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MOTHERING AND GOVERNING

How news articulated gender roles in the cases of Governors Jane Swift and Sarah Palin

Jaime Loke, Dustin Harp, and Ingrid Bachmann

Media discourse scrutinized Massachusetts' Governor Jane Swift when she bore twins but Governor Sarah Palin's pregnancy garnered different reactions. From a feminist perspective, this research uses articulation theory to examine discursive links and frames in news coverage of Swift and Palin as governors and mothers—both of whom were members of the Republican Party and proponents of heterosexual marriage. Articulations vilified Swift's parenting and governing because she strayed from a dominant mothering ideology and her husband, a stay-at-home father, disrupted hegemonic white masculinity. News stories about Palin, in contrast, present her circumstances favorably, we argue, because she identified herself foremost as a mother and more closely fitted familial gender roles.

KEYWORDS gender roles; masculinity; motherhood; media; politics

Introduction

Only 32 women since 1924 have served as US governors. Sarah Palin, governor of Alaska from 2006 to 2009, is the highest profile of these women because of her nomination as Republican vice presidential candidate in 2008. Palin is only the second woman to have given birth while serving as Governor. In 2001, Jane Swift, acting governor of Massachusetts, made headlines when she became the first woman to give birth while in office. The birth of Swift's twins initiated mediated discourse about her capabilities as a mother and politician. At the time, a governor giving birth, returning to work, and leaving her babies with a stay-at-home dad represented a cultural disturbance that threatened hegemonic gender roles. However, just a few years later Palin gave birth to a son while in office, an occasion that seemed to escape the parenting/working mother debate that had troubled Swift.

Using discourse analysis and a feminist and critical theoretical framework, this research examined local and national coverage of both Swift and Palin to determine how discursive frames and ideological links emerged surrounding their pregnancy, roles as mothers, families, and gubernatorial posts. A primary interest is to determine how discourse on motherhood and politics both changed and remained stable over this short period. The research adds to our understanding of the discursive positioning of powerful female politicians in the United States and how within media texts hegemonic gendered ideologies are linked to these women.

Theoretical Framework

This essay critically examines news media's discursive framing of US white female leadership/power, traditional notions of motherhood, and illustrations of hegemony. The

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research's theoretical framework attends to masculinity and fatherhood with the understanding that mothering is typically and theoretically done in partnership with fathering. Analysis of Swift is interesting not only because she was the first governor to give birth while in office, but because her husband stayed at home. Palin's inclusion offers an analysis of how hegemonic gender roles may have shifted as more women/mothers are seen in positions of power.

Discourse, Articulation and Hegemony

Discourse is the means by which meaning is socially constructed (Foucault, 1980). Discourses that serve dominant social interests occupy the mainstream position "through the production of truth" (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). Foucault notes, "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (1980, p. 131). These truths are ideological constructions formed through discourse that function as taken-for-granted or common sense (Makus, 1990).

Hall (1982) links ideology to social practices, arguing things and events do not contain meaning independently of language. Further, ideologies do not exist as single ideas but are connected through discursive links or semantic arenas, with one idea setting off a "chain of connotative associations" (Hall, 1985, p. 104). Hall's articulation theory emphasizes the importance of attending to the social and historical specificity of discourse—a "linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (1986, p. 53). Unity is formed, according to Hall, when there is a linkage between articulated discourse and social forces—in this case, patriarchal conceptions of mothering and changing roles of women. Hall's theory for an understanding of how "ideological elements come, under certain conditions to cohere together within a discourse" (Hall, 1986, p. 53).

This analytical tool is useful because it attends to the underlying presumptions resulting from articulation—connections that are not necessarily conscious or made explicit to the authors who form them or those who make sense of them. Ideology as conceptualized through Hall is firmly placed within the "function of discourse and of the logic of social processes rather than an intention of the agent" (Hall, 1982, p. 88). The function of ideology is understood through Gramsci's concept of hegemony—an ecology of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that permeates throughout society resulting in ideological and cultural power exerted by a dominant group (Gramsci, 1971). Because its infiltration is perceived as the norm, it becomes a part of what is considered "common sense" so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite dictates the normative philosophy, culture and morality and comes to appear as the natural order of things (Boggs, 1976). Gramsci theorizes hegemony as a process, a constant struggle to define common sense understandings within a culture. "Hegemony, or any form of articulation, is never final or total" which means that re-articulations are always a possibility (Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006, p. 966).

