

"RHYMES WITH BLUNT": PORNIFICATION AND U.S. POLITICAL CULTURE

KARRIN VASBY ANDERSON

In this essay, I contend that political culture and campaign journalism during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign was “pornified.” Examination of broadcast journalism, viral videos, online commentary, political pop culture, and get-out-the-vote campaigns reveals the ways in which pornographic metaphors, images, and narratives infiltrated U.S. political culture during the 2008 presidential primary and general election season. I assess the media framing of candidates Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, as well as that of female voters as a group, arguing that the emergence of the pornification frame signals a backlash against the gains women have made in the U.S. political system.

In the first picture, an attractive young woman is naked and bound in heavy, black tape. Her arms are pinned behind her by the tape, which also encases her mouth. Her eyes, looking off into the distance, well with tears as her heavy black eyeliner and mascara run. One eye is darkened—either by a shadow cast across her face . . . or by a beating. The second picture features another bare-shouldered young woman. Her blond bouffant, porcelain skin, and red lipstick are reminiscent of ideal feminine beauty, circa 1950. A single tear cascades down her face as her blue eyes stare blankly into the distance.

KARRIN VASBY ANDERSON is Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Colorado State University in Fort Collins. The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers for Rhetoric & Public Affairs and the following members of the Colorado State University Department of Communication Studies writing group for their helpful feedback on this essay: Eric Aoki, Martín Carcasson, Greg Dickinson, Scott Diffrient, Jon Lupo, Chani Marchiselli, Brian Ott, and Linda Scholz. Thanks, also, to Gi for encouraging me to go for it!

Her perfectly glossed lips are contained by a leather strap, woven through metal rivets affixed to her skin and tied to resemble a nineteenth-century corset. The women in the photos are not anonymous crime victims; they are celebrities Jessica Alba and Christina Aguilera. The photos, tagged as “public service ads,” appear in the “Declare Yourself” youth voter campaign.¹ These beautiful yet brutalized women are supposed to encourage the 18- to 25-year-old demographic to register and vote.

Unfortunately, such misogynistic images are not rare in U.S. culture. Scholars have documented the ways in which women have been objectified, symbolically annihilated, attacked, fictionally murdered, and pictorially dismembered in images designed to sell products, open a film, or attract a television audience. As political candidates, campaigns, and journalists draw increasingly on framing and marketing strategies that have proven successful in corporate and entertainment contexts, it should be no surprise that women often are portrayed negatively.² However, in a political year that witnessed U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton waging a formidable campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination, and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin joining Senator John McCain’s ticket as the Republican vice-presidential nominee, some have taken these developments as evidence that women had almost achieved equality in U.S. political culture. Both Clinton and Palin touted the “18 million cracks in the glass ceiling” represented by Clinton’s primary campaign supporters. As one blogger on the website *Feministing.com* wrote, “the very fact that [Clinton] was *there* . . . proves that sexism *is* dying and *is* in remnants of what it used to be. . . . No, sexism isn’t dead, but yes, it is on its way out.”³ Although that statement is not entirely false, the situation is also not that simple. The 2008 presidential campaign produced diverse cultural discourses, many of which were designed to discipline difference and reconstitute white masculinity as the invisible standard for the U.S. presidency.⁴ Like previous campaigns, the 2008 race was framed using the language of sports, war, and even romance; for the first time in U.S. presidential campaign history, however, a new frame emerged that fulfilled both the journalistic trend toward titillation and the cultural impetus to reinscribe traditional norms of political power.

In this essay, I argue that political culture and campaign journalism during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign was “pornified.”⁵ Pornographic metaphors, images, and narratives infiltrated U.S. political culture in ways similar to their earlier emergence in advertising and popular culture. After briefly reviewing the literature on campaign framing, I examine debates among feminists regarding the import and influence of pornographic discourses on women’s

agency. Next, I examine a diverse array of texts from the 2008 presidential campaign, including comments of broadcast journalists, viral videos, campaign paraphernalia, political satire, and get-out-the-vote campaigns. I conclude by contending that metaphors of pornography construct women candidates in ways that reveal the persistence of cultural stereotypes about women political leaders, despite the progress evidenced by Clinton's and Palin's candidacies. The emergence of the pornification frame signals a twenty-first-century backlash against the gains women have made in the U.S. political system.

CAMPAIGN FRAMING FROM RACEHORSES TO ROMANCE

Robert M. Entman explains that politics are viewed through one of two frames. Substantive frames identify socio-political problems and their causes, suggest preferred solutions, and pass ethical judgments. Procedural frames suggest "evaluations of *political actors' legitimacy*, based on their *technique, success, and representativeness*." Entman contends that "procedural framing does little to motivate or equip the public to engage in political deliberation," but he notes that procedural frames which, for example, situate political campaigns as contests, "have other important political effects."⁶ The most common procedural frame for political campaigns is the game or strategy frame, which structures campaign news using metaphors of competition, particularly those invoking games, sports, and war. As Thomas Patterson notes, framing campaigns as contests or games "dominates the journalist's outlook in part because it conforms to the conventions of the news process," including a dynamic plotline, inherent conflict, and the illusion of novelty.⁷ Kathleen Hall Jamieson explicates the components of this frame, which she calls the "strategy schema":

In the strategy schema, candidates are seen as performers, reporters as theatrical critics, the audience as spectators. The goal of the performer is to "win" the votes of the electorate projected throughout the performance in polls. . . . In the strategy schema, candidates do not address problems with solutions but "issues" with "strategies." The language of the strategy schema is that of sports and war.⁸

Entman explains that framing works "through *priming*," insofar as "frames introduce or raise the salience or apparent importance of certain

ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way.”⁹ Metaphors such as “battleground” states, a campaign’s “arsenal,” and “lobbing” negative attacks become literalized as true, making it difficult for voters or journalists to envision campaigns in alternate ways.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, the competition frame emerged forcefully. For example, the CBS News political blog was titled “Campaign ’08 Horserace,” and the entry posted there on September 23, 2007, had the headline “Starting Gate: The Crucible of Events.”¹⁰ The website *www.2008Horserace.com* displayed Vegas-style odds for each candidate, had animated clips of jockeys and their racehorses, and encouraged visitors to vote for their preferred candidate. The horserace metaphor even works its way into coverage of public policy, as in the October 13, 2008, MSNBC.com headline that read “Parties jockey for an edge on economic aid.”¹¹ The *New York Times* reported on a study conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and Harvard University’s Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, which confirmed that although “the public wants to know more about candidates’ records, their backgrounds and where they stand on issues,” media coverage of the 2008 presidential campaign gave “voters the horse race, or as the study put it, ‘the game of politics.’”¹²

Despite the prominence of the frame of competition, another metaphoric cluster has gained popularity as a framing device in news coverage of U.S. political campaigns: romance. Rather than competing with the frame of competition, romance metaphors fit within that broader narrative. Instead of positioning candidates as competing against one another to win the game or battle, the candidates here compete for the affection and loyalty of the electorate. Dan Hahn argues that “[e]lectorate politics parallels” the stages of a marriage relationship, “especially at the presidential level.”¹³ He continues:

Hence, candidates “woo” the voters, who say “yes” or “no.” If the answer is yes and the person is elected, there is a public ceremony that “cements” the bonds, called the “Inaugural,” in which the person elected vows fealty to the Constitution (a kind of “til death do us part” pledge). This is followed by a honeymoon, after which the “marriage” proceeds until the president dies in office or is replaced at the polls by a new suitor or is impeached.¹⁴

Hahn documents the presence of romance metaphors in media coverage of campaigns and presidencies from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush. The

2008 campaign similarly produced evidence of a romance frame in campaign journalism. For example, various reports described Democratic nominee Barack Obama as one who “woos” “the Rust Belt,”¹⁵ “women voters,”¹⁶ “Silicon Valley,”¹⁷ and many others. Similarly, Republican nominee John McCain “courted” “women voters,”¹⁸ “Hispanic voters,”¹⁹ “blue-collar Democrats,”²⁰ and “gay voters,”²¹ to name a few. One story on *CNNPolitics.com* made McCain’s appearance on ABC’s female-anchored talk show *The View* sound like a first date. After being “coaxed into some hugs,” the candidate “nestled on the couch” and “softened his approach trying to explain his position on Iraq.”²² Conversely, the headline on a report about tension between journalists traveling with Obama on an international tour positioned Obama as the contrite suitor trying to win back his sweetheart: “Barack Obama: Charm Offensive Wins Over Angry Crowd . . . of Reporters.”²³ The metaphor of a quarrelling couple was rare in coverage of Obama, which more often adopted the tone of the following blog headline: “Obama Charms the Pants Off the World.” The headline accompanied a picture captioned “Obama Wooing General David Patreus.”²⁴ A story posted on the *National Journal’s* website about former President Bill Clinton’s appearance on David Letterman’s late-night talk show referred to his favorable discussion of Joe Biden as the “Ultimate Bromance: Bill Clinton Has a Lot of Love for Joe Biden.”²⁵ Finally, in the tradition of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine quiz, ABC News’s Politics webpage advertised the “Match-o-Matic II,” urging readers to “Take the test and find your candidate match!”

Like the game frame, the romance frame for political campaigns is more than just a metaphoric way to position citizens and their presumptive representatives. The metaphors have been literalized so that pundits and journalists speculate on the actual sexual attraction between candidates and voters. John F. Kennedy was said to have benefitted at the polls from his appeal to women voters.²⁶ The “soccer moms” who supported Bill Clinton over Bob Dole in 1996 did so, according to some pundits and journalists, because they were romantically enamored with him.²⁷ During the 2004 presidential campaign, journalists heralded the “Sex and the City Voter” as the exemplar of the young, female swing voter who was looking for an ideal candidate match.²⁸

Media frames are consequential because they shape the ways in which people understand and participate in a democracy. When voters are sidelined by sports metaphors or seduced by romance metaphors, they become passive observers of the political system rather than engaged participants. Journalists

focus on the excitement of daily fluctuations in the polls rather than spending time assessing complicated policy proposals. Jamieson points out the ways in which this system exacerbates the cynicism about politics that already plagues many citizens.²⁹ Studying frames is important, however, not only to invigorate participation or to combat cynicism; by explicating the logology of campaign frames, critics can unmask the values and motives that shape political dialogue, contextualize candidate identity, and create U.S. political culture.

Since, as Entman explains, frames that are culturally resonant must “use words and images highly salient in the culture, which is to say *noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged*,” examination of campaign frames provides a snapshot of political culture and its corresponding narratives, themes, assumptions, and power relationship during a given election cycle.³⁰ Moreover, as political campaigns and news outlets struggle to catch the attention of an American citizenry increasingly distracted by fragmented relationships, economic hardship, and digital diversions, one way to make their discourse “*noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged*” is to participate strategically in popular culture. Candidates make obligatory appearances on late-night talk shows and participate in self-deprecating satirical sketches; cable news stations populate their programming with bombastic punditry and slick news productions. As culture has become increasingly coarse, so too has the campaign framing that is embedded in that culture. Of particular note during the 2008 campaign were the ways in which anachronistic stereotypes about femininity and women’s leadership were repackaged and deployed in the polysemous postmodern political environment.

