

**Gender, leadership, and crisis: A framing analysis of Sally Mason's presidency of the
University of Iowa**

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Sally Mason had served less than a year of her tenure as 20th president at the University of Iowa when she came under heavy fire from the media. Two months after she was installed as head of the university on August 1, 2007, a UI freshman female athlete reported being sexually assaulted by two football players in a campus residence hall. As the investigation continued into the spring and summer, the alleged victim's family released a letter to the media, accusing Mason of brushing aside the incident and keeping the accusations "in-house." A media frenzy ensued as newspapers across the nation picked up the tantalizing story. Local newspapers, including the Iowa City *Press-Citizen*, extensively covered her subsequent actions and eventual apology to the state board of regents.

As only the second female president of the University of Iowa, the role of gender in the framing of Mason within these widely read articles and others from her presidency is of particular interest. In particular, Mason's portrayal in the *Press-Citizen* provides a unique case study of media representations of women in power in contemporary American society. It is this paradox between the official and often legal equality afforded women and the way they are commonly represented in the media that forms the premise of this study. As recently as the 2008 presidential election season, scholars — and even political candidates and their affiliates — have publicly decried how women leaders are depicted in

the news: from how reporters describe the timbre of their voices to how and why the press comment on their wardrobe decisions. As we examine Mason's framing, this study contributes directly to our understanding of the impact of dominant cultural beliefs about gender and its relationship to power as they were constructed in the news.

Communication studies of media gender portrayal date from the 1970s. Such studies have generally fallen into three types of analysis: the critical textual, audience reception, and quantitative (Dow & Condit, 2005). Through a case study of news coverage in one local media outlet, the *Press-Citizen*, this article will apply a critical textual approach to analyze the frames that were constructed about and around Mason in terms of how women at work have traditionally been framed. The study focuses on significant points in Mason's presidency, including her tumultuous hiring, the largely criticized handling of the Hillcrest sex assault case, and her role during massive 2008 summer flooding that struck the university campus and the City of Iowa City.ⁱ

Framing theory

Framing is commonly accepted as an important factor in many communication studies, although widely varying definitions of media framing exist throughout those studies. One definition is that frames are a "central organizing idea" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987). Another is that framing is a construction of our social reality (McQuail, 1994). "Journalists actively construct frames to structure and make sense of incoming information," according to Scheufele (1999, p. 115). More important, however, is the ways in frames work to organize, even filter, our reality.

Tuchman (1978) wrote that frames are set by media to help readers understand public events, which in turn allows journalists to communicate information effectively to

readers (Gitlin, 1980). In the context of news production, framing can be conscious or unconscious (Gamson, 1980). Some factors that affect how journalists frame stories include, professional values and expectations about audiences as well as media organization and news form and content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

As in the case of Mason, some traditionally gendered frames can help communicate “colorful” aspects of otherwise dry stories about academic administration. In general, this coloring can be spurred by numerous factors, including a reporter or editor's personal experience, interpretations, or peer interaction (Neuman et al. 1992). But as many news outlets tout that they are unbiased filters of the news, these unconscious cultural interpretations lend the press dangerous power (Ross, 2007). They may even be more prevalent in a setting such as the *Press-Citizen*, a Gannett-owned newspaper, where reporters are typically overworked and understaffed.

One way to look at framing is as an extension of agenda setting (McCombs, Shaw and Weaver, 1997). When journalists give space to a particular aspect of leader, other media will often follow suit. This saturation of coverage, relevant or not, can affect what issues the public views as important. Furthermore, looking at media through a framing lens can further our understanding of news effects (Scheufele, 1999). After all, framing gives stories a “spin.” More formally, Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) wrote, “Frames influence opinions by stressing specific values, facts, and other considerations, endowing them with greater apparent relevance to the issue than they might appear to have under an alternative frame” (p. 569).

Sometimes circumstance places the received, or culturally historical, meaning of a frame in conflict with its dominant use. In plain language, where frames represent cultural

norms, “femininity,” and “power” or “leadership” do not normally go together. During the 2008 floods in Iowa City and Cedar Rapids, if the media chose to portray President Mason as a powerful leader with a strong message throughout the University of Iowa’s recovery—which they did—constructing that frame would necessarily have outweighed another, more traditionally feminine portrait of her, such as those employed during the stories surrounding her hiring. Because the frames accorded Mason varied by circumstance, it seems reasonable to suggest that understanding the process of framing in this case depends on understanding deeply imbedded cultural concepts of gender and power as they were shaped by circumstance.