Feminist Theory and Motherhood

Within the framework of this analysis, the politics of patriarchy come into question. Feminist theory focuses on the ways gender and power organize the material and

symbolic worlds (van Zoonen, 1994) and mass media's ideological support of hegemonic power structures (Meyers, 1997; Vavrus, 2007). Historically dominant ideological constructions of gender subordinate women in the political sphere, resulting in less economic and social capital for women and an expectation of mothering and homemaking. Through a feminist lens, this research critiques this patriarchal system of power.

Feminist scholars have long critiqued definitions and expectations of mothering in contemporary US society. Penelope (1990) noted significant differences between how the terms "father" and "mother" are understood as verbs. "*Father* denotes the act of fertilization, implying no responsibility toward a child on the part of the male parent" (Penelope, 1990, p. 188). The verb *mother* means "(1) to give birth to, to be mother of, (2) to create, to care for, (3) to watch over, nourish and protect, and (4) to love" (Penelope, 1990, p. 188). This is significant because language and discourse form the course by which meaning is constructed and ideologies are negotiated.

The dominant US mothering ideology in recent decades—the "good mother"—is a full-time, at-home, white, middle-class, heterosexual woman entirely fulfilled through domestic aspirations; a woman who cares for her family and finds nurturing more fulfilling than paid work (Boris, 1994; Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Harp and Bachmann, 2008; Johnston and Swanson, 2006; Orenstein, 2000). The homage paid to motherhood and domesticity is an ideology steeped in biases of race, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation, resulting in various identities preventing women from achieving "good mother" status (Feldstein, 2000).

A recent intensification of this ideology—"intensive mothering"—is now dominant in American culture (Garey, 1999; Harp and Bachmann, 2008; Hattery, 2001; Hays, 1996; Ranson, 1999; Wall, 2001). It is a "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive, financially expensive ideology in which mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture and development of the sacred child and in which children's needs take precedence over the individual needs of their mothers" (Hays, 1996, p. 46). This image is prevalent "since World War Two when media texts reflected the government's goal of mobilizing Rosie the Riveters from their industrial work sites back to their homes to care for their children and husbands" (Vavrus, 2007, p. 48).

Idealizing and moralizing motherhood is not unique to the United States nor is its relation to normalized gender roles (Machado, 2008; Mazierska, 2006; Renner and Ule, 1998). Renner and Ule (1998) argue authorities in post-communist countries emphasize domesticity as a means for establishing an internalized classification of men as public citizens and women as belonging within the private sphere.

Masculinity and Fatherhood

Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity, performed by the dominant group in a particular society, is characterized by traits such as dominance, aggressiveness, competitiveness and control (Cheng, 1999).

However, within this hegemonic framework, there are different forms of masculinities dependent on cultural specificity. For example, Chinese masculinities are represented more often by academic intelligence, while Western masculinities are rooted in

physical capabilities (Louie, 2002). Multiple masculinities must be recognized in order to avoid over-simplification (Beynon, 2002; Clatterbaugh, 1990; Connell, 1995; Hearn, 1996; Pease 2002). However, with multiplicity comes social relations between masculinities resulting in some being dominant and others subordinated (Connell, 2000).

In the US context interpretation of white men's masculinity dominates over, for example, racial minorities' interpretations of what is masculine. "A masculine man in Western societies is portrayed as a traditional bread-winning man, who is white, physically strong, rugged, manly, and displays qualities of heterosexuality" (Phua, 2007, p. 910). One way to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity is to be aggressive or react violently toward what is regarded as "feminine" such as parenting (Cheng, 1999).

