

**Media Framing of Black Women's Campaigns for the US House of Representatives**

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## Introduction

At the US 2012 general election, six minority women were newly elected to the House of Representatives. Among the most prominent were Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI 2<sup>nd</sup> District) who became the “first Hindu American,” and Mia Love (R-UT 4<sup>th</sup> District), the “first viable Black female Republican”. Thus, in addition to rising numbers of minority women elected to the House, ethnic and religious diversity among minority female candidates is also on the rise, and competitive candidacies are no longer fielded solely by the Democratic Party. Indeed, parties increasingly appear to view racial and gender diversity among candidates as an electoral advantage, as was demonstrated by Love’s invitation to address the 2012 Republican National Convention. Questions of how voters respond to this increased diversity are explored by Aiisha Harden Russell and Shyam Sriram in Chapters 8 and 9.

While it has long been demonstrated that women and minorities receive unfavourable campaign coverage in relation to their White, male counterparts, little attention has been paid to the intersectional effects of these aspects of identity on coverage of political campaigns by minority women. Nearly all previous scholarship has treated race and gender as mutually exclusive categories. Thus coverage specific to minority women in politics remains almost entirely unexplored. Notable exceptions include Chapter 12 in this volume, in which Andra Gillespie discusses the framing of Michelle Obama as First Lady.

This exploratory analysis employs an open-ended, qualitative content analysis on local and national newspaper coverage of sixteen Black women running for the US House of Representatives in 2012. Three broad questions are considered:

- In what ways are Black female candidates' race and gender represented in newspaper coverage of electoral campaigns?
- Do media frames link race and gender to candidates' campaigns, character, or viability?
- Do representations of Black female political candidates correspond with stereotypes of Black women in general?

Single-axis studies of framing of predominantly White women and minority men have identified various 'racial' and 'gendered' frames (for respective reviews, see Caliendo & McIlwain, 2006; Murray, 2010:50-52). This analysis considers the way in which racial and gendered references create specific intersectional frames applied to Black women running for office. Such frames simultaneously highlight both female and minority status, and have not previously been addressed in scholarship focusing solely on race or gender. Mia Love's candidacy is used as an illustrative case study, while more general framing of the cohort of viable Black women running for the House in 2012 is also analysed.

The analysis indicates that Black women are subject to framing which posits them as substantive representatives of Black constituencies, but not of women in general.

Additionally, textual links between intersectional identity and viability suggest Black women are framed as having advantages due to their race and gender, but at the same time failing to win over White voters, despite evidence to the contrary (Philpot & Walton, 2007).

Furthermore, latent frames of Black women's character appear to correspond with generalized stereotypes and negative imaging of the 'angry Black woman' and the 'strong

Black woman' as identified by Hill Collins (1990) and others. This topic is also addressed by Gillespie in Chapter 12.

Finally, the anomaly of a Black female Republican led to a variety of first frames portraying Mia Love as motivated by her race and gender and co-opted by her party, as well as skeptical responses towards her attempts to employ counter-frames, which reduced the saliency of her race and gender. The exceptionalism of Love's candidacy goes beyond her framing as a Black female Republican first. In 2012, Love eventually secured 47% of the vote against a White male six-term incumbent, Jim Matheson. She achieved this in an almost entirely White district and went on to win the race in 2014. Love is also a Mormon. Her campaign called this racial, partisan, and religious identity "the trifecta".<sup>1</sup> Additional aspects of Love's biography, which differentiate her from many other Black female candidates, include her Haitian heritage (and therefore exemption from experience as a descendent of U.S. slavery), and status as the wife of a White man, both of which add additional layers to the complex images which emerge in coverage of her campaign. Because of the many aspects of Love's candidacy that challenged expectations, she garnered exceptional press attention and was subject to several clear frames not applied to other Black women running for the House of Representatives in 2012.

### **Intersectionality and campaign coverage**

This study employs a theoretical framework underpinned by the concept of intersectionality, as developed by Crenshaw (1989; 1991; 2011), Hill Collins (1990) and King (1988) among others.<sup>2</sup> In the context of this analysis, the media frames previously identified in coverage of

(White) female candidates and minority (male) candidates are neither expected to apply fully to Black women, nor are effects simply expected to be the sum of both. Instead, previously identified gendered frames are regarded as implicitly racializing (often through the absence of reference to the race of White candidates), and racial frames applied to minority male candidates are regarded as implicitly gendered. Therefore, the frames applied to Black female candidates are instead expected to reflect their intersectional identities.

