

Running Head: GREAT LEGS ON PRIMETIME NEWS

GREAT LEGS ON PRIMETIME NEWS: HOW READERS DECONSTRUCT “AMERICA’S  
SWEETHEART’S” FRAMED NEWS STORIES

A Thesis presented to  
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Master of Arts in Professional Communication

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## APPROVAL PAGE

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of Humanities and Social Science, have examined the thesis entitled

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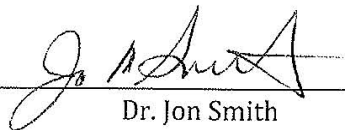
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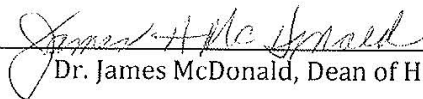
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Great Legs on Primetime News: How Readers Deconstruct  
“America’s Sweetheart’s” Framed News Stories

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**ABSTRACT**

On September 5, 2006, *The Today Show’s* and “America’s Sweetheart” Katie Couric began a new career as the first solo female nighttime news anchor for CBS *Evening News*. During Couric’s transition, several news stories were published about Couric; many of which were stories that focused on her physical appearance and personal life. Using prior research, this paper investigated newspaper articles that used framed themes about Couric and Charles Gibson, who too was transitioning from daytime to nighttime news the same year, and determined whether or not the categories dealing with personality, family, appearance/clothes, and sex had a significant effect with university students.

The purpose of this research paper was to first give an overview of the framing theory and of past research on gender roles and then to create a connection between the two. This was achieved through an evaluation of news stories which had framed themes and gender stereotypes.

Significance was found in the Personality, Family, and Appearance/Clothes framed theme categories on Couric. It did not, however, indicate significance in the Sex category for Couric. The data indicated no significance with Gibson or Anchors in any of the four categories. This indicates that the news stories’ agenda focused more on critiquing Couric as a woman than Couric as a news anchor.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

On April 7, 2006, NBC's *The Today Show* news anchor Katherine Anne "Katie" Couric announced that after 15 years with the morning news show, she would be leaving to begin a new journey as the first solo female anchor of a weekday evening news show, *CBS Evening News* (Friedman, 2006).

Large hype was built around Couric's transition from morning feature stories to nighttime hard-covered journalism. And with all the publicity surrounding the change, the biggest question of all was – will she succeed?

Couric knew she wanted to be involved in journalism at a young age largely due to the influence of her father, John Couric, who was once a reporter himself. Couric said "I was inspired to go into journalism largely because my father urged me. I thought about newspapers, then decided that if my face didn't stop a clock, I might as well try television" (Klein, 2007, p. 18).

In late 1970s and early 1980s, Couric began her journey by working as a desk assistant for the ABC news bureau in Washington D.C. and later moved to CNN as an assignment editor (Huff, 2008). Although she was given opportunities for news reporting, Couric fell short of expectations. Burt Reinhart, the president at the time, did not think Couric had what it took to be a news reporter and officially took Couric off the air. After four years in the television news business, but little experience as a reporter, Couric went to Florida's WTVJ Channel 6 in 1985 in an attempt to find her big break (Bayard, 2007).

Even with two years of news reporting in Washington DC as the deputy pentagon correspondent (Carmody, 1989), Couric's big break did not hit until 1989 when she began to substitute for co-anchors Jane Pauley and Deborah Norville on *The Today Show* (Auletta, 2005). In 1991, when Norville officially left the show to have a baby, Couric was chosen to replace her (Bickelhaupt, 1991).

Couric was an instant success on *The Today Show*; her quirky, sweet spirit titled her as "America's Sweetheart" (Shales, 2009). Success, however, brought about conflict in the workplace. With the high ratings, Couric demanded and received a shared spotlight with Bryant Gumbel. The change in roles for the two anchors left them often "sniping at each other off camera and undercutting each other on the air" (Klein, 2007, p. 100). The conflict eventually led to Gumbel's dismissal from the show in 1997 and it did not take long for the media to hear about the conflict the two anchors had with one another. When asked how she felt about Gumbel's departure Couric said,

I feel like it's more my candy store. Bryant opened up every show. He threw to commercials. Basically, Bryant always spoke first. The things I'm talking about are primarily cosmetic. But they are symbolic in terms of the position of the anchors on the show. I think his philosophy was that somebody had to guide the ship. But I saw things a bit differently (Klein, 2007, p. 103).

The misconception that men are assertive and women are communal (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007) is the old-fashioned form of leadership. Now with Couric taking the reins, the traditional form of morning news broadcasting, with the man as the leading correspondent and the female as his sidekick, was being pushed aside and a new form of news reporting had begun.



In January of 1998, Couric's husband, Jay Monahan, lost his fight against colon cancer and viewers no longer saw Couric as just the quirky, fun personality; she was also the "grieving widow, the single mother, and the symbol of suffering womankind all rolled into one" (Klein, 2007, p. 116). It appeared that this loss strengthened her identity to the viewers which, in turn, strengthened her credibility as a reporter.

Soon after Gumbel left the show in 1997, *Today's* newsreader, Matt Lauer, was selected to replace Gumbel. Couric did not waste time putting him in his place which was the secondary role that was traditionally saved for the female news anchors (Klein, 2007). No longer was she talking about things that were "primarily on cosmetics" but instead she was leading the show.

With the change of her position on the morning news show, Couric decided to make drastic changes in herself. She began to lose weight and become more fashion-conscious with her style of clothes and hair. Her physical changes made an impression on television viewers; she was now considered "the best legs in television" (Klein, 2007, p. 125). The attention she was given was both positive and negative and even Couric herself admitted that it bothered her that her legs and the way she dressed was the media's main coverage in their stories. "Why, she asked, didn't reporters write about Charlie Gibson's hair or his necktie? Of course, Katie knew the answer. Fairly or not, women on television were held to higher standards of personal appearance than men" (Klein, 2007, p. 141).

It did not take long before Couric was again updating her contract with NBC. On December 2001, NBC granted her a 4.5 year contract for \$65 million; an income that

was \$3 million more than both Barbara Walters and Peter Jennings. This officially made her the highest-paid journalist in the history of television news (Greppi, 2006).

After 15 years with the morning show, Couric became restless so when CBS President Leslie Moonves offered Couric a career change of a lifetime, it did not appear difficult for her to make the transition from NBC's morning news, *The Today Show*, to CBS's *Evening News* as the first female solo news anchor (Stanley, 2009). Once the decision was made, however, Couric was not as confident in her judgment. Couric understood the risk she was taking and she told CBS "this better be fun" (Klein, 2007, p. 212).

On September 5, 2006 Couric attempted to make it fun on her first show by welcoming the 13.5 million viewers with her bubbly, "Hi, everyone!" salutation; an informal greeting that was quickly replaced with a more professional introduction, "Hello everyone" (Goldiner, 2008).

That same year, Charles Gibson from *Good Morning America* was offered a nighttime news anchor job as well for ABC's *World News Tonight* (Steinberg, 2006). Both reporters had a long-time career in morning news; Gibson worked for *Good Morning America* for a total of 19 years throughout his career (Kurtz, 2006).

The first two weeks reported back-to-back success for Couric who beat both NBC's Brian Williams and ABC's Charles Gibson's evening news shows' ratings—the first time since 1998 (Klein, 2007). But not long after her two weeks success, Couric fell down from the ranks to a third place position and has been there ever since (Huff, 2008).

What did Couric do or not do to fall short of expectations? Was she trying too hard to change the image of the traditional news anchor or was the media too critical on her while she was transitioning from daytime to nighttime news? The purpose of this paper was to determine if news stories which used framed themes can have a framing effect on university students' decision outcomes, specifically focused on gender stereotypes. Past research has (Brewer and Macafee, 2007) indicated that Couric was more often framed for her personality, appearance, family life, and sex than her contender Gibson. This research paper used the same news stories to analyze the framing effect it had on university students.

Since Gibson and Couric both began their transition from daytime to nighttime news the same year and both spent most of their reporting careers doing daytime television, the two were selected to be compared in the research. The experiment used students at a small, western university who read a sample of the news stories which used framed themes on Couric and Gibson, studied by Brewer and Macafee (2007), and then pretest and posttest surveys were distributed to the participants to determine whether or not there was a change in decision outcomes after reading the news stories. University-age students were selected to participate in this study because of their lack of interest in primetime, television news (Mindich, 2005). Having older participants, who are familiar with Couric or Gibson, could have negatively influenced the experiment. Participants who were neutral on the position helped to determine that it was the framed stories themselves that influenced their decision outcomes.