Within this context stay-at-home fathers are a threat to the dominant ideology of masculinity. Research shows fatherhood is seen as the trait that most diverts from masculinity and fathers who stay home to care for their children are perceived negatively (Brescoll and Uhlmann, 2005; Ruspini, 2007). Generally psychological theories of gender have found people respond negatively to men and women who deviate from traditional gender roles (Deaux and Major, 1987; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Glick and Fiske, 1996, 2001; Prentice and Carranza, 2002; Rudman, 1998; Rudman and Glick, 1999; Russo, 1976; Silverstein, 1996).

Media and Female Politicians

Historically constrained to the private sphere, women have been discouraged from accessing the public world of politics, policy, or authority (Frasier, 1993), and media messages suggest that women do not belong in politics (Byerly and Ross, 2006; Ross, 2002, 2004). Accordingly, women struggle to be regarded by the media as legitimate political actors (Braden, 1996). Female candidates and politicians are trivialized by the press (Byerly and Ross, 2006; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991) and are open to gender-specific forms of scrutiny that dismiss their platform and focus on their personality traits, physicality, sartorial styles, and domestic lives (Norris, 1997; Ross, 2002; Vavrus, 2002).¹ Recent examples include candidates Elizabeth Dole (Aday and Devitt, 2001) and Hillary Clinton (Scharrer, 2002) in the United States; Canada's Kim Campbell and Audrey McLaughlin (Gidengil and Everitt, 2003); Helen Clark in New Zealand (Devere and Davies, 2006), and "Blair's babes" in the United Kingdom (Ross, 2004).

Perceived as either "too nice" to get involved in politics or complete anomalies contravening expectations and stereotypes about a woman's place (Ross, 2002), female politicians' behavior is subject to more evaluation and disproportionate media attention (Ross and Sreberny, 2000; see also Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996). Research also suggests female leaders have to endure the gendering of leadership roles, as the skills of a leader are deemed more appropriate for men (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

Journalists' differential treatment of women and men politicians leads to crucial aspects of females' gender being routinely incorporated into political news stories (Byerly and Ross, 2006; Ross, 2004). Thus the coverage women politicians receive is "different from the manner in which male politicians are represented" (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996, p. 113), further reinforcing traditional definitions of women that link femaleness with domesticity, family life, emotionality and passivity (van Zoonen, 1994). Even with the inroads made by women in the public sphere, discourses of femininity still focus on

motherhood, as if performing multiple roles were impossible (see Gillespie, 2000; Maher and Saugeres, 2007).

Methods

This study uses discourse analysis to investigate coverage of Jane Swift in *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times* in 2001, when she became acting governor and gave birth to twins, and the coverage of Sarah Palin in the *Anchorage Daily News* and *The New York Times* in 2008, the year she announced her pregnancy and gave birth to her youngest son. The analysis focused on the articulations of the Swift and Palin personas as mother and governor.

Hall's articulation theory attends to meaning making within discourse and "to the particular historical moments—or conjunctures—during which specific linkages are made, unmade, and remade, thereby emphasizing the contingent, contextual force of ideology" (Jung, 2007, p. 161). Within this framework we can understand how ideological elements come to be linked or not within a particular discourse.

Analysis for Swift included stories published by the leading and most prominent newspaper in the region, *The Boston Globe*, in addition to *The New York Times*, in consideration of its role in setting the agenda for other news media (Sparrow, 1999). A Lexis-Nexis search for any 2001 piece with the words "Swift," "governor" and "twins" yielded 82 news stories, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor (included because they incorporate meanings articulated and reproduced by the press). Seven stories were discarded—they only coincidentally included the keywords or were duplications—and the final sample included 75 stories, 60 from *The Boston Globe* and 15 from *The New York Times*.

The Palin analysis included the *Anchorage Daily News*, the daily with the largest circulation in Alaska, as well as *The New York Times*. A Lexis-Nexis search with the words "Palin," "governor," "baby," "infant" and "pregnant" was conducted from January 2008 to August 29, 2008—just before she was announced as the vice presidential candidate for the Republican party. The *Anchorage Daily News* produced 57 news stories, op-ed pieces and letters to the editors—only a quarter discussed her pregnancy or her role as a mother—and while *The New York Times* resulted in 52 articles, none referred to her double roles of mother and governor.