The exception to single axis studies of race or gender in this context is recent work by Gershon (2012). Gershon shows that when an intersectional approach is employed- by comparing patterns of coverage of minority women, minority men, White women and White men, minority women received *less frequent and less positive coverage than all other groups*. Therefore, Gershon demonstrates that in terms of frequency and tone, findings for White women and minority men do not apply to minority women. Building on Gershon's quantitative evidence of disadvantages for minority women of various ethnicities, this study narrows the focus to Black female representatives to provide a detailed qualitative examination of the content of frames present in coverage of their campaigns.

### **Foregrounding race and gender**

Election-time news coverage has been shown to emphasize minority candidates' and representatives' ethnicity while ignoring the race or ethnicity of Whites (Clay, 1992; Larson, 2006; McIlwain & Caliendo, 2009:11; Niven & Zilber, 1996; Reeves, 1997). In addition to highlighting minorities' race, minority candidates' deployment of racial messages is suppressed and instead replaced with the media's own racial emphases, both regarding

candidates themselves, and their electoral base (Terkildsen & Damore, 1999). Similarly the tendency to foreground the gender of female candidates and representatives is well documented (Falk, 2012; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Ross, Evans, Harrison, Shears, & Wadia, 2013; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). Racial and gendered emphases may take many forms, either via explicit “first” frames, descriptions of supporters, the framing of candidates as substantive representatives of specific constituencies, or more latent references to appearance or family life.

For example, the foregrounding of gender is often manifested in references to female candidates’ personal lives, creating a double bind in which they must be seen to display the qualities of a wife and mother, at the same time as conforming to contradictory leadership norms (Sones, Moran, & Lovenduski, 2005; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Stevens, 2007; Ward, 2000). However, for Black women, references to spouses and families may also serve to confirm or contradict negative intersectional stereotypes regarding families and motherhood.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, frames of “racial authenticity” are constructed by coverage which highlights candidates’ correspondence with physical, partisan, issue-based or historical expectations based on their racial identity. While Black voters express higher levels of satisfaction when descriptively represented in Washington (Tate, 2001), in non majority-minority districts, minority candidates need to balance the need to appear racially authentic to minority voters while also appealing to Whites (see Tate, 1994:174). Therefore, as Caliendo & McIlwain (2004) argue, frames of racial authenticity may position minority candidates in a troubling double bind. For example, the 2008 presidential election saw intense debate regarding

whether Barack Obama was either “too Black” or “not Black enough” (Augoustinos & De Garis, 2012).

Thus there are parallels in the way in which racial and gendered stereotypes question the possibility of substantive representation by female and minority candidates who challenge norms by attempting to win elected office, leading to implied or explicit questions regarding whether they are “real” women or minorities. For Black women, these effects may be compounded by intersectional frames, which highlight both racial and gendered otherness.

### **Firsts**

Throughout her first run in 2012 and successful campaign in 2014, media outlets focused on one aspect of Mia Love’s candidacy above every other: the possibility of her becoming the first Black Republican woman elected to congress. This is not unusual. Studies of news coverage of political campaigns show that women are consistently singled out as “firsts” or “novelty” candidates (Falk, 2012; Heldman et al., 2005; Ross et al., 2013; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). Additionally, Caliendo & McIlwain (2004) note that the media’s placement of race as a central issue of US campaigns occurs particularly in majority White districts, such as Love’s. While the ubiquity of the first frame is clear, debate remains regarding its effects on representations of women and minorities who run for public office. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross (1996) note that first frames are associated with increased frequency of coverage. This was certainly the case for Love, who rose to both national and international prominence following her speech to the Republican National Convention in 2012, and widespread interest in her candidacy continued in 2014. However Falk (2008:37) has suggested that, despite the name recognition that may be gained from a first frame,

emphasis on the “nation of women as out of place and unnatural in the political sphere may be longer lasting and have important political consequences.” Ross et al. (2013:7) argue that the frame ensures that “the role of politician continues to be codified as male, with women politicians as ‘other’.” For minority women, otherness is likely to be heightened by the foregrounding of not one but two subordinated axes of identity. This may also have negative effects when women and minorities in elite politics are conceptualised as “space invaders” and as a result are subject to “super surveillance” in their roles, “thus their every gesture, movement and utterance is observed” (Puwar, 2004:73).