Scholars of gender and U.S. political culture have documented the ways in which archetypes of female identity are employed to frame female politicians and political candidates. Women are cast as “puppets” and “pioneers,” as “beauty queens” and “bitches,” as “Madonna” and “Eve.”³¹ Shanto Iyengar, Nicholas A. Valentino, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Adam F. Simon explain that cultural stereotypes reinforce gendered campaign frames, noting:

Culturally ingrained expectations about the strengths and weaknesses of candidates serve as important filters for interpreting and understanding campaign communication. The typical voter lacks the motivation to acquire even the most elementary level of factual knowledge about the candidates and campaign issues. In low information environments, expectations based

on visible cues—including a candidate's gender—take on special importance. Messages that confirm rather than cut against these expectations are more likely to be noticed, assimilated, and retained.³²

The metaphors used to describe, critique, and satirize political campaigns can both reveal and reinforce stereotypes, especially those that may not be explicitly stated in other communication forms. In his study of political framing, William A. Gamson stresses that as citizens negotiate meaning, "the public discourse that people draw on is much broader than the news and takes many forms."³³ Consequently, in this study, I examine a variety of journalistic and pop cultural texts, including news broadcasts, political punditry, blogs, viral videos, campaign paraphernalia, and get-out-the-vote campaigns. In assembling this textual bricolage, I follow Michael Calvin McGee's admonition that a primary task of critics is "*text construction*," insofar as "our first job as professional consumers of discourse is *inventing a text suitable for criticism*."³⁴ To understand the "'invisible text' which is never quite finished" but is "constantly in front of us," we must cast a wide net and draw together textual fragments that are diverse in type and tone, form and function.³⁵ The "invisible text" that this study seeks to reveal is the frame of pornification that emerged in the 2008 campaign. This frame is indicative of a progression in campaign framing and political culture more broadly in which campaigns were first treated as competitions, then trivialized as romances, and finally transformed into cultural peep shows.

My contention in this essay is that metaphors of pornography constructed women candidates in ways that revealed the persistence of cultural stereotypes about women political leaders, despite the progress evidenced by Clinton's and Palin's candidacies. Additionally, these metaphors functioned to discipline women, as candidates and constituents, becoming increasingly misogynistic as women closed in on the office of U.S. president. Before examining the pornification of the 2008 campaign, however, it is important to understand debates in feminist communities over the issue of pornography and, more broadly, women's agency.

PORNOGRAPHY AND WOMEN'S AGENCY

Pornography is a highly contested subject within feminist communities. Although it is difficult to define what, exactly, constitutes pornography,

antipornography feminists point to sexist objectification and the sometimes violent dehumanization of women as distinguishing features. Insofar as pornographic objectification dehumanizes women and presents them, in some cases, as providing and even gaining sexual gratification from their own victimization, antipornography feminists argue that pornography creates a cultural climate that reinforces male dominance and implicitly or explicitly condones violence against women. Additionally, some critics claim that the majority of women who participate in the production of pornography are exploited, and their participation (whether voluntary or coerced) exemplifies patriarchal power relationships. For this reason, antipornography feminists of the 1970s and 1980s formed unlikely alliances with social conservatives, articulating political and intellectual objections to pornography and lobbying for legal restrictions on the distribution of pornography.³⁶

In response to the efforts of antipornography feminists, some feminist critics took an oppositional approach that has been called “sex-positive,” “pro-sex,” or “sex-radical” feminism. Proponents of this view argue that antipornography feminists sometimes conflate pornography with erotica—a form of sexual display that is not inherently patriarchal. Moreover, sex-positive feminists advocate for an expanded range of accepted sexual interactions, display, and performance as long as the activities take place between consenting adults.³⁷ This strain of feminist thought contributed, in part, to the power feminist argument that women could and should revel in their sexuality as a source of personal agency.³⁸

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the pendulum began to swing again as academics, pundits, and public intellectuals reflected, once more, on the mainstreaming of pornographic themes and images in popular culture.³⁹ In part, the attention to porn as entertainment was triggered by the popularization of the “pimp culture” promoted in rap music, on popular television programs like MTV’s *Pimp My Ride*, and in film with movies like *Hustle and Flow*, which produced the academy-award winning original song “It’s Hard Out Here for a Pimp.” Pop music, too, was becoming increasingly pornified, with Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, and others performing exaggerated versions of the Madonna/whore dichotomy in their music videos and concerts. Of course, popular culture has always transgressed the boundaries of social convention. However, in the effort to maintain a reputation as “cutting edge,” stars, advertisers, and producers peddle increasingly exaggerated, patriarchal versions of (mostly) female sexuality, where women are objectified, dominated, and abused.

Feminist debates over pornography and popular culture typically focus on questions about women's agency (does a pornified culture inhibit women's personal and political power?) and concerns about violence against women (does the mainstreaming of sadomasochistic images promote gendered violence?). This debate has been engaged for several decades by thoughtful critics from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives; spatial constraints preclude an exhaustive examination of the arguments proffered by proponents and opponents of these various positions.⁴⁰ What has not been examined, however, is the increasing pornification of U.S. *political* culture. This is an especially troubling trend insofar as it occurs within the realm of governance and public policy, redefining the woman citizen in the public mind. Moreover, it comes at a time when women have just begun to gain enough leadership credibility that they perform well in national political contests. The continuum of pornification represents a twenty-first-century backlash against women's power that inhabits many guises: playful and prurient, satirical and sexist, masochistic and misogynistic.

PORNOFICATION AND CAMPAIGN 2008

Before building a case for the claim that themes, images, and metaphors of pornography functioned as an important media frame for the 2008 presidential campaign, I first must explain how pornification as a rhetorical process differs from pornography as an artifact. Unlike pornography, pornification need not include actual nudity or explicit sex acts. Rather, I define pornification as a process that includes the following characteristics and strategies:

- Pornification mainstreams the narratives, metaphors, images, and frames culled from the realm of pornography.
- A pornified image need not be as explicit as actual pornography. Rather, it connotes interpretations that are hypersexual or sexually exploitative.
- Pornification highlights sexuality in contexts that otherwise are not normally sexualized and, through the use of crude humor or gender-based parody, disciplines individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms.

Both male and female politicians' images can be pornified. Certainly many of the jokes and satirical images spurred by President Bill Clinton's

affair with Monica Lewinsky could be categorized as pornification. During the 2008 campaign, a photograph of a shirtless candidate Barack Obama in a swimsuit (taken while he was on vacation) appeared in magazines, YouTube videos, and other pop cultural contexts. In 2010, when Republican Senatorial candidate Scott Brown was vying with Democratic candidate Martha Coakley to succeed the deceased Edward M. Kennedy in the U.S. Senate, the media dug up a 28-year-old photograph of him posing nude for the magazine *Cosmopolitan* as the winner of the magazine's "America's sexiest man" contest.⁴¹ The increasing prevalence of the pornification frame in stories about candidates of both genders coincides with the coarsening of U.S. culture more broadly. Even so, the process is both more prevalent for women candidates and more problematic. As Jamieson explains, "throughout history, women have been identified as bodies not minds."⁴² Because women candidates perpetually combat the double bind between femininity and competence, media frames that cast them as sex objects undermine their credibility as leaders in ways that the same frames do not undercut male candidates.

The pornification of U.S. political culture exists on a continuum. At one end are relatively innocuous images of candidates as sexy and appealing, and female voters as infatuated with the candidates they support. These discourses may occasionally be intended as compliments and are certainly less lurid than much of what is considered acceptable within mainstream entertainment culture. These images are pornified, however, by their appearance in the civic context of public, democratic politics, where they reconstitute women citizens and leaders as vixens, sex objects, and/or nymphomaniacs. Importantly, unlike the pornography published in magazines like *Playboy* or *Hustler*, the pornified images of women politicians appear without their consent or participation and often are distributed under the guise of humor or parody. Thus, even images that purport to flatter or are distributed "in good fun" are exploitative in that they hijack a woman politician's image or persona to serve sexist, patriarchal, or misogynistic purposes. As the continuum expands, pornified political discourses become baser and more extreme until, at the opposite end of the spectrum, a sadomasochistic narrative emerges that explicitly depicts or defends sexualized violence against women as pleasurable, natural, or deserved.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, the images of candidates from both major parties, as well as the collective identities of women voters, were

co-opted and pornified. Discourses emerged from supporters and opponents of Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton and employed very different, but equally sexist, symbolic framing.

SARAH PALIN AS NATIONAL MILF

When Senator John McCain chose Sarah Palin, the relatively unknown governor of Alaska, to be his vice-presidential running mate, political journalists and pundits were stunned. Although her resume as a culturally conservative, Western governor with professional connections to the oil and energy industry made her a potentially good strategic pick for McCain, the dominant media frame in the initial weeks after the selection focused on her physical appearance. Palin was a former beauty-pageant contestant who exuded a Western, rugged sex appeal. Whether she was riding a Harley Davidson, hunting big game, or ostensibly taking on special interests as governor of Alaska, Palin somehow negotiated the dangerous terrain between being either too feminine to lead or not feminine enough to be a "normal" woman. Palin's burgeoning national persona was cemented by her trademark up-do and glasses, which invoked one staple of pornographic entertainment, the "sexy librarian." *Stylelist.com* reported that Palin's "sexy librarian glasses spark[ed] interest in eyewear," and noted that Palin also has "become the flavor of the month in the political thong industry."⁴³ (Exactly when did political thongs become an industry?) An entry on *The New Republic* blog quoted former federal prosecutor David Lat, who "switched from supporting Hillary Clinton to supporting McCain-Palin," saying:

Well, some of my reasons for supporting Palin are a bit idiosyncratic, and independent of the minutiae of policy platform or her record on various issues. . . . [I]t's like being in love—reason flies out the window! . . . What I like about Palin is that she has [Obama's] glibness, his surface appeal but you can't help thinking that behind those librarian glasses, she knows she is playing a role—and playing it beautifully.⁴⁴

Palin's sexy celebrity spawned a host of artifacts, from the picture of a fictional Alaskan license plate that read "ALASKA; O-MAMA! WHERE THE AIR IS COLD, AND THE GOVERNOR IS HOT!" to the political cartoon featuring two presidential campaign buttons (see Figure 1).⁴⁵

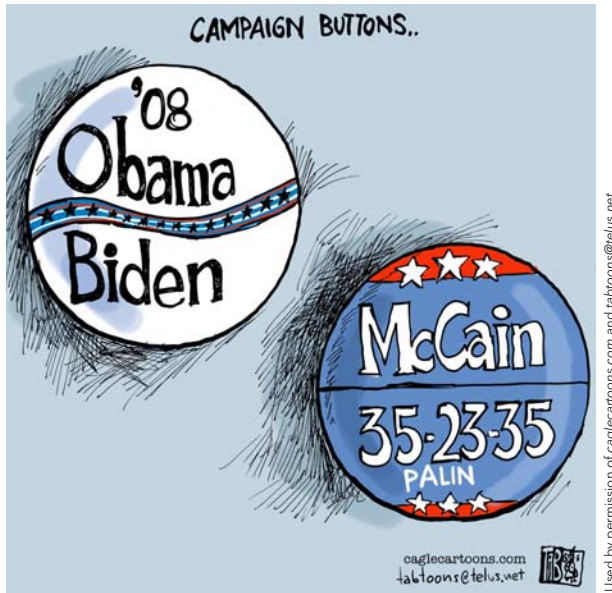


Figure 1.

