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The Portrayal of Powerful Women in the Media

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is to investigate the portrayal of powerful women in the media and to gain a perspective of different ways the media tend to elaborate and focus on gender issues to a greater extent than the general public may think. I intend to demonstrate that powerful women are often portrayed unfairly in the media and that this could affect the progress they make in their careers. I hypothesize that although women are making strides in the right direction, the often negative portrayal of powerful women in the media can be unwarranted and lead to the unfair perception of women in powerful positions.

First, I address background information that includes the progress professional and influential women have made in corporate America. I then discuss how many of these advancements, although they are a start, are not as substantial as they should be in the twenty-first century. Next, I investigate the possibility that the media might hinder women's abilities to move up into positions of power due the influence that the media have on our perceptions and behaviors.

To demonstrate that the media do in fact focus on gender issues when portraying powerful women, I investigated how the media portrayed three specific women in power. I chose to examine media portrayals of Carly Fiorina, former CEO of Hewlett-Packard, Katie Couric, anchor of CBS Evening News, and Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. By concentrating not only on women in corporate America, but also on a woman in the world of journalism, and one in the political world, I was able to gain a perspective on whether unfair media portrayals of women in corporations are parallel in their portrayals of influential women in general.

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POSITIVES

Presently, there are many men and women who argue that the movement to treat women equally in the corporate world is going along well and they have no complaints. There are many women who are making strides in the corporate world and beyond, and there is a lot to be said of their success. For example, the top seven positions on Fortune's 2006 Most Powerful Women list are held by CEOs, and the list of brand-name companies with women chief executives is longer and more impressive than ever. It includes PepsiCo, Xerox, eBay, ADM, Kraft Foods, Sara Lee, and Avon (Sellers, 2006).

After a year of many promotions, there are several women who took the reins at large, prominent Fortune 500 companies (Sellers, 2006). In June, Irene B. Rosenfeld was named the chief executive of Kraft Foods; Patricia A. Woertz jumped from Chevron Corporation to become chief executive at the chemical giant Archer Daniels Miland, and Indra Nooyi ascended to the top seat at PepsiCo. (Creswell, 2006). Indra Nooyi has taken pleasure in standing out from ordinary executives, especially the men, and is bold proof that powerful women need not tone down their style to get ahead (Creswell, 2006). However, she did tell Fortune a few years ago that, "There is no question that women who reach the top have to perform at a higher level" than men (Sellers, 2006, p. 137). Maggie Wilderotter became CEO of Citizens Communications and credits her early boost to a male boss who gave her numerous opportunities in the emerging cable industry in the 1970s (Creswell, 2006). She said she was prepared to be a leader and "A lot of that had to with the entrepreneurial founder of the company, Bob Matthews, who built a culture where women were given opportunities" (Creswell, 2006, p. 9).

Carol Bartz, former chief executive of Autodesk, is another success story. She combined a "first-rate mind with hard work and decisive career moves" to rise through the male-dominated technology industry in the 1980s (Creswell, 2006). By the early 1990s, Bartz had become one of the first women to run a large corporation (Creswell, 2006). She turned Autodesk into a leading international software company, and

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although she has stepped down as chief executive, she remains the executive chairwoman of its board (Creswell, 2006).

Women are also starting to get more promotions than they have in the past and are starting to be recognized for their talents more often in the corporate world than ever before. This is demonstrated by the fact that the number of women holding the top executive positions in the Fortune 500 doubled from five in August 2001 to ten in August 2006. Currently, there are more than 20 female CEOs in Fortune's top 1,000 lists (Sellers, 2006).

Mary Minnick, nicknamed "Queen of Pop," is a perfect example (Foust, 2006). Minnick began her career at Coca-Cola in 1983 and managed to work her way up the corporate ladder (Foust, 2006). In 2000, she was promoted to President of Coca-Cola operations in Japan (Foust, 2006). Then, in 2002, she was promoted yet again, heading up all of Coke's Asian operations as President and Chief Operating Officer of the Asia Group (Foust, 2006). Finally, in May 2005 she was appointed President, Marketing, Strategy and Innovation and she is a member of the Company's Executive Committee (Foust, 2006). Minnick has been putting her innovative talent to work and she's in the process of diversifying Coca-Cola even further than it already is (Foust, 2006).

Recent studies have demonstrated that women continue to add value to companies when they are part of executive management (Levenson, Tkaczyk, & Yang, 2006). Indra Nooyi, for example, is Pepsi's new Chief and is a powerful force behind the consumer giant's strong profit pipeline and \$108 billion stock market valuation (Levenson et al., 2006). Anne Mulcahy, Chairman and CEO of Xerox, referred to as the "turnaround magician," continues to drive steady growth of the \$15.7 billion company (Levenson et al., 2006). The Vice Chair of Beauty and Health at Proctor & Gamble, Susan Arnold, added the personal health, oral care, and pharmaceutical businesses to her beauty portfolio. At \$29 billion in sales, her division brings in 42% of Proctor & Gamble's revenues (Levenson et al., 2006). Also, Andrea Jung, Chairman and CEO of Avon, has a turnaround plan for the \$8 billion beauty company

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(Levenson et al., 2006). Steps she has taken towards achieving this goal include changing the company's product strategy, reviving its sales representatives, engaging in aggressive global expansion, implementing cost-cutting initiatives, and developing an image makeover for the company (Levenson et al., 2006).

Further research suggests that women on corporate boards can even boost the companies' bottom lines (Konrad, 2007). "In the past five years we've seen more companies and more CEOs make a real business case for diversity," said Julie Nugent, senior associate at Catalyst. "When you include and advance women, it helps you understand your customers, your clients, and other stakeholders. Without fail, it translates into the bottom line" (Konrad, 2007, p. 66). Catalyst, a nonprofit organization working to expand opportunities for women in business, takes an annual census of women in the Fortune 500 (Konrad, 2007). According to a recent Catalyst study, among the top 500 companies, those with the highest percentage of women corporate officers yielded, on average, a 35% higher return on equity and a 34% higher total return to shareholders than those companies with the lowest percentage of women corporate officers (Konrad, 2007).

Promoting women, and thus keeping them happy, really does pay off. Companies have previously competed with each other on price alone; recently they started competing to bring costs and expenses down while increasing productivity. Pink Magazine predicted that the next thing companies will strive to be best at is human capital management (Konrad, 2007). With 76% of baby boomers beginning to retire by the year 2014, women will enter the workforce for the first time in greater numbers than men (Konrad, 2007).

In an effort to discover why some companies are so much better at promoting women and keeping them at the top, Catalyst examined three big companies in traditionally male-dominated industries that defy the expected statistical norms for the presence of a high female representation in management (Levenson, 2006). The first company they researched is Reynolds American, a tobacco giant, which is the only Fortune 500 Company to have women in the CEO and CFO positions, as well as a female

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COO running its largest subsidiary (Levenson, 2006). Next was DuPont, where two women run three of the company's five business segments, bringing in \$18 billion of the company's \$27 billion annual revenues (Levenson, 2006). Finally, Honeywell, unlike any of its competitors, has an equal number of men and women, two each, as divisional Chief Executive Officers (Levenson, 2006).

What Catalyst learned from this study was that all three companies are fanatical about measurable results (Levenson, 2006). The three companies say they value performance, but they go further by creating the conditions, empirical standards, clear goals, and frequent reviews that enable them to identify and reward high performers, regardless of sex (Levenson, 2006). Diane Gulyas, who heads the \$6.8 billion Performance Materials division at Honeywell, said, "There's a willingness here to put you in high-risk, high rewards situations" (Levenson, 2006, p. 189). Gulyas is a perfect example of someone who was able to learn along the way and catch management's attention as a high performer (Levenson, 2006). There is definitely a chain reaction effect: high-level female executives can inspire women throughout the organization and help draw new talent (Levenson, 2006). Reynolds CEO Susan Ivey said, "It's easy for companies to say they don't have a glass ceiling, but when you walk in the door here, it's eminently clear that we don't" (Levenson, 2006, p. 189).