### **Viability**

Given the largely symbolic nature of some early campaigns by female and minority candidates, and associated lack of resources and infrastructure, it is unsurprising that media frames have previously raised questions concerning such candidates’ chances of electoral success. This is important because voters’ evaluations of candidates are influenced by assessments of viability (Abramowitz, 1989; Abramson, Aldrich, Paolino, & Rohde, 1992). Such references include “any consideration of a candidate's strength or chances of success: strength of campaign organization, poll results, debate performance, and overall likelihood of winning” (Jalalzai 2006, building on Kahn (1994)). This analysis considers how references to minority women’s intersectional identity are linked with viability frames: whether race and/or gender are represented as irrelevant or relevant, an advantage or disadvantage, and whether possible advantages or disadvantages are portrayed as the responsibility of the candidate or the voting public.

## **Character and Stereotypes**

Recent work by Schneider & Bos (2013) contends that a specific stereotypical category exists for female politicians, distinct from “women” or “politicians” in general. The effect is that female politicians are disadvantaged by perceptions that they lack masculine qualities associated with leadership, and at the same time are additionally perceived as lacking positive qualities usually associated with women, such as warmth or empathy. How then, does this play out for Black women who are subject to frames which highlight both race and gender? Are stereotypes of minority women in general applied to minority women politicians? If so, how do minority women negotiate this symbolic landscape while attempting to generate broad voter appeal on the campaign trail?

Jamieson (1995) identifies a ‘woman / brain’ double bind in which women’s emotions are deemed to hinder their intellectual and therefore leadership abilities, and Falk (2008) notes that female presidential candidates are described with different emotions to men: women are “sad” whereas men are “angry”. However, this is in contrast to the ubiquitous controlling image of the “angry Black woman” (Hill Collins, 1990). While “feminine” traits often function as double binds for White female candidates, the “unfeminine” elements of persistent slavery era mythology may result in different or additional effects for Black women seeking public office. This analysis explores the extent and ways in which specific intersectional frames represent Black female politicians’ character, and how such frames correspond with existing stereotypes of Black women in general.

Such stereotypes are multifarious, overlapping and non-static. Jordan-Zachery (2009:46) provides a useful typology of six key images of black womanhood: the Mammy and the Jezebel, appearing during the slavery era, the Matriarch and Sapphire which gained

prominence in the 1950's and 1960's, and the Welfare Queen and Urban Black Mother which were popularized in the 1980's and 1990's. Furthermore, Wallace (1990:107) shows the way in which, “[f]rom the intricate web of mythology which surrounds the black woman, a fundamental image emerges. It is of a woman of inordinate strength.” The fundamental image of the Strong Black Woman is illustrated by the personal reflections of Joan Morgan (2000:87): “by the sole virtues of my race and gender I was supposed to be the consummate professional, handle any life crisis, be the dependable rock for every soul who needed me, and, yes, the classic- require less from my lovers than they did from me.”

Harris-Perry (2011) articulates the way in which stereotypes of Black women function in contrast with one another and new iterations are spawned from long lived characterisations. For example, the promiscuous Jezebel is contrasted with the asexual Mammy and the Welfare Queen is born of the promiscuous Jezebel.

Although historical myths are seldom imported wholesale into the contemporary era, they are meaningfully connected to twenty-first-century portrayals of Black women in public discourse. African American women who exercise their citizenship must also try to manage the negative expectations born of this powerful mythology.

Harris Perry, 2011:45

Additionally, Collins (2005: 48) argues that the media has generated “images of Black women that help justify and shape the new racism of color blind America.” Political candidates are a specific group of Black women. Therefore intersectional frames incorporated in campaign coverage are expected to reflect elements of existing stereotypes rather than

“importing them wholesale,” as well as possibly generating new iterations which apply specifically to Black female politicians.

### **Data and methods**

Using data from the Federal Election Commission, the Center for American Women and Politics, and the National Journal, sixteen Black women were identified as viable candidates for the US House of Representatives at the 2012 election. Only those who secured at least 40% of the vote were included in the sample, as viable candidates were expected to receive relatively substantial media coverage, and should be less likely to be framed as “symbolic.” Of these sixteen women, fifteen ran as Democrats and Love ran as a Republican. Two thirds were incumbents, and all but two races were classified as “solid” Republican or Democrat (uncompetitive) by Cook’s Political report eight weeks prior to Election Day. Only Love and Val Demings (D-FL 10<sup>th</sup> District) ran in competitive races.