Almost immediately after joining the ticket, Palin's head was Photoshopped onto a picture of a woman clad in a U.S. flag bikini holding a rifle. The picture spread like wildfire on the Internet, even after being revealed as a fake.⁴⁶ Palin's sex appeal was cheerfully lampooned more than once on *Saturday Night Live*, and that topic made the rounds in the late-night comedy monologues as well. The raciest of the early "pro-Palin" discourses were T-shirts, posters, and a *Saturday Night Live* skit that touted her as a "MILF," with the acronym standing for "Mom I'd Like to Fuck."⁴⁷

In less than a week, Palin went from being a rising star in the Republican Party and the first Republican woman to be nominated for the vice-presidential ticket, to being the national MILF. This transformation has the potential to undercut women's agency by reducing their power to sex appeal and

*I have chosen to explicitly spell out objectionable language in this essay because acknowledging the actual words connoted by the acronyms and images included in this essay is part of the social critique in which I am engaging. Neglecting to spell out the terms, even under the guise of academic propriety, would obscure the rhetorical force of the framing that I am attempting to point out. When terms appear in direct quotations, I replicate the form in which they appeared in the original quotation.

rewarding their attractiveness with heterosexual male approval rather than respect. Framing women's political agency in terms of sexual influence is a familiar strategy, one that has shaped both ancient and contemporary narratives.⁴⁸ Reporting for *msnbc.com*, Carrie Dann suggested that the MILF frame resonated with the public; reviewing results of a study analyzing "search term data compiled for NBC News by the online research company Hitwise," Dann explains:

About one in every five hundred Web searches containing the phrase "Sarah Palin" during that week inquired about the Alaska governor's support for the pork project [which attempted to bring the infamous "Bridge to Nowhere" to Alaska], making "Sarah Palin Bridge to Nowhere" the 72nd most frequent search term on her list. But ranking far above the earmark investigation in popularity (among the 10 million internet users in Hitwise's sample) were "Sarah Palin legs" (No. 16), "Sarah Palin Vogue" (No. 18), and "Sarah Palin sexy photos" (No. 49).

In other words, while political operatives frenetically worried about how the public viewed the authenticity of Palin's claims, the online public was frenetically viewing—without particular worry about authenticity—doctored photos of a bikini-clad, gun-toting Alaska governor.⁴⁹

If the business acumen of pornographer and *Hustler* founder Larry Flint can be trusted, there's a market for images of a pornified Palin. Shortly after McCain made his choice public, the *New York Daily News* reported that Flint was "Hustling up an Ala-skin flick with Sarah Palin look-alike."⁵⁰ Sadly, Flint's *Nailin' Paylin* was quickly produced, with edited clips featured on widely read political blogs such as the *Huffington Post*, which posted clips with nudity obscured so that they would be "safe for work" viewing.⁵¹ That same blog reported that as of October 2008, the Flint video included "a threeway with Hillary and Condoleezza look-alikes" and was "being fast tracked for release before the election."⁵² The *Huffington Post* certainly was not the only news outlet playing up the so-called "Sarah Palin porn flick." It became a featured entertainment news item in the weeks preceding the presidential election and appeared on political news outlets such as *Salon.com*, *Politics Daily*, *Right Wing News*, and *DCRepublican.com*.⁵³ The unnamed blogger for *DCRepublican.com* lauded Flint's film, asking, "Can anyone else think of another time in history where a conservative has become such an icon in pop-culture? While this isn't exactly the best form of publicity, I think it's great

that the conservative movement has a woman standing up for our principles that is not only gorgeous, but intelligent at the same time.”⁵⁴

The pornification of Sarah Palin’s political identity falls toward the soft-core end of the continuum. The sitting governor of Alaska did not hide her status as a former beauty pageant contestant, and like so many women (and men) in politics, she chose to conform to mainstream standards of beauty and attractiveness. But the framing of her candidacy in blogs, political cartoons, journalistic sources, and political paraphernalia went well beyond noting her attractiveness. Sarah Palin was dubbed the national “MILF,” a term that not only trades on the stereotype of an attractive older woman’s sexual allure, but also features the four-letter word for sexual intercourse. Surprisingly, however, that four-letter word was not the worst example of coarse characterization in campaign 2008. Before Sarah Palin was the national MILF, Democratic presidential primary contender Senator Hillary Clinton went from being a “bitch” to a “cunt.”

HILLARY CLINTON: “RHYMES WITH BLUNT”

In January of 1995, following the failed Clinton health-care reform campaign and the midterm election that handed a congressional majority to the Republicans, journalist Connie Chung interviewed the mother of Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. A now infamous portion of their exchange unfolded as follows:

CONNIE CHUNG: Mrs. Gingrich, what has Newt told you about President Clinton?

KATHLEEN GINGRICH: Nothing, and I can’t tell you what he said about Hillary.

CHUNG: You can’t?

GINGRICH: I can’t.

CHUNG: Why don’t you just whisper it to me, just between you and me.

GINGRICH: “She’s a bitch.” About the only thing he ever said about her. I think they had some meeting, you know, and she takes over.⁵⁵

At the time, Kathleen Gingrich’s explicit invocation of the term “bitch” was treated as a shocking departure from accepted norms of public, political discourse. A media debate over the use of the term ensued, with some pundits noting that there was only one label more offensive to women, and so far “the C word” had not been sanctioned for public use.⁵⁶ One wonders

if, during the 2008 campaign, Clinton viewed 1995 wistfully, as a time of relative cultural innocence. By July of 2008, when Clinton was stumping for Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama, one online respondent to a story about Clinton posted on the *Washington Post's* website charged that "Hillary is a conniving . . . well, never mind . . . it rhymes with blunt."⁵⁷ Despite the temptation to dismiss the anonymous comment as an isolated incident or a rant from the digital fringe, the euphemistic rhyme invoked a term that was hurled explicitly at Clinton during the 2008 Democratic primary.

After Clinton was positioned as the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination early in the primary season, explicit examples of Clinton as "cunt" began to surface in political culture. One photo that made the Internet rounds appeared to be an authentic picture of a T-shirt worn by an anonymous man. The shirt presented a series of simple images that corresponded to the words "I Love Country Music." Above the written text appeared an eye, a heart, a head shot of Hillary Clinton, a tree, and a musical staff.⁵⁸ An article on *Salon.com* introduced a new political action committee called "Citizens United Not Timid, (aka CUNT)."⁵⁹ Not a spoof, this registered 527 organization was established to oppose Hillary Clinton's candidacy. Its logo was a red, white, and blue drawing shaped like a woman's crotch with the tagline, "Citizens United Not Timid to educate the public about 'what Hillary Clinton really is.'" The *Salon.com* article explains that the organization's purpose was to "sell \$25 T-shirts emblazoned with the organization's charming name and its red, white, and blue logo. The logo is supposed to evoke a woman's crotch."⁶⁰

Although the emergence of "cunt" into public, political discourse seems to have been triggered by the Clinton candidacy, it was not limited to her. Comedian Jon Stewart marked a different instance of the term's use during the June 11, 2008, edition of *The Daily Show*. His monologue was as follows:

There's an old saying in Washington that the nastiest four-letter word in government is "cunt" [bleeped, but lips not obscured]. And you know, that adage is as true today as it was when the saying was first etched on the side of the Jefferson Memorial. Now, you may be sitting there wondering, (a) why you let the kids watch with you tonight, and (b) "Why the dry history lesson, professor?" Well, it turns out that one of the gentlemen running for president has been accused of dropping the C-bomb while engaged in a heated debate on the floor of the living room of his own house. According

to a new unauthorized biography, *The Real McCain*, one time, after his wife Cindy told him his hair didn't look good, Senator McCain responded, "At least I don't plaster on the makeup like a trollop, you c**t." Okay, seems a little harsh. But in his defense Senator McCain's a Navy man. It's just salty Navy talk. He's not trying to hide it. You've seen his campaign slogan [flash to a picture of McCain in front of a green campaign sign]: "John McCain: Experience You C**nts Can Count On." You know, you can't spell "count on" without c . . . [trails off]

Stewart concludes the bit by saying, "Is this story true? Who knows, but the important thing is, it's out there, signaling that we have officially moved into the character assassination portion of our presidential campaign."⁶¹

Although Stewart's satirization of the "cunt" story pointed to its inappropriateness in the context of a political campaign, it also furthered the introduction of a formerly taboo characterization into mainstream political pop culture. A one-liner tossed out by comedian and talk-show host Bill Maher on his HBO show lacked the critical edge of Stewart's bit. During a discussion about media censorship he joked, "Now they fined CBS a million dollars—a million dollars—for Janet Jackson's nipple. Think what they could get for Hillary Clinton's cunt!"⁶²

Soon, that imagery migrated from the realm of entertainment and satire to serious political news shows. Consider, for example, the following exchange taken from MSNBC's political talk show *Tucker*, hosted by conservative pundit Tucker Carlson:

On the October 15 edition of MSNBC's *Tucker*, discussing Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton's (D-NY) presidential campaign with *Washington Post* columnist Eugene Robinson and Cliff May, president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, host Tucker Carlson said: "Gene, this is an amazing statistic: 94 percent of women say they'd be more likely to vote if a woman were on the ballot. I think of all the times I voted for people just because they're male. You know? The ballot comes up, and I'm like, 'Wow. He's a dude. I think I'll vote for him. We've got similar genitalia. I'm—he's getting my vote.'" After asserting that "the Clinton campaign says: 'Hillary isn't running as a woman,'" Carlson stated: "Well, that's actually completely false, considering the Hillary campaign—and I get their emails—relentlessly pushes the glass ceiling argument. 'You should vote for her because she's a woman.' They say that all the time." May responded: "At least call her a

Vaginal-American." Carlson replied: "Is that the new phrase? Boy, that's nasty. I don't think I can say that." Robinson interjected, "No, you don't say that," to which Carlson responded: "I shouldn't say that? I'm not going to attempt it. No, no."⁶³

Despite Carlson's assessment of the term "Vaginal-American" as "nasty," the three men who participated in the discussion laughed both at the specific "Vaginal-American" joke and at the notion that women would like to vote for a woman president. This anecdote also illustrates an only slightly toned-down version of the "cunt" discourse that surrounded Clinton's candidacy insofar as it explicitly calls attention to the female genitalia in a derogatory way.

