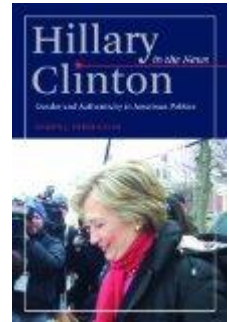


**Shawn J. Parry-Giles.** *Hillary Clinton in the News: Gender and Authenticity in American Politics*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014. 272 pp. \$27.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-252-07978-8.



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**Published on** Jhistory (June, 2014)

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Shawn Parry-Giles's self-described "news biography" of Hillary Clinton arrives at a poignant historical moment, given Jill Abramson's firing from *The New York Times* and the rising speculation that Clinton will run for president in 2016. Both circumstances have sparked discussions about the cultural acceptance of women in roles of public and professional leadership and the behavior expected of them in those roles. In Abramson's case, *Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger said her firing was due to "arbitrary decision-making, a failure to consult and bring colleagues with her, inadequate communication and the public mistreatment of colleagues." [1]

These accusations bear similarity to public criticism of Clinton in her two decades on the national stage, depictions Parry-Giles has methodically assembled and analyzed using feminist theory and the concept of political authenticity. In *Hillary Clinton in the News*, the author builds a steady and compelling argument about the recurring frames the news media have used to portray Clinton in her many roles as first lady, policy advocate,

legal defendant, political candidate, international emissary, and U.S. senator.

The author demonstrates that rhetoric surrounding Clinton grew negative and violent during periods of Clinton's career when she stepped outside traditional gender roles and into historically masculine spaces, such as politics and policy-making. When Clinton seized opportunities to gain power or influence, such as running for the U.S. Senate in 2000, she was characterized as "too polarizing, too unlikeable, and too incendiary" (p. 159). As long as Clinton remained firmly behind her husband, Bill Clinton, before and during his presidency, "her persona was one of political intelligence and calculation" (p. 152).

The images and discourse surrounding Hillary Clinton in the broadcast media provide a fascinating case study of the rhetorical relationship between gender and power. They also offer a look at how current practices in broadcast news help to shape the nation's political discourse. The author analyzes news frames contained in television cov-

erage of Clinton from 1992, the year of her husband's first campaign for the presidency, until 2001, when Bill Clinton left office and Clinton was a U.S. senator representing New York. Although the bulk of the research was conducted before Clinton ran for the Democratic presidential nomination, the author has updated most chapters to include examples from the 2008 election.

Historians and other researchers will appreciate the study's length and depth, which allow the author to examine change and continuity over time, as well as the author's singular focus, which enables her to make insightful observations about how television producers use and contextualize images to suit their chosen narratives. If the book has a weakness, it is in the framework of political authenticity, which is not fully explicated to account for historical changes in how character is defined and measured. Nevertheless, the book makes a significant contribution to the literature on gender and the media by demonstrating, with concrete examples, how news frames work to constrain, if not control, a political actor's effectiveness in the public sphere.

Chapter 1 focuses on Clinton's role as the spouse of a presidential candidate, examining news coverage from 1992 and 1996. The author shows how television journalists established a "baseline frame" in 1992 based on several comments made by Bill and Hillary Clinton. The broadcasters cast Hillary Clinton as both a progressive woman and an outspoken, controversial feminist, leading her to adopt a lower profile after the primaries and beginning a cycle of "empowerment followed by retribution and silencing" in the media's treatment of her (p. 19).

Chapter 2 examines Clinton's role as the leader of Bill Clinton's health care reform efforts and as the target of a legal investigation into a land deal in Arkansas. Of this period, Parry-Giles writes: "Although evidence of Clinton's linguistic disciplining was visible in the 1992 news frames, the health care debate showed a growing level of

vitriol over an empowered first lady, culminating in a rhetoric of violence that reflected the history and ideological underpinnings of U.S. nationalism" (p. 58). The dilemma for Clinton was that when she bowed to perceptions that she had overstepped her boundaries and retreated into more traditionally feminine pursuits, television journalists revisited the baseline "unruly feminist" frame to question her authenticity.

Chapter 3 addresses the years Clinton spent as an international emissary, traveling the world to speak on behalf of women and children while she was first lady. Away from the glare of the national media, Clinton achieved her most positive news coverage, the author argues, perhaps most pointedly during the fallout from Bill Clinton's sexual scandal involving Monica Lewinsky. Clinton was cast in the role of "scorned wife" during this period, making her the object of sympathy but also raising more questions about her authenticity as a feminist because she had decided to remain married and served as her husband's chief defender in the media.

Chapter 4 closes with Clinton's candidacy for the U.S. Senate in 1999-2000, a period that subjected Clinton to questions about whether she could handle the rough, masculine world of politics. Television commentators speculated about "what the press was waiting to do to her," anticipating Clinton would have "thirty guys ... yelling at her" in a campaign one Republican described as a "blood fight against evil" (pp. 163-164). Anticipating a vicious contest between Clinton and Republican Rudy Giuliani, a political commentator on MSNBC suggested Clinton was not ready for the fight, saying, "Mrs. Clinton has never taken it full in the face before.... I think in the case of Hillary Clinton, full aggression will probably be in order from the guy and Mrs. Clinton will be hard pressed to say, 'I can't believe he hit me'" (p. 166).

Examining the longitudinal arc of rhetoric, the author concludes the cycle took on a pattern resembling domestic violence. Each time Clinton

was perceived as having overstepped, the criticism became more severe as broadcasters reached for language that would intensify the discourse.

That Clinton has withstood this cycle of exposure to become one of the most powerful women in American history is a testament to her fortitude, the author argues, and suggests that news frames function as a rhetoric of constraint, not of control. However, the frames also might function as a warning to other women about what might happen if they, too, were to step into a public role: “The sentiment that Clinton was a difficult and haughty woman led some to question her ability to fit into a position that relied on backroom and backslapping deals and required one to be liked by the people who sent her to Congress. These frames reinforced age-old stereotypes that strong

women often exhibit personality problems that make them standoffish and incapable of collegiality. Her personality and seemingly her gender, correspondingly, did not fit the profile of a successful political leader” (p. 174).

Future researchers might explore whether this cycle of rhetoric fits the experiences of other historically significant women--and whether it will repeat itself in 2016.

#### Note

[1]. Ravi Somaiya, “After Criticism, Times Publisher Details Decision to Oust Top Editor,” *New York Times* (May 17, 2014), available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/business/times-publisher-denies-gender-figured-in-top-editors-dismissal.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/business/times-publisher-denies-gender-figured-in-top-editors-dismissal.html?_r=0) (accessed May 29, 2014).

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**Citation:** Tracy Lucht. Review of Parry-Giles, Shawn J. *Hillary Clinton in the News: Gender and Authenticity in American Politics*. Jhistory, H-Net Reviews. June, 2014.

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