The selection of Swift and Palin as cases had to do with their personas: they are the only two women who had given birth while serving as governors in the United States. While they were both Republican, married and heterosexual, we acknowledge there are several differences between these two politicians and the circumstances defining their maternity and tenures as governor. That said, we used the same criteria when selecting the newspapers to study—prominence and circulation, locally and nationally—and tried to keep similar time frames for both cases. Arguably, Palin becoming a vice presidential candidate soon after giving birth to her son subjected her to a new dimension of media scrutiny and thus we considered it inappropriate to include that coverage in the analysis.

The three researchers authoring this article are females and were each born in different countries, backgrounds that inform their readings and interpretations. Each is also familiar with dominant and feminist gender ideologies regarding motherhood, parenting, and women's positions of power/leadership. Each author conducted multiple close readings of each text and conferred to discuss identified links, themes, and patterns.

The multiple researcher approach—a type of triangulation that seeks convergence of meaning (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002)—enabled us to confirm our findings and to increase interpretive validity.

Following Sikka's (2008) example, the analytical structure is built on three central issues. They consist of: (1) an examination of speakers who commented on Swift's and/or Palin's pregnancy and the cohesive discourse (whether consciously or unconsciously) they attempted to create. Speakers include reporter's and source's voices including op-ed writers; (2) an analysis of the speakers' statements and the commonalities that are stressed and silenced; and (3) an assessment of alternative representations and re-articulations of the dominant discourse—voices questioning hegemonic constructions.

This method allows for connections to the embedded representations and ideological resonances within the discourse surrounding the two women, and meanings and representations circulated in the public sphere regarding motherhood, parenting, and politics. We acknowledge the polysemy of the texts but argue that dominant readings—based on common sense (hegemonic) notions of gender—are visible and powerful.

Analysis and Discussion

Swift Coverage

News discourse constructed Swift as a woman at odds with dominant ideological gender roles. Prevalent are negative stances on Swift's situation, questioning her ability to fulfill her political responsibilities and still be a good mother. In the 75 stories, reporters quoted 155 sources and used 560 quotes; 253 of these quotes took a negative tone toward Swift for trying to perform both roles and only 73 favored motherhood in the governor's office. The remaining quotes were factual and/or did not relate to Swift's mothering. *The New York Times* less often discussed Swift's parenting status but when it did the discourse was similar to *The Boston Globe*.

The newspapers' main articulation was a vilification of Swift's position as a mother. Throughout the coverage, including a vast spectrum of speakers from mothers to former presidential candidate Ross Perot, Swift was situated as the sole parent responsible for her children's well-being.

With a stay-at-home spouse, extended family's assistance, and a well-paid job, this arrangement seems favorable. The discursive frame surrounding Swift's circumstances called into question her parenting capabilities because, we argue, as a white woman of financial means, she (and her family) did not fit into traditional roles. In this case the at-home spouse is a *husband* and the salary is *her* paycheck. This disrupted society's hegemonic image of the traditional man—breadwinner, woman—homemaker model. Even though there has been much discussion about the need to support working mothers and provide resources for mothers in the workplace, our analysis recorded that Swift's at-home-husband and sizeable income were repeatedly ignored.

A mother interviewed in *The Boston Globe*, said, "I know it sounds like I'm a male chauvinist, but I think a mother is different from a father. A mother gives birth and she's important to the child in those early months. I just don't see how Jane Swift can do it" (Wen, 2001). The danger of harnessing the emphasis on differences between a mother and a father without a balance of positions articulates the inappropriateness of fathers as nurturers and the compulsory role mothers must undertake.