The intention of this study was to gain a stronger understanding of how news framing and gender identity interact and affect one another. While feminist theorists are

actively creating critical research papers on gender roles and how the media portray women, little research focuses primarily on gender news framing and its effect on viewers.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### Framing Defined

Just as a photo can be cropped to only have a selected portion of an image portrayed, information can be cropped, or framed, to steer an audience toward a specific interpretation. Sociologist Erving Goffman was credited for introducing the framing theory and he recognized psychologist Gregory Bateson for originating the metaphor (Reese, Gandy, Grant, 2001). Both scientists used this approach to consider how people “rely on expectations to make sense of their everyday social experience” (p. 7).

Entman (2007) describes framing as “the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation” (p. 164). Reese et al. (2001) proposed their own definition of framing stating, “Frames are *organizing principles* that are socially *shared* and *persistent* over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully structure the social world” (p. 11, original emphasis). Entman (2007) explains that the structured reality in framing is an attempt to influence viewers to “think, feel, and decide in a particular way” (p. 164).

These “framing effects” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 11) occur when changes, which often are minute, change in meaning enough that it will influence the change of opinions (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Zaller (1992) found that the alternate phrasings of the same issue can “significantly alter its meaning to respondents, even when the change of connotation is not immediately identified” (p. 34). For example, in politics, there are two

political parties with two different connotations for the same issue—abortion. One party claims their stance is on pro-life while the other supports pro-choice. The alternate phrasing, how it is framed by the interpreter, immediately changes the perspective on the topic.

The major premise behind framing theory is that events or issues can be viewed from several different perspectives and have multiple influences. And once the manipulation has taken place, individuals exposed to the framing may have a change of decision outcomes (Chong & Druckman, 2007). In other words, opinions or choices can be influenced to change in a different outcome. Byerly and Ross (2006) state that many times the framing tactic is gone unnoticed by the viewers saying, “there is never any acknowledgement that what we see, read, and listen to in the news is the results of myriad selection decisions that follow journalistic conventions in terms of what constitutes a ‘good’ news story” (p. 39). The audience will take information at face value and those who control the information, such as the media, can choose to manipulate information about a crime (Stempel, Weaver, & Wilhoit, 2003), a political candidate (Ross, 2002; Devitt, 2002), or, in this case, an up-and-coming female news anchor.

### **Framing Applications**

There are four locations where framing is analyzed in communication (Matthes, 2009). The first three examine the use and categorization of framing but the fourth process examines the “framing effects” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 11) on the audience's decision outcomes.

The first process is used when political actors or social movements use the strategy of framing to address their goals or issues (Gamson, 1992). The process of

framing information, Entman (1993) explains, is done by “promoting a particular problem, definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). For example, Nomai and Dionisopoulous (2002) analyzed news stories that critiqued Major League Baseball agent Joe Cubas’ speech that the researchers titled “Cubas Narrative” (p. 97). New stories focused on the “rags to riches” myth which glorified the Cuban baseball players leaving the vilified Communist Cuba. Nomai and Dionisopoulous said, however, the news stories failed to “address a critical disjunction between the popular mediated American Dream and capitalist reality” (p. 98).

The second framing process is used by journalists who “compose a news story to optimize audience accessibility” (Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999, p. 550). The purpose for the framing in news could be to either fulfill audience’s expectations (Nomai & Dionisopoulous, 2002) or slant an issue (Entman, 2007). For example, Husselbee and Elliott (2002) located and analyzed several framed categories in national and regional newspapers which covered two small-town hate crimes. The two communities feared the media would portray their town as “breeding grounds for brutal hate crimes” (p. 847) but their study found the stories focused more on post-crime attitudes and healing “in the wake of a vicious hate crime” (p. 847). In this case, the assumption that the media would be critical to the communities by framing them in a negative light was disproven.

The third process is devoted to assessing the description of media frames (Matthes, 2009), such as locating frame categories within the information. Research shows schemas are used to influence the receivers’ cognitive processing of media information (Entman, 2001; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). Entman

(2001) explains that the schemas are not used to filter out information but instead “provide inferences when information is missing or ambiguous” (p. 349) which directs attention to the selected relevant information and toward a specific conclusion. Schemas have different devices that influence the framing of the central storyline. The five common devices are catchphrases, metaphors, visual images, depictions, and exemplars (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). These devices are subtle ways the media can influence the audience. Chyi and McCombs (2004) analyzed a two-dimensional measurement framing scheme in news stories that wrote about the Columbine school shootings. Using the time and space dimensions, they identified several frame-changing patterns in the stories that covered the highly salient news event. They found that news stories that reflected the past focused on the individual theme, meaning it centered its story on individual people, such as the gunmen and the victims. Stories that focused on the present used societal themes, meaning it focused on social or national significance. Finally, stories that focused on the future used societal themes as well, but focused on what could be preventative measures. This shows that there is a direction in a frame, in this case a time and space dimension.

The final process and what Matthes (2009) found to be the least studied, is the analysis of framing effects. Entman (2001) mentions that framing schemas can influence “substantive beliefs, attitudes, values and preferences,” even for those who have strong adherents on the particular news topic (p. 349). Reese et al. (2001) strongly support Entman’s (2001) theory, stating “the way information is structured affects cognitive processing” (p. 9). To evaluate the effectiveness of framing, researchers attempt to determine if the framing effects have a change in the audience’s decision



outcomes (Iyengar, 1991). In this research paper, both the analysis of news media framing and the effects it has on readers were studied.

### **Framing in the Media**

The news media are just one aspect of communication that can be manipulated to frame a particular interpretation. Byerly and Ross (2006) said that “news stories are everything and nothing at once, providing ‘information’ about the social world but often without the necessary context that would make the events described fully meaningful” (p. 39). The structure of framing in the news is determined by journalists who decide which elements of a story are emphasized over others (Miller, Andsager, & Reichart, 1998; Reese et al., 2001) and many times that constructed reality is accepted by viewers at home (Potter, 1998; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

Using the framing schematic devices (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989), the media may attempt to motivate behavioral changes by using selectivity as a means for sending information that may seem contradictory of individuals’ certain views or interests (Entman, 2001). Emphasizing important ideas in the storyline influences viewers to “think, feel, and decide in a particular way” (Entman, 2007, p. 164). Information and values that influence the cognitive process for viewers of the media are greatly influenced by journalists and their sources (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). Gamson et al. (1992) suggest that “the organization of news into ‘beats’ had a great influence on what was and was not considered newsworthy” (p. 375). As Reese et al. states, “News events are framed within the prevailing paradigm of social and political reality, reinforcing stereotypes, existing political agendas, and prevailing conventional wisdom” (p. 312). In other words, the media attempt to “compose a news story to

optimize audience accessibility” (Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999, p. 550). If the audience accepts or even expects certain stereotypes or agendas, the media will attempt to fulfill the audience’s expectations.

Entman (2007) claims it is reasonable to suggest “that when news clearly slants, those officials favored by the slant become more powerful, freer to do what they want” (p. 170). When slanting the stories, frames offer two ways to organize news information: by selecting and calling attention to particular aspects of the reality or directing attention away from other aspects (Zoch & Turk, 1998). The influence of framed stories that either attract or detract from the reality can indeed slant a position to make a group or individuals more powerful.

### **Gender Roles**

In order to fully understand the difficulty Couric had to overcome in the transition from daytime to nighttime television, one must understand the role she was taking over. Kimmel (2004) states “gender is not simply a system of classification, by which biological males and biological females are sorted, separated, and socialized into equivalent sex roles....[it] also speaks about hierarchy, power, and inequality” (Kimmel, 2004, p. 1). Stereotypical gender roles have been developed through the years in the media. Couric stepped into a man’s territory when she began the CBS *Evening News* in 2006. Never before in the history of news reporting had a female single-handedly anchored a nighttime news show; she alone defied the social rules of gender roles.

