Public perceptions of news stories and news photos of Hillary Clinton

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Public Perceptions of News Stories and News Photos of Hillary Clinton

BY ESTHER THORSON & ANDREW MENDELSON

Every day the media are filled with stories about and photographs of politicians. These raw materials form the basis of the images we have of our leaders; Lippmann's (1922) "pictures in our heads." John Hartley (1992) suggests contemporary politics has become more and more image-based. It is a politics of pictures and images. The implication is that we must look at pictures to understand how we know politicians, especially since we primarily interact with mediated images of politicians, not the politicians themselves.

Historically, pictures have long been associated with the image of celebrities and political figures. Goldberg (1991) recounts numerous examples of pictures that have defined the way we saw famous people we never personally met. Matthew Brady's portrait of Abraham Lincoln, taken just before his first election, created the image of strength for those who had never seen him before. More recently, "the Kitchen Debate" helped solidify Nixon's image as a man tough on Communism.

But people are not just passive receptors of mass media images, powerful though they are thought to be. There is ample evidence that images result from complex interactions between mass media pictures and a person's demographic and personality characteristics and their previous experience (Lippmann, 1922; Byers, 1966; Barthes, 1980; Barrett, 1996).

The focus of this paper is to look at what mediated visual and verbal messages of a well-known political female, Hillary Clinton, people store in memory, and then relate that memory to what has been shown to be the content of news stories and news photos of Hillary Clinton. We also examine the impact of a variety of individual differences, such as demographics and attitudes on what images people have. Because most people never meet Hillary Clinton in person, they form their concept of her from the news and entertainment media, primarily the former, since that is where she most often appears. As Lippmann (1922) argues, "The only feeling that anyone can have about an event he does not experience is the feeling aroused by his mental image of that event" (p. 9).

Why examine people's images of Hillary Clinton? The first reason is that she is a newsmaker, probably as no other recent first ladies have been, with the possible exceptions of Jackie Kennedy, who was more a glamorous than a political player, and Eleanor Roosevelt, who was much more a political player than glamorous. Second Hillary Clinton, as any First Lady does, serves as a role model for many people in a variety of ways (Winfield, 1997). She can serve as model of a hostess, a wife, a daughter, a mother, a politician, and a modern American woman. This multiplicity of roles makes looking at Hillary Clinton particularly important and fascinating. As a public figure, she is also someone that just about every American knows quite a bit about, and therefore we can ask people to recall stories about her and pictures of her, and get some reasonably informed responses. The bottom line is that looking at Hillary Clinton is important because she provides so many prisms through which we can examine the "news image."

At this point in the model we hypothesize a complex interaction of individual characteristics with information available both from news stories and news photos of the former First Lady. The result is varying levels of attention to Hillary Clinton, varying levels and varying content of memory about that input, and varying likes and dislikes concerning her. When we ask people questions concerning their "image of Hillary Clinton," then, what we expect is a description that can be predicted by: (1) media consumption patterns; (2) demographic characteristics of the person him- or herself; and (3) prior attitudes and beliefs about relevant concepts named above ("woman," "First Lady," "politician," and so on). Figure 1 shows the flow of processing that we expect determines people's "image of Hillary," a concept that we define as having both visual and verbal components, and which involves a variety of additional concepts.

Figure 1. A model of verbal and visual news processing concerning Hillary Rodham Clinton

This study, then, examines the cumulative effects of exposure to photographs of and stories about Hillary Clinton over the long term, rather than the effects of a single exposure in an experimental setting. Certainly long-term effects, especially for pictures, are more difficult to isolate. Memory for words and images have been shown to merge over time (Pezdek, 1977; Grimes, 1990; Grimes, 1996). Though, photographs have been shown to be more memorable than words, even over long periods of time (Paivio & Csapo, 1973).

Of course there are caveats in this approach. First, we know that people also receive important television inputs, and here we attempt to look at some effects of television, even though no prior content analysis information was available to provide us with a picture of what television content about Hillary Clinton has involved. Second, we know that people also receive important entertainment inputs concerning the Clinton, but again, there has been no examination of how she has been treated by entertainment magazines and television.