Women and power

President Mason was not unfamiliar with leadership or its requirements when she came to the University of Iowa. A Ph.D. and former bioscience professor, she had already served six years as provost at Purdue University, as well as receiving several teaching and advising awards (Sally Mason, 2010). Nor was Mason unaware how her relationship with local media could drastically alter the public's perception of her. Upon her arrival in Iowa City, she specifically asked for media training. Since her time in office, she has reorganized her communications staff to manage media relations or to advocate for her preferred issue positions.

The first challenge women in power often face is getting media exposure at all. Newsroom culture may give more space and more credence to male voices. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) showed that as both subjects and sources men are twice as likely as women to appear in newspaper articles. This appears to be an issue in both stories and

photos (Len-Rios et al., 2005), and in articles that are particularly salient to the public (Zoch & Van Slyke Turk, 1998).

As the head of a major public university, Mason may have been less susceptible in some senses to that bias; she is the top source for university information, with numerous local requests for interviews. Nonetheless, any under-representation of Mason in a newspaper may indicate to readers that she doesn't deserve her powerful position (Zoch & VanSlyke Turk, 1998), which could have serious implications for her presidency. Despite the fact that Mason is one of a growing number of women in such a position, under-representation is still prevalent among women executives (Armstrong, 2006).

Furthermore, women are more likely to appear in lifestyle and feature stories than any other section of the paper perhaps because of a misguided interpretation of “women's issues” (Tuchman et al., 1978). Featuring a leader such as Mason in a story covering topics such as fashion or parenting could also assign traditional stereotypical frames to her. Yang (1996) showed that “women’s issues” are generally described by news producers as “topical issues like breast cancer and hormone replacement therapy to stories about weddings and parties, which generally appear on a lifestyle or features page.” Even female journalists suggest those topics are the most important to women readers (VanZoonen, 1998).

Because women are more likely to appear in lifestyles and features pages, this kind of coverage perpetuates gender stereotypes (Len-Rios et al., 2005). In general, women are more likely to be portrayed as “victims” (usually of male violence), “eye candy” or “the mother/sister/wife of a newsworthy man” (Carter et al., 1998). If nothing else, these tropes could seriously undermine Mason’s authority and have legitimate repercussions in regards

to her ability to garner public support for initiatives. These stereotypes become apparent are in the ways in which reporters — even female reporters — discuss women, using terms such as “passive,” “gentle,” or “compassionate” (Kahn & Goldberg, 1991). These commonplace stereotypes are described as “hegemonic” by Danner & Walsh (1999), as they reflect the dominant effort by the group in power (i.e., white men) to preserve their power (Len-Rios et al., 2005).

It is in these terms that media portrayals of women are connected to gender and status. This relation characterizes the hegemonic dynamic where maleness is consistently associated with high status, and women are not (Conway & Vartanian, 2000). As a woman in power, Mason presented a clear example of a challenger to the status quo, a woman surrounded by a majority male board of supervisors and largely male colleagues. In this situation, the ideological routines of news production tend to privilege male sources in order to define local reality in culturally dominant terms (Ross, 2007; Len-Rios et al., 2005). The cultural strength of this elite masculine voice is so strong that individual reporters who struggle for accuracy often cannot overcome it (Ross, 2007). Even female reporters play into this bias as women are relegated to traditional roles in “traditionally female” stories.

The difficulties facing women in power, in this case at the University of Iowa, are something the *Press-Citizen* has used its pages to discuss. On October 15, 2008, Mason raised this issue at a luncheon for women at the university that was covered by the *Press-Citizen*. She said, “Now, we still do have a lot of catching up to do in terms of number of female faculty members — still less still less than one-third of our tenured and tenure-track faculty — and their relative pay” (Morelli, 2008a). In the face of a well theorized culture of

gendered hegemony, the question asked here is how the media's process of framing unfolded for Mason from circumstance to circumstance within that dynamic and what it meant.

Methods

We selected the *Press-Citizen* as the source of our texts for analysis for a number of reasons. As one of four daily newspapers covering Iowa City—including the Cedar Rapids *Gazette*, the *Daily Iowan*, the University of Iowa's student newspaper, and the Sunday edition of the Des Moines *Register*, which is combined with the *Press-Citizen*—the daily *Press Citizen* offers the most consistent reportage on local events in the city. Founded through the 1920 merger of the *Iowa State Press* and the *Iowa City Citizen*, the *Press-Citizen* has no ties to the University of Iowa and has a record of consistently covering campus events. With about 100 employees, the *Press-Citizen* circulates about 14,000 copies daily and is owned by the Gannett Company.