Not only is the nation seeing an increase in the number of women entering the corporate world, but the percentage of women in colleges, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, is also rising. Take for example Chapel Hill Law School. There were two women in the 1969 class and today, over 50% of the entering class is female (Trawick, 2006). The same is true of the law schools at Campbell University and North Carolina Central University (Trawick, 2006). In an article, "Watch it, young man, woman rule," Gary Trawick speculated on the likely result of this increased percentage of women in higher education (2006). He predicted that when these women are fifteen years into the workforce, the positions of power traditionally held by men are going to be equally, if not more, held by women (Trawick, 2006). Over half of the lawyers, judges, school principals, bankers, members of boards of

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directors, and so on are going to be women (Trawick, 2006). He joked, “The boss is just as apt to wear a skirt as trousers” (Trawick, 2006, p. 11A).

Trawick also predicted that the most significant changes are more likely to be felt in the political arena rather than in the corporate world (2006). Congress, state legislators, county commissions, and town boards are currently made up of mostly men (Trawick, 2006). Incumbents are hard to beat. However, in the next fifteen years these men are going to be aging out (Trawick, 2006). The result is going to be that their seats are just as likely to be filled by women as by men (Trawick, 2006). Trawick anticipated that the nation may have its first really serious contender for president in Hilary Clinton and North Carolina will almost certainly have its first serious contender for governor in Beverly Perdue (Trawick, 2006). As women seize political power, a lot of rules are going to change. Trawick commented, “Women have fought for many, many years to have an equal standing in the public world and now it’s going to be a short time coming” (Trawick, 2006, p. 11A).

Some colleges and universities are also making efforts in the curriculum to explore the importance of gender diversity in the corporate world. For example, Columbia Business School has recently introduced a new program that teaches the importance of a more empathic and sensitive leadership style in globalized business, as opposed to the “command-and-control style” that has dominated the White House and Pentagon for so many years (Dowd, 2006). Students learn how to read facial expressions, body language and posture, and get coaching on their brain’s “mirror neurons,” that is, what they’re thinking and feeling and how that can affect others (Dowd, 2006). “This less autocratic leadership style draws on capabilities in which women are as good as men,” said Michael Morris, a professor of psychology and management who is running the business school’s new program (Dowd, 2006, p. B7).

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NEGATIVES

While the movement to treat women equally in the corporate world and give them the opportunity with men to move up the rungs of the corporate ladder is showing promising results, many feel that the advances made thus far are not sufficient. The big question seems to be that for all the talk about diversity in the ranks of corporate executives, have women really made much progress?

While some people, both men and women, are willing to argue that having ten top executives among the Fortune 500 is a great accomplishment, others believe that if progress for women continues at the rate it has been going for the past decade, it will take America 40 years to reach male-female parity (Fairfax, 2005). Many argue that the statistics of women in powerful positions are just not where they ought to be for the twenty-first century (Fairfax, 2005).

When it comes to business, women are still very much a minority. In 2003, women held 13.6% of available board seats at Fortune 500 companies (Fairfax, 2005). Moreover, these figures appear particularly low when compared to the number of women in the labor force and school population (Fairfax, 2005). In 2004, women comprised roughly 46% of the US labor force and held more than 50% of all managerial and professional positions (Fairfax, 2005). Then too, in 2002, women earned 57.4% of all bachelor's degrees in the US, 58.7% of all master's degrees, 46.3% of all doctorate degrees, and 48% of all law degrees (Fairfax, 2005). Women also make up 35% of all MBA degree recipients and 2% of Fortune's 500 CEOs (Fairfax, 2005). When viewed in this context, and taking into consideration all of the education and knowledge that they have, women appear to be under-represented in the corporate board room (Fairfax, 2005). Ilene Lang, president of Catalyst, said, "What we've found is that women rise to the middle, but they don't easily get to the top" (Levenson, 2006, p. 189).

Furthermore, women are still paid less than men in many cases. Women earn 77 cents for every dollar men are paid (Seigel, 2007). As of 2003, the average woman CEO received about 30% less in pay, bonuses, and options than did their males

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counterparts (Morton, 2003). This amounted to a difference between \$900,000 a year and \$1.3 million (Morton, 2003). The median annual pay for female CEOs at the largest nonprofit organizations is \$170,180, compared to \$264,602 for males (Morton, 2003).

The Wall Street Journal coined the term “glass ceiling” more than twenty years ago, and it still exists despite the efforts of human resources departments across the continent (Maich, 2005). Women comprise about 46% of America’s workforce but fewer than 8% of its top managers, according to the National Association of Women Business Owners (Maich, 2005). Numbers in Canada and Europe are similar. Almost half the companies in Canada’s benchmark stock index do not have a single woman on their board of directors (why Maich, 2005). The reasons for this are quite complicated.

For one thing, Catalyst research has shown that women are almost two and one half times as likely to be channeled into staff jobs like HR and communication rather than into operating roles where they would be generating revenue and managing profit and loss (Creswell, 2006). Illene Lang said, “When more women hold line positions, there will be more women top earners and CEOs” (Creswell, 2006, p. 9). Catalyst also found that one of the biggest impediments to women’s ascent to corporate ranks is the thick layer of men who dominate the boardrooms and corner offices around the country (Creswell, 2006). Bartz said, “The men in the boardroom and the men at the top are choosing and tend to choose who they are comfortable with: other men” (Creswell, 2006, p. 9). A recent experiment by Lydia Bigelow and Judi McLean Parks, professors at Washington University in St. Louis’ Olin School of Business, asked, “How would potential investors react if they received one of two prospectuses identical in every respect but one, the gender of the person running the company” (Gender Stereotypes, 2006)? Although the offerings presented CEOs with identical resumes, one CEO was a man and the other was a woman (“Gender Stereotypes,” 2006). What a difference one minor detail made! Male investors were prepared to invest three times more money in the male-run company as they were in the female-run firm, which they viewed as a riskier proposition (“Gender Stereotypes,” 2006).

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When asked what the CEO should be paid, they determined the woman should be paid only 86% of the male CEO's compensation ("Gender Stereotypes," 2006).

In another recently released study, Catalyst found executives of both genders generally consider men to be better at "take-charge behaviors" such as decision making and delegating responsibility ("Why the Glass," 2005). Executives of both genders also consider women better than men at "take-care" behaviors such as being supportive and rewarding others (Why the Glass, 2005). Most men see men as problem solvers, and a lot of women also perceive men as problem solvers (Why the Glass, 2005). This can be a huge barrier to advancement because problem solving is widely considered the most important leadership skill (Why the Glass, 2005). Jeanine Prime, author of the study, said, "Adding insult to injury, these perceptions mean women may have the least interpersonal power with people who report to them" (Why the Glass, 2005, p. 21).

According to Julie Creswell of The New York Times, in the past the explanation was that women simply had not been in the work force long enough and with patience the pipeline would fill (2006). This explanation is no longer valid, as many top business schools have an increasing number of females graduating with MBA's while only about 16% of corporate officers at Fortune 500 companies are women (Creswell, 2006). Julie H. Daum of the North American Board Practice Leader for Spencer Stuart, the executive search firm, said, "There have been women in the pipeline for 20 to 25 years; progress is slower than anybody thought it would ever be" (Creswell, 2006, p. 9). She believes that "we're still way far removed from where we should be and from where women would like to be" (Creswell, 2006, p. 9). A professor of corporate governance at the University of Pittsburgh Law School, Douglas Branson, thinks that corporate boards remain "clubby and male-dominated worlds where members have attended the same schools, dress the same, and represent a single social class" (Creswell, 2006, p. 10). He thinks that boards can minimize their isolation from larger social issues by adding women (Creswell, 2006).

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Viki Kramer, a management consultant, co-authored a study released by The Wellesley Centers for Women that examined how the issues and dynamics discussed in the boardroom changed as more women were added to the mix (Creswell, 2006). She interviewed 12 CEOs and 50 women who served on a combined 175 boards of Fortune 1,000 companies (Creswell, 2006). She said, “Women on boards are the ones who pay attention to the pool of employees and succession planning and whether there are women and people of color coming up in those succession plans” (Creswell, 2006, p. 10). Kramer concluded that a single woman on a board is considered a token woman and is unlikely to drive female-related issues because she does not want to be seen as a one-issue director (Creswell, 2006). A second woman slightly changes the environment, but the women sometimes feel they need to stay separate from one another or else they might appear as if they are conspiring against men on the board (Creswell, 2006). Three women, however, alleviate gender issues and are much less concerned about being seen together (Creswell, 2006).