Kimmel (2004) categorizes three sociological elements when defining gender: identity, interaction, and institution. He claims that individuals are influenced by validation and legitimization from others. He said, “We do not simply inherit a male or

female sex role...we define and redefine what it means to be men or women in our daily encounters with others” (p. 113). Kimmel (2004) claims that we are influenced by stereotypical gender roles from others, stating “our social world is built on systemic, structural, inequality based on gender; social life reproduces both gender difference and gender inequality” (p. 113). Elmore (2009) explains that “gender schemas” (p. 235) are ways we unconsciously make sense of the world and our place within it. She claims that men are more often expected to do well professionally whereas females’ effort in the workforce can never accumulate to the advantage point the opposite gender has (Elmore, 2009). Couric is going against all odds in her new position but whether or not her fight to succeed will have any effect will be determined by the media and its viewers.

The often misconception that women are only skin-deep is even found in politics (Ross, 2002; Devitt, 2002). When credentials, political affiliation, and service to the community should be amongst the first considerations when choosing a political candidate, female politicians struggle with the media who instead focus on their “attire or marital status” (Devitt, 2002, p. 459). Ross (2002) said, “aspects of their sex are routinely incorporated into what should be ‘ordinary’ stories of politics; they are mundanely framed as women first and then, maybe, as politicians” (p. 81). When Couric was officially moving to nighttime news from daytime, the need to point out her physical appearance and family life seemed just as important (if not more) than her history and experience as a news reporter.

Brewer and Macafee’s (2007) content analysis supported the skin-deep argument which evaluated the framed themes used to describe the new nighttime news anchors. Of the six anchors evaluated during their official move to nighttime news,

Couric and ABC co-anchor Elizabeth Vargas were the highest in appearance-framed coverage. Couric's evaluation primarily focused on her legs and a controversy centered on a digitally altered photograph. Both Couric and Vargas were regularly framed in terms of being women. The men, on the other hand, had little to no reference of their sex. Research on female and male politicians found a similar result where women's personal life, such as attire, appearance, and marital status, were commonly used in the news articles but men were more identified by their experience, occupation, and accomplishments (Robinson & Saint-Jean, 1995; Byerly & Ross, 2006).

Ross (2002), when comparing social relationships between genders, emphasizes the impact and responsibility the media have in portraying females, stating "... media send important messages to the public about women's place, women's role, and women's lives" (p. 79). The media can choose to represent the female reporter as "bubbly" and not credible, due to the length of her skirt, or they can discuss her news reporting experiences. Byerly and Ross (2006) state that

They (women) are persistently trivialized by media speculation over their private lives, domestic arrangements, and sartorial style...their potency as change agents or even as serious politicians is casually undermined by the media's use of extraneous detail such as their age, their shoes, or their latest haircut (p. 44).

Ross (2002) points out a double standard when it comes to critiquing women politicians stating "they expect 'better' standards of behavior, higher moral values, more honesty, and integrity" (p. 82). The media portray women as a generalized cookie cutter stereotype which, in turn, represents women as a whole. This generalization assumes that the success of one can positively reflect on all women and likewise negative results

can reflect poorly on women as a whole (Byerly & Ross, 2006). In this case, Couric represents women striving to succeed in primetime news and if she does not do well in the male-dominant role, it will be perceived that most likely no woman can succeed in evening news.

With the idea of generalized women, Kimmel (2004) points out that “we respond to the world we encounter; shaping, modifying, and creating our identities through those encounters with other people and within social institutions” (p. 93). With limited encounters with women in the news, society may deem women uninformed or inadequate to work in or contribute to the field. Research has shown that because of the limited representation of women as news sources, “it may serve as a signal to readers that women are unimportant for public events and activities and undeserving of leadership roles” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 140). Gender stereotypes have created the illusion of a successful leader (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). While women are considered to be “communal, possessing traits such as kindness, helpfulness, concern for others, warmth and gentleness,” men are considered to be “agentic, possessing traits such as ambition, confidence, self-sufficiency, dominance, and assertiveness” (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p. 127)—the same traits people assume a leader should possess. Stereotypes can influence the perception of a leader. In the case of Couric and Gibson, viewers are accustomed to and expect a male news anchor delivering important, serious information to the nation while they may be hesitant to accept a “gentle” female anchor in the same position. The hesitation comes without credible support for research has found that women and men both shy away from tougher government stories but at the same time value the quality of adversarial news (Norris, 1997).

Because women allegedly do not possess these leadership traits, people have a difficult time perceiving a woman in an authoritative position. Kellerman and Rhode (2007) state

Often people consider women unqualified because they lack the stereotypical directive and assertive qualities of good leaders. But people also frequently dislike women who possess and display those very abilities because highly directive and assertive behavior can be incompatible with the communal stereotype of the female gender role (p. 128).

In short, it appears that Couric is in a lose-lose situation: if she is to be her bubbly, quirky self as she was in *The Today Show*, she would not be considered credible in her field but if she appears too directive and cold, viewers will be turned off by her unwomanly demeanor.

Carli (2006) did a study that focused on this very idea: female and male pairs were assigned different communication roles and while they were role playing, participants evaluated their personalities. In each pair, there was either a female or male who was dominant and assertive while the opposing member was communal and agreeing. The female actors who expressed dominance over the males were disliked whereas the dominant males were accepted. The females that were more communal and accepting were considered more influential than when they were assertive communicators; the males were accepted using both styles of communication (Carli, 2006). Research by Yoder and Schleicher (1996) found similar stereotypes. In their study, they evaluated and compared women who had succeeded in male-dominated professions against other women who had traditional female work positions. Research

found that the successful women were considered less likable, attractive, happy, and socially desirable than the women who worked in the feminine careers such as daycare and nursing (Yoder & Schleicher, 1996). Couric is the first female to have her own nighttime news show; she is competing against a history of successful men. It can be assumed that her position as a nighttime news anchor will create negative feelings from the viewers at home.

The muted group theory is a feminist communication theory that suggests “people who are attached or assigned to subordinate groups may have a lot to say but they tend to get relatively little power to say it” (Kramarae, 2005, p. 55). This theory claims that women are more limited in what they say, when they say it, and with what results. Also it states that accepted language practices have been centered primarily on men and their experiences (Kramarae, 2005). This means that women are constrained in language, thus muted. The theory has three basic tenants that explain how the dominant and subordinate groups deal with communication (Wall, 1999). First, the theory states that the two sexes see the world differently due to their diverse life experiences. Couric’s life experiences as a woman would create a new dimension in nighttime news as opposed to Gibson’s male-dominant experience. In past research, studies found that men were 70 percent more likely to be the source for news stories than women (Zoch & Turk, 1998); that lack of representation limits the perception and interpretation of the story. Not having a woman directing nighttime news is, in a sense, a limitation to the viewers at home. Secondly, since men are considered the politically dominant group, their “mode of expression is dominant” (p. 26) meaning, they are more influential and persuasive in political dialogue than women who are less accepted as

political communicators. Viewers, in result, may not find Couric credible enough to cover serious, world news because of her soft news personification. Lastly, the theory claims that in order for a woman to succeed in the male-dominant world, she must express herself similarly to that of the dominant group. Unless Couric presents herself as a serious, political commentator, similar to past news anchors like Walter Cronkite and Peter Jennings, she may not succeed as a nighttime news anchor. Ironically, as mentioned before, research has shown that women who present themselves more dominant and confident are less appealing (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Carli, 2006; Yoder and Schleicher, 1996). So again it appears that Couric is faced with a double-edge sword.

Kellerman and Rhode (2007) point out that “global competition, technology growth, increased workforce and customer diversity, and accelerated social change have all placed increasing pressure on organizations to find new and creative approaches to leadership and management” (p. 140). Feminists claim that new approach is what women have already been doing. Postmodern feminists embrace the notion of being the “others” saying, “the condition of otherness enables woman to stand back and criticize the norms, values, and practices that the dominant cultures seek to impose on everyone” (Salwen & Stacks, 1992, p. 503). Women offer new experiences and perspectives in a situation that can benefit the news story (Norris, 1997). CBS specifically hired Couric for her “other” style of news anchoring in an attempt to create a new perception of nighttime news (Klein, 2007). Klein said CBS was “in the business of using warm, womanly emotions to court valued demographic niches” (p. 199). CBS *Evening News* was in the third place spot in nighttime news; they needed a new face



and a new style of presentation to succeed with the demanding, ever-changing audience and that was why Couric was selected (Klein, 2007). Winzenburg (2006) points out, though, that the few women who have succeeded in nighttime news had a male co-host to strengthen the appeal. He said

Others will blame society, saying viewers welcome only a 'girl next door' type when she's sitting next to a strong male. Couric will be the real test to see how willing viewers are to watch a woman sitting alone delivering supertime news of the latest disaster (USA Today, 2006).