The national newspaper sample included all three nationally distributed US newspapers: *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times*, as well as the *Washington Post*, noted for its focus on national politics. Local US newspaper circulation figures are not published by congressional district. Therefore the strategy developed by Lawless and Hayes (2014) was employed in order to identify the highest circulating newspaper published within each candidate’s district. Circulation figures and place of publication were downloaded from the Alliance for Audited Media, and congressional district maps from [www.govtrack.us](http://www.govtrack.us). Where no local newspaper was published within a candidate’s district, the highest circulating newspaper published in an adjacent district was used.

The timeline for the sample of coverage is eight weeks prior to the general election on November 6<sup>th</sup> 2012, and the week following the election. Articles were downloaded from Nexis, Newsbank or Access World News where possible, and directly from newspaper website archives in a small number of cases. For each candidate, the search term “first name” AND “last name” was used within the date range, generating samples of 42 national newspaper articles, and 157 local newspaper articles. These include news reports, op-ed columns, and letters to the editor. In order to provide a more complete analysis of the intersectional “first Black woman frame” that was applied almost exclusively to Mia Love; the sample was then extended to cover the period between Love’s primary nomination on April 21<sup>st</sup> 2012 and the week of her speech to the Republican National Convention on August 28<sup>th</sup> that year, as well as responses to her win at the 2014 general election.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the texts. One advantage of this method of text analysis is its suitability for large N data. While qualitative work in this area has tended to focus on case studies of individuals such as Condoleezza Rice or Michelle Obama (Alexander-Floyd, 2008; Meyers, 2013) I instead analyse coverage of a cohort of candidates in order to also identify frames which apply to black women in politics collectively. Both latent and manifest coding was employed to capture both overt references to candidates’ racial and gendered identity as well as more subtle code-words, phrases and images. For example, references to appearance or emotion, which often correspond with intersectional stereotypes. The coding process was open and quasi-inductive, beginning with general categories corresponding to aspects of coverage such as focus on candidate identity, the “horserace” or substantive policy, before identifying specific racial and gendered frames relating to these categories.

Entman (1993) defines media frames as the selection of aspects of perceived reality in order to make them more salient. Candidates' race and/or gender may be made salient by the presence of frames which include key-words or stereotypical images which thematically reinforce the relevance of their identity, and link it to other aspects of their candidacy.

Building on the work of Meyers (2013:57), these frames were considered in the context of broader stereotypes and representations of Black women.

## **Findings**

### **Who got coverage and why?**

Before considering the content of this coverage, it is important to note which women are most prominent within it. Levels of exposure vary hugely from 44 articles and 229 name mentions for Mia Love, (almost a quarter of all coverage in the sample) to none at all for Yvette Clarke (D-NY 9<sup>th</sup> District). Additionally, while some candidates gain high levels of local exposure, they are largely absent from the national stage, and vice versa. Only Love gained substantial coverage in both spheres, resulting from a combination of her framing as an intersectional and partisan "first", and the competitiveness of her race. Like Love, Val Demings also ran in an unusually competitive race and was therefore featured often in her local newspaper, but appeared only occasionally in the national press. An ethics investigation into Maxine Waters (D-CA 43<sup>rd</sup> District) and voting rights debates featuring Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX 18<sup>th</sup> District) and Corrine Brown (D-FL 5<sup>th</sup> District) were all covered with relative frequency by national papers. Gloria Bromell Tinubu (D-SC 7<sup>th</sup> District) was not deemed newsworthy by the national media, but received the most frequent coverage from her local publication due to its comparatively small circulation size. Therefore, just as there is substantial variation

among the candidates within the sample, there are also a myriad of candidate, campaign and news agenda factors which result in the prominence of some individuals and silence around others. Just as there is increasingly no “typical” Black female candidate, there is little consistency in the quantity or quality of coverage they receive. The analysis did reveal however, a number of specific intersectional frames and counter-frames applied to such candidates when particular conditions arise. Several such frames are outlined below, before a more in depth discussion of the exceptional coverage of Love’s candidacy.