Third, the present study was limited to a survey of people in a small college town in the Midwest. A national survey or a survey...
conducted in other parts of the country would be likely to show important differences, particularly in prior attitudes toward Clinton. A study conducted today would also likely show differences. Overall, liking for Hillary Clinton and Bill Clinton would certainly have been different from what we found, as would have media consumption patterns. We do not believe, however, that the relationships between people’s demographic, patterns of media consumption and attitudinal characteristics, and their “images of Hillary Clinton” would have been particularly different. That is, we expect the process of remembering visual images to be the same regardless of whom we test. One difference that we do expect, although neither we nor any other researchers that we know of can provide exact specification of this, is it appears that “local” newspapers have not carried as many stories or photographs of Hillary Clinton as have the national newspapers that we used to tell us what images were available from the media. For example, coverage of the First Lady’s trip to Bosnia and Turkey in March 1996 was extensively covered in the newsmagazines and in the Washington Post and The New York Times. Newspapers in the area of the present study, however, tended to show only two AP photos (one of Hillary with Chelsea and one of Hillary surrounded by troops), and small articles, or sometimes only a news photo and a caption. Thus it seems likely to us that the First Lady is much more salient in some areas of the country than in towns and cities where local newspaper coverage of her is probably less. Of course, it is clear that everyone has access to newsmagazines and to television images.

To motivate the study presented here, a diversity of literature must be examined, but because of space constraints, we will look at that literature in broad strokes. First, we look briefly at the literature on how people process news photos. We look, then, at the literature on the personalization of news. Next, we examine the cognitive dissonance literature that examines selective memory for information with which we agree. We mention some of the highlights of findings about what kinds of news photos of Hillary Clinton typified the first two and a half years of the Clinton administration. We then look briefly at how public opinion polls have treated the issue of “image of Hillary Clinton.” Finally, we posit some research questions and then attempt to test them with data from a phone survey that essentially asked people to talk about what they “see” when they think of the Clinton, and then asked people about themselves so that we could try to relate “image” to personal attributes of the viewers. Although this methodology, as applied to photos, is new and, therefore, exploratory, we believe that there are some important basic attributes of the processing of news images that can be indexed in this way.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE IMPACT OF NEWS PHOTOS IN NEWSPAPERS

An important approach to the impact of news photos is the “cultural” literature. This literature argues that news photos have a significant impact on viewers. For example, Goldberg (1991) chronicles a variety of ways that specific news photos have changed the way we see the world and ourselves, and she points out that news photography is considered by the profession to be critically important to people’s perceptions of the news. More recently (News Photographer 1994), a photo of a dead U.S. soldier in Somalia was credited as the impetus for troops being removed from that country. Further, Sontag (1977) and Hall (1973) argue that news photographs significantly affect the social construction of reality. For example, Sontag offers the 1972 image of the naked South Vietnamese child running down the road screaming after a napalm attack as having “did more to increase the public revulsion against the war than a hundred hours of televised barbarities” (p. 18).

In terms of social scientific evidence on photography’s role in image creation, we would expect significant effects of photographs on memory for news content based on the psychological literature on the effects of pictorial information. As stated earlier, pictures have been shown to be highly memorable, due to pictorial information being encoded in both a verbal and visual format, known as dual encoding (Paivio & Csapo, 1973). Further, pictures have been shown to enhance memory for people by fostering elaboration at encoding (Lynn, Shavitt & Ostrom, 1985), especially when the pictures relate to relevant traits of the to-be-remembered person.

Still most of the research from the journalism and communication literature suggests a more limited role for photos. Much of the research on the impact of photography in newspapers has focused on how pictures influence knowledge for news story content. Wanta (1988) provided only weak evidence that the size of a news photo could influence how important the topics of news stories were to people, observing effects of photo size for only one story out of the three he tested. Stone (1987, p. 72) is often referred to as providing evidence that “pictures have increased readers’ enjoyment and interest in newspapers,” and “people’s attention is arrested more by pictures than by stories,” but no data is referenced to back up these claims. Garcia and Stark (1991) presented results of eye-tracking data that suggest that photos are most likely the “point of entry” into newspaper pages (sometimes sharing that role with headlines) and that overall, 75% of all photos are “looked at.” This is in contrast to text, only 25% of which is said to receive an eye fixation. Unfortunately, it is not clear what, if anything, momentary fixations tell us about the impact photos have on attention, attitudes, memory or comprehension of the news.