This experiment tested Winzenburg's (2006) very idea; did society accept Couric as a nighttime news anchor or did the biased media negatively influence the readers through the use of gender framing?

### **News Framing Women**

Social gender roles do exist and news framing does occur, both have been discussed in the above mentioned literature review. This research focused on gender news framing and whether audience members are influenced by its slant. Past research has already found there is lack of representation when dealing with female news sources (Armstrong, 2004; Zoch & Turk, 1998) which "signals to readers that women are unimportant" (Zoch & Turk, p. 771). However, this paper focused on the reporters themselves—nighttime news anchors specifically.

Beck (2001) argues that "the idea that dominant ideological codes are not reality but only one interpretation by one social group is the source of significant conflict between feminists and those who oppose them" (p. 149). Beck states further that the decision makers in the media play a significant role in perpetuating those codes. Norris

(1997) explains that many times the ideological codes are influenced by what the readers want to know. He explains that the media are pressured into covering the social movements in a way that can “minimize or distort their message” (pg. 185) for the value of entertainment, drama, and simplification. As Rakow and Wackwitz (2004) put it, women’s coverage is “undeniably marked by a commitment primarily to ‘news value’ rather than by concern for the rights of women” (p. 194). Thus, whatever the media choose as newsworthy is what the audience will receive and that framed reality will be taken at face value; whether or not the rights of women have been taken into consideration. Thus, it would be easier and more interesting to criticize and label Couric as a bubbly news reporter who will not be able to handle the pressure of a man’s world than to support and encourage her transition by listing her credentials and experiences.

Female political candidates have gone through the same framing critiques. Devitt (2002) states, “focusing on female candidate’s attire or her marital status does not add to the electorate’s knowledge of where she stands on public policy issues or whether or not she’s qualified to hold the office she’s seeking” (p. 459). The media determine what is meaningful to its audience. Thus, it can be assumed that the media are aware of the framing process and will use it for their benefit.

Byerly and Ross (2006) explain that news frames are ways to understand social relations that encourage a “commitment to share a particular interpretation of and ways of seeing the world that are entirely partial and that preserve the male-ordered status quo” (p. 39). So for women who go against the particular interpretation, being “cast as outsiders, trouble-makers, even evil women, is inevitable since they challenge the very basis of a patriarchal society” (Beck, 2001, p. 140). In an attempt to keep male-ordered

status quo, Couric, the “trouble-maker,” will be framed negatively in an attempt to keep social order.

Couric had to take a lot of criticism when transitioning from daytime to nighttime news, so much in fact it seemed that the media had an agenda. Kurtz said “despite her years of experience interviewing presidents and world leaders on *The Today Show*, Couric has faced skepticism... even though press reports about Gibson rarely mention the lighter shtick he did during 19 years of *Good Morning America*” (Kurtz, 2006). It is apparent that there is gender news framing but Beck (2001) goes further when saying it can have an effect on public opinion. He states, “Treating women and their concerns seriously in the media would go a long way to getting society to take them seriously” (p. 152). The time has come for viewers to demand news that take women seriously; for until then, the lack of representation tells the public that women “have no access to information that would be of use to the public” (Zoch & Turk, 1998) and are otherwise useless to the news world.

### **Rationale**

Feminist theories “advance and value the study of women and women’s institutions separately, in comparison to, or inclusive with, those who have predominantly been of, for, and by men but generalized to all humans” (Salwen & Stacks, 1992, p. 499). This paper took the two framing processes, the concept of news framing and the study of framing effects, and determined if the concept could play a function in gender roles. Past research has already indicated that news stories have framed gender sources negatively (Armstrong, 2004; Zoch & Turk, 1998) which limit

representation for women. But this thesis focused primarily on primetime news anchors and the framed gender themes used to critique both Couric and Gibson.

Salwen and Stacks (1992) state, “feminist theories offer an opportunity to explain the complexity and diversity of women’s lives, not just the oppression they experience or the collusion in which they sometimes participate,” but it is also a chance to celebrate the advancement of women’s liberation and progression in the workforce (p. 503). Katie Couric is a great example of progression in the workforce; she is the first woman to be a solo primetime news anchor. And with such success, it necessary to acknowledge her achievements and analyze how the media portrays her as a primetime news anchor.

Reading or conducting research about how women and men “are portrayed in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain socially endorsed views of gender” (Wood, 1994, p. 234) is not only interesting but essential in the social science world of research. Without acknowledging the fact that inequality still exists in the world today, there will be no progression. Women’s media activism is an “organized effort on women’s part to make changes in established media enterprises or to create new media structures with the goal of expanding women’s voice in society and enabling their social advancement” (Byerly & Ross, 2006, p. 101); this research paper contributes to that very cause. Just as gender and feminist theories “actively refuse to continue the silence” (Salwen & Stacks, 1992, p. 504) this paper acknowledged the inequality of women in the news media, specifically news anchors. This study will be beneficial to the mass communication and gender research field.

Based on the reviewed literature, social gender roles do occur in news framing but is not clear whether these studies indicate if viewers can be affected by the two

issues. Therefore, this study focused on the “framing effect” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 11) news stories have, or may not have, on university students. Framing effects refer to changes in decision outcomes resulting from framing alterations (Iyengar, 1991). Fowler (1991) said,

Women are represented in an unfavorable light and men are characterized by mentions of occupational and political success...taken all together, the discourse of the newspaper media handle men and women in terms of different sets of categories, different stereotypes and it seems very likely that discrimination in discourse helps maintain intellectual habits that promote discrimination in practice (p. 105).

The focus of this study compared framed articles on nighttime news anchors, Couric and Gibson. Brewer and Macafee (2007) found four feminine themes (Armstrong, 2004) used most often in the news stories about Couric than Gibson. In the personality theme, Couric had 28% coverage and only 8% of Gibson’s articles mentioned his personality. In the family theme, Couric had 12% coverage in her stories and Gibson had 11%. In the appearance/clothes theme, Couric had 21% coverage yet Gibson had only 8%. Finally, 34% of Couric’s stories mentioned her sex while only 4% of Gibson had any mention of his gender. Having used the above mentioned themes, this study determined if such framing alterations in the news articles positively or negatively influenced the perception of female and male nighttime news anchors, specifically Couric and Gibson.

## Chapter Three

### Hypotheses and Research Question

In creating the four hypotheses, this study focused on the “feminine issues,” which are themes that are considered “pejorative labels or unfavorable terms” (Armstrong, 2004, p. 140). As Ross (2002) explains, the media repeatedly cover women using themes such as their age and “what they look like, their domestic and family circumstances, their fashion sense, and so on” (Ross, 2002, p. 89). This study determined if using such framed themes in news stories can have a “framing effect” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 11) on readers. Therefore, the following four hypotheses were created based on the four feminine themes.

The first framing theme was personality. Words such as “bubbly” and “quirky” commonly described Couric as a reporter (Klein, 2007; Johnson, 2006). With this type of word usage viewers may question her credibility as a news anchor.

*H1: The framed news stories will significantly influence the university students' decision outcomes on Katie Couric but not with Charles Gibson when dealing with personality.*

The second framing theme was family. References to Couric's two daughters and husband, who died of colon cancer in 1998 (Wyatt, 2006), are examples of family themes in news stories. Ross (2002) found that it is common to find references to family circumstances when dealing with female politicians; Couric may not have been running for a political position but she was campaigning for viewership. This hypothesis will determine if such a theme can have a negative effect on Couric.

*H2: The framed news stories will significantly influence the university students' decision outcomes on Katie Couric but not with Charles Gibson when dealing with family.*

The third framing theme was appearance/clothes. Women are constantly being evaluated by their choice of clothes, hairstyle, and physical looks; this critique in women even goes into the professional setting. Professional women being judged by their physical appearance was even addressed from Couric herself when she stated, “[W]hy didn’t reporters write about Charlie Gibson’s hair or his necktie?” (Klein, 2007, p. 141). As Klein (2007) puts it, “Fairly or not, women on television are held to higher standards of personal appearance than men” (p. 141). Critiques based on Couric’s appearance and clothes may discredit her as a serious news anchor.

*H3: The framed news stories will significantly influence the university students' decision outcomes on Katie Couric but not with Charles Gibson when dealing with appearance/clothes.*

The fourth and final framing theme was sex. Labeling the anchors as male or female would fall into the sex framed theme. To be a nighttime news anchor, it would be assumed that the sex of the anchor would not matter but even in politics, Ross (2002) found that “a woman politician is always described as a *woman* politician; her sex is always on display, always the primary descriptor” (p. 93, original emphasis).

