential. The other 48 per cent of the evaluations came from his private life. In this case, his private life was above all mobilised to put the emphasis on his leadership qualities. The fact that his family (his father and his grandfather) were important members of the Conservative Party for decades was stated as an important indicator of his faithfulness to the party and its politics. His wife and children were presented as having a great importance in his life. "He is a good family guy", stated his supporters and advisors in interviews. So in the 1993 race, it was the male candidate, Jean Charest, who got the largest part of his coverage personalised. 58 per cent of stories related to him had an element referring to his person, his personal life (family, wife, children) or the fact that he was one of the youngest candidate ever (he was 34 at the time) to bridge the head of a national party. The significant part of the coverage was centered on the person is in part explainable by the fact that the candidate himself put his family forward during the race. His good looks; a tall blond curly

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<sup>3</sup> Since Canada is a bilingual (English and French) country, it is an important criterion of evaluation for any national party leader.

haired, charming man, as well as his wife, familiarly called *Michou* (her real name is Michele) and their three young children were always part of the *photo op*. Charest's family and wife were mentioned 75 times in the 35 articles analysed. He even tried to disqualify his opponent by stating that she was a divorced woman.

In the case of his opponent, Kim Campbell, only 32 per cent of the articles were personalised. Most of the coverage was about the person, but the stories were mostly centered on her law studies, her divorce and the fact that she did not have any children. It should be noted that the Kim Campbell campaign was mainly about ideas, and seldom about her personal life. Her team even called the attack on her divorce a "cheap shot". This partly explains the fact that 80 per cent of Kim Campbell's evaluations were about her political life and only 20 per cent about her private life. As previously indicated, Campbell and her team did not emphasize that part of her life mainly because her double status of divorcée and childless woman which made her an easy target for criticism from the other team.

In 2004, the Conservative party was again looking for a new leader. The race was quite mediated notably because the party had just gone through a merger process with the other right wing party of the country, the Reform Party, and one of the candidates, Belinda Stronach, was a star in the business world. Three contenders were running against each other to lead the party, Stephen Harper, Tony Clement and Belinda Stronach. She got the highest proportion of personalised coverage, with 93 per cent of the articles focusing on her person. In Belinda Stronach's case, her gender and appearance were the center of the attention. Stronach, a tall, blonde woman, the daughter of a rich business man and a COE of his company (Magna International, specialized in auto parts), attracted a lot of media attention. Her blondness, beauty and clothes were mentioned in most of the stories. After that, the fact that she was rich, her celebrity life, her friends in high places (among them, Bill Clinton) also got the journalists talking. Nearly all allusions to her body and her private life were negative. Expressions such as "daddy's little girl" or "sexy" were used while referring to the candidate. These results, based on an analysis of the French press in Canada, are similar to Trimble's (2005) research on the media coverage of the leadership race of two national English newspapers (the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*). In 40 per cent of the stories she analysed, the appearance of Stronach was the first topic of discussion. "Her hair, wardrobe, body and sexual attractiveness were scrutinized and analysed. Stronach was called young, attractive, beautiful, a 'hot babe' with bodacious good looks" (Trimble 2005: 11). The other subject of the discussion was, in this case too, her marital status and family life. While the other candidates were married and had young children, offering what Trimble (2005) calls a "quintessential family model", Stronach was a two-time divorcée and a young single mom. She was assessed as a less competent candidate and received a majority of negative comments. Other evaluations accentuated the fact that she had no political experience and no opinions on important political issues. Some commentators wrote that "Stronach is only a charming woman manipulated by veteran conservative organizers". Belinda Stronach got



almost a 50/50 ratio of her evaluations based on political and private life. 53 per cent of all her evaluations were about her political performances and 47 per cent about her private life performances. As stated above, these evaluations were mostly negatives ones. A lot of stories were about her styling flair, her designer clothes and were linked to her leadership potential. Her private life was dissected. Due to the fact that she was single, questions were also raised about whether she was having affairs. Some reporters were looking for potential lovers while others questioned her ability to speak publicly and raised questions about whether she bought the party members and organizers' votes. The focus on her persona was unquestionable. As Jalalzai (2006) illustrates, these stories emphasized traditional gender roles, and scrutinized the marital status of women even more.