It is not easy being the only woman on the board of directors. Carol Bartz confirmed this statement in a December interview with Julie Creswell (2006). Bartz said it has been her experience that male counterparts and supervisors “shook the corporate ladder ever more fiercely with each rung” that she and other pioneering women of her generation ascended (Creswell, 2006, p. 1). For example, during a recent meeting of business and political leaders in Washington, despite Bartz’s hard-won reputation as a smart businesswoman, she was repeatedly skipped over during the meeting, because the men at the table just assumed that she was an office assistant, rather than a fellow executive (Creswell, 2006). Bartz commented that it happens all the time (Creswell, 2006).

Creswell reported that Bartz and other women interviewed who have moved into senior corporate roles over the past few years said they discovered every decision they made, whether it was business related or on a personal issue, was magnified in the media (2006). Problems Bartz ran into while “ascending the ladder” are numerous. Bartz told Creswell in interview that when she was a salesperson at 3M, a

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manager booked her to share a room with male sales representatives during a business trip and then later tried to fire her for inappropriately sharing a room with males in a professional setting (Creswell, 2006). Then, in her fourth year with this company, she asked for a transfer to corporate headquarters and she was told that “women don’t do those jobs” (Creswell, 2006, p. 9). When Bartz was asked what questions she has received that would never be presented to a male CEO, she offered as an example a news conference shortly after she disclosed her breast cancer diagnosis when a reporter asked her, “Which breast?” (Creswell, 2006, p. 9).

Although it’s hard to believe that a reporter would ask such a question regarding a sensitive subject, there are some people, both men and women, who have no problem openly expressing their opinions that women should not be allowed to make it to the top (Maich, 2005). At an industry gathering in Toronto, Neil French, the creative director of advertising juggernaut WPP Group PLC, was asked why there weren't more women in the senior creative ranks of the advertising business (Maich, 2005). He responded that women “don’t make it to the top because they don’t deserve to” (Maich, 2005, p. 26). He continued on to say that women could never devote themselves fully to the top jobs because of family commitments (Maich, 2005). French added that anybody who doesn’t fully commit to a job “is crap at it” (Maich, 2005, p. 26). He reiterated that women are rarities in senior corporate positions because most are unwilling to make the personal sacrifices of time and energy required to be the boss (Maich, 2005).

As can be seen in French’s comments, today’s working woman is presented with an inescapable dilemma: if she sacrifices her family, in any way, for the sake of her career, she’s a lousy mother. If she sacrifices career for family, then she’s letting down the generations of feminists who fought to give her a shot at a decent career (Maich, 2005). According to Steve Maich, a writer for Maclean’s Newspaper, what nobody seems to acknowledge is that the inability of women to advance in the workplace is a family failure as much as a professional one (2005). Why, he asked, if a woman is pursuing a challenging business career, can’t the husband be the one to drop everything at work and pick the sick kid up from school (Maich, 2005)? An

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economist would say whichever spouse has the lower-paying job should be the one to sacrifice career prospects for the sake of the family, but that's not the way it works in the real world (Maich, 2005). Instead, we've established a system in which employers must make up for the lack of gender equality in the home (Maich, 2005).

While Maich's analysis may be correct to some extent, there are many more factors beyond family issues hindering women's progress. Corbette Doyle, Chief Diversity Officer at insurer Aon Corp., said that talented women employees no longer want to "fight the tide" (Konrad, 2007). She said, "It's not like women aren't working, but rather they're not buying what corporate America is selling" (Konrad, 2007, p. 65). This becomes obvious when considering how many women are self-employed or have otherwise carved out lives where they can combine the way they want to work with all the other things they want and need to do in life (Konrad, 2007). "When it comes to the right environment, America has failed for too many women" Doyle said (Konrad, 2007, p. 65). The numbers of women in executive, vice president, and president positions don't lie (Konrad, 2007).

Females now make up about 53% of new recruits at accounting firms and 45% of new associates at law firms, yet women's share of upper-level accounting positions is less than 20%, according to the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (Konrad, 2007). Even worse, women's share of managing partner positions in law firms is only 5%, according to a new survey by the National Association of Women Lawyers (Konrad, 2007). Using Chicago as a microcosm of corporate America, it is clear that women aren't getting ahead in the executive suite, in fact, they're losing ground (Konrad, 2007). The proportion of women directors at Chicago-based companies decreased to 13.8%, down a percentage point from the previous year, and the proportion of women executive officers dropped about the same amount to 14.6%, according to Chicago Network 2006 Census report (Konrad, 2007).

According to PINK Magazine, women don't stick around for reasons that go well beyond "family issues, lactation rooms, and flextime" (Konrad, 2007). Often they can't be themselves in a culture today created by and for men; although frequently those

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men are well-intentioned (Konrad, 2007). Among 2,400 professional women surveyed last fall at PINK Conferences across the country, about 49% say they still can't always be their true selves as women in the workplace (Konrad, 2007). Women also don't want to stay where they are not heard. "Women want to feel stretched, important, valuable, and a part of what makes action and positive execution happen," said Joanne Cini, who left her high-powered sales job at NBC years ago to become an author and entrepreneur (Konrad, 2007, p. 68). "I resigned (in part) because of the politics and that feeling that I couldn't fly freely. The boys' club just bothered me too much" (Konrad, 2007, p. 68).

Deloitte, one of the big four public accounting firms, has long been considered among the leading companies when it comes to hiring and training women, with efforts that have come directly from the top (Konrad, 2007). Still, even Deloitte is struggling with retention. "Because there's a disproportionate amount of male partners, men tended to have more information on how to become partners through informal channels than women," Lissa Perez, partner in Deloitte's Audit & Enterprise Risk Services practice said. "We're trying to change that and take the mystery out of it all" (Konrad, 2007, p. 68). Some company-wide innovations include a "mass career customization" effort, designed to help women decide when they want to go all out for their career and when they'll need to cut back because of family obligations – as well as how to stay on track through it all (Konrad, 2007). They also have a Personal Pursuits program that allows eligible employees who leave the work force for up to five years for personal reasons, to stay connected to Deloitte and the accounting field through mentors, subsidized training, networking, and other resources (Konrad, 2007). To date, Deloitte's retention has improved. In the mid 1990s, Deloitte was losing women at all levels at the rate of 7% greater than that for men (Konrad, 2007). That gender gap in turnover has since narrowed to less than 1% (Konrad, 2007). Real proof that upper management supports diversity initiatives is another key to their success (Konrad, 2007).

The best diversity programs have long tentacles that reach into every corner of the organization. GE created a group of twenty senior executives and company officers

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from around the world called the Cabinet (Konrad, 2007). It is the central decision-making body for the GE Women's Network (Konrad, 2007). The Cabinet brings women's issues to the forefront and uses GE's extensive succession planning strategies to target top women (Konrad, 2007). This has helped women gain exposure to the top ranks and, quite naturally, move up the ladder (Konrad, 2007). Now 14% of GE's corporate officers are women, up from 5% in 1998, and 21% of the company's executives are female (Konrad, 2007). What's more is that women are actually sticking around (Konrad, 2007). Before the women's Network formed, female turnover in the executive ranks was 14% and the number has now dropped to 7% (Konrad, 2007).

Slowly but surely, companies in a broad range of industries are starting to understand GE's lesson, that gender diversity equals retention in today's workforce, especially when it comes to women (Konrad, 2007). When women feel welcomed, accepted and confident that they are on an upward path to success, they stay put, often with unwavering loyalty (Konrad, 2007). Corbette Doyle believes that "we can't make progress until men really understand how women work. That's why I'm trying to change the situation – one executive at a time" (Konrad, 2007, p. 69). Doyle was chair of Aon's national healthcare industry practice when new CEO Gregory Case asked her to head up his diversity initiative last spring (Konrad, 2007). She brought in 25 of Aon's top women managers to give advice on professional development (Konrad, 2007). Spencer Stuart's Virginia Clarke believes that women must bring it upon themselves to help teach what diversity is all about in their own organizations and help the men see them for who they are (Konrad, 2007).