**Explicit foregrounding: “Black” or “Black woman”, but not just “woman”**

Explicit foregrounding of candidates’ race or gender, for example referring to their status as a “first”, to the race or gender or their supporters, or grouping them together with other female or minority political actors was relatively rare in both national and local reporting. While more frequent in national papers, the vast majority of references comprised the “first Black woman” frame applied specifically to Love, and in conjunction with her Republican partisanship and Mormon religious identity. In coverage of other Black women, coverage most often highlighted one axis of identity without mentioning the other. In both national and local papers, articles referring to Black women’s race were twice as frequent as those referring to gender. These occur in a broad variety of contexts. For example, in coverage of voting rights debates Sheila Jackson Lee is described as “a Democrat who is Black”,<sup>4</sup> arguably positing her race as incidental, while at the same time foregrounding it. Other women are more distinctly racialized in ways that represent their race their primary identity. Barbara Lee (D-CA 13<sup>th</sup> District) is grouped with “other members of the Congressional Black Caucus”<sup>5</sup> and Maxine Waters is aligned with other “Black politicians” who have “held their fire”<sup>6</sup> regarding criticizing Obama, purportedly on grounds of racial solidarity. Perhaps more concerning, was Waters’ position as “a senior member of the Congressional Black Caucus”<sup>7</sup>

is occasionally foregrounded in the context of a long running ethics investigation, which eventually cleared the congresswoman of wrongdoing.

In contrast, coverage almost never highlights the gender of Black women without referring to their racial identity. It appears that Black women's identity as "Black" or "Black women" is made salient, but very rarely their identity as "just" women. Black women are framed as the symbolic and substantive representatives of Black constituents: for example, Marcia Fudge is dubbed a future "a national spokeswoman for Black America"<sup>8</sup> and is covered attending "a forum on breast cancer issues among Black women"<sup>9</sup>. However, Black women were not framed as the substantive representatives of "women" in general. This raises the question of whether such a frame is reserved only for White women.<sup>10</sup>

More dominant than the framing of candidates as substantive representatives of particular constituencies, or even substantive policy coverage of any kind, was discussion of electoral viability. Even in a sample of candidates where fourteen of sixteen were in "solid" districts, (i.e. uncompetitive) over half of the articles in the sample featured the horserace. In this context, Black women's race was again made salient while their gender garnered less attention. In majority minority districts, minority voters are unsurprisingly described as an advantage: "Black voters comprise about 50 percent of the electorate, an edge for Brown, who is Black, over Kolb, who is white."<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the coverage of campaign contributions of organisations such as the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus or Houston chapter of the NAACP is another straightforward way in which Blackness is explicitly linked with viability. However, while minority voters are described as an advantage to Black women seeking office, in majority white districts the question posed is whether the candidate can win over white voters- not whether white voters are a hindrance. For example, "Democrats question whether Tinubu, an African-American woman, can win enough crossover votes to carry the

politically moderate district,”<sup>12</sup> and later in the same article: “She turned out more than a minority vote. [...]I am encouraged ... she can attract some middle-of-the-road and independent voters in the general election.” Thus, in the case of Gloria Bromell Tinubu, her identity as a Black woman is both explicitly foregrounded, and implicitly posited as at odds with a “politically moderate district” and “middle of the road” voters.

Overall however, apart from the “first” frame applied to Love, explicit frames foregrounding Black women’s racial, gendered identity were unusual. When they do arise, Black women are represented as substantive representatives of Black communities but not women. Campaign disadvantage and disadvantage associated with their identity is foregrounded, but the burden is on the Black female representative to win over White voters if there is a disadvantage. The frame includes no explicit onus on White voters to support such candidates.

### **Latent foregrounding: Character**

During the 2012 election, several African American female candidates seem to have been subject to framing that includes many of the tropes of the stereotype of the “angry Black woman”, in particular, the “emasculating anger” identified by Harris-Perry as a key feature of contemporary myths about Black women informed by long lived stereotypes. The frame includes adjectives such as “outspoken”<sup>13</sup> to describe Corrine Brown or speech verbs such as “screaming”<sup>14</sup> in coverage of Gwen Moore (D-WI 4<sup>th</sup> District), as well as more substantial negative characterizations. In the case of Donna Edwards (D-MD 4<sup>th</sup> District), the frame was clearly linked with her status as other. While one *Washington Post* article cited Edwards framing herself as “straightforward”, it also described her as taking an “aggressive stand”,