To retrieve a consistent source of texts relating to the two events in question, the Hillcrest sexual assaults and the flood, we searched Access World News for the term, "Sally Mason," in the *Press-Citizen* between July 2007 and November 2008. By searching the keywords, "Sally Mason," in the *Press-Citizen*, we located 460 stories. After reading each of these stories, we discarded all articles with only tangential mentions of Mason, leaving 368. We also discarded all wire service copy, duplicate stories, and briefs, reducing the total number of articles to 307. The majority of remaining coverage of Mason involved day-to-day stories reporting on events such as her appearance at a ribbon cutting or a summary of which conferences she planned to attend. Of the stories written about her,

approximately half (n=161 or 52 percent) corresponded to these major events of her tenure as president.

Through a close reading of those articles, it became apparent that breaking down the study into three significant periods of turmoil or change for the university and Iowa City would yield the richest texts for analysis of the main periods of her tenure: Mason's hiring in 2007, the Hillcrest residence hall sex assault case, which happened in 2007, and the flood of 2008. Accordingly, we divided those articles into categories covering the most salient periods of the Mason's presidency: Mason's hiring (n=43), the Hillcrest assault case (n=52), and 2008 summer flooding (n=66). These pieces included news articles, letters to the editor, and guest columns. In addition to those categories, we included general interest feature stories about or sourcing Mason that appeared throughout her presidency. The majority of these articles were written by two staffers at the *Press-Citizen*, Lee Hermiston and Brian Morelli, although some female reporters also contributed the coverage. Twelve of the 22 articles we will reference within the analysis of the case are by Morelli.

To select those cases—in addition to selecting the articles from their event-specific categories—we first employed a methodology by Perkins & Starostra (2001), who offer a way to decode the implicit journalistic routines that can reflect ideological differences in the way that the news is written. They propose observing five points within a news story:

- (a) Who is/is not quoted?
- (b) Who is/is not given credence by title?
- (c) Where are those cited positioned within the news reports?
- (d) Whose ideas are supported (reinforced)/questioned?
- (e) And, which details are included or excluded? (p. 75)

After selecting event-specific examples based on that scheme, we selected texts in terms of the framing and gender concepts indicated by the conceptual framework. In this sense, the most important dimension of our text selection method was theoretical, as the relevance of a particular exemplar depended on its conceptual validity.

Analyzing the coverage

Within the *Press-Citizen's* coverage of Mason, two divergent and competing themes emerge. One paints Mason as a powerful leader, capable of guiding the university through a troubling period. The other is less flattering, characterizing Mason as a diminished woman who is subordinate to the men around her. As they appear within the three most salient news periods during Mason's presidency, these themes are analyzed (below) as evidence of the framing processes of reification, transmission, and naturalization, where reification signals asserting a cultural-historical frame, transmission involves relating a frame through a source, and naturalization means implementing a frame of framing device as a fact within a story (Reese, 2008).

Mason's placement within the stories

The most prevalent framing device involved Mason's placement within stories, often with her appearing below lower-ranking colleagues, giving the impression that she had less status than the men around her (Perkins & Starostra, 2001). Because that type of framing appeared throughout coverage of her presidency in the period studied, we are treating it as a general premise, rather than identifying it within each news article. Because the weight of some frames may seem more apparent than others, our emphasis on this approach to organizing news stories establishes a generally diminished representation of Mason's power prior to our analysis of the event-specific coverage (Conway & Vartanian, 2000).

On balance, the traditional gender frame applied to Mason, one describing her as weaker because of her sex, was more prevalent during the Hillcrest incident and her hiring than coverage of the flood or other periods of her presidency, although no period of time was completely free of gender stereotyping (Tedesco, 1974). These devices also appear in feature stories about her. They were perhaps most blatantly presented on the opinions page, through guest opinions and editorials, some of which were not written by journalists but by community members.

But most commonly, Mason's name was placed low in news stories where she was a central figure or should have been a main source (Perkins & Starostra, 2001).

Throughout her presidency and the major news events therein, Mason was often sourced late in the article or not at all. In this type of situation, the dominant frame of Mason was one that challenged her leadership, which is in line with Conway & Vartanian's (2000)

assertion that in modern framing women tend to be associated with low status because maleness is connected with high status. This also resonates with Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) report that women are half as likely to be sourced as men in newspaper articles.