By contrast, only 35 per cent of the articles about Stephen Harper were personalised, as few of them were about the man *per se*. Most of the stories focused on the fact that he was representing Calgary, an electoral district rarely producing party leaders. As for the evaluations, 86 per cent were about Stephen Harper's political performances, and only 14 per cent about his private life. He was presented as the winning candidate. His political competence included the fact that he was bilingual, had already occupied political positions, and was popular inside his party. As for the third runner up, Tony Clement, 71 per cent of the articles were personalised. In this case, the focus was on his law degree, and his participation in the recent merger of two right wing parties. 67 per cent of his evaluations were about his political performances and 33 per cent about his private life performances. In the case of the two male candidates, no questions were raised about their capacity to handle and balance politics and family. Moreover, no stories were centered on their look, and their private life was not scrutinized in the same way.

In the 2005 race to lead the Parti Québécois, three candidates clearly took the lead: André Boisclair, Richard Legendre, and Pauline Marois. André Boisclair was the candidate who got the largest share of media coverage. 85 per cent of the articles on Boisclair were personalised in a way or another. Pauline Marois and Richard Legendre each got 41 per cent and 38 per cent of their stories personalised. More specifically, 47 per cent of Boisclair's evaluations were based on his political performances, and 53 per cent on his private life. His political performances were harshly judged by the press. He was elected at 23, making him the youngest deputy ever elected in Québec. The fact that André Boisclair took cocaine while occupying an official function (being a cabinet minister) caused him a lot of trouble, and many articles were about this revelation. His team framed the event as youthful indiscretions, but it was nonetheless used to question his sense of responsibility as a leader.

In the case of Richard Legendre, the articles were mostly about his former tennis player career and his role as minister of *Tourisme, au Loisir et au Sport*. His performances in sports were used to assess his leadership potential. He was presented as a confident man, a team player, and as someone who sticks to his game plan. In short, Legendre got 56 per cent of

his evaluations based on his political performances, and 44 per cent on his private life performances.

As for the female contender, Pauline Marois, the stories emphasized the fact that she was an experienced candidate, having led key departments in the past, such as health, finances, and education. Her political skills, as well as her motivations for being in politics, were often put forward in the stories. “She’s in politics to build a more equal society”, and “She is competent, empathic and knows what she’s doing” were comments often found in stories about Marois. In her case, the private life did not play a big role in her assessment. Some stories mentioned that her husband was a former president of the *Société générale de financement* (SGF) du Québec, which is an important agency for economic development and the establishment of business partnership. Others pointed out that she raised four kids while being a full time cabinet minister, but the political part of her evaluations was much higher. She got 82 per cent of her evaluations based on her political performances, and only 18 per cent of them focused on her private life. Her campaign was based on the fact that she had been in politics for 20 years, and that she knew what she was doing.

### ***Leadership qualities***

What are the qualities used to assess the leadership potential of a candidate? For all the politicians studied, the capacity to be a good speaker was a central element. This quality was scrutinized while discussing the potential of all the candidates to be the leader of their party. The other qualities mentioned and used to assess positively the candidates were determination, reliability, good sense of humour, and some repartee. When assessed negatively, politicians in our study usually lacked charisma, leadership abilities, or were not able to unite the party members. The strongest critics went to the politicians who were arrogant, condescending or aggressive while answering questions from their opponents or from citizens.

In the case of female politicians, the lack of combativeness was mentioned a few times, but intelligence was a quality mentioned for every woman candidate in our study. It is worth highlighting the fact that this quality was not systematically part of the discourses on male candidates. Female candidates were also described as being ambitious fighters, empathic and good listeners. They were also presented as being more human, and better able to resolve differences. This depiction of women candidates fits leadership stereotype studies (Norris 1996, Eagly 2007) which show that female politicians are supposed to introduce a more subtle, gentler kind of leadership, as well as a more relational and human way to practice politics (Blanc & Cuerrier 2007).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The broad question guiding this paper has been are male and female leaders personalised and assessed differently. To what extent the political and the private scenes play a role in this evaluation. The emerging conclusion is that there is, indeed, a difference in the way the male and female contenders are framed, personalised and evaluated. Political leadership still appears to be an exclusively male domain for a number of reasons. First, in the leadership races studied, the private life of female politicians played a negative role in the evaluation of their leadership potential. Women candidates did not put emphasis on their private life, in part because most of them did not fit the traditional family model, three out of the four female candidates being divorcées. Female candidates mostly presented a political and professional persona to the public. On the contrary, the private life of the male candidates played a larger role in their positive evaluation. This stresses the importance of the family life persona in politics. As the studies of Marshall (1997) and Van Zoonen (1998) illustrated, the political persona is often based on public fatherhood, which promotes leadership characteristics such as kindness, reliability and authority. “Moreover, especially for leaders with small children, it can attest both their virility and their youth”, writes Langer (2010: 66). This was the case for most of the male candidates. “Like appearance, private life is a potential site of trouble for female politicians, not because it contains the danger of sexual scandal as it does for man, but because it is a continuous reminder of women’s odd choices of public mission instead of private fulfilment” (Van Zoonen 2006: 299). Our study goes along Van Zoonen’s research results, offering similar conclusions.