A study by Wanta and Roark (1994) involved having people read and answer questions about a single front-page story as it had appeared in one of 20 different newspapers. The photos that accompanied these stories fell into nine different categories, and the objective was to determine whether these categories would have an effect on responses to the story. The main dependent variable was how much information was learned from reading the stories. Unfortunately, variations in the stories, differing in authorship, were confounded with the variations in the photos, so it is impossible to determine whether readers were learning more because of the photo or the story they received. Interestingly, however, whether the result of the stories or the photos, there were virtually no differences in memory as a function of which story people received.

An older study by Wolf and Grotta (1985) varied the content of a photo that always accompanied exactly the same news story. The story appeared on the front page of a campus newspaper, with either an active photo of a dancer, a portrait of her, or a totally unrelated photo. Surprisingly, the “less interesting” portrait produced the highest story readership. However, on only one fact question out of three was there any effect of the kind of photo present. Thus there was evi-
dence that the photos differentially affected the likelihood that the article was read, but little evidence that they affected learning from the articles.

Thorson and Mendelson (1996) found only minimal impact of newspaper photos on either interest for or memory of associated news stories. Photo presence made a story more interesting, but had no effect on recall of story content. Stories were the dominant factor in determining interest and memory. This is also consistent with research by Mendelson (1999, 2001). For example, Mendelson (2001) showed that changes in photographs affected people's memory only when viewed on their own. The stories drove interest and memory when photos and text were seen within a newspaper, however.

We now turn to a brief examination of research showing the tendency for people to remember personalized news stories.

**THE IMPACT OF PERSONALIZED NEWS**

To understand what image people have of Hillary Clinton, we must examine what, in general, people tend to remember from the media. In her review article, Rucinski (1992) showed that all news tends to have a predominantly personalized bias. This refers to the media focusing on "individual actors and human interest angles rather than institutional factors or structural relationships when describing political phenomena and social issues" (p. 93). The media try to give a human face to the news about major issues. Graber (1990) showed that people tend to recall television news stories that are "humanized" and "visually-oriented." Price and Czilli (1996) showed that personalized news stories were better recognized and better recalled. From these results, we operationally define personalized news as stories or photos that focus less on politics and more on personal roles and characteristics. We suggest that people should have a biased memory for news stories about Hillary Clinton as a wife and mother rather than as a professional.

**EFFECTS OF ATTITUDES ON MEMORY**

Popular belief has long posited that people have better memory for information that is congenial to prior attitudes. This is based largely on the cognitive dissonance literature (Festinger, 1957), that argues people try to avoid information with which they do not agree. However, recent meta-analyses show that this isn't the case: people are not more likely to seek out and remember only congenial information (Eagly, Chen, Chaiken, & Shaw-Barnes, 1999; Eagly, Kulesa, Chen, & Chaiken, 2001). As Eagly and her colleagues argue: "We suspected that the one flaw in the reasoning underlying this idea is the assumption that people inevitably avoid information that challenges their attitudes. It may be more likely that under many circumstances people expose themselves to such material, attend to it, scrutinize it carefully, encode it accurately, and thus remember it fairly well, even though they dislike the information and are not persuaded by it" (2001, p. 7). Still, these authors do not feel that attitudes have no effect on memory, but that the process is more complicated and moderating variables, such as relevance and motivation, need to be addressed. From these results, it is not clear how prior attitudes will color memory for Hillary Clinton, though because Clinton is a lightning rod for many people's political belief, it makes sense to think that these attitudes will relate to what is remembered.

**ATTRIBUTES OF NEWS PHOTOS AND STORIES OF HRC DURING THE FIRST PART OF THE CLINTON ADMINISTRATION**

Colbert's (1995) content analysis of *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and three news magazines demonstrated that most news photos of Hillary Clinton showed her in one of two roles: lawyer/professional (57% of all photos) or mother/wife/hostess (37%). That is, there were nearly twice as many professional representations as there were non-professional. Not only was the role she played highly conventionalized, other features of content were stereotyped. For example, Hillary Clinton was shown at a professional distance (46%), a social distance (29%), or a personal distance (21%), and almost never at an intimate distance.

Winfield (1997) examined all news content about Hillary Clinton in *The New York Times* in 1993 and 1994. She found that coverage was predominantly negative in tone. Modified cultivation theory would lead to the expectation that if people only see negative information about Hillary Clinton, their image of her should be negative in tone.