*H4: The framed news stories will significantly influence the university students' decision outcomes on Katie Couric but not with Charles Gibson when dealing with sex.*

Framing effects refer to changes in decision outcomes resulting from framing alterations (Iyengar, 1991). Prior research has already determined that news articles critiqued Couric more by feminine themes than her opponent, Gibson (Brewer and Macafee, 2007). The four hypotheses tested to see if the use of such themes made a strong enough framing effect to change the university students' decisions.

Once the hypotheses were analyzed, the research question determined if such news stories which used framed themes on Couric and Gibson had an effect on gender stereotypes for any primetime news anchors. If the hypotheses are proven and Couric was criticized by the participants but news anchors in general were not, this study could question if it was Couric as an individual that people criticized, not Couric as the anchor.

*RQ1: After reading the framed news stories on Couric and Gibson, did the participant's decision outcomes on news anchors, in general, change?*



## Chapter Four

### Method

Using the same newspaper articles used in Brewer and Macafee's (2007) research paper, participants will be asked to read and evaluate Couric and Gibson's stories. They will each be given a pretest and posttest survey which will have gender stereotype statements about Couric, Gibson and news anchors, in general, based on the four feminine themes (Armstrong, 2004).

### Participants

There were 76 university students who participated in the experiment. They were told the point of the research was to study their impressions of primetime news anchors. The study sample was selected from those enrolled in communication classes during the spring semester. There were 33 boys and 43 girls, ages ranging from 18-26 years.

For this experiment, college-age students were used to test the framing effect on the news stories which used framed themes on Couric and Gibson. The younger generation is not considered the target audience for primetime news. In fact, adults under the age of 30 years are the least likely to watch television nighttime news (Mindich, 2005) yet they were selected for that very reason; this helped control for the overall effects of the experiment. Having participants who are not emotionally committed to a show helps avoid extraneous variables that may influence the participants' decisions. For example, if the participants already watched Couric on *The Evening News* their opinion may have been too biased to test the manipulation variable in the experiment or they could have had a strong disdain toward one of the anchors which, again, could have lost the precision of the study.

Students in the experiment group were given 20 news stories on Couric and Gibson that were studied prior to this research (Brewer & Macafee, 2007). The control group consisted of 38 students who sat through a class lecture on conflict and decision making in interpersonal relationships, in replace of reading the news stories. Each group received a pretest and posttest survey in which the questions centered on the four feminine themes: personality, family, appearance/clothes, and sex (Appendix A and Appendix B).

### **Control**

Environmental factors were taken into consideration during the preparation of the experiment. The location of the experiment was in a secluded classroom setting with the drapes closed; the clock had been removed from the wall. The same room was used for every participant.

Once participants showed up for the experiment, they were asked to turn off their cellular phones and place them in a cabinet which was closed off from the group. They were notified in the beginning that once the experiment began; they could not leave the room nor talk to one another during the experiment.

No time limit was set for the completion of the pretest, posttest, or readings of the 20 news stories to allow each participant sufficient amount of time to read through the stories and fill out the surveys. Participants were instructed to place the paperwork back in the folder after the completion of the tests and readings. For each phase of the experiment (pretest, reading, posttest), the documents were distributed by the moderator and then gathered in the same manner.

## Data Gathering

Study participants were first asked to fill out a pretest survey which consisted of 24 gender stereotype statements dealing with nighttime news anchors in general and then specifically statements on Couric and Gibson. The questions were based on the four feminine themes: personality, family, appearance/clothes, and sex.

Once the participants filled out the pretest survey, they were asked to read a selection of news articles from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* newspapers. Brewer and Macafee (2007) located 99 stories from the three newspapers that were between Couric's transition from daytime to nighttime news; the dates were from April 6, 2006 to November 8, 2006. Gibson had 53 news stories published from the three newspapers during his transition; the dates were from May 24, 2006 to November 8, 2006. The same articles used for Brewer and Macafee's (2007) research were collected for this experiment. Ten stories on each news anchors, 20 total, were randomly chosen from the sample and used for the experiment. When randomly selecting the articles for both Couric and Gibson, the four framed categories (personality, family, appearance/clothes, sex) were used in the search field to randomly selected stories that covered each feminine issue.

After the participants finished reading the articles, they were asked to fill out the posttest survey which consisted of the same gender stereotype statements yet in a different, random order. This was done to avoid memorization between the two surveys and/or manipulation in the results. This determined the framing effect, if any, the news stories had on the university students' decisions.

## Instruments

The three newspapers involved in Brewer and Macafee's (2007) study, which were the same stories used for this experiment, were the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. The dates of the articles were between Couric and Gibson's transition from daytime to nighttime news; for Couric they were from April 6, 2006 to November 8, 2006 and Gibson the dates were from May 24, 2006 to November 8, 2006.

The pretest-posttest surveys were designed in a Likert scale. Each statement gave the option to answer by circling one of the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree (see Appendix A and B). Neutral was available for the statements in which the participant had no opinion. When coded, the Strongly Agree represented 5 and then went down to 1 for Strongly Disagree.

The pretest and posttest surveys centered on the four feminine themes: personality, family, appearance/clothes, and sex. Written in opposing fashion, two statements were created for each feminine theme under each news anchor (Couric, Gibson, and Anchors). When coding the responses to the surveys, the responses to the second statements (written in opposition to the first) were inverted to accurately parallel the first statement and answer. The second statements had an asterisk on the coding section of the surveys to clarify which responses to reverse.

The pretest and posttest surveys had the same statements but in a different, random order. The survey statements were originally developed and were pilot tested to determine its reliability. Reliability for this study was .96 in the pretest and .96 in the posttest.

## **Design and Analysis**

This study employed a pretest and posttest survey design. The independent variables were the 20 news stories which used framed themes about Couric and Gibson. The dependent variables were the posttest surveys; they were compared to see if there was a framing effect after reading the news stories.

This study was investigated to determine the difference between the pretest and posttest results based on nighttime news anchors. The four variables analyzed were Couric, Gibson, Anchors, and the control group. The data was measured on an interval scale and the participants were randomly selected. Thus, the parametric, two-tailed, dependent t-test was used as the statistical test.

## Chapter Five

### Results

The data used in the pretest-posttest experiment was analyzed using the two-tailed dependent t-test with an alpha level of .01; thus,  $p < .01$  to indicate significance. The critical value for the two-tailed test at the .01 level of significance with 75 df was 2.65.

#### Personality

As shown in Table 1 and 2, using the two-tailed dependent t-test, statements dealing with Personality indicated statistical significance for Couric at the .01 level ( $p=.000$ ) with the sample mean reporting 2.91 in the pretest compared to 3.36 in the posttest. Therefore,  $t(75) = 5.58$ ,  $p<.01$ , indicating the test statistic had a greater value than the predetermined critical value: 2.65. Thus, the results indicated that gender stereotype statements regarding Couric's personality had a framing effect on the participants.

Furthermore, statements dealing with Gibson ( $p=.042$ ) and Anchors ( $p=.014$ ) did not report significance at the .01 level. With Gibson ( $t(75) = 2.05$ ,  $p>.01$ ), the sample mean reported 2.66 in the pretest compared to 2.81 in the posttest. With Anchors ( $t(75) = 2.47$ ,  $P>.01$ ), the sample mean reported 2.50 in the pretest and 2.69 in the posttest. Therefore, the hypothesis for this category (Personality) was supported by the data.

Table 1  
 Personality Framing Category's Mean, Standard Deviation, and Difference of  
 Mean for News Anchors Using the Pretest and Posttest Correlation

		<b>Personality</b>		
		Mean	Standard Dev.	Mean Difference
<b>Couric</b>	Pre	2.91	.95	--
	Post	3.36	1.01	-.448
<b>Gibson</b>	Pre	2.66	.79	--
	Post	2.81	1.01	-.149
<b>Anchor</b>	Pre	2.50	.93	--
	Post	2.69	.86	-.195

Table 2  
 Personality Framing Category's Sample, Test Statistic, and Significance for  
 News Anchors Using the Pretest and Posttest Correlation

<b>News Anchors</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Test Statistic</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Couric	76	5.58	.000
Gibson	76	2.05	.042
Anchors	76	2.47	.014

## Family

As shown on Table 3 and 4, using the two-tailed dependent t-test, statements dealing with Family did not report significance for either Gibson ( $p=.112$ ;  $t(75) = 1.60$ ,  $p>.01$ ) nor Anchors ( $p=.687$ ;  $t(75)= .403$ ,  $p>.01$ ) at the .01 level. With Gibson, the sample mean reported 2.78 in the pretest compared to 2.90 in the posttest. With Anchors, the sample mean reported 3.16 in the pretest compared to 3.19 in the posttest.