It is important, at this juncture, to explain why the preceding examples fit onto the pornification continuum as I have constructed it. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "cunt" is defined both as "The female external genital organs" and "a term of vulgar abuse" which is "[a]ppplied to a person, esp[ecially] a woman."⁶⁴ The entrance of this term into political discourse is evidence of more than merely the coarsening of U.S. culture. The term "cunt" is a pornified version of terms like "vagina"—one that is applied exclusively to women and represents not just sexism but a misogynistic hatred of women. By deploying it in the context of legally recognized political action committees, mainstream cable news shows, and political pop culture, proponents participate in the third type of pornification: highlighting sexuality in contexts that otherwise are not normally sexualized and, through the use of crude humor and gender-based parody, disciplining individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms.

Using terms like "Vaginal-American" and "cunt" to describe Clinton's political identity was only one form of discipline exercised in political pop culture. Other strategies fit within the pornification frame insofar as they use gender-based parody to highlight her status as an abnormal or improper woman candidate. One image credited to *FreakingNews.com*, which describes itself as a site for "News Photoshop Contests," takes a picture of a president giving a speech behind a lectern with the first lady sitting to his right, and places Hillary Clinton's head on the male president's body, with Bill Clinton's head topping the figure of the first lady. Similarly, another Photoshopped image poses as a still shot taken from a security camera in a men's bathroom. Hillary Clinton is standing in a skirt, looking around suspiciously, and using the urinal. The subtext of these examples is, of course, that any woman who seeks the office of U.S. president is unnatural, dangerous, even deviant.

The threat of the power-seeking woman was crystallized in the Hillary Clinton nutcracker. Consumers may purchase the functional nutcracker on *Amazon.com* as well as many other websites, where animated images show her nutcracking power in action (the nut is placed between her thighs). To ensure that this product is recognized as a reaction against her presidential bid, the nutcracker Hillary is wearing her signature black pantsuit and a “Hillary” campaign button.

Central to sadomasochistic pornography is the notion that women should be humiliated, violated, and abused. Occasionally, the abuse is taken to the extreme, causing the woman’s death, either simulated or real, as in the genre of the “snuff” film. A review of discussions occurring on mainstream political talk shows demonstrates the cavalier invocation of threats of violence and death against candidate Clinton as they occurred within the off-hand comments and jokes of guests and hosts, particularly when the conventional wisdom was that Clinton was overstaying her welcome by refusing to bow out of the Democratic primary race. For example, on an episode of MSNBC’s *Countdown* with Keith Olbermann, *Newsweek*’s senior Washington correspondent Howard Fineman was discussing the need for Clinton to concede the primary race to Obama. Fineman’s exchange with Olbermann unfolded as follows:

FINEMAN: There’s some adults somewhere in the Democratic party to step in and stop this thing like a referee in a fight that could go on for thirty rounds . . .

OLBERMANN: Right—somebody who can take her into a room and only he comes out.

FINEMAN: [nodding] Yes.⁶⁵

Although Fineman chose a nonviolent metaphor of a referee, Olbermann responded with the image of a mob hit man, an imagistic switch with which Fineman easily concurred. Similarly, on a CNN broadcast, NPR’s political editor Ken Rudin stated, “Well, first of all, let’s be honest here, Hillary Clinton is Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*, she’s going to keep coming back and they’re not going to stop her . . .”⁶⁶ In case there was any doubt about what should happen to the Glenn Close version of Hillary Clinton, an Obama delegate was caught on tape saying, “Barack Obama’s going to be the nominee of our party. . . . Senator Clinton, I thought when she said ‘I’m going to support the Democratic nominee’ was indicating kind of finally she was going to give up, but uh, like Glenn Close [she] should have stayed in that tub,” referring

to the drowning of the Glenn Close character in *Fatal Attraction*.⁶⁷ On Fox News's *Hannity and Colmes*, Republican strategist Pete Snyder encouraged the Democratic Party essentially to put Hillary down (a euphemism for killing an animal) in order to get her to withdraw from the Democratic primary race. He said, "You know, I think someone's going to have to go out there and take her behind the barn. You know, I grew up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and that's kind of the term you use for that."⁶⁸

It may not be immediately evident why I place the aforementioned examples on the pornification continuum. My argument is that pornification functions to sexualize, objectify, discipline, and sometimes dehumanize women candidates. Glenn Close's character in *Fatal Attraction* was not just psychotic. She was sexy, sexually available, obsessive, and psychotic. She became a cautionary tale in U.S. culture because she took sexual obsession too far and demanded too much from her lover. She represents the unity of sex, obsession, power, and death. Importantly, at the end of *Fatal Attraction*, her death was a deserved death—one brought on by her choice to transgress established social boundaries for how the "other woman" should conduct herself. When that character becomes a pop cultural moniker for one of the leading candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination, pornification is at work.

At this point, some may question whether the aforementioned examples do any actual harm to women in politics. After all, the Internet is full of fringe humor and offensive discourse, and in an environment of 24-hour cable news, people are bound to say things they might later regret. Concerned citizens have the option to avoid certain websites, delete objectionable emails, and turn off the television. Of course, that does not solve the problem of individuals who seek and share material like this because they think it is funny or apropos. Even so, doesn't Clinton's formidable primary campaign demonstrate that these discourses have little material impact? The cloak of humor allowed pornified political discourses to infiltrate "serious" political discussion to the extent that even "jokes" about killing candidate Clinton passed, unremarked upon, by cable news hosts and contributors. That is a stunning cultural devolution. It illustrates the extent to which misogyny continues to be speakable in U.S. culture. Additionally, the examples discussed in this essay were not garnered by scouring the dark corners of the Internet netherworld. Rather, I have included only examples that emerged in or were covered by mainstream political journalism and widely viewed political pop culture. Unfortunately, artifacts that fit within my criteria for popular

consumption were not limited to those involving candidates Clinton and Palin. The next set of discourses I examine are pornified images of women as voters and political activists. The emergence of pornification as a frame for women voters as a group suggests that the implications of this frame extend far beyond a limited focus on Palin and Clinton.

*INVITATION TO A POLITICAL HO-DOWN: THE PORNIFICATION
OF WOMEN VOTERS*

The website YouTube has facilitated the explosion of a seemingly endless barrage of political parody. Some of these viral videos present thoughtful political critique. Many take on the tone of a political rant. A few, however, reach an audience outside the confines of YouTube. During the 2008 Democratic primary, perhaps the most infamous of these videos was Obama Girl's "I Got a Crush . . . on Obama."⁶⁹ Posted in June 2007, "I Got a Crush . . . on Obama." launched the now popular website *BarelyPolitical.com* and was touted on that website as being "named one of 2007's 10 best videos by *Newsweek*, *People Magazine*, the AP and YouTube."⁷⁰ The video instantly received attention from national news outlets. The *washingtonpost.com* political blog *Channel '08* described the video to its readers as follows:

Alternately dressed in a bikini, some very short shorts and a tight white-and-pink top that reads "I GOT A CRUSH ON OBAMA," she pole dances on a subway stop, sings to a stranger on a park bench and gets on top of an office desk and starts dropping it like it's hot. Lyrics include such gems as: "You're into border security. Let's break this border between you and me . . . Universal health care reform, it makes me warm . . . You can Barack me tonight . . ."⁷¹

The video is a complex text and cannot be fully examined here; however, by patterning itself after the form of R&B and hip hop videos, "I Got a Crush . . ." invokes stereotypes about black male and female sexuality, situating the female star/Obama campaigner as a sex-starved "ho" and Obama as the stud she is eager to service.

The video's popularity spawned a cottage industry of similar videos for other candidates, including Rudy Giuliani and Hillary Clinton. The viral music video backing candidate Clinton was called "Hott 4 Hill" and appeared on YouTube several weeks after the release of "I Got a Crush. . . ."⁷² Stylistically, the video borrows from the 1980s Van Halen music video "Hot for Teacher"

in that it depicts a young, attractive teacher dancing in front of her elementary school class as she pines for her candidate. In one shot, the teacher takes a seductive bite out of the middle of a cake with Clinton's picture on it, singing "The U.S.A. would be a better place / if everyone could just get a taste / of you." Invoking the popular girl-on-girl porn motif, the teacher sings "I know you're not gay / but I'm hoping for bi"—after a brief pause a voiceover adds "lingual!" The allusions to body parts and sexual terms, finished by words that turn the suggestion toward politics is one strategy employed throughout the video. It is telling that the "Hott 4 Hill" video was envisioned with a female, rather than male, teacher (played by Taryn Southern). In addition to tacitly acknowledging the many actual charges of lesbianism leveled at Clinton throughout her public life, the video's parody of recognizable pop rock video form is what lends cultural salience and makes it successful as a parody.

The videos earned multiple appearances on MSNBC's *Hardball*, where roundtable discussants reviewed them at length.⁷³ "I Got a Crush . . ." was promoted on the *New York Times's* political blog *The Caucus*,⁷⁴ was discussed during the Sunday morning roundtable on ABC's *This Week . . . with George Stephanopoulos*,⁷⁵ and appeared on ABC's *World News Sunday*,⁷⁶ to name only a few major news sources. The popularity of "I Got a Crush . . ." and "Hott 4 Hill" also earned their stars occasional interviews on major cable news shows. For example, Southern, Ettinger, and the short-lived "Giuliani Girl" Adolina Kristina were invited to appear with Chris Matthews on his political news show *Hardball*. In response to Matthews's question, "What do you like about Rudy Giuliani?," Kristina stated, "I like his leadership skills, what he was able to. . ." Cutting her off in mid-sentence, Matthews goaded and teased her, saying:

MATTHEWS: That's the name of the book you're reading. Is that where you got the word from?

KRISTINA: No.

MATTHEWS: Come on, I saw you with the book today, Adolina, that said leadership on it. It looked to me like a talking point.

KRISTINA: No.

MATTHEWS: That's the name of his book.

KRISTINA: No, it's not. He didn't write that one. It's somebody else's. I'll show you later.

MATTHEWS: OK, what do you like about him, besides what you saw on the cover of the book?

KRISTINA: Well, I really like what he did for New York City and how he cleaned up the crime.

MATTHEWS: Cleaned up the town, cleaned up that city.

Kristina delivers a coherent answer despite Matthews's efforts to thwart her. He then asks the women if they are registered to vote, inquires about their political affiliation, and concludes that "with no insult intended to Pat Buchanan and the other people I usually have on this show, I would rather be with these people."⁷⁷ Matthews makes clear how much personal pleasure he derives from consuming both the women and their cultural productions.

Both "I Got a Crush . . ." and "Hott 4 Hill" invoke the stylistic tropes of their respective music video genres (R&B, hip hop, and female pop). Academic research has thoroughly established the implications for women's identity and agency contained in this form of entertainment.⁷⁸ This essay extends that argument to the realm of women's political agency. Although viral videos certainly do not impinge on anyone's right or ability to vote, to the extent that these images form media frames, especially for positioning young female voters, they undermine and rhetorically dismiss women's political agency.