**PUBLIC OPINION POLLS TREATMENT OF HILLARY CLINTON**

Burrell and Penalosa (1995) provide a good overview of public opinion poll treatment of Hillary Clinton during the first two years of the Clinton administration. They point out that she has received much more polling attention than any other First Lady has. Between February 1992, and June, 1994, four major polling companies surveyed the public concerning Hillary Clinton's favorability rating a total of 64 times. In addition, there were apparently a variety of other polls concerning other aspects of Hillary Clinton (whether she would make a good president, how she should be involved in policy making, and so on). In general, at the beginning of the Clinton administration (January 1993), she experienced her highest ratings (67% approval), although during the health care research period, the approval ratings remained fairly high. During the second year of the administration, however, the failure of the health care plan, together with the onset of Whitewater, brought her favorability ratings down into the 40's. In January 1996, an USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll showed about the same level of approval (43%). This poll was conducted just before the First Lady was questioned by a grand jury concerning her Whitewater dealings.

More important than the overall averages, however, is the pattern of relationships between favorability toward Hillary Clinton and demographics (Burrell and Penalosa, 1995). Throughout the administration, women have approved of Hillary Clinton more than men. In fact, this difference became greater over time (Burrell and Penalosa, 1995). There was also a tendency for higher educated people to approve Hillary Clinton at higher levels than less educated people. The huge party affiliation effect is, of course, larger with Democrats approving of Hillary Clinton at a 70% or above level, and Republicans approving at only around 30% or lower. Non-whites were more approving than whites. And younger people show higher approval ratings than older people. (See the results of a 1996 national sample in Table 1.)

Based on the literature review, we propose several research questions. First, given such strong opinions about Hillary Clinton, especially for liberals and conservatives and for women and African Americans, our first research question examines the effects of prior attitudes on what is remembered from the news about Clinton. From the cognitive dissonance literature, it is not clear how prior
that when people were asked to recall a news photo, there would be
given Colbert’s (1995) findings about how stereotyped or conven-
tionalized news photos of the First Lady have been, we also expected
that those who rely heavily on print would tend, after the effects of demographic variables were
removed, to have more negative images.

RQ2: Is there a clear relationship between what media people used to glean information about the First Lady, and what their perceptions were?

We also wondered, given Price and Czilli’s (1996), Graber’s (1990) and Rucinski’s (1992) research, if people would recall mostly
typeset or conventionalized images, rather than political stories about Hillary Clinton. But, given Colbert’s (1995) findings about how stereotyped or conven-
tionalized news photos of the First Lady have been, we also expected
that when people were asked to recall a news photo, there would be
a marked homogeneity in what “pictures” were described, and that
most of what would be remembered would be the predominant
photos of Hillary Clinton in her executive role.

RQ3: Will people remember the more personalized examples of Hillary Clinton or the more prevalent professional examples?

Finally, we expected that both what stories people remembered
about Hillary Clinton and what photos they remembered would be
highly predictable from their own prior attitudes toward both
Hillary Clinton and President Clinton. In other words, as people try
to sort out the news information they receive about the First Lady, they are guided by their own predispositions.

RQ4: How will predispositions toward Hillary and Bill Clinton affect which news stories and photos of Hillary Clinton are remembered?

METHOD

Data were collected in a telephone survey of 302 adults in Boone
County, Missouri, where Columbia, population 75,000, is located. A
professional survey research company conducted the survey during
December 1995. Households were selected by random-digit dialing
procedures to insure that unlisted numbers would be represented.
Interviews were completed with approximately 50% of the eligible
census figures indicated Boone County officially has only 16% at
this range.

Media use variables included how often people watched the
evening network news, how often they read a newspaper(s) and
which newspapers they read; how often they read news magazines and which ones they read.

Measures relating to Hillary Clinton included what three major
stories respondents remembered reading about her (“Trying to
remember back all the way to the time when Bill Clinton became
President. What have been the major stories about Mrs. Clin-
ton?”) We then asked what images they recalled (“Sometimes certain
images, either from television or from newspapers or from news
magazines, really stick in our memories. Can you name three images
of Hillary Clinton that you remember best?” We then asked in an
open-ended format how the respondent would rate the kind of per-
son Mrs. Clinton appeared to be in the stories. Finally, we asked,
separately for television, newspaper and news magazine stories,
whether they had been mostly negative, neutral, or positive about
Mrs. Clinton.