In an effort to keep up public awareness, many women encourage the media to address the issue of women landing top jobs and making their stories newsworthy (Creswell, 2006). As long as the issue remains in the news, it will have to be addressed (Creswell, 2006). Interestingly enough, sometimes women who themselves are in these powerful positions forget to keep fighting the equality battle (Estrich, 2006). Pollsters have consistently found that women candidates start out ten points behind on matters of toughness, among female as well as male voters

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(Estrich, 2006). However, according to journalist Susan Estrich of the *Beaumont Enterprise*, that's not new news (2006). What is news is that there are now women in decision-making posts, and although they might not be in the top position, and they are certainly not in equal numbers in these posts, there are still enough to make a difference (Estrich, 2006). If every woman in a powerful position said, "Wait a minute, let's hire a woman, let's bring on so-and-so," women would have a better chance (Estrich, 2006). Estrich said she has been to big conferences where presence on the panel is a huge deal, and there are no, or few, women on these panels, but a woman put the panel together (Estrich, 2006). These women sometimes forget that they wouldn't be where they are were it not for the efforts of other women to open doors (Estrich, 2006). They forget that strength comes in numbers. They don't understand power. They think you have more if you save it, less if you use it. They don't like being reminded that they have a special obligation because they're women. They think helping other women will cost them something (Estrich, 2006). I believe that the women who "forget" about these obligations are in the minority. For the most part, women in high ranking positions understand they have an obligation to help other women attain the status they themselves have achieved. It's a chain reaction, and the more women there are at the top rungs of companies, the more of a chance other women have to follow in their footsteps.

Women are still in the minority. Taking into consideration the education levels they have attained and the fact that they make up almost half of the United States labor force, there is clear evidence that women are underrepresented in corporate board rooms. While there are many factors affecting the women's movement, by keeping public awareness up and by companies and universities implementing diversity and training programs, things are bound to improve.

PORTRAYAL OF POWERFUL WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Because the movement – parity of professional women – is of great interest to the media as well as in the boardroom, I have concentrated on the portrayal of powerful women in the media and how many of these portrayals can be unfair and lead to an unjust perception of women in powerful positions. Women are moving up in the business world, but are their efforts made more difficult by the various ways the media put them in the spotlight? Despite giant steps up the corporate ladder, the female boss remains the star in “water-cooler” gossip as everyone’s favorite villain – even among other women (Rock, 2007). A recent Lifetime Women’s Pulse Poll found that more women would “definitely or probably” prefer a male boss over a female one (Rock, 2007). It is little wonder that many female execs worry about turning into fanged vixens when the pressure is on; they know strong women get a bad rap that never applies to strong men (Rock, 2007). One cannot help but wonder if these images are due to the powerful influence the media have over the general public’s perceptions and behaviors.

Anne Fisher of Fortune Magazine thinks we are in the midst of a cycle right now where there is a widespread perception that women aren’t fully committed to their careers (2005). It tends to happen every time the spotlight is on a high-ranking woman who flames out, like former HP CEO Carly Fiorina (Fisher, 2005). The media immediately begin analyzing what the woman did wrong (Fisher, 2005). “But in my opinion its time to shift the focus of discussion to what companies can do better. Here is this incredibly well-educated, talented population of women. Why is so much of that talent underutilized?” asked Fisher (2005, p. 252).

Whether it is right or wrong, a high-profile woman caught in a compromising situation makes for a sexy scandal (Templeton & Moore, 2006). Perhaps that is because women traditionally are supposed to fill the role as the moral compass and glue for families (Templeton & Moore, 2006). Or maybe it has something to do with the fact that powerful women challenge expectations of what a woman should be (Templeton & Moore, 2006). Either way, it seems that a woman with a powerful career will quickly

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find herself in all of the tabloids should something go awry (Templeton & Moore, 2006).

The reason women get more attention in the first place is there are still fewer of them in high-profile positions, said Elizabeth Van Acker, a lecturer with Griffith University's School of Politics and Public Policy (Templeton & Moore, 2006).

“It’s a more interesting story in a way because it is about the bad girl. They are judged more harshly in a way. It’s almost as if people want to know more about women. They are also judged on different criteria than are men, including their appearance and what they wear. For men, there is little choice when it comes to attire, and unless he’s a parliamentarian who turns up to work in a pair of Speedos, the most discussion we see about a male politician’s attire is John Howard’s tracksuit when he’s out walking. So for high-powered women, what they wear, how they dress, their grooming and appearance all have an effect on how they are viewed and judged. Women add color to a story just by their appearance” (Templeton & Moore, 2006, p. 41).

An example of this took place when Senator Debbie Halvorson first campaigned for her seat representing Illinois more than a decade ago (Woodward, 2007). She was pelted with questions about how she would take care of her daughters and other such home life issues (Woodward, 2007). Halvorson said, “I was so sick and tired of them asking me what I did with my children... I finally said, ‘Well I get them up in the morning, I dress them, I put them in the freezer, and then when I get home at night, I defrost them and we all have dinner together.’” She added, “They would never have asked a man ‘What do you do with your children?’ I believe men get the presumption of credibility and confidence, whereas women have to prove it” (Woodward, 2007, p. A18).

Gloria Steinam, a feminist who helped found the Women’s Media Center and wrote *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self Esteem*, recently launched a new radio network for women (Seigel, 2007). She said, “Sometimes I feel no matter how old I

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get and how long I work and how hard I try, people will attribute what I do to my looks. That's very painful to have to say" (Seigel, 2007, p. 56). The insinuation that looks smoothed her way into the media spotlight and feminist history still hurts. The uneven focus on women's looks and personality still playing in public, like the recent dig at Senator Hilary Clinton as formerly "ugly," or the reverse comment geared towards Carly Fiorina for being "glamorous" (Seigel, 2007, p. 56). Steinem wondered why women can't be both (Seigel, 2007). It gets back to those stereotypes, which a Catalyst report called a major obstacle to work advancement (Seigel, 2007). Those stereotypes still hinder from outside – and within (Seigel, 2007). "Women have low standards," Steinem said. "They say 'How can I combine career and family?' never expecting men to ask the same question" (Seigel, 2007, p. 56). She advises women to ask for the raise, ask for better work-family policies and ask men to share in family responsibilities, even if it's an awkward conversation (Seigel, 2007).

Meredith Vieira, NBC's Today's new co-host, was discussed heavily by the media after her first few mornings on Today. Reporter Allie Adams commented, "A hot red or blue heel (Meredith was wearing black shoes) would have completely changed the look from typical anchorwoman to respected girlfriend giving me the morning news. You commit to a morning program like you commit to your skim almond latte- I'm waiting for my upgrade for a softer, more relaxed Meredith" (Newsflash: Watch, 2006). Another media source reported that "Vieira is acting like the morning mommy. She often brings up her teenage children, claims to be a Matthew Perry fan, gives the Superman pose with Ben Affleck, gently interrupts a talkative Laura Bush and has cast mates Matt Lauer, Al Roker and Ann Curry come out and play on her game show, "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," for comic relief" (Pergament, 2006). It's interesting that none of these comments have to do with how Vieira actually reported the news or what she reported, just what she looked and acted like while doing so.

In order to investigate the portrayal of powerful woman by the media even further, I chose to focus on three powerful women, one in the business world, one in the entertainment world, and one in the political world, to get more specific evidence and examples of how the media put these women in the spotlight. My first example is

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Carly Fiorina, the former CEO for Hewlett Packard Co. I examined how she was portrayed in the media while in that position, but more importantly what was said once she left the company.

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CARLY FIORINA

Once America's top-ranked businesswoman, Fiorina sought to eliminate gender as a roadblock to the executive suite (Taylor, 2005). She was named President, Chief Executive Officer, and Chairman of Technology at Hewlett-Packard and was the first woman to hold all three titles at a major computer company (Taylor, 2005). As the first woman and first outsider to head a huge Silicon Valley institution, Fiorina received enthusiastic press coverage (Taylor, 2005). Her good looks and her stylish attire drew attention, as did her appearances at high-profile events like the Academy Awards, the opening of the Mission: Space attraction at Disney World, and the World Economic Forum, in Davos, Switzerland (Taylor, 2005). "She was a Hollywood-class icon," George Keyworth, the board's longest serving member, said (Stewart, 2007, p. 155).