The final example I will introduce into this discussion of the continuum of political pornification similarly attacks young women's political identity, but this example employs images of sadomasochistic violence rather than parody as its discursive tactic. It is the "Declare Yourself" get-out-the-vote campaign referenced at the beginning of this essay. Two images from the campaign—reprinted on the opposite page—illustrate the ways in which the campaign simultaneously invokes bondage, pain, and sexual allure.

Those familiar with the campaign know that it depicts women and men and young people of various ethnicities. That fact, however, does not negate my argument. A close examination of the nine print images that were featured during the 2008 presidential campaign demonstrates that it pornifies women and gay men in ways that the white men and straight black men are not depicted.

First, let me outline the similarities in the photographs. Each shot frames the subject's head and shoulders. All the subjects have a troubled expression on their face and look as though they are under duress. Many are crying. Most of the models are recognizable young actors or musicians, with Jessica Alba, Christina Aguilera, Jonathan Bennett, Andre 3000, and La Toya London making credited appearances. According to the advertising archive *Coloribus*, the "Declare Yourself" campaign "hired photographers Marc



Photo by Mark Liddell. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Figure 2.



Photo by David LaChapelle. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Figure 3.

Liddell and David LaChapelle to shoot a bondage-themed print advertising campaign. . . . The ads include models, including celebrities . . . in various forms of bondage as a symbol of reducing one's voice by failing to register as a voter."⁷⁹ A critically important component of this campaign is the "Declare Yourself" tagline, which reads, "Only you can silence yourself." The motto presumably was inspired by the statistics from the 2000 presidential election, which revealed the large number of young voters, and especially single women, who did not vote.⁸⁰ The explicit message is that young voters limit their own political agency.

The "Declare Yourself" images have enough in common to make sense in the ad campaign, but closer examination reveals differences that are significant for political identity and agency. First, although the images are framed to exclude everything below the shoulder, none of the women is clothed while all but one of the men are. The male model (not identified as a celebrity) who is unclothed appears in a photo that the campaign calls "Ballgag PSA." He is dark-skinned and portrayed with a billiard-style eight-ball stuffed in his open mouth and strapped to his head. The image invokes a bizarre version of pornified homosexuality. It is the only image in the campaign where a male subject is explicitly sexualized.

The bondage constraining the other male subjects of the campaign is, importantly, not sexualized. African American rapper and actor Andre 3000 is pictured in "Silenced" in a 1930s-era cap and suspenders with a yellow bow tie in his mouth. The image hearkens to the minstrel era when black entertainers were cast as buffoons. The uncredited white male subject in "Stapled Shut" is portrayed with his lips stapled shut and wearing a professional shirt and black eyeglasses. The suggestion seems to be that white men have sacrificed their political voice in their quest for success in business. The ad featuring Jonathan Bennett, an actor best known for his roles as a hunky boyfriend or love interest, depicts Bennett's lips literally screwed shut. A parallel to "Stapled Shut," this ad suggests that by focusing on sexual conquest ("screwing"), young men have given up their political agency. This same theme is illustrated in the "Fish Hooks" ad, where the attractive male subject's lips are encased in fish hooks. By focusing on the many "fish in the sea" young men have turned their focus away from politics.

What differentiates the images of women from those of men is not the fact that they are sexualized—arguably all the subjects are chosen, in part, because of their sex appeal. Instead, salient to my thesis in this essay is the manner in which the women are sexualized. Consider the specific symbols

of containment in the Alba and Aguilera photos described in this essay's introduction. Alba is tied up in black tape in a way she would have been physically incapable of doing to herself. Her distraught look, naked body, and taped bondage invokes either a sadomasochistic narrative that women participate in and enjoy their own pain and humiliation, or it suggests a scene of criminal physical detainment and abuse. When the explicit message reads that only women can do this "to themselves," it reifies misogynistic "blame the victim" logic. Similarly, in the Christina Aguilera image, her voice is constrained by a firmly laced corset—a symbol of women's cultural containment during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is no accident that dress reform coincided with the final campaign for woman suffrage in the United States, and suffrage became, both literally and symbolically, the incarnation of women's political voice. The "Declare Yourself" campaign erases the history of women's political and cultural oppression, adopting the postfeminist claim that women already possess full political agency, if only they choose to use it. Even the La Toya London image, the only depiction of an African American female in the campaign, is problematic. The image is similar to the Bennett photo, but instead of screws encasing her lips, London's lips are closed by a nail which is driven through them. A very different portrayal of women's and men's sexuality is suggested by the photographers' symbolic choices. Men "screw" women, while women "get nailed" by men. The tacit argument is that African American women (the "hos" of pimp culture) give up their political agency when they sleep around.

All of the images in the "Declare Yourself" campaign are problematic. They take complicated histories of oppression and reduce them to an individualistic "blame the victim" mentality. Many of them are pornified images that introduce hypersexuality into the realm of a political "public service ad." But the images of the women are particularly egregious representations that cast women as sexually appealing even as they are being degraded, and as participants in and sources of their own political oppression. The message of this ad campaign is that, in politics and life, women get what they deserve.

PORNIIFICATION AND POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

When individuals reflect on the status of women in U.S. political culture, they often point to political opinion polls as indicators of cultural attitudes. During the 2008 presidential debates, some networks introduced a dial that

focus groups observing the debates could turn as the candidates spoke, in order to indicate instantly their positive or negative opinions. This essay proposes another measure for assessing public political attitudes, particularly in terms of responses to women's political agency. Of course, the notion of a unified "public opinion" is a useless fiction, and many citizens embrace and promote gender equity. This analysis demonstrates, however, that the misogynistic framing of women's political power, which dates back to premodernity, remains salient in contemporary, postmodern political culture. It is important for critics to continue to point that out when the broader voice of political pundits often adopt a "you've come a long way, baby" logic. Yes, women's political achievements during the 2008 campaign were historic, and their significance should not be ignored. Yet we also must recognize the significant discursive opposition that resulted from feminist gains, implicitly and explicitly disciplining both the candidates and women writ large.

My argument goes beyond identifying sexism in popular culture—critical ground that has been well traveled. This essay contributes to the understanding of media frames and their functions in U.S. politics. First, the evidence presented in this essay suggests that during the 2008 campaign, pornification was a salient frame for women candidates and voters, rather than an isolated occurrence. My research produced a few errant examples of male candidates being pornified in 2008. The most mainstream example was the positioning of Obama as a black stud in the "I Got a Crush . . ." video. The hypersexualized black male is a mainstay of racist imagery, and Murali Balaji explains that "Black masculinity—and the performance of it—in music videos is a manifestation of identity and body politics steeped in the normative assumptions of Black men's behavior."⁸¹ Yet even in the "I Got a Crush . . ." video, Obama is more often pictured in a suit, giving a speech, or conducting himself in otherwise appropriate activity for a political candidate. It is Ettinger as "Obama Girl" who inhabits the role of scantily clad "ho," pole dancing on a public bus and gyrating on a desk while her male coworkers consume her performance. Other examples of a pornified Obama or McCain can be found on the Internet, but there are many fewer of them and none gained the mainstream media or pop culture traction of the examples cited in this study. Similarly, my research found even more egregious examples of pornification of Clinton and Palin, but I did not include all of them in this study, choosing instead to focus solely on instances that were widely circulated in popular culture and/or appeared in mainstream media sources. Nevertheless, pornification was a consistent, recognizable, salient frame. It emerged in journalistic accounts

and campaign parody. Women from both parties were pornified. Women of various ages and ethnicities were pornified. Women were pornified as candidates and as voters.

Now that the characteristics of the pornification frame have been delineated and its presence documented in a major presidential contest, more work must be done to assess the implications of this emerging frame. Researchers have explicated the implications of journalistic reliance on the game/strategy schema to describe political campaigns. More research is needed on the consequences of the use of both romance and pornification narratives to understand politics. The first, and perhaps most obvious, problem with the romance frame is one of positionality. Whereas the game frame positions voters as fans or observers rather than participants, the romance frame casts voters as bachelors and bachelorettes participating in the campaign season version of a reality dating show. Emphasis on candidate likeability over policy platforms is heightened in a process that, unlike its parliamentary counterpart, already places enormous emphasis on an individual candidate's qualities and quirks.⁸² Policy stances, when covered, are often reduced to the level of a *Cosmopolitan* quiz, allowing voters to find their perfect candidate match.

A second problem arises with the romance frame for political news. By ascribing to the heterosexual norms of U.S. culture, the frame does not position voters and candidates of diverse genders equitably. The frame itself can induce (perhaps subconsciously) journalists to employ gendered representations of candidate appeal. For example, during the 2000 Republican presidential primary campaign, Governor George W. Bush appeared at the annual convention of the National Federation of Republican Women, an organization originally formed in 1938 that boasts a membership of 100,000 people. It's a serious political organization and a major player in Republican Party politics. However, when *ABCNews.com* correspondent Jonathan Dube employed the romance frame for his coverage of Bush's speech, the sexist characterizations were hard to ignore. The headline read, "Bush Charms the Ladies: Republican Women Fall for George W." The subsequent story covered the political speech like a rock concert populated by overly emotional teenage fans, with Dube concluding that "it didn't take long for him to win their hearts, judging by the glowing smiles and thunderous applause that swept across the Convention Center auditorium."⁸³

If the romance frame trivializes candidates, voters, and democratic practices, perpetrators of the pornification frame actively attempt to subjugate political actors who only recently have begun to experience meaningful political

agency. Women, who make up over 50 percent of the population and have had the right to vote in the United States for nearly a century, in 2010 comprised only 17 percent of the U.S. House of Representatives (73 out of 435, plus 3 delegates from Guam, the Virgin Islands, and Washington, D.C.), 17 percent of the U.S. Senate (17 out of 100), and six state governorships.⁸⁴ Women have made inroads in presidential administrations during the past two decades, with women from both major political parties serving in key cabinet posts, including the Secretary of State. As the visibility of women's political power increased during the 2008 campaign, however, they experienced a cultural backlash—digitally disciplined in a wide array of cultural contexts through humor, punditry, and parody that fixated on women's bodies.

It is important to note, at this juncture in the argument, that observations about the symbolic impact of the pornification of political discourse do not rely on them being the only, or the most prominent, or even a frequent news frame. Unlike the argument about horserace journalism—which is premised on the ubiquity of the frame in campaign reporting—the argument about political pornification is one of presence and palatability. The *presence* of the romance narrative is a marker of the narrative fidelity that heterosexual romantic norms continue to have in twenty-first-century popular culture—even popular *political* culture where the notion of romance would seem disjunctive with civic republicanism. The frame is unremarkable because it somehow “fits” within accepted cultural notions of political relationships. We have grown to expect that our candidates for public office will “court” and “woo” us as suitors instead of “persuading” us as interlocutors. Once the romance frame was employed frequently enough to sound familiar, it was not too far a leap from gendered romance to sexist compliment, from sexist compliment to dirty joke, from dirty joke to hard-core exploitation, and finally to symbolic (and then political) annihilation. Consequently, the second part of my argument about the impact of political pornification is one of palatability.