Next were a series of questions about how important the position
of First Lady was, and then how important the position was as
Hillary Clinton had shown it to be (exact questions are shown in
Table 2).

Table 1. Results of national sample (January 12-15, 1996)

|                      | USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll: Hillary Rodham
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
|                      | Clinton Favorability Ratings by Demographic Group                                         |
|                      | Mean favorability rating: 43% (vs. 57% in January 1994)                                  |
|                      | Liberalists  77%                                                                       |
|                      | Conservatives 26%                                                                    |
|                      | Hispanics 48%                                                                       |
|                      | African American men 74%                                                               |
|                      | African American women 81%                                                             |
|                      | White men 35%                                                                        |

attitudes will affect the respondents’ images of Clinton. Thus, we especially wanted to know:

RQ1: Is opinion about Hillary Clinton related to actual news sto-
ries and news photos of that people remembered?

Next, given Winfield’s (1995) findings that much of the news cov-
erage of Hillary Clinton, at least in print, has been predominantly
negative in tone, we expected that those who rely heavily on print
would tend, after the effects of demographic variables were
removed, to have more negative images.

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Next were a series of questions about how important the position
of First Lady was, and then how important the position was as
Hillary Clinton had shown it to be (exact questions are shown in
Table 2).

Table 2. Attitudes toward First Lady, in General, and Hillary Rodham Clinton as First Lady: Boone County Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(December 10-15, 1995; n=302; percent who agree or strongly agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The position of First Lady of the U.S. provides a role model for women.</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The position of First Lady of the U.S. is very powerful.</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Rodham Clinton has shown her position to be a role model for women.</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Rodham Clinton has shown her position to be very powerful.</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents were asked to rate Bill Clinton on seven characteris-
tics (warm, dishonest, good leader, knowledgeable, strong, is solving
our economic problems, is my candidate in 1996). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .90, and the scale was considered a measure of
“attitude toward Bill Clinton.” Hillary Clinton was then rated on
eighteen characteristics (good at relating to others, warm, dishonest,
good leader, knowledgeable, strong, good mother, good wife, and
dependent). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .86, and the scale was considered a measure of “attitude toward Hillary Clin-
ton.” The correlation of these two scales was

r=.80 (p=.0001).

Finally, people were asked basic demographic questions concerning their age, whether they voted in the last election, their employment
status, income, race, and party affiliation.

RESULTS

Both the pictures and stories that people recalled in the open-
ended questioning were coded in terms of Hillary Clinton’s role. The
codes included First Lady, wife, mother, professional in her
own right, and references only to her personal appearance. The last
category was used when people referred only to such aspects as her
hair styles, clothing or hats. The stories and pictures were also coded
in terms of the event they portrayed. The main events mentioned
were Whitewater, the healthcare effort, and Hillary Clinton's trips to India and China.

A new variable called "tone," was developed based on the adjectives that were used when people described how Hillary Clinton was represented in news stories or in the pictures they remembered. Many people were classified as neutral in their comments about the pictures because they simply stated what they remembered without any evaluative adjectives. In fact, 76 percent of the respondents were classified as neutral for the picture they recalled. In evaluations of what kind of person Hillary Clinton appeared to be in the news stories, 7.5% of the respondents used no evaluative adjectives.

We also asked a series of questions to assess people's attitudes toward Hillary Clinton, President Clinton and the role of First Lady in general. Most of the respondents were favorable toward both Hillary Clinton and the President (Table 3).

Table 3. Attitudes toward Hillary Rodham Clinton and President Clinton: Boone County Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relates well to others</th>
<th>Ratings of HRC</th>
<th>Ratings of President Clinton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good leader</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good mother</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good wife</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In looking at those people who either agreed somewhat or strongly agreed with statements about Hillary Clinton, the lowest was 53% for her being honest and the highest was 83% for her being strong. The unweighted average for her was 68% either somewhat or strongly agreeing in the positive direction.

The respondents were less positive toward President Clinton (Table 3), but they still mostly liked him. The lowest score was 42% of the respondents saying he was a good leader. The high score was 73% indicating he was knowledgeable. His unweighted average approval rating was 56%.

In looking at both Hillary Clinton as a First Lady and the role of the First Lady in general, 65% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that she was a good role model as First Lady and 65% felt she was powerful as First Lady. These respondents also felt that First Ladies, in general, are powerful (48%).