Table 3  
Family Framing Category's Mean, Standard Deviation, and Difference of Mean  
for News Anchors Using the Pretest and Posttest Correlation

		<b>Family</b>		
		Mean	Standard Dev.	Mean Difference
<b>Couric</b>	Pre	2.84	.75	
	Post	3.10	.88	-.260
<b>Gibson</b>	Pre	2.78	.84	
	Post	2.90	.88	-.123
<b>Anchor</b>	Pre	3.16	1.02	
	Post	3.19	.95	-.032

Table 4  
Family Framing Category's Sample, Test Statistic, and Significance for News  
Anchors Using the Pretest and Posttest Correlation

<b>News Anchors</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Test Statistic</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Couric	76	3.08	.002
Gibson	76	1.60	.112
Anchors	76	.403	.687

However, there was a significance with Couric ( $p=.002$ ) at the .01 level with the sample mean reporting 2.84 in the pretest to 3.10 in the posttest. Therefore,  $t(75) = 3.08$ ,  $p < .01$  which indicates that gender stereotype statements regarding Couric and family had a framing effect on the participants. As a result, the hypothesis for this category (Family) was supported by the data.

### **Appearance/Clothes**

As shown on Table 5 and 6, using the two-tailed dependent t- test, statements dealing with Appearance/Clothes found no significance regarding Gibson ( $p=.846$ ;  $t(75)= .194$ ,  $p > .01$ ) nor Anchors ( $p=.796$ ;  $t(75)= .259$ ,  $p > .01$ ). With Gibson, the sample mean reported 2.25 in the pretest and 2.27 in the posttest. With Anchors, the sample mean reported 3.46 in the pretest compared to 3.48 in the posttest.



However, there was a significance with Couric ( $p=.006$ ) with the sample mean reporting 2.61 in the pretest compared to 2.85 in the posttest. Therefore,  $t(75) = 2.80$ ,  $p < .01$  which indicates that gender stereotype statements regarding Couric's appearance and clothes had a framing effect on the participants. Therefore, the hypothesis for this category (Appearance/Clothes) was supported by the data.

Table 5  
Appearance/Clothes Framing Category's Mean, Standard Deviation, and Difference of Mean for News Anchors Using the Pretest and Posttest Correlation

		<b>Appearance/Clothes</b>		
		Mean	Standard Dev.	Mean Difference
<b>Couric</b>	Pre	2.61	.76	
	Post	2.85	.97	-.24
<b>Gibson</b>	Pre	2.25	.90	
	Post	2.27	.93	-.02
<b>Anchor</b>	Pre	3.46	1.01	
	Post	3.48	1.00	-.02

Table 6  
Appearance/Clothes Framing Category's Sample, Test Statistic, and Significance for News Anchors Using the Pretest and Posttest Correlation

<b>News Anchors</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Test Statistic</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Couric	76	2.80	.006
Gibson	76	.194	.846
Anchors	76	.259	.796

## Sex

As shown on Table 7 and 8, using the two-tailed dependent t-test, statements dealing with Sex did not show significance with Couric ( $p=.579$ ;  $t(75)= .556$ ,  $p > .01$ ), Gibson ( $p=.101$ ;  $t(75)= 1.652$ ,  $p > .01$ ), nor Anchors ( $p=.449$ ;  $t(75)= .760$ ,  $p > .01$ ). With Couric, the sample mean reported 3.16 in the pretest compared to 3.12 in the posttest. With Gibson, the sample mean reported 3.03 in the pretest compared to 3.14 in the

posttest. Lastly, with Anchors, the sample mean reported 3.14 in the pretest compared to 3.07 in the posttest.

It appears that the framed stories on Couric and Gibson did not have a framing effect on the participants' decisions about sex stereotypes; however, it is interesting to note that of the three variables, Gibson was the closest to significance and the sample mean for Couric and Anchors changed to a smaller number in the posttest. Couric's sample mean reported 3.16 in the pretest compared to 3.12 in the posttest and Anchor reported 3.14 in the pretest compared to 3.07 in the posttest; the only place in the four categories that the mean data changed from larger to smaller in the results. This indicates that after reading the news stories which used framed themes on Couric and Gibson, the participant's stereotype opinion about Couric and news anchors, in general, decreased, but not significantly. Therefore, the hypothesis for this category (Sex) was not supported by the data.

Table 7  
Sex Framing Category's Mean, Standard Deviation, and Difference of Mean for  
News Anchors Using the Pretest and Posttest Correlation

		<b>Sex</b>		
		Mean	Standard Dev.	Mean Difference
<b>Couric</b>	Pre	3.16	.81	
	Post	3.12	.96	.39
<b>Gibson</b>	Pre	3.03	.81	
	Post	3.14	.76	-.13
<b>Anchor</b>	Pre	3.14	1.17	
	Post	3.07	1.10	.07

Table 8  
Sex Framing Category's Sample, Test Statistic, and Significance for News  
Anchors Using the Pretest and Posttest Correlation

<b>News Anchors</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Test Statistic</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Couric	76	.556	.579
Gibson	76	1.652	.101
Anchors	76	.760	.449

### **Control Group**

Statements dealing with the feminine framed categories did not indicate a significance toward Couric (Personality  $p=.450$ , Family  $p=.616$ , Appearance/Clothes  $p=.427$ , and Sex  $p=.300$ ) Gibson (Personality  $p=.260$ , Family  $p=.265$ , Appearance/Clothes  $p=.427$ , and Sex  $p=1.00$ ) or Anchors (Personality  $p=.038$ , Family  $p=.012$ , Appearance/Clothes  $p=.748$ , and Sex  $p=.409$ ) at the .01 level. Therefore, the control group, who did not read the news stories which used framed themes on Couric and Gibson, was not influenced by the gender stereotype statements dealing with nighttime news anchor.

## Chapter Six

### Discussion

This study determined the framing effect, if any, news stories, which focused on Couric and Gibson during their transition from daytime to nighttime news, would have on university students. It investigated to see, after having read the stories, if their opinion about either anchors changed significantly.

Studies have shown that the media has been known to frame news stories to support a particular position (Miller, Andsager, & Reichart, 1998; Reese et al., 2001) and feminist research have analyzed the impact of gender schemas (Elmore, 2009) when defining gender roles. This research paper went beyond a content analysis by testing the framing effect the gender framed stories had on the participants, namely university students (Iyengar, 1991).

Participants were given a pretest and posttest survey that had 24 gender stereotype statements on Couric, Gibson, and Anchors, in general, dealing with the four feminine categories: personality, family, appearance/clothes, and sex. Once participants were given the pretest survey, they read 20 news stories which used framed themes about Couric and Gibson. Lastly, they were given the same 24 gender stereotype statements, yet in a different, random order, on Couric and Gibson in the posttest survey.

After reviewing research on gender roles and stereotypes, it was hypothesized that the news stories, which used framed themes on Couric and Gibson, would have a framing effect on Couric, but not on Gibson, when pertaining to the feminine themes: Personality, Family, Appearance/Clothes, and Sex.

In the Personality category, there was a statistically significant framing effect on Couric when participants were asked about their impressions of her as a “bubbly and personable” news anchor. In the pretest, participants disagreed with the critiques that she was too bubbly as a nighttime news anchor but then became neutral in the posttest after having read the framed stories.

Participants disagreed with statements regarding Gibson being too personable as a primetime news anchor in the pretest and their opinion did not change after reading the framed articles. Thus, the hypothesis that the news stories would have a framing effect in the Personality category on Couric but not on Gibson was supported.

Being “bubbly and quirky” (Klein, 2007; Johnson, 2006) is what attracted the audience to Couric on *The Today Show*. However, the results of the Personality hypothesis indicated that the same traits have discredited her as a primetime news anchor. The feminine traits that Couric was once praised for having, now leaves the audience questioning her role as a serious, nighttime news anchor.