The texts, particularly through the reporter's selection of quotes and through letters to the editor, consistently reinforced the idea mothers should be fulltime parents. This position is at odds with facts showing a majority of US mothers work outside the home. Another story quotes the response when Swift asked former presidential candidate Ross Perot a question during a luncheon:

If I had one wish, it would be for every mother to understand how her baby's brain works. A baby is born like an unwired computer. If you want to tap a baby's full potential you have to start at birth . . . Now we have the phenomenon of the successful career mother. We have Wall Street women who work 14 hours a day. (Kowalczyk, 2001)

Regardless of whether Perot targeted his answer directly at Swift, then pregnant with twins, his answer (and reporting of it without question) reinforces mothering ideologies that place the burden of parenting on the *mother* while ignoring the father's role. That the quote chastised the successful career woman exemplifies the dominant ideology—women shortchange their children when they work. In a letter to the editor, a reader wrote:

As a mother of twins (who also had a 2-year-old at home when they were born), I must say there's no way despite the amount of help she has, that Jane Swift can be both a competent governor and an adequate mother. One (the state) or the other (the babies) will get the short end of the stick. (Campbell, 2001)

This letter offers another example of how the press circulated this particular discourse about Swift. Further, the discourse neglected to acknowledge Swift's stay-at-home husband or other parenting assistance. When the idea of assistance is articulated, what is discursively interesting is exactly the notion of *assistance*. In this sense, Swift is situated as the primary caregiver. This near invisibility of Swift's husband's role and linking Swift's choices to negative outcomes for her children contributes to harmful notions of parenting and work.

Especially problematic, these links about dominant gender roles are prevalent in the texts and typically unquestioned rather than balanced with an opposing perspective. An op-ed declares Swift's "biggest challenge comes after the twins are born: How will she balance work and family?" (Vennoch, 2001a). This represents classically how women are questioned about balancing work. In a later op-ed, the same writer vilified Swift's mothering capabilities in an argument for not seeking reelection (Vennoch, 2001b). The op-ed stressed Swift's failure to separate the personal and professional:

I am just thinking about what it must be like to be Jane Swift at this moment. The babies are hungry and crying. Her older daughter is needy and wanting to be hugged. Her husband is sullen and resentful. (Vennoch, 2001b)

This imagined portrayal assumes Swift's family is unhappy and blames her work. Harmful in this picture is the description of her husband, which puts forth the idea that men who are stay-at-home fathers cannot possibly be happy. Further, Vennoch's image of neglected children articulates fathering to inadequate care, again reinforcing dominant gender roles. That a father cannot satisfy a child's need for a hug supports a non-nurturing notion of masculinity. To assume Swift's husband is "sullen and resentful" further confirms dominant ideological gender constructions and indicates men do not desire child care nor

their wives as breadwinners. The articulation of the arrangement is one that is unfulfilling to everyone in the family.

The unity of discourse continually reinforced Swift's role as mother while mostly rendering absent her husband's role as primary childcare provider. This construction yielded the way for repeated challenges of how the "state's mum-in-chief" will balance work and family (Collins, 2001). This overload of information focusing on how Swift mothers, displays the imbalance of how dominant gender roles (channeled through newsrooms), reinforce dominant ideologies of mothers and fathers.

The discourse mostly neglects to discuss how Swift's husband will handle his day-to-day childcare responsibilities while Swift's personal choice on breastfeeding became matter for discussion (Weiss, 2001). Only one interview, published in the *Globe*, discussed his role as primary parent (Cassidy, 2001). One paragraph stated:

Despite his image as Massachusetts Mr. Mom, he is not truly a stay-at-home dad. Daughter Elizabeth, almost 3 and her infant twin sisters are in day care now, and their father spends his days doing errands and working in the yard and on the house renovation. (Abraham and Cassidy, 2001)

Other than this story, the coverage essentially ignored the father-as-primary-parent construction in Swift's story, we argue, because it contradicted the hegemonic white masculinity society is accustomed to and comfortable with. When Chuck Swift and his parenting skills were covered in the news, he was re-articulated with hegemonic masculinity through his masculine activities of working in the yard and on house renovations. Because effeminate men are a threat to hegemonic white masculinity, the stay-at-home father—one who has taken the quintessential female role—posed a conundrum for journalists who did not know how to portray him (a man) as a nurturer. Instead his masculinity was reinstated through stereotypical male activities.