Given Colbert's (1995) findings about how stereotyped or conventionalized news photos of the First Lady have been, we expected that when people were asked to recall a news photo or image, there would be a marked homogeneity in what "pictures" were described, and that most of what would be remembered were the predominant photos of Hillary Clinton in her professional role. In looking at the results of what was recalled about stories, 87% of the respondents could name a story about Hillary Clinton. Further, 76% of the people who recalled a story cited either her role in the healthcare arena (46%) or Whitewater (30%), both categories of which involve Hillary Clinton's professional roles. The next leading role after these two was personal appearance (9%).

Only 6% of the respondents cited a story that referred to Hillary Clinton as either a wife or a First Lady. As we expected, then, people were definitely biased toward the two big stories in which Hillary Clinton's role was a professional one, rather than as a First Lady or in her more personal roles. This is similar to findings that most of the coverage of Hillary Clinton has been focused on these issues/events (e.g., Winfield, 1995).

In startling contrast to the percentages for story recall, 78% of the respondents recalled pictures of Hillary Clinton in a personal appearance, wife, mother, First Lady or daughter role. Only 22% of the respondents recalled an image of Hillary Clinton in a professional role. As Colbert's examination of The New York Times and The Washington Post showed, photos of Hillary Clinton were dominated by professional images, such as the health care hearings. But these were not the images that people remembered, and thus this finding is inconsistent with the fact that two-thirds of all news photos of Hillary Clinton show her in a professional role (Colbert, 1995).

There were some additional interesting aspects of recall of pictures of Hillary Clinton. About three-quarters (76%) of these people could recall one image, 42% could recall two images and only 12% could come up with three separate images. For the first image recalled, 77% of what people recalled were "specific visuals," while 14% stated simply a verbal description of Hillary Clinton that did not appear to refer to a picture. (For example, a respondent might say, "Hillary Clinton is selfish and aggressive.")

A "specific visual" was often clear enough that we could find the referent image. There were a number of frequently mentioned specific visuals. An example was "after the Oklahoma bombing with all the kids sitting in front of her and Bill talking." Or, "She is standing by a Christmas tree wearing a red dress and looking nice." In fact, it was interesting to see how many of the quotes we could actually connect with a specific news photo. Of the 756 references to images of Hillary Clinton, fully 31% seemed to be to specific pictures of her. These results probably reflect the stereotyping and conventionalizing (Colbert, 1995) of news images of Hillary Clinton.

One of our research questions concerned whether there were relationships between what media people used for news and whether they recalled positive, negative or neutral stories and pictures. Neither regressions examining evaluative tone of recalled pictures or stories, nor regressions examining people's assessments of whether newspaper, news magazine or television coverage of Hillary Clinton was positive, negative or neutral, showed significant effects of how much television, news magazine, or newspaper use people reported. Thus, media use patterns were not, as had been expected, related to evaluative images of Hillary Clinton coverage.

In looking at what predicted memory for pictures, the number of pictures recalled was predicted by a younger age (sR²=.045; p=.0001), higher income (sR²=.031; p=.005), and being Republican (sR²=.051; p=.0007). The number of pictures remembered was not predicted by any of the media use variables nor attitudes toward Hillary or Bill Clinton. Greater readership of newsmagazines did, however, predict whether at least one picture was recalled (sR²=.018; p=.046).

In a series of regressions, we examined what variables would predict a positive tone associated with an assessment of the type of person Hillary Clinton was perceived to be in all news stories in general. After partialling out the effects of the basic demographic variables
(i.e., gender, age, education, income and party affiliation), we found that having a positive attitude toward Hillary Clinton was correlated with a positive tone for story recalled ($r^2 = .1296; p = .0001$). Also associated with this assessed positive tone for all stories in general was a positive assessment of Hillary Clinton coverage in newspapers ($r^2 = .019; p = .046$), a positive assessment of Hillary Clinton in news magazines ($r^2 = .044; p = .12$), and greater belief in the importance of First Ladies in general ($r^2 = .02; p = .02$).

In looking at what variables predicted a positive tone for pictures recalled (after the effects of gender, age, income and party affiliation were partialled out), we found that a positive attitude toward Hillary Clinton ($r^2 = .03; p = .04$), and more frequent television news use ($r^2 = .015; p = .045$) were the only two significant predictor variables.