When Couric first began CBS’s *Evening News*, she greeted her audience with a bubbly, “Hi, everyone!” salutation; an informal introduction which was quickly replaced with a more professional, “Hello everyone” (Goldiner, 2008). It became apparent during her first week that her personality, which helped make her become a star on daytime television, was not accepted in the role she was playing on CBS’s *Evening News* and such criticisms from the media had a framing effect on those who read the critiques.

Couric is in a difficult position: she cannot appear too bubbly and quirky because she then loses her credibility as an anchor. However, women who appear too masculine are considered “evil women” who challenge “the very basis of a patriarchal society”

(Beck, 2001, p. 140). Women have to become gender neutral in order to appease both ends of the spectrum when they should be embracing their femininity.

In the Family category, there was a statistically significant effect on Couric when participants were asked about their impressions of her family affairs and its impact on her reporting style. In the pretest, participants disagreed with the critiques that her family affairs play an important role as a primetime news anchor yet, after reading the news stories, participants' opinion changed to neutral in the posttest.

Participants disagreed with statements regarding Gibson's news reporting and the impact it has with his family affairs and, after reading the news stories, participants' opinion did not change. Thus, the hypothesis that the news stories would have a framing effect in the Family category on Couric but not on Gibson was supported.

Viewers grieved with Couric when her husband died of colon cancer in 1998 and because of that, her reputation as a woman and a reporter was strengthened (Klein, 2007, p. 116). The idea that family affairs reflect on reporting styles is not equally applied to both sexes. The media have a tendency to focus more on female figures' marital status than men (Devitt, 2002; Ross, 2002) and, as shown from the results of the hypothesis, Couric is no different. Concerns for females' personal lives reflect back on gender roles. Ross (2002) noticed a similar pattern when analyzing the media's portrayal of female politicians. She said, "they (female politicians) are mundanely framed as women first and then, maybe, as politicians" (p.81). Couric is a woman and a mother and, to the media, they become first priority before her career; that is her role.

In the Appearance/Clothes category, there was a statistically significant effect on Couric when participants were asked about their impressions regarding her appearance

and attire during her primetime news show. In the pretest, participants disagreed when the gender stereotype statements criticized her for having a distracting look that poorly reflected her as a serious news anchor. Yet, after reading the news stories, participants' decisions changed to neutral in the posttest.

Participants disagreed with statements regarding Gibson and his attire being distracting when he reports on his nighttime news show and, after reading the news stories, the participants' opinion did not change. Thus, the hypothesis that the news stories would have a framing effect in the Appearance/Clothes category on Couric but not on Gibson was supported.

Couric was praised for having "the best legs in television" (Klein, 2007, p. 125) during her daytime career but now those same legs are hurting her reputation as a serious anchor. Results in this hypothesis found that her appearance and clothes were distracting when she reports. Women are perceived to be a distraction on television news; specifically, Couric's looks take away from the message she delivers which, in turn, takes away her credibility as a reporter.

In the Sex category, there was no statistical significance with the news stories when dealing with Couric and Gibson's sex and their style of news reporting. Before and after reading the framed new stories, participants' opinion that Couric would be a better daytime news anchors, because she is a woman, and Gibson would be a better nighttime news anchor, because he is a man, was not influenced. Thus, the hypothesis that the framed news stories would have a framing effect in the Sex category on Couric but not on Gibson was not supported.

Nobody wants to appear to be a sexist. Having straight-forward statements, such as “As a woman, Katie Couric would be better in reporting daytime news rather than nighttime news” forces participants to admit they follow gender stereotypes. This statement may have been the cause of the lack of significance. Chong and Druckman (2007) explain that “framing effects” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 11) occur when changes, which often are minute, change in meaning enough that it will influence the change of opinions. Zaller (1992) found that the alternate phrasings of the same issue can “significantly alter its meaning to respondents, even when the change of connotation is not immediately identified” (p. 34). In essence, the participants were not influenced by the statements because they were too direct. The feminine traits that were significant, personality, family, and appearance/clothes, did not blatantly say that because she is a woman she has these traits which, in turn, affect her as a news anchor. Just like framing of news stories, the sex statements needed to have an alternate phrasing to significantly alter the meaning to the participants.

As stated, it has been determined that three of the four categories (Personality, Family, and Appearance/Clothes) had a framing effect with participants’ opinion on Couric after having read the news stories which used framed themes. This study’s research question wanted to determine if, after reading the 20 news stories on Couric and Gibson, the participants’ opinion about gender stereotypes, when dealing with primetime news anchors, in general, changed. Results found, after having read the news stories, that in all four categories, there was no significance with the participants’ opinion about news anchors, in general.



In the Personality category, the pretest and the posttest both indicated that participants disagreed with gender stereotypes based on primetime news anchors' personality. In the Family category, the pretest and the posttest both reported participants were neutral with gender stereotypes dealing with primetime news anchors' family issues. In the Appearance/Clothes category, the pretest and the posttest both reported participants were neutral with gender stereotypes dealing with primetime news anchors' appearance and clothes. Lastly, in the Sex category, the pretest and the posttest both indicated that participants were neutral with gender stereotypes when dealing with primetime news anchors' sex.

Thus, it can be deduced that the news stories which used framed themes on Couric and Gibson did not have a framing effect, when dealing with the four feminine categories, on the participants' impressions of primetime news anchors, in general.

Having found that the news stories influenced the participants' decisions on Couric but not on anchors, in general, indicate that the framing effect may have limited power or may have a direct course of framing. Although reading the stories did influence the participants' impressions of Couric, it did not make a change in impact when stereotyping news anchors in general. This may be an indication that the agenda in the new stories focused more on Couric as a woman than Couric as the news anchor. If the stories had focused more on Couric's qualifications (or lack of) as a primetime news anchor, the results of the Anchor category may have been different.

### **Limitations**

Naturally, this study contains a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. Although significance was reported in the results of the study, having a

larger sample size in the future may strengthen the research. Only 76 university students, taking a communication course, participated in the study. Using students from other communication classes and/or disciplines would provide a larger sample size and allow for the data to be more generalized.

Also, it was difficult to control a few of the participants during the manipulation. As stated, the participants in the study were least likely to be involved or interested in primetime news. For a few it was difficult to keep them focused on the reading and not distracting one another. In fact, the last group, which consisted of eight participants, was so bad they were excused early from the experiment and their data was not used in the final results. Having fewer articles could reduce the length in time; however, it still seems necessary to have 20 articles (10 for each anchor) to provide enough influence for a framing effect and enough time to forget their answers from the pretest. Having older, more mature participants, who have been attending college a few years longer, may have been less difficult to control. However, the students who did fully participate, after being reminded of the importance of the study, were cooperative in the experiment.

### **Future Research**

Although there were framing effects in the news stories on Couric, it seemed important to note that, overall, the university students' opinion about Couric, Gibson, and anchors, in general, did not fit in the gender stereotypes. In the pretest average, the participants either disagreed or were neutral on the stereotype statements. In the posttest, even with significance of influence, the participants' decision outcomes did not report any more than neutral. It is encouraging to see that, not only were the college

students unwilling to accept the stereotypes in the pretest, the categories that made an influence in the posttest only left the participants unsure— which is most likely due to little knowledge of primetime news and/or the two anchors. University-age students were purposely selected because of their lack of primetime television viewing (Mindich, 2005) as a means to control the experiment. Having participants who were familiar with the two anchors and/or passionate for one would be an extraneous variable that could manipulate the results of the data. However, it would also be interesting to see if the older generation—those that are more likely to watch primetime television—would still be influenced by the news stories on Couric or Gibson, even with the preexisting knowledge on the subject.

As stated in the results of the hypothesis, three of the four categories reported a framing effect when dealing with Couric: personality, family, and appearance/clothes. Of the four categories, the sex category did not have an effect on the participants for Couric, Gibson, or Anchors, in general. The gender stereotype statements in the sex category emphasized the different style of news reporting for women and men. The statements recommended that women (specifically Couric) would be best suited for daytime news and men (specifically Gibson) would be best suited for nighttime news. In the news stories which used framed themes, it often made reference to Couric's sex but did not specifically state that she would be best suited for daytime television. This may have been the reason there was no significance in the category and rewording of the statements, that better reflected the news articles, may make a difference in the future.

Using different anchors, such as Diane Sawyer and Brian Williams, for a comparison analysis should be considered for future research. Finding similar results in the two would strengthen the hypotheses of this study and the theory of framing effects.