stating that she “did not hold back”. The author interprets this as the behaviour of an individual “accustomed to being on the outside looking in”, and voice was given to criticism that Edwards is “not in touch” and “has alienated many colleagues and should do more to repair relationships.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, criticisms of Gloria Bromell Tinubu’s campaign by her local newspaper were highly personalized. An endorsement of her opponent argued that her “facade” was “stripped away” and instead the “true personality” that was alleged to have emerged in the context of a “stressful election season” was “not pretty.” Behavior viewed as “belligerent” by the publication outweighed the benefits of her “economist background” and the editors elected instead to support a competitor they believed to possess a “calmer temperament” and “willingness to compromise”.<sup>16</sup> Thus an acrimonious contest between two candidates was represented as the “real” nature of a woman who apparently lacked rationality despite her expertise. Anger and rationality were also posited as opposites in other contexts. For example, the Reverend Al Sharpton was cited praising Marcia Fudge (D-OH 11<sup>th</sup> District), stating: ““She's a fighter, but she's also rational [...] Sometimes you get people that are so fiery, they are not strategic. She has the passion and the fire in the belly, but she has the maturity in her mind to get things done.”<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the statement suggests that “fighter” element of her public persona is apparently in need of qualification, despite her role. Furthermore, visible anger is deemed not righteous, but a red flag of immaturity. It is worth noting also that these criticisms and characterisations are not confined to the sometimes more extreme sentiments expressed in Letters to the Editor, but regularly appear in news copy and editorial, as with the examples here. Thus they are firmly present within mainstream media platforms rather than relegated to the fringes.

Character references were by no means universally negative. However, explicitly positive representations also show substantial correspondence with the counter-frame of the “Strong

Black woman.” Candidates are praised for ‘tenacity’,<sup>18</sup> described as ‘capable and energetic’,<sup>19</sup> and cited representing themselves as “a hard-charger”<sup>20</sup> or “secure enough in who I am and what I stand for.”<sup>21</sup> Harris-Perry (2011:185) points out the ways in which this characterization can be a double-edged sword: “What begins as empowering self-definition can quickly become a prison. [...] To protect against always being seen as inferior, they declare themselves uniquely capable, but this strength is a shield full of holes; it sets up new possibilities for being misrecognised.” The frame is defined as much by what is excluded as what is included. Even positive framing of Black women’s character very rarely references any kind of straightforward likeability. Instead, strength is consistently made salient, while other positive traits stereotypically associated with women, such as warmth, compassion or principle (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993) are conspicuously absent.

### **“First Black Republican woman”**

The explicit foregrounding of Love’s race and gender, and framing of her candidacy as extraordinary most often comprises ostensibly positive references to her position as a likely “historic first.” These stem from the mouths of news reporters, columnists, political actors, academics, and other commentators. Not all such references are unequivocally affirmative, though. During the 2012 Republican primary, Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff labelled Love a “novelty” and was widely reported doing so.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, University of Iowa political science professor, Tim Hagle was quoted by local media attributing her success within the GOP to her status as “an attractive and articulate Black woman”.<sup>23</sup> Shortly afterwards, the *Deseret Morning News* published a letter to the editor, asking if it was only Love’s identity that attracted interest, “rather than what she really has to say”.<sup>24</sup> Beyond these explicit examples of the intersectional first frame which dominate Love’s coverage, there are also a

wide variety of more latent versions. For example, political commentators were cited describing Love as “innovative” and “exciting”.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, reports quoted former Republican Matheson-challenger, John Swallow, characterising her as “fresh”.<sup>26</sup> *The Washington Post* commented, “there is little about Mia Love that doesn't stand out,” asking, “How does a woman born in Brooklyn and reared in Connecticut end up in Utah?”<sup>27</sup> Finally, *The Deseret Morning News* claimed Love and Matheson’s backgrounds to be “so disparate they might as well come from different solar systems.”<sup>28</sup>

### **First as motive**

While otherness and difference are clearly a defining feature of representations of Love, the salience of her intersectional identity is enforced by several sometimes contradictory manifestations of the traditional ‘first’ frame. News reports often present the possibility of becoming a historic first as Love’s *primary* goal. Comments and headlines describing her “hope”, “effort”, “bid”, or ‘challenge’ to “become the first Black Republican woman in Congress” implied that Love’s racial and gendered identity was the motive for her congressional race. Furthermore, this implication arguably aligned her with historical symbolic candidates who did not share Love’s strong viability. This characterisation is in striking contrast with much of Love’s messaging regarding her motivation. Furthermore, there are also notable differences in the deployment of the frame by the candidate and her own party.