However, in the end, Fiorina's gender became the focus when she was forced to leave the company. Some business analysts said the media hype over Fiorina getting fired was over her refusal to hire a strong vice president, others say it was because of her management style, and others claim it was her handling of the controversial merger with Compaq Computer Corp. (Taylor, 2005).

Others however, including members of the HP board, said Fiorina, described by critics as a self-promoter and brazen leader who achieved "near rock-star" status, spent too much time in the spotlight and not enough in the corner office implementing her strategy (Taylor, 2005). Other powerful businesswomen contend that the "polished blonde who graced glossy magazine covers actively pursued and used the media spotlight to draw attention to herself and her leadership at HP – in the process of becoming one of the best-known female executives in recent memory" (Creswell, 2006, p. 10). Maggie Wilderotter, CEO of Citizens Communications, commented, "She lived her tenure in the press, but she did that by design" (Creswell, 2006, p. 10).

Many disagree with this opinion. Susan Sher, VP for legal and governmental affairs at the University of Chicago Hospitals, said, "She's so personally impressive. I think it's unfair to say that it was all about her. I just think it's so unfortunate that women

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cannot succeed or fail in these jobs in the same way men do” (Taylor, 2005, p. 8). Although Fiorina did receive a lot of press coverage and was on the covers of a lot of magazines, she was also the topic in a lot of media discussions in which she had no say (Creswell, 2006). It would not be a fair accusation to say that she wanted the amount of media attention that she ended up receiving (Creswell, 2006).

After her removal from her job at HP, Fiorina declared that she had been treated differently just because she was a woman. “In chat rooms around Silicon Valley, from the time I arrived until long after I left HP, I was routinely referred to as either a ‘bimbo’ or a ‘bitch,’” Fiorina said (Dowd, 2006, B7). “Too soft or too hard, and presumptuous.” She added, “I watched with interest as male CEOs fired people and were hailed as ‘decisive.’ I was labeled ‘vindictive’” (Dowd, 2006, B7). On her first day at HP she said, “The glass ceiling does not exist” (Dowd, 2006, p. B7). Now she concedes, however, that the glass trapdoor might (Dowd, 2006). “I think somehow men understand other men’s need for respect differently than they understand it for a woman,” she said on 60 Minutes (Dowd, 2006, p. B7). Fiorina proceeded to list some things that offended her. The editor of BusinessWeek asked her if she was wearing an Armani suit, as if that was newsworthy (Dowd, 2006). She felt adjectives such as “flashy,” “glamorous,” and “diamond studded” were meant to make her seem superficial, and there was “painful commentary” that she’d chosen not to have children because she was “too ambitious” (Dowd, 2006). Fiorina concluded, “When I finally reached the top, after striving my entire career to be judged by results and accomplishments, the coverage of my gender, my appearance and the perceptions of my personality would vastly outweigh anything else” (Dowd, 2006, p. B7).

It’s hard to stay focused on the reports on what Fiorina did right and wrong as Chief Executive Officer at HP when an overwhelming number of these critiques are filled with gender issues. Fortune Magazine reported that after being named CEO of Silicon Valley’s famous Hewlett-Packard, Fiorina’s reputation “bloomed, heading toward rock-star celebrity. She became one of the few businesspeople identifiable by her first name: She was just Carly. Totally poised, she gave countless speeches, she became the only woman who never had a bad hair day; she was the subject of

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endless rumors that she might move on to politics. But celebrity, as everybody knows, isn't an achievement in itself. Beneath the public image are the yardsticks against which executives are, and should be, measured" (Loomis, 2005). This article makes a very good point; there are yardsticks against which executives are and should be measured, but prefacing that opinion with comments about "bad hair days" and "rock star celebrities" is somewhat hypocritical. If the writer believed that Fiorina should be measured as other executives are, he should have been writing on her business decisions and achievements, not her celebrity achievement.

In situations quite similar to that of Fiorina's, Albert "Chainsaw Al" Dunlap of Sunbeam and Chuck Watson of Dynegy were both shoved out the door in very public ways (Sixel, 2005). However, the media focused on Fiorina's failures much more heavily than they ever did for Dunlap and Watson (Sixel, 2005). "It's true equality when women are allowed to be as mediocre as the men out there," Joan Ehrlich, director of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in San Francisco, said (Sixel, 2005, p. 1). "She had to be an extraordinarily talented woman because women are not yet allowed to be as mediocre as men CEOs are" (Sixel, 2005, p. 1). Paula Hinton, a well-known trial lawyer and partner at Vinson & Elkins, added that the fact that Fiorina is a woman put a spotlight on her departure (Sixel, 2005). "Whatever flaws and weaknesses a woman has, seem to get more exposed than if she were a man. Women are just looked at differently from men, that's just life" Hinton concluded (Sixel, 2005, p. 1).

The media even went as far as to stir up rumors that Fiorina had a pink marble bathroom installed in her office and demanded that a hairdresser and makeup artist go with her when she traveled (Guglielmo, 2006). Fiorina said the fact that she is a woman had something to do with why the board treated her the way it did; Dunn, former Chairwoman of HP, said she isn't so sure that she was treated differently because she was a woman (Guglielmo, 2006). But in the opinion of many, as long as the number of female CEOs at Fortune 500 companies can be counted on one hand, it is inevitable that their experiences will be generalized. Rightly or wrongly, the fall of these two talented women reflects on all women" (Murry, 2006c).

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In an article in the Wall Street Journal, “Why Gender Plays a Role in HP Drama,” Alan Murray called the relationship between Carly Fiorina and Patricia Dunn an “odd sisterhood” (2006b). He believes they have both chosen to portray themselves as victims (Murray, 2006b). While Murray agreed with the fact that they are victims to some extent, he also felt that they “are both overplaying the part” (2006b). He believes that this “sisterhood” is not helping women’s causes (Murray, 2006b). Murray’s article generated much response from the public and one responder said that it isn’t about the sisterhood when these two women get fired anymore than it’s about the brotherhood when two men get “axed” or step down (“Dunn and,” 2006). It’s about the attention that women get when they’re “singing solo” (“Dunn and,” 2006). Instead of off-hand references to the “women’s cause,” Murray could have focused on the business case.

As previously noted, a Catalyst study shows that when women are included at the top levels of corporate leadership, they tend to financially outperform companies without women at the top, Murray’s conclusions on Carly Fiorina and Patricia Dunn are flawed (Dunn and, 2006). When he linked what he called their “playing the victim” and “righteous indignation” to their “sisterhood” he reduced their behavior to some kind of feminine ploy (Dunn and, 2006). It was almost like saying that the two women aren’t taking it like a man (Dunn and, 2006). Karen Kaplowitz, President of The New Ellis Group in New Jersey commented, “I am sorry to see two such powerful, talented, and prominent women sidelined. But they remain role models of dignity in the face of disaster for other women – and men” (Dunn and, 2006, p. A21). It isn’t feminine wile or victimization for Fiorina to complain that she didn’t get enough notice or explanation when she was fired (Dunn and, 2006). Dunn has certainly not taken cover and played the victim, but rather has been incredibly forthcoming (Dunn and, 2006). She hasn’t claimed that she was betrayed as a woman or that she was a scapegoat; she has simply insisted that she relied on people whom she expected to give her better guidance (Dunn and, 2006). “We have two people who are ‘sticking to their guns’ which is usually a highly valued trait, at least in men,” Kaplowitz concluded (Dunn and, 2006, p. A21).

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Another reporter, David Olive, agreed with Murray's accusation that Fiorina sees herself as a victim of devious directors, a condescending media that put her down by calling her Carly, and a workforce envious of her unsought celebrity (2006). Olive goes even further when he criticizes Fiorina for her failure to mention her severance package (2006). He thought it was "no different than severance packages men walk away with and they do so without the media coverage she is getting" (2006, p. A19). Again, Mr. Olive is assuming Fiorina wanted this media coverage, in the absence of any evidence that this is the case.