Only a decade ago, “the C word” was still unspeakable in public political dialogue. Calling a candidate a “bitch,” although too common in everyday parlance, was a shocking departure from the norms of public civility when Connie Chung's infamous interview with Newt Gingrich's mother aired in 1995. A mere twelve years later, Senator Hillary Clinton's bid for the Democratic presidential nomination was inundated with words, images, and slogans that made “bitch” sound almost quaint. As an article in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* pointed out, Clinton faced “an onslaught of open misogynistic expression,” and the writer admonished the reader to “step lightly through

that thickly settled province of the Web you could call anti-Hillaryland," for one can too easily find oneself "knee-deep in 'bitch,' 'slut,' 'skank,' 'whore,' and, ultimately, what may be the most toxic four-letter word in the English language. We have never been here before."⁸⁵ As the Web becomes the source of choice for political news, in a climate where newspapers are shuttering their doors and consumers are customizing their online news delivery by subscribing only to their preferred pundits and bloggers, the Web can no longer be dismissed as the chaotic ramblings of the cultural and political fringe. As this study has demonstrated, even the mainstream cable political talk shows and print media picked up on many of the pornified images, recycling them sometimes under the protective guise of condemnation, but often as simply the latest political joke to be told around the cyberspace equivalent of the office water cooler.

It is the *presence* and *palatability* of political pornification that is critically significant in this study. The study does not claim, and does not need to claim, that the examples selected for examination are representative of all campaign discourse. Thankfully, they are not. But they are *indicative* of the persistent, pernicious backlash against women's political gains. Even—or perhaps especially—as women approach the last glass ceiling of U.S. electoral politics, they are disciplined by increasingly base, vile, and violent discourses that reinscribe the worst kind of misogynistic patriarchy. It is a misogyny that most U.S. voters would recoil from if asked about it in those surveys that gauge whether Americans are "ready to vote for a qualified woman presidential candidate." But surveys and focus groups are losing credibility as the best measurements of public opinion. In the age of the Internet, researchers are now turning to social networking sites, blogs, and other digital repositories of public opinion, many of which are regarded for their ability to record candid opinion because of contributor anonymity (in blog comments, for example), or their ability to access quickly the opinions of large numbers of "real people" (on Twitter, Facebook, and MySpace).⁸⁶ This study demonstrates that analysis of political pop culture can serve as another important gauge of public opinion. Communication scholars have long recognized that opinion polls are problematic sources of public attitudes because factors such as the wording and ordering of questions can make poll results unreliable.⁸⁷ Critical assessment such as that undertaken in this study reveals the persistence of stereotypes that many people insist have been vanquished from the public dialogue. If "postfeminism" refers to a time in which the goals of the feminist movement have largely been achieved, this study demonstrates that, regrettably,

the postfeminist era is not yet upon us. Critics and citizens have more work to do to ensure that women are equitably represented—in language, in culture, and in positions of political leadership.

During the summer of 2010, in his *New York Times* op-ed, Ross Douthat announced that the postfeminist dream actually had been realized. He began an assessment of the 2010 primary elections as follows: “When historians set out to date the moment when the women’s movement of the 1970s officially consolidated its gains, they could do worse than settle on last Tuesday’s primaries. It was a day when most of the major races featured female candidates, and all the major female candidates won.”⁸⁸ In fact, women candidates fared so well in the primary contests for both major political parties that media outlets dubbed it a new “Year of the Woman.”⁸⁹ *The Huffington Post’s* election summary typifies the media frame employed by a variety of news agencies, declaring:

It’s looking like a new “year of the woman” in politics. Eighteen years after a few glass ceilings were broken, hundreds of female candidates have set their sights on Congress, governorships and state legislatures, and a significant number racked up big wins in Tuesday’s primaries. Republican women, in particular, served notice to the old boys of the party.⁹⁰

California Republican candidates and ex-CEOs Carly Fiorina and Meg Whitman garnered national attention as they won their party’s nominations for U.S. Senate and governor, respectively. *Newsweek’s* Jonathan Alter asserted that “being a woman helped Senator Blanche Lincoln pull off a huge upset in a runoff over challenger Bill Halter,” and *Forbes* touted the so-called mama grizzlies, the rookie female candidates representing the Tea Party constituency who snagged endorsements from the governor-turned-conservative-media-personality Sarah Palin.⁹¹ Alter, a veteran political journalist, pointed to Nikki Haley’s showing in South Carolina’s Republican gubernatorial primary as evidence of women’s newfound power at the polls, explaining that she won “49 percent of the vote, more than twice that of her closest rival,” and became “the first woman in modern political history to have electoral success after being implicated in a sex scandal.” Alter remarked, “If someone had told me a few years ago that the next governor of South Carolina was almost certainly going to be an Indian-American woman accused of cheating on her husband, I’d have said they were high.”⁹² The primary showing did seem to suggest that Haley, who steadfastly denied all adultery charges, had

joined the long list of male candidates who have successfully weathered a sex scandal, indicating that in this regard and others, voters were prepared to hold women and men to similar (even similarly low) standards. However, Haley's framing in the media both before and after the primary illustrates that the pornification frame gained traction even during the first "Year of the Woman" of the twenty-first century.

On the first post-primary episode of his HBO show *Real Time with Bill Maher*, Maher did an extended comedy bit with mock campaign posters containing slogans Haley could use after weathering charges of adultery during the primary season. Maher introduced the piece by identifying Haley as "38 years old" and "very attractive," and explained that opponents "thought they were going to get her out of the race because two men came forward and said that they had extramarital relations with the very married Nikki Haley, and they thought that would hurt her. She won big. So, apparently this works and Nikki Haley is now going with this, and we have some of her campaign posters to prove it." Maher then ticked through the following slogans:

- "Nikki Haley: Are You Getting Off Better Than You Were Four Years Ago?"
- "Nikki Haley: Yes We Can! . . . but we have to hurry"
- "Nikki Haley: I'll Represent You Long Time" (with a bamboo shoot to flag the racial stereotyping, in case the grammatical error did not make it clear enough)
- "Nikki Haley: In Your Heart You Know She's Ripe"
- "Nikki Haley: You Come First"
- "Don't Stop! Don't Stop! OH GOD, DON'T STOP Thinking About Tomorrow"
- "Nikki Haley: Room 314"
- "Nikki Haley: Taking Care of the Little Guy"⁹³

Certainly, in the post-(Bill) Clinton era, late-night humor is populated with jokes about politicians and their sexual dalliances. Male and female politicians alike can be pornified. One difference, typified by Maher's bit, is the way in which the pornification of female politicians dehumanizes and discredits them. Maher's joke establishes fidelity to the campaign narrative by invoking slogans of modern presidents: Ronald Reagan's "Are you better off than you were four years ago?," Barack Obama's "Yes We Can," and Bill Clinton's "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow." However, it also rings true to stereotypes about women's sexuality: women exist to please men, to get

them off, to be available for quick, illicit encounters. Such women are then regarded as “ripe,” related to as sex workers, and put in their place as caretakers for men’s sexual gratification. In Maher’s narrative, Haley’s job is to service, rather than serve, her constituency.

In this respect, political pornification functions similarly to epithets such as “bitch,” hurled at women who have transgressed the boundaries of appropriate behavior for their gender and wielded too much public power. As I have argued elsewhere, “bitch” functions as a rhetoric of containment in contemporary political culture, one that is particularly debilitating for women because it relies on the logic of the double-bind between femininity and competence.⁹⁴ Male leaders can be tough and (appropriately) masculine. Female leaders can be either tough or (appropriately) feminine. Pulling off both at the same time is not impossible, but it is tricky terrain to navigate. Women candidates have worked diligently to break down the logic of that particular double-bind during the past two decades. As they succeed in displacing the “bitch” charge, however, a new rhetoric of containment emerges to discipline them once more. This “new” pornified political parlance, however, simply repurposes old stereotypes about gender and sex. When male candidates are pornified, they are typically still cast in positions of power: jokes about Bill Clinton situated him in the Oval Office with a woman hiding under his desk; the tabloid photo of a shirtless Barack Obama immortalized in the “I Got a Crush . . .” viral video was intercut with images of a swooning, scantily clad groupie pole-dancing on a bus. Haley, on the other hand, is cast in *powerless* roles in the Maher bit—roles that erode her credibility as a candidate and leader. *The Daily Beast*’s Rebecca Dana quotes Emily Gould in a column about the Haley controversy, who asserts that “Men are typically seen as having agency and women are typically seen as being acted upon in romantic relationships. . . . So then even when those stereotypical power dynamics aren’t really the ones at play, the culture-making machinery will simplify whatever the real story is until it is a more familiar . . . narrative.”⁹⁵

Of course, sometimes the disjunction between the familiar narrative and the facts at hand are so jarring as to produce a rhetorical adjustment. Reporting on the Haley story for the blog *Talking Points Memo*, Josh Marshall was prompted to create a new word to describe Haley as he pondered “which would make for a more colorful and entertaining story”: either “GOP operatives . . . conspiring to publicly allege phony affairs with Haley,” or exposing Haley as “an inveterate . . . what I guess you’d call *man-izer*.”⁹⁶ Mark Liberman,

writing for the Linguistic Data Consortium's *Language Log* blog, seized on this "sex-related linguistic innovation" and discussed the ways in which the Haley story revealed a "lexical lacuna. . . . A male politician who is prone to out-of-wedlock hookups would be called a *womanizer*, but there seems to be no appropriate equivalent for a female."⁹⁷ Liberman briefly traces the linguistic origin of the term "womanize," noting that adding "ize" to a word indicates that one will "do or follow some practice." He continues:

Thus to botanize is to go around "following some practice" associated with botany ("doing botany") and to womanize is to go around "following some practice" associated with women ("doing women"). This coinage worked in Victorian or Edwardian England (because why else would a man pay attention to women taken as a group?), and once established, it persisted as a useful term for a common concept.⁹⁸

Of course, Liberman immediately recognizes that there may be "some issues associated with *man* as the pragmatically unmarked category of human—'following some practice associated with men' may not connect quickly enough to sex."⁹⁹ One does not need to be a battle veteran of feminism's second wave to recognize that "man" is neither unmarked nor a pragmatically useful way to refer to people of all genders. Liberman concludes with this jaunty sentiment: "As powerful women become more and more common, we'll need some word for the inveterate . . . um, manizers among them, and I'll be rooting for Josh's coinage."¹⁰⁰

Does the emergence of a term like "manizer" indicate the leveling of the political playing field? For every blogger saluting the trend of "powerful women becoming more and more common," there are others anticipating "so many sexy stories about Nikki Haley's boy-toys,"¹⁰¹ and charging that "GOP Candidate Nikki Haley Can Not Keep Her Knickers On."¹⁰² This essay, however, is less concerned with the musings of a few stray bloggers and more concerned with the broader story of women's political agency that is bantered about on cable newscasts, peddled by pundits, and etched into the Internet—that twenty-first-century incarnation of cave-wall drawings. Humans have always been storytelling animals. As critics, we consider not only what stories teach us, but also what they reveal about us. Unfortunately, this particular story demonstrates that if you're a woman running for public office, you're just a few jokes away from becoming a . . . well, I can't write it here, but it rhymes with blunt.