### **Token or substantive representative (of the Republican Party)**

Explicitly positive messages around Love’s identity from the Republican Party and its sympathisers are distinguished by the infrequency of references to other, more traditional

leadership attributes: "Who better than Love, a Black Republican Mormon woman, to push the reset button on all of those preconceptions about Mormons and Republicans?"<sup>29</sup> "John McCain said Thursday that he believes Mia Love can be an effective member of Congress, despite polarization in Washington, because of her profile and prominence in political circles."<sup>30</sup> "The Republican Party has tried to highlight its diversity, giving prime speaking slots to Latinos and Blacks who have emphasized their party's economic appeal to all Americans."<sup>31</sup> When Love's other leadership qualities are mentioned, they are often in the context of reference to what she can achieve for the Republican Party as a Black woman: "Besides being the first Black GOP woman in Congress, McCain said he liked Love's personal story of being raised by Haitian immigrants and that 'she's incredibly articulate for the conservative values and principles we believe in.'"<sup>32</sup> This view is bolstered by Republican commentators who openly refer to the benefits of having a Black woman onside: "Mia has a great opportunity to extend the message of liberty and economic freedom in ways that a lot of us can't, and we're excited about that."<sup>33</sup> *Ebony* magazine went as far as calling Love 'the great Black G.O.P. hope', a moniker which was again picked up by the national press.<sup>34</sup>

### **Co-opted**

Perhaps most obviously negatively, the frame was used to suggest that the candidate had been co-opted by the party, implying a disturbing lack of agency. Love was frequently framed by her rival as a pawn of the Republican Party. It is explicitly suggested that she has been "co-opted" by the party, and that her success within it is a result of being a Black woman. This frame appears both in reported comments by Matheson's team, as well as in news copy: Utah Democratic Party Chairman Jim Dukakis is cited saying, "She's made a deal with the devil

[...] They bought her...”<sup>35</sup> and, “She's been co-opted by all the lobbyists and members of Congress and we have to wonder if she's going to speak with an independent voice”.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Love’s support by the national Republican Party is rationalized with reference to her race and gender: “Her campaign will receive tremendous support from many right-wing and Republican PACs interested in the realistic possibility of the first African-American Republican female in Congress” ; “Love, who is Mormon, also could go a long way toward helping presidential candidate Mitt Romney, putting a fresh face on his church and his party as both try to appeal to an increasingly diverse nation.”<sup>37</sup> While these comments are ostensibly encouraging, they are also highly reductive and imply that the candidate is something of a puppet for the party: “She's good on television and makes for a good story on race and gender -- two issues that have bedevilled the GOP.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Love on being a ‘first’**

Meanwhile, in the initial stages of the campaign, Love appeared reluctant to explicitly foreground her intersectional identity. For example, she was not cited describing herself as a representative of Black or female voters, or commenting on the possibility of being the first Black Republican woman in Congress. Instead, she was frequently quoted referring indirectly to the racial and gendered differences between herself and Matheson: “He’s never been up against a candidate like me, [...] How is he going to be able to define me?”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, she hinted at differences between herself and members of her own party without explicitly employing the frame: “I’m a new generation of Republican, grounded in conservative principles by demonstrating the diversity and tolerance of my party.”<sup>40</sup>

Instances of rhetoric from Love which actively challenged the media's first frame were relatively unusual, but were occasionally pointed. In one interview she stated "The only history I'm interested in making is getting our country on track".<sup>41</sup> Overall, Love's apparent decision to only partially embrace the first frame was met with a dose of scepticism: "If elected, Ms. Love, 36, would be the first Black female Republican to serve in the House, *a fact that she studiously plays down*"<sup>42</sup> but "is impossible to ignore."<sup>43</sup> Implied is the suggestion that it would be inconceivable to define the candidacy in another way without this intersectional first being an elephant in the room. This is problematic for candidates for whom other frames may be more advantageous. In addition to "playing down" her intersectional identity, Love also appears to have challenged some of the racial othering she was subject to by playing up racial and gendered stereotypes around motherhood. There are similarities between this and the self presentation of Michelle Obama as First Lady as, "a woman to whom other married women can relate" (Meyer, 2004). Khal (2009) argues that this strategy by Obama, and Love, I would suggest, is "use of herself and her family as signs of racial progress to combat stereotypes". However, even the tactic of foregrounding gendered stereotypes was met with scepticism by the press: "Ms. Love likes to say, during nearly every campaign stop or speech, that she is 'first and foremost a wife and mother.'"<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the image of Love's interracial family and her role as the mother of a white man's children has the potential to catalyze the additional slavery-era stereotype of the Mammy. There was however, surprisingly little discussion or comment about Love's domestic life during her campaign, despite her own frequent use of the "wife and mother" frame.