Olive added that he believes Fiorina was a bad hire in the first place, and said she was "recruited during an evening of boozy flirtation by HP director Dick Hackburn at an airport lounge" (2006, p. A19). He believes that in her book she "unintentionally advances the ruinous notion that women in high places should be cut more slack than their male peers. That when they overpromise and underdeliver, which was Fiorina's hallmark at HP, the consequences should be milder than those a male might expect" (2006, p. A19). He concluded, "She is not representative of the wronged woman in corporate life. She's a crybaby" (2006, p. A19). Olive is out of line saying Fiorina was recruited by flirting in an airport lounge. This kind of comment would never have been about a male. Olive also went as far as to say that Fiorina wants to be treated "milder" than her male counterparts; in fact, all she really asked for was equality.

The Wall Street Journal published yet another article that immediately focused on the fact that Fiorina is the "first businesswoman to achieve one-name fame" (Murray, 2006a). Mark Hurd, the man chosen to succeed Fiorina, did not undo the work that Fiorina had already done with the merger between Hewlett Packard and Compaq. Recently, HP has surpassed all of its rivals and total return to shareholders since the merger has been almost 50% (Murray, 2006a). But now that Fiorina is gone, when the question of who gets credit for this merger is raised, Hurd is "given kudos all around" (Murray, 2006a). Regarding Hurd, Murray commented that "he is everything she wasn't. He dives deep into operations, is in love with the metrics and out of love with the media..." (Murray, 2006a).

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KATIE COURIC

To investigate if this phenomenon is specific to businesswomen or more general to all powerful professional women, I also chose to focus on Katie Couric who recently left the Today Show and started her new career working on CBS Evening News and 60 Minutes. Couric's move to CBS last September was hailed as a milestone, as she was to become the first solo female anchor of a network evening news program (Stanley, 2007). Although she is not directly involved with the corporate world, the portrayal of Couric and the things said about her when she assumed her new job have striking similarities to those of Fiorina.

In the months before she left Today, Couric was the target of so much vicious ridicule that her stiletto heels had become a trademark goof (Estrich, 2006). Even after her debut on CBS, the commentary was vicious, with one columnist, interestingly enough a woman, comparing her face to that of a girl who was desperate to go to the bathroom (Estrich, 2006). But the viewers, the ultimate judges, didn't see it that way. On the first night, she received a 9.1 rating and a 17 share, meaning that 17% of everyone watching television at that time were watching her (Estrich, 2006). It was the highest-rated CBS Evening News broadcast since the Feb. 23, 1998 edition during the Olympic Winter Games (Estrich, 2006).

Instead of focusing on the great accomplishment that Couric's move was, Newsweek's Marc Peyser and Johnnie Roberts commented that "when she takes that \$15 million-a-year anchor seat, she could well become the most influential newscaster in the country." They added, "The initial reaction to her announcement 'naturally' focused on her gender" (Peyser & Roberts, 2006, p. 147). It seems strange that focusing on her gender is now considered natural. However, the media seem to agree with Peyser and Roberts as various sources report they are unsure if viewers will accept their evening news from someone wearing mascara and have even labeled Couric as "the girl next door" because of her broadcasted life that the public knows so much about (Peyser & Roberts, 2006).

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The second half of the Newsweek article focused on whether the network news would change her. Peyser and Roberts wanted to know if Couric would now ration her trademark smile, if she'd ditch the tangerine lip gloss and "killer shoes" (2006). They wanted to know if she would remodel herself for the new job (Peyser & Roberts, 2006). These are the questions the media were asking when determining if Couric would make a good news anchor or not. When Couric got a makeover after her husband died, the media slammed her from hairdo to high-heeled shoe, claiming she'd become a "diva who'd traded Gap for Gucci and let her paycheck go to her ever-blonder head" (Peyser & Roberts, 2006).

Three female media experts discussed the CBS Evening News anchor and concluded "Katie Couric can't catch a break" (Shister, 2006, p. G6). They said she's been under the public microscope since her debut (Shister, 2006). One reporter, Karey Perkins, commented, "On September 5, 2006, yes, that's right, the 21st century, Katie Couric historically debuted as the sole female news anchor of a prime-time television news show" (2006). Succeeding the likes of Walter Cronkite ("the most trusted man in America") and Dan Rather at CBS, Couric became the first woman on any network to occupy this influential and coveted spot (Perkins, 2006). She should have been heralded with rigorous and thoughtful critiques (Perkins, 2006). Instead, her reviewers seemed to be writing for the fashion columns or gossip sections (Perkins, 2006). For example, reviewer Wendell Brock of the Atlantic Journal was less than impressed with Couric in general, and the only things he managed to quote from her extensive resume were "ex-cheerleader" and a former University of Virginia "Tri-Delt" (Perkins, 2006). He ended his review by commenting on her "bright white blazer" (Perkins, 2006).

Her hair, makeup, clothes, and performance were all evaluated by critics during her debut. Some commentators, such as Tom Shales of The Washington Post and Andrea Peyser of the New York Post, saw fit to criticize her outfit (Belcher, 2006). Shales wrote, "She oddly wore a white blazer over a black top and skirt buttoned in such a way as to make her look chubby, which we know she isn't" (Belcher, 2006, p. 4). Peyser added, "Katie chose to wear an unfortunate blazer and the result, no

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doubt, of some jokester lying to her face when Katie asked ‘Does this make me look fat?’ And the day after Labor Day to boot” (Belcher, 2006, p. 4)! It’s fair to ask if Charles Gibson’s suits were critiqued when he took over World News and whether there was any mention of Brian Williams’ ties when he replaced Tom Brokaw (Belcher, 2006). Of course, no such analysis ever occurred.

Even Couric’s obvious and well-known accomplishments like her Today Show career (the number one rated morning show during her entire fifteen year tenure) or her contributions to the fight against colon cancer, didn’t seem to receive even a brief review (Perkins, 2006). Instead, David Bianculli of the New York Daily News, was impressed by Couric’s performance as a journalist, but noted that she wore a “smart, crisp, white jacket over a black top and skirt” (Perkins, 2006, p. A11). He ended with “Couric was leaning against the edge of her desk, showing her famous legs” (Perkins, 2006, p. A11). Lynette Rice of Entertainment Weekly reported that all eyes were on Katie Couric’s white jacket the night of her debut (2006). She lured 13.6 million viewers her opening night, grabbing CBS’ best numbers in eight years (Rice, 2006). By the end of the week, when the novelty of the first solo female anchor subsided, the reporters wondered if it would now be time for Katie to “show some leg” (Rice, 2006).

Next, in another review of Couric, Alessandra Stanley said,

“Her male rivals always wear formal suits and ties. (Mr. Williams is a bit of a Savile Row dandy, whereas Mr. Gibson favors a rumpled J. Press look.) Couric’s on-air wardrobe is more mercurial: a casual navy turtleneck one night, pearls and dark suit the next. It can be distracting, which is odd, given Couric’s complaints about being held to a different standard because of her sex. Society’s obsessive focus on a newswoman’s hair and outfits is such a sore point that it’s surprising she hasn’t settled on a more consistent look. In the battle to change the culture, frequent sartorial makeovers stoke unwanted attention rather than defuse it” (Stanley, 2007). Stanley went as far as to blame the news coverage of Couric’s

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outfits and appearances on her! He is in good company. For example, Knight Ridder Tribune published an article about wearing white after Labor Day (Solomon, 2006).

Wendy Solomon commented, "If Couric really wanted us to focus on her reporting rather than her wardrobe, she shouldn't have flouted one of the oldest rules in the book" (2006, p. 1).

Tad Friend of *The New Yorker* said it was no surprise that CBS gave Couric a shot as the first solo female anchor (2006). He made fun of CBS, saying they were a "last-place network" so they had to take risks and he made reference to the network's disaster pair of Connie Chung with Dan Rather (2006). Friend thought it was only natural that CBS should give Couric a serious makeover to match her more "sober responsibilities" (2006). Couric's playful suits were replaced with strands of pearls and elegant fitted ensembles in the strictest black and white and gray, conveying the message that "our little girl had grown up" (Friend, 2006). Friend commented, "Unfortunately, her makeup on the first night was slathered on, particularly around her eyes, conveying the message that our little girl had grown up and became Tammy Faye Bakker" (2006). He finally concluded that he would vote for Friday's show, when Couric "impishly read the news wearing a black burka. (A Prada burka, but still)" (Friend, 2006, p. 80).