We also asked the respondents to characterize the tone (positive, negative, and neutral) of stories in newspapers, in newsmagazines, and on television. After removing effects of demographics and media use (all of these were non-significant predictors), a negative tone of television news coverage was predicted by a person’s positive attitude toward Hillary Clinton ($r^2 = .028; p = .04$) and positive attitude toward Clinton ($r^2 = .055; p = .0021$). For the perceived tone of newspaper stories, again attitude toward Hillary Clinton ($r^2 = .04; p = .025$) and attitude toward Clinton ($r^2 = .034; p = .004$) were both inversely related to tone. Last, perceived negative tone of news magazine stories was predicted only by one’s positive attitude toward Clinton ($r^2 = .352; p = .03$). These results are particularly striking. The more people approved of the Clinton’s, the more negative they perceived newspaper, television and news magazine coverage to be.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the survey show that people recall news stories that concern Hillary Clinton’s role as a professional, mainly in terms of her roles in health care and Whitewater. But in direct contrast, and in spite of the preponderance of news photos that show her in a professional role (Colbert, 1995), people mostly recall pictures of Hillary Clinton in the more personal roles of her personal appearance, or her roles as wife, mother, First Lady or daughter. These images, presumably ones that get us closer to the “real Hillary,” are those that have the greatest memory impact on people.

These results could be explained simply because there may be more visual cues in photographs of Hillary Clinton as a wife or mother than as a professional person, making it easier to store and recall. A photo that contained an Hillary with Chelsea would be more immediately recognizable as mother and daughter, while a “lawyer” is more abstract visually. Still, we do not feel this is likely, as most of the professional images of HRC do provide similar visual cues to tell the viewer what is going on.

For example, a viewer is able to tell that Clinton is in a professional role when she is seated at a podium, surrounded by microphone, photographers and flip charts in the Senate or answering questions at a press conference. In addition, just posing with former President Clinton does not automatically suggest to viewers she is his wife. For example, they often were photographed together in the early days of the healthcare debate presiding over policy discussions. There were more cues suggesting a professional role for HRC than a wife one.

To our surprise, we did not find that people who more heavily relied on newspapers for their information about Hillary Clinton remembered more professional pictures of Hillary Clinton. In fact, regardless of media used, people remembered personal role pictures, although they remembered professional role stories. It seems likely that people use news stories to get “news” about the First Lady in terms of her role as a political player, i.e., as a newsmaker. But they use photographs of Hillary Clinton to get an image of who she is as a person—a wife, a mother, a woman, or as someone whose manner of dress or hair style reflects that kind of person she actually is. These results build on earlier work by Goldberg (1991) and others that has examined the role pictures have in creating a certain image of celebrities and political figures. Clearly, people’s image of Hillary Clinton was related to the photographs that ran of her.

Also to our surprise, more frequent use of newspapers, newsmagazines and television news did not predict either evaluative perceptions of Hillary Clinton stories or pictures. Media use also failed to be related to how positively or negatively people thought the coverage of Hillary Clinton was in newspapers, newsmagazines or television news. In fact, it was clearly the case that people who had positive attitudes toward the Clintons, though media coverage was more negative.

Of course, there are caveats to consider when making inferences from this data set. We have already discussed the problem of the limited geographic nature of the survey. Second, we relied on people’s ability to recall, rather than presenting them with images to “recognize.” There may be high levels of recognition of professional photos of Hillary Clinton, but the free-recall process itself somehow favors accessing of personal-role photos. In addition, we asked people to describe the photos verbally. This is likely a difficult task requiring that people translate a “picture in the head” to a phrase or sentence. Given this constraint, it was impressive that we could “identify” as many specific photos as we were able to.

Finally, we hope that this paper, in spite of its limitations, provides an initial step toward connecting research about media content with research about how people somehow take in and process all that content. As we have seen, the “active processor” is a critical reality here. Media content does not predict people’s perceptions. Instead, people apparently pick and choose what stories and what photos will remain with them, and which ones are consistent with their own point of view (selective attention and retention). This means two things. First, it is not appropriate to assume what the impact of media content will be on people. And second, it is not appropriate to assume content from what people say they were exposed to. Instead, it is critical to look both at content and at news consumer response to that content. Only then will we have a truly accurate representation of how news stories and photographs create their impact.

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