During the heavy coverage of Swift's pregnancy, there existed much unsolicited advice on parenting directed at her, from amateurs and specialist alike. A main concern became the workability of her long commute. One article reads:

See Jane run from the governorship to motherhood, and then back again. See Jane run 130 miles from Boston to Williamstown several times a week to be with her three young children. See Jane run until she can barely tell yesterday from tomorrow, until her physical and mental health deteriorate, and until the state and its government are probably better off without her. (McGrory, 2001)

A *New York Times* editorial insists that "[r]unning a state while your three children are still in diapers is a heavy enough lift without spending half of your time on the highway" (*The New York Times*, 2001). Swift had a chauffeur, aides to assist in her gubernatorial duties, a stay-at-home spouse caring for the children, and extended family nearby, and portrayal of her draining commute was a mischaracterization of real circumstances. Disappointing in this articulation was the failure of journalists to use Swift's story as a link to stories about working mothers who truly lack resources and struggle with balancing the economic and logistical realities of work and home. Recent data illustrate 11.4 million single mothers live in the United States with about 30 percent living in poverty (Grall, 2007).

The influx of unsolicited advice consistently framed Swift's pregnancy as impending doom for her family and career. By discursively including advice from several speakers, the

articles linked Swift to uncertainty about her abilities, generating a discourse of doubt about Swift's decision to have children while serving as governor.

Palin Coverage

A few years later, Governor Palin of Alaska was about to give birth to her fifth child. The coverage of Palin and her pregnancy was surprisingly scant compared to Swift. What is striking about the coverage, however, is not the divergence in terms of number of articles but how different the discourse about Palin's motherhood and governing status was in comparison to Swift. Out of the 57 articles about Palin in the *Anchorage Daily News*, only 14 pertained to her pregnancy or her role as a mother and only one article discussed at length her juggling roles as mother and governor. The *New York Times* search yielded zero articles regarding Palin's pregnancy or any mention about her role as a mother. The fact that Palin disclosed her pregnancy only during her third trimester is a likely explanation for the lesser coverage she received in comparison to Swift. This analysis, however, focuses on the discursive constructions of the news rather than a quantitative data.

Within that construction, choices journalists make in terms of who to quote is significant. These voices are offered space in the public dialogue, become legitimized perspectives. In the case of Palin, and in contrast to Swift, a majority of the quotes were supportive of Palin's mothering while governing. For example, of the 95 quotes included by reporters in their stories, from a total of 51 sources, only three conveyed a negative opinion of Palin's dual duties, while 25 were in favor and even celebrated her promise to perform both her roles as a mother and governor.

Overwhelmingly the discourse circulated in the *Anchorage Daily News* about Governor Palin's pregnancy was positive and filled with congratulatory wishes on her family's new addition. A majority of the mentions about Palin's pregnancy or mothering status were found in "letters to the editor," which either congratulated Alaska's first family, commended Palin for being a good mother, or both. On the surface this may seem like an encouraging shift to a more supportive stance of working mothers. On the other hand, within the context of a richer discursive reading there are two less optimistic reasons that may have contributed to this support. First, throughout Palin's political career she has consistently located herself as foremost a mother. This positioning has placed her safely in a space that aligns with dominant patriarchal gender roles. This self-positioning may have shielded her from the criticisms of family abandonment that plagued Swift. Second, Palin's husband worked outside the home, unlike Swift's husband who threatened the dominant hegemonic gender order through his role as the primary nurturer. In other words, Palin's position within the family, unlike Swift's, followed a more traditional role. Further, Palin's husband worked in the oil fields of Alaska—a decidedly masculine occupation. Palin, then, did not "swap" traditional familial roles as was the case with Swift.