The Palm Beach Post even went as far as to compare Katie and Meredith Vieira, Couric's successor on the Today Show (Tuckwood, 2006). Jan Tuckwood commented on how Katie went darker and Vieira went lighter, and if hair color holds cosmic significance, does this mean that more pigment equals more gravitas? She wondered if this meant that mornings should be greeted by sunshine or if it meant that Vieira was trying to cover up gray roots, because that's what Couric was supposedly doing a few years before when she went blonder (2006). Tuckwood then analyzed the importance of color (2006). She concluded that in Couric's case it mattered a lot because she had a clear motive, which was to darken her hair to appear more serious for her new "more serious" job as a news anchor (Tuckwood,

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2006). It is comical that reporters would spend this much time analyzing hair color and the meanings behind a woman's choice to dye her hair.

Among the thousands of words written to mark Couric's big "first," many dwelled on her "great" or "much hyped" or "shapely" legs (Berman, 2006). The less effusive writers settled for "nice" (Berman, 2006). Popular headlines included "leg up" and "leg-acy" puns (Berman, 2006). The powerful woman in pantsuits gets jeered because she's accused of forsaking, or at the very least, being uncomfortable with her femininity (Berman, 2006). The powerful woman in skirts is accused of teasing, flirting, and otherwise engaging in provocative displays (Berman 2006). As with every male anchor including Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, Brian Williams, and Dan Rather, Couric's attractiveness is an asset (Berman, 2006). Like one of the guys though, she has to pretend she never thought of that (Berman, 2006).

Another example of journalistic attention to Couric's appearance is that even when an article is not about Couric herself, but on the news event she is reporting, her outfit is still a topic of conversation. An article from the New York Post article reads, "The American people have got to understand that [with] a defeat in Iraq . . . the terrorists will be emboldened," Bush said in an interview for last night's 'CBS Evening News' and for a 9/11 special. Couric wore pearls last night, along with a matching dark jacket and skirt. The outfit was a vast improvement from an ill-fitting white coat she wore on her debut show Tuesday" (Starr & Li, 2006, pg. 21). Michael Starr and David Li were reporting on Bush's interview on the Evening News the previous night, but could not help but end with a comment on Couric's outfit.

Although the media seemed to leave "bitch" and "bimbo" out of their reports on Couric, neither her news reporting abilities, nor the stories on which she reported, were not the focus of the countless newspapers, magazines, and news stories regarding her recent move to CBS Evening News.

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NANCY PELOSI

The third powerful woman I chose to focus in on is Nancy Pelosi, elected first female Speaker of the United States House of Representatives in January. She is now next in line to take over the presidency if President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney could not serve.

Fewer than a quarter of state lawmakers across America are female, and that share has changed little in a decade (Smyth, 2007). Despite a slight gain in the overall percentage this year, to 23.5%, or 1,734 of 7,382 seats, many Legislatures see the numbers slipping (Smyth, 2007). "I've watched the numbers for years, and I'm disappointed," said former Ohio House Speaker Jo Ann Davidson, co-chair of the Republican National Committee. "I would have hoped that by now we'd be going in another direction, but we're not" (Smyth, 2007). Pelosi's position as the most powerful woman in a U.S. elected office could help improve the state-level numbers in 2008, Davidson and other trend watchers said (Smyth, 2007). Such a jump last happened in 1992, when Hillary Clinton began gaining attention for her hands-on approach as First Lady -- an effect that has been sustained as she has risen to higher office (Smyth, 2007). "It makes people comfortable with women in leadership," said Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University. "Pelosi is on the front page almost every day, above the fold. People see a woman operating in the world successfully and that can't help but help" (Smyth, 2007).

However, ever since Nancy Pelosi's historic swearing-in as the first female Speaker of the House, women have been reminded that perhaps they haven't come such a long way after all (Tuck, 2007). "Newspapers, including this one (The Atlantic Journal) and The New York Times, have carried articles critiquing Pelosi's fashion sense," journalist Angela Tuck said (2007, pg. A13). When Tuck questioned colleagues why they bothered with stories on Pelosi's outfits, they acknowledged that while the notion may be outdated, people are interested in what powerful women choose to wear (2007). The United States Representative, Hank Johnson's first day in office was heavily covered by The Atlantic Journal as well, and no one mentioned

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anything regarding his suit designer, the color of his shoes, or what pattern his tie was. (Tuck, 2007).

There is certainly no denying the public's obsession with physical appearance, especially the physical appearance of women. Before any award shows, celebrities take to the red carpet, shouting out their designers and eagerly awaiting unofficial best-and worst-dressed awards from the various fashion pundits (Tuck, 2007). But Tuck asked why Pelosi and other powerful women elected to office on the merits of their politics are judged by their wardrobe and hairstyle choices (2007). Their colleagues aren't held to the same standards (Tuck, 2007). In her January 5th Living Front story headlined, "Well Suited: With Speaker's Higher Profile, Her Wardrobe Could Get as Much Attention as Her Words," AJC fashion writer Marilyn Johnson asked a few experts why so much attention is paid to what powerful women wear (2007). Ken Bernhardt, a marketing professor at Georgia State, acknowledged that such critiques are sexist, but went on to say that magazines would be a hard sell if their only topic was what men were wearing (Johnson, 2007). Johnson, who's been covering fashion and style for nearly 25 years at the AJC, said the double standard goes beyond wardrobe (2007).

"When a man gets gray hair, it's silver," she said. "When a woman gets it, it's called drab. Look at Bill Clinton. The attacks on the appearances of former Attorney General Janet Reno and former Supreme Court Justice Nominee Harriet Miers come to mind. Even Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has to endure ridiculous comments about her hairstyles. Unlike celebrities whose livelihoods depend on their appearance, these women are making important decisions about the future of our country. They shouldn't be judged by their choice of shoes, suits and accessories" (Johnson, 2007, p. 1F).

Consequently, not only will the nation be watching how the highest-ranking woman in American politics performs as the first female Speaker of the House, the public also will be gossiping on how Nancy Pelosi dresses around the House (Johnson, 2007).

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“Will the mother of five and grandmother of six opt for designer pantsuits, or will she stand out in photos by donning bright red dresses? Stilettos or flats? A short bob or pageboy?” (Johnson, 2007, p. 1F). One newspaper’s Style section that was filled with psychoanalytic forays into Pelosi’s wardrobe choices asserted that “an Armani suit, for a woman, is a tool for playing with the boys without pretending to be one” (Fuentes, 2007). A New York Times article noted that Pelosi looked “preternaturally fresh, with a wardrobe that, while still subdued and over-reliant on suits, has seldom spruced the halls of Congress” (Fuentes, 2007). Of course, her predecessor Dennis Hastert never had to think about such fashion dilemmas, and neither should Pelosi, according to some (Fuentes, 2007). “It is sexist,” said Ken Bernhardt. “The attention to one’s appearance is almost always concentrated on females, whether it be politicians, movie stars or athletes” (Johnson, 2007, p. 1F). But a female leader’s clothing is always “more memorable and yet always more criticized,” added Atlantan Susan Bixler, head of her namesake consulting group that focuses on leadership development (Johnson, 2007).

Pelosi is not alone. Other articles that appeared in such publications as the Baltimore Sun and Chicago Tribune mentioned Senator Hilary Clinton’s fashion choices, hair styles, and preferences for black pantsuits, as well as Florida Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz’s haircut (Fuentes, 2007). “Like many women executives in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, Pelosi knows expensive tailored suits convey authority and strength,” said Johnson, a New York-based editor. “Pelosi’s favorite designer, Italian designer Giorgio Armani, is known for his amazing soft drape and beautiful fabrics so the look is chic, not boxy or man-tailored” (Fuentes, 2007, p. 11A). “It’s a double standard that should not be applied to women in 2007,” said Manson, who works for the Department of the Army. “And it’s unfair. Let’s judge her on the content of character and not the content of her wardrobe” (Fuentes, 2007, p. 11A).