To analyze the framing of Mason's leadership through her placement within stories (Conway & Vartanian, 2000), we refer to eight articles, which we separated into two categories, those in which Mason is placed low in the article, and ones in which she does not appear at all, despite being an integral figure in the story (Armstrong, 2006).

As early as the initial coverage of Mason's hiring, the effect of placement on the frame is apparent. "A welcome fit for a president" was an early story written about Mason by staff reporter Rachel Gallegos (2007). The article discussed her hiring as the new UI president, but in the story, the new leader at the university was quoted after her husband, Ken Mason.ⁱⁱ Later, in the article about her installation, "Mason officially installed," Mason was not quoted until more than halfway through the article, and then she was afforded only two single-sentence quotes (Fiegen, 2007). Instead, former Iowa State University President and Purdue University President Emeritus Martin Jischke were given the most space.

In the first story, Ken Mason's first quote, "We plan on being here for a very long time," could easily have been replaced with one from Mason. In fact, Mason's first quote was, "We look forward to many, many years ahead of us." Also in that story, an Iowa City resident appeared before Mason, saying, "I'm just happy we finally have (a president)" (Gallegos, 2007, p. 3A). Mason's low position in the story, one with particular salience to the University of Iowa and Iowa City communities, is not unprecedented (Zoch &

VanSlyke Turk, 1998). Rather, this placement worked in line with Carter et al.'s (1998) report that women often appear as the wife of a newsworthy man.

An October 29, 2008, story in the *Press-Citizen*, "Women not looking to be student leaders at the UI," investigated why the UI Student Government has only had two women run for president in the past five years (Morelli, 2008b). Mason, head of the university, was only quoted once at the very end of the article and on the whole was given only three short paragraphs of space. Mason said the gender gap was "interesting, if not curious," and discussed her leadership class at the UI, which she said is a step in the right direction. With reference to the course she was teaching, she said, "I very much hope that the young women in my class will be inspired to pursue student government leadership positions during their years at Iowa," she said (p. 1A).

Several other articles featured Mason and her decision-making, but offered no quotes from the president herself. One story, "UI reorganizes health system" (Morelli, 2007b), discussed the restructuring of the University of Iowa Health Care system, a key policy decision which UI vice-president for medical affairs Jean Robillard reported would be up to Mason to decide. Although she was still two weeks from beginning her official duties at the UI, she was still available to the media and quoted in numerous other articles. If the *Press-Citizen* attempted to contact her, the article didn't say so.

That fall the *Press-Citizen* published, "Women are missing from top pay levels," which described women "missing from the upper echelon of the University of Iowa pay chart" (Morelli, 2007f, p. 3A; cf. Morelli, 2007e). Mason was mentioned, because she didn't rank among the top 30 paid UI employees. However, the reporter make no visible

effort to contact Mason for the story, despite her being an important source, both as a subject and as a UI leader.

In another salary story, “Mason’s salary is on the low end,” Mason was again not quoted. The story made no mention of attempts to reach her, even though she was the subject of the story (Morelli, 2007e), which is in line with Armstrong’s (2006) concept that even women executives are less likely to appear as sources, giving the men in the story more credence (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), perhaps even bringing into question her authority (Zoch & VanSlyke Turk, 1998).

The next fall, former university counsel Marcus Mills spoke out against Mason in “Mills says Mason knew what was happening” (Morelli, 2008c). Mason had fired Mills, a former UI executive, after a consulting law firm found he had inappropriately decided to withhold documents related to the Hillcrest case. Mason was not quoted in the article, and Mills’ side is the only one reported, leaving only a very critical view of Mason, one that is apparent from the lede. It read, “University of Iowa President Sally Mason was aware of how an alleged sexual assault investigation was being handled, a former UI executive said” (p. 1A). Despite attributing the lede to a source, it provides an unchecked condemnation. Again, as a woman, Mason is less likely to appear as a source, even in light of her salience to the article (Zoch & VanSlyke Turk, 1998).

Len-Rios et al. (2005) have reported that the news is indelibly linked to gender and power, but Mason’s placement in the above articles shows the negative direction of femininity in that context. In that sense, all of the above articles are problematic: They show that the practices of the *Press-Citizen* are no exception to Danner & Walsh’s finding (1999) that gender-based hegemony is “commonplace” in the newsroom. As she was

positioned in these stories, Mason struggled to find a place in the patriarchal society where she is otherwise expected to be a leader (Len-Rios et al., 2005). This pattern is traceable in many ways through news events during Mason's presidency. In particular, coverage of her hiring and the Hillcrest sex assault case provide focal examples.