NOTES

1. "Only You Can Silence Yourself PSAs," *Declare Yourself*, http://www.declareyourself.com/multimedia/gallery_197.html (accessed January 2011).
2. For example, the *Declare Yourself* ad campaign employed celebrity photographers Dave LaChapelle and Mark Liddell, who both work primarily in the entertainment industry. The photos exhibit techniques commonly deployed in fashion photography and advertising, many of which dehumanize women. See Jean Kilbourne's series of documentary films, *Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women*. The most recent edition is Jean Kilbourne, *Killing Us Softly 4*, directed by Sut Jhally (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2010). For a more general discussion of marketing strategies employed in political campaigns, see Bruce I. Newman, *The Marketing of the President: Political Marketing as Campaign Strategy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994); Jules Witcover, *No Way to Pick a President: How Money and Hired Guns Have Debased American Elections* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
3. AlarajRogers (username), blog response to "Hillary Sexism Watch: If a Woman is President, Who Will Iron the Shirts?," *Feministing.com*, January 8, 2008, http://feministing.com/2008/01/08/hillary_sexism_watch_if_a_woma_1/comment-page-1/#comments (accessed January 2011).
4. For a discussion of the U.S. presidency as white and male, see Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn J. Parry-Giles, "The West Wing's Prime-Time Presidentiality: Mimesis and Catharsis in a Postmodern Romance," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 209–27; and Janis L. Edwards, ed., *Gender and Political Communication in America: Rhetoric, Representation, and Display* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).
5. The terms "pornified," "porning," and "pornification" have appeared in a number of books, including Pamela Paul, *Pornified: How Pornography is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families* (New York: Times Books, 2005); Laura Ingraham, *Power to the People* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2007); and Carmine Sarracino and Kevin M. Scott, *The Porning of America: Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008).
6. Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 5–6. For additional discussion of framing, see Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman, *The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories that Shape the Political World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
7. Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), quotation on 60, and conventions discussed on 56–63.

8. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 166–67. For additional discussion of the game/strategy frame, see Joseph N. Capella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and James Fallows, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (New York: Vintage, 1997).
9. Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication* 57 (2007): 164.
10. "Starting Gate: The Crucible of Events." http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-502163_162-4470739-502163.html (accessed January 2011).
11. Associated Press, "Parties Jockey for an Edge on Economic Aid," October 13, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27166063/> (accessed January 2011).
12. Clark Hoyt, "The Campaign and the Horse Race," *New York Times*, November 18, 2007, 14. This result is notable insofar as the study evaluated news coverage occurring a full year before the election rather than that which occurred closer to election day, when candidates would be closer to the "home stretch," so to speak.
13. Dan Hahn, *Political Communication: Rhetoric, Government, and Citizens*, 2nd ed. (State College, PA: Strata, 2003), 163.
14. Hahn, *Political Communication*, 163.
15. Alec MacGillis, "Obama Woos the Rust Belt," *New Statesman*, October 9, 2008, <http://www.newstatesman.com/north-america/2008/10/barack-obama-vote-usa-union> (accessed January 2011).
16. Sam Stein, "Biden, Clinton To Unite as Obama Woos Women Voters," *Huffington Post*, September 16, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/09/16/biden-clinton-event-plann_n_126717.html (accessed January 2011).
17. Sarah Lai Stirland, "Obama Woos Silicon Valley," *Wired Blog Network*, November 14, 2007, <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2007/11/obama-unveils-s/> (accessed January 2011).
18. Dana Bash, "McCain Courts Women Voters," *ElectionCenter2008*, April 10, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/04/10/mccain.women.voters/index.html> (accessed January 2011).
19. "McCain Courts Hispanic Voters," *ElectionCenter2008*, May 5, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/05/05/mccain/index.html> (accessed January 2011).
20. Ariel Sabar, "McCain Courts Blue-Collar Democrats," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 7, 2008, <http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2008/0507/p01s02-uspo.html> (accessed January 2011).
21. Marc Ambinder, "McCain Courts Gay Vote in *Blade* Interview," *The Atlantic*, October 1, 2008, http://marcambinder.theatlantic.com/archives/2008/10/mccain_courts_gay_vote

- _in_blad.php* (accessed October 19, 2008).
22. Bash, "McCain Courts Women Voters."
 23. Ewan MacAskill, "Barack Obama: Charm Offensive Wins Over Angry Crowd . . . of Reporters," *The Guardian UK*, July 26, 2008, <http://www.truthout.org/article/obama-charms-angry-reporters> (accessed January 2011).
 24. "Obama Charms the Pants Off the World," *The Daily Dogfood*, July 21, 2008, <http://www.thedailydogfood.com/2008/07/obama-charms-pants-off-world-mccain.html> (accessed February 2011).
 25. "Ultimate Bromance," *The Hotline*, September 23, 2008, www.NationalJournal.com (accessed October 19, 2008).
 26. See, for example, Bella Kelly, "Dade Women Swoon Over Ability! Can Sex Appeal Win Vote?" *The Miami News*, August 10, 1960, B1.
 27. Mary Douglas Vavrus, "From Women of the Year to 'Soccer Moms': The Case of the Incredible Shrinking Women," *Political Communication* 17 (2000): 193–213.
 28. Karrin Vasby Anderson and Jessie Stewart, "Politics and the Single Woman: the 'Sex and the City Voter' in Campaign 2004," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8 (2005): 595–616.
 29. Jamieson, *Dirty Politics*, 186.
 30. Entman, "Cascading Activation," *Political Communication* 20 (2003): 415–32, 417.
 31. See, for example, Karrin Vasby Anderson and Kristina Horn Sheeler, *Governing Codes: Gender, Metaphor, and Political Identity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); Greg Dickinson and Karrin Vasby Anderson, "Fallen: OJ Simpson, Hillary Rodham Clinton and the Recentring of White Patriarchy," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 1 (2004): 271–96; Karrin Vasby Anderson, "Hillary Rodham Clinton as 'Madonna': The Role of Metaphor and Oxymoron in Image Restoration," *Women's Studies in Communication* 25 (2002): 105–32; Molly Mayhead and Brenda DeVore Marshall, eds., *Navigating Boundaries: The Rhetoric of Women Governors* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000); Karrin Vasby Anderson, "'Rhymes with Rich': 'Bitch' as a Tool of Containment in Contemporary American Politics," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 2 (1999): 599–623; Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Discursive Performance of Femininity: Hating Hillary," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 1 (1998): 1–19; and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
 32. Shanto Iyengar, Nicholas A. Valentino, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Adam F. Simon, "Running as a Woman: Gender Stereotyping in Political Campaigns," in *Women, Media, and Politics*, ed. Pippa Norris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 79. For additional discussion of the variety of gendered ways in which women candidates are framed, see Edwards, *Gender and Political Communication in America*; and Molly A. Mayhead and Brenda Devore Marshall, *Women's Political Discourse: A 21st Century Perspective* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

33. Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 118.
34. Michael Calvin McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54 (1990): 274–89, quotes on 274 and 288.
35. McGee, "Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture," 287.
36. See, for example, Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Penguin, 1981); Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (Minneapolis, MN: Organization Against Pornography, 1988); Michael Kimmel, ed., *Men Confront Pornography* (New York, NY: Meridian, 1990); and Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995).
37. See, for example, Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston, MA: Routledge, 1984), 267–319; Wendy McElroy, *XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); and Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
38. See, for example, Naomi Wolf, *Fire with Fire* (New York: Random House, 1993); and Camille Paglia, *Vamps and Tramps* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
39. See Paul, *Pornified*; Ingraham, *Power to the People*; and Sarracino and Scott, *The Porning of America*.
40. For discussions of academic and legal perspectives on pornography and feminism, see, for example, Duggan and Hunter, *Sex Wars*, and Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged*.
41. See Ashley Womble, "Senator is the Centerfold," *Cosmopolitan*, September 22, 2009, <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/celebrity/news/scott-brown-nude-in-cosmo> (accessed January 2011).
42. Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind*, 53.
43. "Palin's Sexy Librarian Glasses Spark Interest in Eyewear," *Stylelist*, September 9, 2008, <http://www.stylelist.com/2008/09/09/palins-sexy-librarian-glasses-spark-interest-in-eyewear/> (accessed January 2011).
44. Christopher Orr, "Sarah Palin as Sexy Librarian," *The Plank*, blog for *The New Republic*, September 5, 2008, <http://www.tnr.com/blog/the-plank/sarah-palin-sexy-librarian> (accessed January 2011).
45. Many of the images assessed in this study spread virally as email attachments or blog postings. When possible, I have tracked the image to its original source. Otherwise I cite the email or blog source where I found the image. See Royce Williams, "O-Mama Spoof of Alaska Statehood Plate," *AKPL8S*, September 6, 2008, <http://blog.akplates>.

- org/2008/09/o-mama-spoof-of-alaska-statehood-plate.html (accessed January 2011); *tabtoons@telus.net* (author credit), "Campaign Buttons," *Calgary Sun*, August 29, 2008, www.caglecartoons.com (accessed January 2011).
46. Charlotte Hilton Anderson, "Sarah Palin Bikini Pictures: Fake Photos Hit the Web," *The Huffington Post*, September 2, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/charlotte-hilton-andersen/sarah-palin-bikini-pictur_b_123234.html (accessed January 2011).
 47. See, for example, the *MILF McCain '08* website at <http://milfmccain.spreadshirt.com/> (accessed October 20, 2008), and the poster with Palin's picture and the caption "MILF" on the *cafePress* website at <http://art.cafePress.com/item/sarah-palin-milf-small-poster/302525295> (accessed October 20, 2008). The narrative of the experienced woman engaging an eager younger man in sex is a staple of popular culture, exemplified in characters such as *The Graduate's* Mrs. Robinson, *Desperate Housewives'* Gabrielle, *Lipstick Jungle's* Nico, and in the Fountains Of Wayne hit song, "Stacy's Mom Has Got It Goin' On."
 48. The biblical story of Esther is the archetypal example of this phenomenon—a narrative that Elizabeth Cady Stanton strongly rejected in her version of *The Woman's Bible*. Contemporarily, the influence of political spouses has been reduced to "pillow talk," suggesting that (mostly) female spouses of political leaders accessed political power primarily via the conjugal bed.
 49. Carrie Dann, "Desperately Searching for Sarah," September 28, 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26903680/page/2/> (accessed January 2011).
 50. "Larry Flynt is Hustling Up an Ala-skin flick with Sarah Palin Look-Alike," *The New York Daily News*, October 2, 2008, http://www.nydailynews.com/gossip/2008/10/02/2008-10-02_larry_flynt_is_hustling_up_an_alaskin_fl.html (accessed January 2011).
 51. "Nailin' Paylin: Another Minute of Hustler Palin-Spoof Porn," *Huffington Post*, October 24, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/10/24/nailin-paylin-another-min_n_137592.html (accessed January 2011).
 52. "'Nailin Paylin': Hustler's Palin Porn Details," *Huffington Post*, October 3, 2008, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/10/03/nailin-paylin-hustlers-pa_n_131581.html (accessed January 2011).
 53. Tracy Clark-Flory, "Sneak Peek: The Palin Porno," *Salon.com*, October 20, 2008, Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed June 27, 2009); Tommy Christopher, "Hustler Endorses 'Serra Paylin,'" *Politics Daily*, October 21, 2008, <http://www.politicsdaily.com/2008/10/21/hustler-releases-palin-inspired-porn-flick/> (accessed January 2011); "Nalin' Paylin: The Palin Porn Flick," *Right Wing News*, October 15, 2008, Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed June 27, 2009); and "Is Larry Flint Nailin' Palin?" *DCRepublican.com*, October 21, 2008, <http://dcrepublican.com/2008/10/21/is-larry-flint-nailin-palin/> (accessed January 2011).