Once elected, Love did enthusiastically acknowledge her position as a first: "Many of the naysayers out there said that Utah would never elect a Black, Republican, LDS woman to

Congress. Not only did we do it, we were the first to do it."<sup>45</sup> Yet she also continued to defend her right not to do so when she chose. In response, several media commentators began to overtly vent frustration her refusal to confirm to their framing of her candidacy and instead define it as she saw fit. After Love argued "I wasn't elected because of the color of my skin. I wasn't elected because of my gender. I was elected because of the solutions I put on the table"<sup>46</sup> she was addressed directly by several commentators and aggressively reprimanded for challenging the reporters' eagerness to frame her candidacy in these terms. It is somewhat ironic that Love was on the one hand framed as co-opted by the Republican Party for being a Black, female member, but on the other was directly challenged when she attempted to define herself in terms other than as an intersectional first.

### **Conclusion**

In many ways, this snapshot raises more questions than it provides answers. A huge body of scholarship on political campaigns by minority women remains to be undertaken. There is much work to be done further understanding the framing of campaigns by candidates, parties, reporters and other commentators, as well as disparities between minority women's self presentation and representations made by others. Just as there are differences between White and minority women's experiences on the campaign trail, framing of minority women is likely to vary substantially by ethnicity. Likewise, how do other axes of identity, such as class, intersect with racial, gendered and other media frames? The exceptionalism of a candidacy such as Love's also raises questions surrounding the generalizability of frames applied to particular individuals. Under what circumstances can a minority woman be a political actor without her intersectional identity being the most salient aspect of her public profile? Finally, how does the framing of minority women affect voter evaluations of

candidates, and what self presentation strategies can minority women seeking elective office employ in order to build on recent wins and gain future electoral successes?

A number of double binds have previously been identified as applying to (predominantly White) female leaders. From this exploratory analysis I would tentatively posit a number of intersectional binds which may apply specifically to Black women in the political sphere. In terms of viability, they are seen as advantaged by Black or female voters, but as failing to win over (rather than disadvantaged by) White or male voters. Their character is often described in terms of irrational anger or, perhaps more positively, strength, but not in terms of positive stereotypically “feminine” qualities. For those whose additional attributes, such as partisanship, renew the novelty of their race and gender, they may gain visibility due to their multiple novelties, but several varieties of the associated first frame imply tokenism, and a lack of agency or authenticity.

More positively, the relative scarcity of explicit foregrounding of race and gender for all but a few candidates suggests some progress may have been made. An optimistic explanation might point to gradually increasing racial diversity and gender balance among those seeking and gaining office, leading to the normalization of “non-traditional” candidates and decreased likelihood of their being framed as “symbolic.” We might also hope that cultural changes mean that in mainstream media, explicit racial and gendered critique is increasingly unaccepted. However, a more critical interpretation could raise two further points. Firstly, while the most *explicit* racism and/or sexism is broadly speaking, no longer tolerated, negative or ambivalent sentiments towards Black women and other groups may find more subtle avenues for expression. There is some evidence for this embodied by the intersectional viability and character frames discussed above. Secondly, even in a sample of candidates where fourteen of sixteen were in “solid” districts, (i.e. uncompetitive) over half of the

coverage of these races featured the horserace. Much of the reporting is highly formulaic. In this context, detailed discussion of candidates' attributes and positions is relatively unusual.

The continued presence of stereotypical depictions of Black women in the political sphere is of pressing concern for several reasons. In her work on the effects of intersectional stereotypes on policy making, Jordan-Zachery (2009:9) argues that “[s]ymbols and myths serve a political purpose because they create a sense of reality by providing an index that is used to judge or define a group’s societal worth- that is, their ability to contribute and participate in societal institutions.” Just as policy informed by such images “makes inferences available about causes and motivations for the group’s behaviours” (Jordan-Zachery, 2009:150) so too do media frames of Black women running for public office. From the examples discussed in this chapter, this is exactly the case when the tone of Gloria Bromell Tinubu’s campaign is ascribed to her character, or Mia Love’s motivation is read contrary to her own statements. Furthermore, when the conditions arise to revive intersectional first frames, they become by far the most dominant frame for a candidate. This means that for trailblazing Black women who reach new heights of political office, frames are likely to revert to explicit othering. The centrality of race and gender in mediations of Love’s recent campaigns is reminiscent of the treatment of former United States Secretary of State (2005-2009) and fellow Black female Republican, Condoleezza Rice. During her term, Rice has been “alternatively constructed as a representation of Black female hypersexuality and cultural and political disorder, in ways that affirm essentialist views of Black women” (Alexander-Floyd, 2008:430). While this study contributes an exploratory qualitative analysis of the mediation of campaigns by Black women, it is clear that in this area much work remains to be done.

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