Unlike in the texts about Swift, there were absolutely no mentions of who would provide childcare for Palin's newborn child prior to its birth. The silence or unquestioning reinforced the notion that Palin would be the primary nurturer. There were also no mentions of the challenges Palin would face in juggling both roles as a mother and governor, or discussions of if her child would be shortchanged by having a mother who governs instead of staying home. This construction, we argue, occurred in part because Palin located herself primarily as a mother and that through this construction the discourse ultimately became supportive in her quest to be a working mother.

A total of six news articles in the *Anchorage Daily News* addressed Palin's motherhood and the pregnancy. Some of the discourse simply focused on a debate at the time about where she had delivered her baby. The stories explain that she delivered her baby in an Alaskan hospital and not in Texas as was initially reported. Other stories centered on how she managed to keep her pregnancy a secret for so long and also her first reaction when she found out that her baby was diagnosed with Down Syndrome.

Contrasting greatly with the Swift case, the overall tone of the discourse surrounding Palin is sympathetic and favorable. The headline alone of one particular story illustrates the point: "Palin Balances Official Duties with Son's Needs; Down syndrome presents family with unexpected challenges" (Quinn, 2008). On the one hand, the headline might be argued as neutral but contrasts so starkly with the treatment of Swift in the news that it seems overly supportive. The text of the article further illustrates the point, particularly in light of coverage of Swift returning to work rather than staying home with her children.

Three days after giving birth, Palin returned to work in her Anchorage office, accompanied by Trig and her husband. This was not a mother's typical visit to the office to show off the new baby; she was serving notice that a child of special needs will not hinder her professional commitments. (Quinn, 2008)

One might argue that the favorable tone is due to the fact that Palin's child has Down Syndrome, however, it is equally plausible to suggest that the needs of her child could also be used to argue for her need to stay home. In this discourse, unlike that of Swift, Palin is given the voice to stand up against traditional ideologies about gender.

Another example of favorable tone and a sympathetic voice within the Palin discourse is an opinion piece on the editorial pages that reads:

it is unsurprising that Gov. Sarah Palin's first crisis is personal. As a candidate, as governor, she has put the personal ahead of the political. She's mom and family member before anything else. The amount of time she spends in Wasilla rather than Juneau illustrates the point. Most Alaskans, while wallowing in the Palin melodrama, probably have some sympathy for the governor. (Carey, 2008)

Again, the news discourse that seems to celebrate Palin's position as mother before governor may be due to Palin's own construction of self. For example, during her nomination speech acceptance at the Republican National Convention—the first time she addressed the public on a national platform—she described herself as a hockey mom.

We strongly suspect that Palin's early and constant articulation of self as mother, which keeps in place the ideological roles of women, may have prevented discursive criticism in the local paper despite the fact that she was in many ways disturbing dominant gender roles. That *The New York Times* did not mention Palin's mothering leading up to the birth of her son was likely for similar reasons, though we believe the growing presence of women in public offices throughout the 1990s and slowly shifting gender attitudes also contributed to the national paper's lack of interest in the issue.

Conclusions

When the newspaper texts discussed Swift as a mother in both *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times* the stories, opinion pieces, and letters were either littered with

implications of family abandonment or inevitable failure as a governor. Just a few years later, the media discourse surrounding Palin in the *Anchorage Daily News* and *The New York Times* offered a stark contrast. *The New York Times* ignored the issue while the local paper did not question Palin's ability to juggle motherhood and governing. In fact, the opposite was true. Palin was treated in a celebratory and sympathetic manner. *The New York Times* reflected less on Swift's status as a mother in 2001 than her local paper yet by 2008 the issue of mothering and politics garnered no mention at all in the *Times*. While the first governor to give birth in office was highly criticized from a traditional ideological gendered standpoint, only a few years later Palin was not treated in the same way. In this sense, we consider if there has been a genuine shift in hegemonic gender roles. As more women occupy political positions, could it be that the idea of mothering and governing becomes common sense? After all, the tipping point theory could apply (Gladwell, 2002) as the country has seen more women than ever elected into positions of power, including Nancy Pelosi as Speaker of the House and two women as vice presidential hopefuls in the last presidential elections. We are hesitant to draw such a strong conclusion for this comparison of only two cases and of women who positioned their roles as mothers and politicians very differently. However, we argue the results offer rich analysis of the first two cases of governors who gave birth during office and open a dialogue for further research on the intersection of mothering and politics.