Once coverage of Armani suits became old news, journalists then turned to Pelosi’s accessories. One journalist discussed what are now being called Power Pearls (Kato, 2007). As worn by Nancy Pelosi, a strand of pearls now represents elegant authority—a description that’s also been used to describe the first female Speaker of the House

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(Kato, 2007). As the highest-ranking political woman in the country, Pelosi's recent fashion choices have been scrutinized almost as much as her political profile (Kato, 2007). While media pundits and bloggers have debated the color of her Armani suits and the rotation of her Italian shoes, it's been her double-digit millimeter South Seas and Tahitian pearls that have garnered the most attention (Kato, 2007). Especially the mixed-color strand of marble-sized spheres she favors with dark suits and tweeds (Kato, 2007). "It's 'unmatronly' and unique. It shows she's not afraid of innovation, and that's a powerful image," said Lincoln Journal reporter Donna Kato (2007, p. 8). While the multicolored strand is the most striking of her neck adornments, Pelosi also wears a less ostentatious, four-strand necklace of small black pearls (Kato, 2007). She wore them on election night with a dove gray suit and a collarless shirt (Kato, 2007). It is amazing the detail that the media are able to pick up on just concerning her pearls, never mind her wardrobe.

After Pelosi was done speaking about a political issue a few months ago, the commentary she received from reviewers included such things as, "not quite what you would expect from the mouth of an Armani-wearing, chocolate mousse-loving grandmother. The Italian-American Catholic girl would not only become Speaker, but also the mother of five children and grandmother to six. She is now one of the world's most powerful grandmothers" (Balogh, 2007). The adjectives used to describe Pelosi are not ones that citizens would normally expect in a critique of the political abilities of the new Speaker of the House of the United States. The world is not often informed about the type of desserts male politicians enjoy, the brand of suits they wear, or whether or not they are grandfathers.

One reporter, Daphne Bramham, commented that her "tipping point" was a headline in last week's paper about Nancy Pelosi which read "Grandmother set to be speaker" (2006). The story's first paragraph mentioned that Pelosi had begun Election Day at the hairdresser (Bramham, 2006). Bramham commented, "That would be fine if the story of Stephen Harper's win early this year had been headlined "Father of two to be next prime minister" and if somewhere in a story there had been a reference to what he wore or to freshly cut hair" (2006, p. C4). Others agreed, as Myrna Blyth, author of

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Spin Sisters, said that women politicians are held to a higher standard (Brown & Holt, 2006). She also acknowledged that no one talked about what Dennis Hastert wore (Brown & Holt, 2006). Similarly, Rona Ambrose is one of the most influential and powerful politicians in Canada, yet leading up to talks in Nairobi, the activists who opposed her didn't attack her policies, but instead blamed her problems on spending too much time at the hairdresser (Brown & Holt, 2006).

Other comments about Pelosi included her being all over TV with a "runaway bride thing going on." Her bright red pantsuit was mentioned numerous times, with plenty of reporters guessing whether or not it was Armani (Eagan, 2006). The Boston Herald columnist Margery Eagan went as far as to say, "The new Congress could amuse itself by searching for any sign of movement in Speaker Pelosi's forehead and the Senate would be entertained by the expressionless, Pelosi-like forehead of Senator Clinton" (2006). Pelosi has also been referred to as the "trim 66-year-old grandmother," "grandmother who favors expensively cut designer suits" and a "gavel-wielding grandmother" (Eagan, 2006). Todd Foster of Knight Ridder Tribune was even observant enough to comment on how Pelosi blinks (2007). He said he noticed, "When she blinks, she often wears an I-just-sucked-a-lemon look on her face" (2007, p. 1). Another commenter on Pelosi's appearance during the State of the Union speech said, "Pelosi was obviously high. No one blinks that much unless they are tweaked" (Foster, 2007, p. 1).

Many believe that like Fiorina and Couric, Madam Speaker Pelosi is being held to an unfair level of media scrutiny that has everything to do with her gender and nothing to do with her qualifications (Cramer, 2007). President Bush has never said publicly about ex-Speaker Dennis Hastert, as he did about Representative Pelosi, that he had sent "the names of some Republican interior decorators who can help her pick out the new drapers in her new offices" (Cramer, 2007, p. 16A).

Ultimately, the question becomes whether focusing on the clothing choices of serious female political players risks rendering them less than serious. With rare exceptions, male politicians are seldom scrutinized for their choice of suits (Fuentes, 2007). Gail

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Dines, sociology and women's studies professor at Wheelock College in Boston, said that some reporters and editors haven't figured out a way to cover female politicians that doesn't rely on the old stereotypes (Fuentes, 2007). "To be a woman politician, you have to strategize and work hard, and yet what matters is what designer you're wearing. It's a way to make woman in power less scary," Dines commented. "It's putting woman into a comfort zone for those who are still baffled by how to treat strong woman" (Fuentes, 2007, p. 11A). Kathleen Hall Jamieson, professor at the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, thinks the underlying motivation for reporting on female politicians' style is "the natural news interest in talking about what changes and men don't look different. There is a uniform for power and we all know what it looks like. The only thing to change is the color of the shirt and tie" (Fuentes, 2007, p. 11A).

Because women have greater fashion options, changes they make are more obvious and invite analysis. Now that Pelosi's "uniform" has been established, that should be the end of it. The same goes for Clinton (Fuentes, 2007). Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, thinks reporting that describes women politicians' appearance is justified in profiles of them. "Beyond that, there comes a point where it reflects badly on the press. Whether it's Condoleezza Rice, Madeleine Albright, or Nancy Pelosi, they all fall into the same zone as their male counterparts. They all look like regular people; no one is a runway model or the elephant man" (Fuentes, 2007, p. 11A).

Although Nancy Pelosi faces much scrutiny regarding her outfits and her favoritism of Armani suits, there are many journalists who praise Pelosi for wearing these articles of clothing and doing so with class. When it comes to politics, there was a time when it was the norm for women to dress and act like men in order to get elected (Weinstein, 2007). But now, powerful women, from Nancy Pelosi, the first female Speaker of the House, to Hillary Rodham Clinton, an aspiring presidential nominee, let their feminine style shine (Weinstein, 2007). Armani suits probably adorn many men in Congress, but it's Speaker of the House Pelosi who looks best wearing the upscale label (Weinstein, 2007). She not only broke the political glass ceiling, but

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she's helping eliminate the once-drab dress code for women on Capitol Hill. "She should treat femininity as an opportunity and not try to emulate masculinity in politics" Dahlia Weinstein of Rocky Mountain News said (2007, p. 8). Donatella Versace said Hillary Rodham Clinton should wear dresses and skirts, rather than pants (Weinstein, 2007). "Since Speaker Pelosi, I pay attention to what political women are wearing. She has really opened up the spectrum of fashion possibilities by not just wearing 'the black pantsuit,' which used to be the uniform" (Weinsteind, 2007, p. 8). Her sense of style could be described as "Business-like with accessories that probably would not be worn in the business world" (Weinstein, 2007, p. 8). Women in politics are the first to say they give serious thought to their appearance because, like it or not, voters at home, powerbrokers on the Hill and the news media are all mindful of the slightest faux pas (Weinstein, 2007).

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CONCLUSION

In conclusion, trivializing women through their coverage in the media seems to be a throwback to a time when women were “only” spouses, not players (Fuentes, 2007). Ruth Mandel, director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University said, “To focus on their attire, the cut of their clothes, is to be in danger of trivializing who they are, the important role they play and the meaning behind women’s advancement to positions of power: That is, we’re moving to a true democracy of shared leadership” (Fuentes, 2007, p. 11A). The problem is the media haven’t caught up yet. “A woman who rises to a leadership position at any level is going to dress appropriately,” said Kathleen Hall Jamieson. “It underscores her competence and is not a distraction” (Fuentes, 2007, p. 11A).

Through the examples of Carly Fiorina, Katie Couric, and Nancy Pelosi, I have concluded that the media tend to elaborate and focus on gender issues of powerful and influential women, regardless of whether or not they are part of the corporate world. The media concentration on their appearances, their time spent at the hairdresser, and their title as a grandmother, tend to trivialize the position of power that these women find themselves in. Whether they are called a “celebrity rock star,” a “bitch,” a “grandmother,” “glamorous,” or someone with “incredible legs,” these often negative portrayals of women in power often hinder women from moving up in their careers. The women who are able to climb to the highest rungs of the corporate ladder are already faced with tougher critics than their male counterparts, and often find themselves having to prove a lot more to their superiors. Therefore, the media is not helping these women by concentrating on their clothing and appearances and trivializing the roles they play. In my research I found that the media portrayals were just as bad whether dealing with the corporate world, the world of journalism, or the political world.