Using other categories could be another option for future research. For example, one category that Gibson was criticized more than Couric was the category of age (Brewer and Macafee, 2007). Although age is commonly referenced in female politicians (Ross, 2002), it was Gibson (not Couric) who received more critiques in the news stories. It would be interesting to see if such a category could have a framing effect on the participants.

Analyzing stories before Couric started and then three years after she began her career on *The Evening News* would be an interesting content analysis. The comparison could determine if there were similar themes used to critique Couric.

Therefore, there is a need for future research when dealing with gender stereotypes, specifically on daytime and nighttime television news anchors, and its framing effect on the audience. This paper is only the beginning for future research on gender news framing.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, this study was able to acknowledge three factors: gender inequality is still an issue, gender stereotypes still influence society, and framing in the news can have an effect on an audience.

Research has already reported that women are still being discredited as leaders (Armstrong, 2004) and career women (Yoder & Schleicher, 1996). And in Brewer and Macafee's (2007) study, it acknowledged that Couric was critiqued differently than her

male challengers by using "feminine" themes. This study helped in acknowledging that when it comes to primetime news, it is still dominantly perceived as a man's world.

The significant categories, Personality, Family, and Appearance/Clothes, were the same traits that made Couric successful on *The Today Show*. Her quirky personality made her unique, her legs grabbed attention, and the death of her husband made her appear strong. However, these same traits were used to critique Couric's lack of credibility as a primetime news anchor. This leads to the question, "What defines a credible, primetime news anchor?" The answer to this question may be connected to the gender stereotype that claimed women do not possess leadership traits because of their "warmth and gentleness" (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p. 127). Perhaps the reason why Couric is not succeeding in primetime television is because it is assumed that women cannot simultaneously be feminine and report serious news.

Lastly, there are two purposes for framing news stories: either to fulfill audience's expectations (Nomai & Dionisopoulous, 2002) or slant an issue (Entman, 2007). In this case, the media may have just reported what their audience expected or simply decided that nighttime news is still a man's world. Either way, it did make an impact (framing effect) on the participants' opinion about Couric which indicates that framed stories can have a framing effect on its readers.

This was a worthwhile study because of its importance in the mass media and gender research field. First of all, it was a new dimension of news framing which involved social gender stereotypes for female news anchors. It indicated that there can be a connection between news framing and gender roles. In this case, the media chose to critique Couric more harshly than Gibson, using feminine traits.

Second, it acknowledged the fact that there is still gender inequality in the news media and it determined that readers, specifically university students, can be affected by its framed influence. Results demonstrated that the news stories on the two anchors had a framing effect on readers; showing that the media has the power to influence the audience's perceptions of male and female gender roles, specifically their roles as primetime news anchors. In this study, it has become apparent that the media chose to critique Couric as a woman rather than a news anchor. With news framing and gender studies research concepts; this research paper may be of use for future students who hope to strengthen the study of gender news framing.

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Appendix A  
Pretest Survey

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Number \_\_\_\_\_

Read each statement and circle the appropriate answer based on your own opinion. Please answer the following survey as honestly as you can. If at any time you wish to stop or skip a question, you may do so.

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <p>1. Katie Couric's appearance and clothes are distracting when she reports.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>                               | 1. _____  |
| <p>2. A nighttime news anchor should have an outgoing personality when presenting the news.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>                 | *2. _____ |
| <p>3. Charles Gibson's personality is too serious for nighttime news.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>                                       | *3. _____ |
| <p>4. It is important for a nighttime news anchor to have strong family values.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>                             | 4. _____  |
| <p>5. A male nighttime news anchor is more credible as a news reporter than a female nighttime news anchor.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p> | 5. _____  |
| <p>6. It is pertinent that Charles Gibson has a strong unity with his family to be a credible news anchor.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>  | 6. _____  |
| <p>7. It is important that the nighttime news anchors are aesthetically pleasing (attractive).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>              | 7. _____  |

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Use Only

8. As a woman, Katie Couric would be better in reporting daytime news rather than nighttime news shows. 8.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
9. Charles Gibson's masculinity fulfills the role of a nighttime news anchor. 9.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
10. Katie Couric's personality is too bubbly and personable for nighttime news. 10.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
11. Katie Couric's family affairs reflect back in her style of news reporting. 11.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
12. Charles Gibson's choice of ties to wear determines the quality of his news reporting. 12.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
13. Katie Couric's appearance and clothes are not distracting when she reports \* 13.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
14. A nighttime news anchor should have a serious personality when presenting the news. 14.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
15. Katie Couric's personality is too serious for nighttime news. \* 15.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
16. It is not important for a nighttime news anchor to have strong family values. \* 16.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
17. A female nighttime news anchor is more credible as a news reporter than a male nighttime news anchor. \* 17.\_\_\_\_\_
- Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree
18. It is not pertinent that Charles Gibson has a strong unity with his family to be a credible news anchor. \* 18.\_\_\_\_\_

- |  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |           |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|-----------|
| 19. It is not important that the nighttime news anchors are aesthetically pleasing (attractive).         |                |       |         |          |                   | *19._____ |
| 20. As a woman, Katie Couric would be better in reporting nighttime news rather than daytime news shows. |                |       |         |          |                   | *20._____ |
| 21. Charles Gibson' masculinity fulfills the role of a daytime news anchor.                              |                |       |         |          |                   | *21._____ |
| 22. Charles Gibson's personality is too bubbly and personable for nighttime news.                        |                |       |         |          |                   | 22._____  |
| 23. Katie Couric's family affairs do not reflect back in her style of news reporting.                    |                |       |         |          |                   | *23._____ |
| 24. Charles Gibson's choice of ties he wears does not determine the quality of his news reporting.       |                |       |         |          |                   | *24._____ |
|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |           |

Appendix B  
Posttest Survey

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_ Number \_\_\_\_\_

Read each statement and circle the appropriate answer based on your own opinion. Please answer the following survey as honestly as you can. If at any time you wish to stop or skip a question, you may do so.

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <p>1. It is pertinent that Charles Gibson has a strong unity with his family to be a credible news anchor.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p> | 1. _____  |
| <p>2. Charles Gibson's choice of ties to wear determines the quality of his news reporting.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>                | 2. _____  |
| <p>3. Katie Couric's personality is too bubbly and personable for nighttime news.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>                          | 3. _____  |
| <p>4. Charles Gibson's choice of ties he wears does not determine the quality of his news reporting.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>       | *4. _____ |
| <p>5. Katie Couric's personality is too serious for nighttime news.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>  | *5. _____ |
| <p>6. It is important that the nighttime news anchors are aesthetically pleasing (attractive).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>             | 6. _____  |
| <p>7. Katie Couric's family affairs reflect back in her style of news reporting.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree</p>                           | 7. _____  |



8. A nighttime news anchor should have an outgoing personality when presenting the news.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

\*8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. It is important for a nighttime news anchor to have strong family values.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. It is not important that the nighttime news anchors are aesthetically pleasing (attractive).

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

\*10. \_\_\_\_\_

11. Katie Couric's family affairs do not reflect back in her style of news reporting.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

\*11. \_\_\_\_\_

12. As a woman, Katie Couric would be better in reporting daytime news rather than nighttime news shows.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

12. \_\_\_\_\_

13. Charles Gibson's masculinity fulfills the role of a daytime news anchor.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

\*13. \_\_\_\_\_

14. Charles Gibson's personality is too serious for nighttime news.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

\*14. \_\_\_\_\_

15. A male nighttime news anchor is more credible as a news reporter than a female nighttime news anchor.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

15. \_\_\_\_\_

16. Katie Couric's appearance and clothes are distracting when she reports.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

16. \_\_\_\_\_

17. A nighttime news anchor should have a serious personality when presenting the news.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

17. \_\_\_\_\_

18. Katie Couric's appearance and clothes are not distracting when she reports

\* 18. \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

19. It is not important for a nighttime news anchor to have strong family values.

\* 19. \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

20. A female nighttime news anchor is more credible as a news reporter than a male nighttime news anchor.

\* 20. \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

21. As a woman, Katie Couric would be better in reporting nighttime news rather than daytime news shows.

\* 21. \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

22. It is not pertinent that Charles Gibson has a strong unity with his family to be a credible news anchor.

\* 22. \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

23. Charles Gibson's masculinity fulfills the role of a nighttime news anchor.

23. \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

24. Charles Gibson's personality is too bubbly and personable for nighttime news.

24. \_\_\_\_\_

Strongly Agree    Agree    Neutral    Disagree    Strongly Disagree