What is especially important in this analysis is not only the positioning of female/mother/governor but how it is situated within a broader discourse that considers the role of male/father within the context of the texts. The two cases, beyond their comparative value, add to our knowledge of the discursive framings of mothering, parenting, and politics and can be used to inform future research.

Media discourses seen in the analysis of Swift primarily reinforced social definitions and hegemonic views of motherhood, masculinity, and childrearing. The texts perpetuated dominant ideological gender constructions, linking specific ideological gender roles to mothers (domesticity, nurturer, caretaker) and fathers (breadwinner, absent in the home sphere). These gender constructions yield way to a long-held patriarchal belief that allows for very little tolerance of nontraditional parenting. The analysis of Swift showed the coverage generally disregarded Swift's husband's choice to take on the primary caretaker role and vilified Swift's decision to work away from home. Possibly because of Palin's husband's normative gender role as working father, she escaped such criticism.

Swift endured societal and professional disapproval for not performing the hegemonic expectation of a mother and woman. Swift's husband, a threat to hegemonic white masculinity, was not subjected to the level of criticism as Swift and instead his fathering role was nearly invisible. This neglected articulation of Swift's stay-at-home husband makes nearly invisible a re-articulation of dominant white masculinity and fatherhood. These textual constructions prevent discussions or instances that might have enhanced public debate on the demanding and fluid roles that both mothers and fathers alike have and ultimately secured hegemonic gender roles.

The near invisibility of Palin's scrutiny as a mother and a governor could be encouraging in that there seems to be progress in allowing women to be in positions of power and also successful mothers, but it could also be attributed to how Palin secured her role as primarily a mother first, politician second. Palin's role as a governor was not centered on her birthing a child unlike Swift whose time in office centered dominantly on the birth of her twins. We argue, though not overly enthusiastically, that this could be a

hopeful finding as the lack of scrutiny on Palin's pregnancy could be construed as a growing acceptance in the public's view of women and mothers in power. However, we cautiously state this argument while keeping in mind Palin's own positioning as a mother and the fact that she had a special needs child, both of which likely played into her more favorable coverage.

That said, the more recent analysis of Palin could be construed as demonstrating progress in that it seems the general public expectations of "appropriate" roles for a mother and a father have evolved, as illustrated by letters to the editor in each case. Questions still remain: is this an isolated incident, a hegemonic shift or more of the same old story? Future research in these areas will be informed by these findings.

Feminist scholars must critique the "ideologically-embedded discourse and social practices [of news media] in order to move toward emancipation" of patriarchal hegemony (Makus, 1990, p. 496). Articulation theory offers a useful means for such a critique. Hall's (1986) theory reminds us that the links made in discourse are not necessary or natural. In this sense, these same ideologies articulated differently might empower people rather than reinforce the hegemonic status quo. For example, a (re)articulation of the press's coverage of Swift could have disrupted the ideas and events that have come to seem natural and offer progress toward emancipation from these hegemonic white masculine and feminine roles. Unfortunately, journalists did not take the opportunity to expand discourse about the ability and need for fathers to serve as nurturers or to develop a dialogue about the difficulties single and poor mothers have juggling work with motherhood. The ideologies were articulated differently in the case of Palin but it would be naïve to claim that they were entirely disrupted.

NOTE

1. However, in her analysis of female world leaders, Norris (1997) found that most of the coverage was not reduced to simple stereotyping, and appearance or "feminine" traits were not the focus of these news stories.

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Jaime Loke (author to whom correspondence should be addressed), School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station A1000, Austin, TX 78712, USA.
E-mail: loke.jaime@gmail.com

Dustin Harp, School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station A1000, Austin, TX 78712, USA. E-mail: dustinharp@mail.utexas.edu

Ingrid Bachmann, School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station A1000, Austin, TX 78712, USA. E-mail: ibachmann@mail.utexas.edu