Secondly, the women candidates did not draw on their femininity to promote their candidature, but a lot of the stories emphasised that notion presenting them as women first or as a novelty. Moreover, they were often presented as not serious contenders. This was most obvious in Belinda Stronach’s case, where gender and sexual allusions were the center of attention. For Ross (1995), such comments reduce women active in the public realm to their sex, moreover making them sexual objects. For Trimble (2005), these privatizing discourses act as “de-qualification devices situating the woman politician firmly in the domestic realm and suggesting that she does not belong in the public, political world” (p. 13). This may explain why women candidates mainly shed light on their political performances and accomplishments, rather than on gender or family matters.

Generalizing the results of this research may be difficult, but we still can build on these findings. Personalisation and evaluation play a major role in the way politics is done today. As Langer (2010) observes in her study about personalisation in the UK, it is a common feature of contemporary politics. The author’s nuances are applicable to our research. She highlights the fact that leaders do make a difference in the way personalisation and evaluation are mediated. We can add that the circumstances of the leadership race, the

popular issues of the moment, as well as the revelations made during the race all considerably influence the way candidates are depicted in the press. They greatly influence the amount of personalised stories published in the press. As Langer (2010) adds, “with the ongoing transformations in the definitions of the political and of how we do politics, it is ever harder to draw sharp distinctions between the personal and the political or to continue to argue that a leader’s experiences, conduct, and choices in the private sphere can be automatically dismissed as trivial or apolitical” (p. 72).

In the introduction of this paper, we raised the question of the agenda-setting role of the media. This theory states that the media play an important role on what we think *about*. We must ask ourselves what are the potential effects of media framing on feminine candidatures or the fact that people will not vote for a woman. “Both the manner in which issues relevant to women are framed and the way in which those active in public life are represented may play a crucial role in the formation of public opinion in general and the mobilization of women voters in particular” (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross 1996: 103). The stories analysed in this research tend to show that it is more difficult for women to perform well in the world of politics. This may discourage female citizens from paying attention to politics, or thinking of a political career.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the body of literature on gender framing and the representation of women politicians in the press. However, the analysis presented here does require additional research in order to offer a deeper understanding of gender, media, and politics. Following Trimble (2007), we assert that “the relationship between gender and news visibility is both complex and complicated” (p. 990) and must be further investigated. The game-frame and horse-race journalism could be the object of more attention, as it is criticised for trivializing the issues, and transforming campaigns into personality contests. We could also look at how politicians present themselves to assess what part of their public speeches is based on personalised issues, especially when considering that the individual politician has become more important in the spectacularised and personalised political world (Van Zoonen 2005).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that in all the races studied from 1989 and 2005, personalisation took similar forms and was not at the women’s advantage even if two of them won the leadership race. When David Marshall wrote in 1997 that “[t]he image [of the political character] is ultimately a controlled representation of idealized conceptions of what constitute a leader; a good father, a strong family man, and an international statesman” (p. 238), he was really close to the reality that every political candidate was still facing in 2004 and 2005. Is it still a man’s world? Is there still a double bind for women politicians? Is female political legitimacy constructed in a different way? With female leaders being elected at the head of their party (in British Columbia and Alberta, two provinces of Canada, for example), appointed at some of the highest positions (secretary of state in the United States),

and even becoming prime minister or president of some important states (such as in Germany), will we see a difference? How and where the co-production of personalised and spectacularised politics will head? Will we see a change in how politics is being practiced?

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