54. "Is Larry Flint Nailin' Palin?"
55. Transcript reprinted in "Gingrich Cries Foul over Mom's Whisper," *Sacramento Bee*, January 5, 1995, A1, Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed February 2, 1996); also see Roger Simon, "Just Answer in a Whisper: Can Connie be Trusted?" *Baltimore Sun*, January 6, 1995, Final Edition, 2A, Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed February 2, 1996).
56. Anderson, "Rhymes with Rich," 599–23.
57. Anonymous comment, response to Perry Bacon Jr., "Clinton: GOP Should Apologize to America," *The Trial: A Daily Diary of Campaign 2008*, July 13, 2008, http://blog.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/07/13/clinton_gop_should_apologize_t.html (accessed January 2011).
58. Katharine Mieszkowski, "More Ways to Call Hillary Clinton the C-Word," *broadsheet*, January 25, 2008, http://www.salon.com/life/broadsheet/2008/01/25/hillary_clinton (accessed January 2011).
59. Carol Lloyd, "The C-Word as a Political Tool," *broadsheet*, January 24, 2008, http://www.salon.com/life/broadsheet/2008/01/24/roger_stone (accessed January 2011). The IRS filing for Citizens United Not Timid is available at *Talking Points Memo Document Collection*, January 23, 2008, <http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/docs/citizens-not-timid/> (accessed January 2011).
60. Lloyd, "The C-Word as a Political Tool."
61. Jon Stewart, "Indecision 2008—Obama Fist Bump" (video), *The Daily Show*, June 11, 2008, <http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=173064&title=indecision-2008-obama-fist-bump> (accessed January 2011), author's transcript.
62. Quoted in "Hillary Clinton—Rising Above Sexism & Misogyny," video montage, May 19, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbzT2YqhGT4> (accessed January 2011).
63. The exchange was described on the *Media Matters for America* website, which also contained video of the full conversation. See Eric Boehlert and Jamison Foser, "Cliff May on Sen. Clinton: 'At Least Call Her a Vaginal-American,'" *Media Matters for America*, October 16, 2007, http://mediamatters.org/items/200710160010?f=s_search (accessed January 2011), author's transcript.
64. "Cunt," *OED Online*, 2nd ed., <http://dictionary.oed.com/> (accessed June 2010).
65. Quoted in "Hillary Clinton—Rising Above Sexism & Misogyny."
66. Quoted in "Hillary Clinton—Rising Above Sexism & Misogyny."
67. Quoted in "Hillary Clinton—Rising Above Sexism & Misogyny."
68. Quoted in "Hillary Clinton: Mad As Hell/Bitch," video montage, April 6, 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcdnINZg2iM> (accessed January 2011), author's transcript.
69. Obama Girl [Amber Lee Ettinger], "Crush on Obama," produced by Ben Relles, June 13, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKsoXHYICqU> (accessed January 2011).

70. "About Us: The Barely Political Team," *www.BarelyPolitical.com/page/about* (accessed January 2011).
71. Jose Antonio Vargas, "Obama Crush . . . With Eyeliner," June 14, 2007, *Channel '08*, http://blog.washingtonpost.com/channel-08/2007/06/obama_crush_with_eyeliner.html (accessed January 2011).
72. Taryn Southern, "Hott 4 Hill," July 2, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Sudw-4ghVe8> (accessed January 2011).
73. Links to relevant episodes can be found at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/1990852/> (accessed October 21, 2008).
74. Kate Phillips, "2008: Obama Girl and More," June 13, 2007, *The Caucus*, <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/06/13/2008-obama-girl-and-more/> (accessed January 2011).
75. George Stephanopoulos, "Roundtable," *This Week . . . with George Stephanopoulos*, June 17, 2007, LexisNexis Academic (accessed October 21, 2008).
76. Dan Harris and David Wright, "Obamagirl; Video Rocks Presidential Campaign," *World News Sunday*, June 17, 2007, LexisNexis Academic (accessed February 2011).
77. *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, July 24, 2008, author's transcript.
78. This argument is powerfully illustrated in the *Dreamworlds* documentary trilogy produced by Sut Jhally and the *Media Education Foundation*. See an unabridged preview of *Dreamworlds 3* at <http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=223> (accessed January 2011).
79. "Declare Yourself: La Toya," *Coloribus*, 2004–2009, <http://www.coloribus.com/adsarchive/prints/declare-yourself-la-toya-204888/> (accessed January 2011).
80. For analysis of the construction of single women voters in 2004, see Anderson and Stewart, "Politics and the Single Woman."
81. Murali Balaji, "Owning Black Masculinity: The Intersection of Cultural Commodification and Self-Construction in Rap Music Videos," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2 (2009): 22. See also R. L. Jackson, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); and R. Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).
82. Some parliamentary systems increasingly emphasize individual candidate appeal. For example, when the May 2010 British election included a "presidential-style TV debate," many took it as a sign of the "presidentialization of U.K. politics." See, for example, Benn Quinn, "British Election: Nick Clegg Wins U.K.'s First Presidential-Style TV Debates," *CSMonitor.com*, April 16, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2010/0416/British-election-Nick-Clegg-wins-UK-s-first-presidential-style-TV-debates> (accessed January 2011). Also see Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb, eds., *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies* (Oxford:

- Oxford University Press, 2005).
83. Jonathan Dube, "Bush Charms the Ladies," *ABCNews.com*, October 15, 1999, (accessed October 19, 1999).
 84. "Facts on Women in Congress 2010," *Center for American Women and Politics*, http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/Congress-CurrentFacts.php (accessed January 2011); "Women in Statewide Elective Executive Office 2010," *Center for American Women and Politics*, http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/Statewide-Current.php (accessed January 2011).
 85. Jonathan Tilove, "Woman-Hating Glee Club," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, December 11, 2007, <http://www.nola.com/living/t-p/index.ssf?/base/living-9/1197354420308740.xml&coll=1> (accessed January 2011).
 86. See, for example, Emily Steel, "The New Focus Groups: Online Networks: Proprietary Panels Help Consumer Companies Shape Products, Ads," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120027230906987357.html> (accessed January 2011); and Alex Cohen, "Artists Use Social Media for Public Feedback," *All Things Considered*, June 18, 2009, www.npr.org (accessed June 28, 2009).
 87. J. Michael Hogan, "George Gallup and the Rhetoric of Scientific Democracy," *Communication Monographs* 64 (1997): 161–79.
 88. Ross Douthat, "No Mystique About Feminism," *New York Times*, June 13, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/opinion/14douthat.html> (accessed January 2011).
 89. The original "Year of the Woman" was 1992, when women voters, ostensibly incensed over Anita Hill's treatment during Clarence Thomas's Supreme Court confirmation hearings, ushered a record number of women into office. See Vavrus, "From Women of the Year to 'Soccer Moms.'"
 90. Liz Sidoti, "Primary Results in Arkansas, Nevada and California Will Set Stage for 2010 Election," *The Huffington Post*, June 9, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/06/08/primary-results-in-arkans_n_604009.html (accessed January 2011). Also see Ewen MacAskill, "U.S. Primary Results Lead Media to Hail this the 'Year of the Woman,'" *The Guardian*, June 12, 2010, http://news.yahoo.com/s/ynews/20100610/pl_ynews/ynews_pl2531 (accessed January 2011); and Liz Goodwin, "'Year of the Woman' Narrative Seduces Media after Primary Vote," *The Newsroom*, June 10, 2010, http://news.yahoo.com/s/ynews/20100610/pl_ynews/ynews_pl2531 (accessed January 2011).
 91. Caroline Howard, "Mama Grizzlies on the Campaign Trail," *Forbes*, June 10, 2010, <http://blogs.forbes.com/work-in-progress/2010/06/10/women-politicians-mama-grizzlies-campaign-trail/> (accessed January 2011).
 92. Jonathan Alter, "Ladies' Night," *Newsweek*, June 9, 2010, <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/06/09/jonathan-alter-on-what-the-june-primary-results-mean.html> (accessed January 2011).

93. *Real Time with Bill Maher*, episode 188, June 11, 2010, HBO. A video excerpt is available at <http://rackjite.com/archives/5131-Video-Bill-Maher-Arizona-wins-Stupidest-State-and-Nikki-Ho-Haley.html> (accessed January 2011), author's transcript.
94. Anderson, "Rhymes with Rich."
95. Rebecca Dana, "Why Women Don't Have Sex Scandals," *The Daily Beast*, December 11, 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2009-12-11/why-women-dont-have-sex-scandals/> (accessed January 2011).
96. Josh Marshall, "Somethin' in the Water Down There," *TPM*, June 2, 2010, http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com/archives/2010/06/somethin_in_the_water_down_there.php (accessed January 2011), emphasis added.
97. Mark Liberman, "Is Nikki Haley a Manizer?" *Language Log*, June 4, 2010, <http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=2367> (accessed January 2011).
98. Liberman, "Is Nikki Haley a Manizer?"
99. Liberman, "Is Nikki Haley a Manizer?"
100. Liberman, "Is Nikki Haley a Manizer?"
101. "Liveblogging the Razorback Blanche Lincoln-Palmetto Nikki Haley Memorial Pig Race," *Wonkette*, June 8, 2010, <http://wonkette.com/415875/liveblogging-the-razorback-blanche-lincoln-palmetto-nikki-haley-memorial-pig-race> (accessed January 2011).
102. "GOP Candidate Nikki Haley Can Not Keep Her Knickers On," *Caffeinated Politics*, June 3, 2010, <http://dekerivers.wordpress.com/2010/06/03/gop-candidate-nikki-haley-can-not-keep-her-knickers-on/> (accessed January 2011).

Copyright of Rhetoric & Public Affairs is the property of Michigan State University Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.