It is possible that all of the above instances of placement were based on reporters' or editors' personal experiences (Neuman et al., 1992). Because there are fewer female authority figures in academia than male, reporters could simply have been more familiar with sourcing a man or could have relied on familiar source relationships. Whatever the reason, as Ross suggests, the effect of placement in a story on frames gave the *Press-Citizen* power, as readers likely interpreted those stories as being balanced, when they may not have been (2007).

Mason's hiring

Typically, a newly appointed public figure enjoys a honeymoon after taking on a leadership role. For Mason, however, the presentation of frames by the media and sources that drew her authority into question due to her gender began immediately following her hiring. Another of the first articles written about Mason, "New UI president starts connecting with students," has in its lede a note that within a day of being hired, Mason already had her black-and gold-wardrobe ready — Purdue University has the same school colors — for her move to the Hawkeye state. This was listed along with mingling and meeting UI students, as well as "honing her 'Go Hawks' call," as the things of paramount importance to her transition to the UI (Morelli, 2007a, p. 1A; cf., Morelli, 2007c.)

The placement of Mason's discussion of her clothes so high in the story was likely a joke used to break the ice among with a new group of students. But irony is a fragile

perspective to preserve in a news story. In giving Mason's riffs about clothes such importance within the story, the reporter helped to construct the main theme, which as shown above can have a powerful effect on readers, who, at the assurances of newspapers as a whole, will presume the articles to be straight reports and, thus, true (Ross, 2007).

As a result, the quotes, which reflected Mason's statements to a small gathering, embodied Reese's (2008) concept of frame transmission through a source, in this case, Mason, herself. Because Reese's (2008) concepts of transmission, reification and naturalization represent a stage model, it is possible to see how this theme of Mason as a woman whose wardrobe was important to her leadership was then reified in a guest opinion column, "A person who can unite others, motivate, even inspire them" (Valentino, 2007). As the author reasserted that one of Mason's qualifications was that she already owned a black-and-gold wardrobe, the *Press-Citizen's* coverage began to affect how the community could view her (McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver, 1997).

The reporter may have been attempting to "make sense of incoming information" (Scheufele, 1999, p. 115), but as Neuman, Just, and Criger (1992) have shown, journalists can bestow undeserved significance by highlighting particular aspects in a story, such as Mason's clothing, which can, in turn, affect public opinion. Another story, "New UI president starts connecting with students," (Morelli, 2007a) added to this frame when it also spent a full paragraph discussing the food at the reception before it delved into Mason's qualifications as a new president.ⁱⁱⁱ

On August 2, 2007, Morelli (2007a) dedicated four paragraphs of a story the president's setting up house in the president's mansion. The article's focus was about the start of her tenure at the UI. Although the moving-in section of the article came toward the

end of the story, it invoked many traditional ideas of a woman's role in the home, especially the importance of her settling her family into a new place. Again, in this article, this reification of her persona was important, because the local community was unfamiliar with Mason as a leader and in her new role at the UI. As the *Press-Citizen* effectively told people what to expect of her, the frame they provided was troubling. The frame presented of Mason in the article might have influenced readers by taking a fact and imbuing it with relevance and import that other stories by competing outlets might not provide (Nelson et al., 1997). This gendered frame was also constructed in several feature stories in which Mason appeared (Morelli, 2008d; Truman, 2008; Morelli, 2007d).

Other coverage

In other articles surrounding the major news events of this case, Mason's coverage was consistent with Tuchman's assertion that women are more likely to appear lifestyle and feature stories (1978). In a feature about "Dancing with the Stars" in Iowa City, Mason was described as a female celebrity (Truman, 2008). Another article, "University Hospitals women's facility unveiled," described Mason at the event, which she attended as a UI official. The article quoted her as saying the facility is "gorgeous" as she mentioned that women's health issues were of great importance to her personally (Fiegen, 2007, p. 3A). Although Mason likely found women's health issues of personal significance—she said so—this key quote seems to frame Mason's agenda based on what is typically important to women on a larger scale (Tuchman, 1978). The significance given to this quote, which appeared high in the story, also sets the stage for it to become a dominant frame. Because this article was written by a woman, it also showed what VanZoonen (1998) suggests, that even women journalists are deeply entrenched in the cultural *status quo*.

Later in the year, in “Exercising purse power” (Morelli, 2007d), Mason was quoted after bidding on a Hawkeye-design purse at a local auction. Here again she appeared in a story about a traditionally feminine object, namely, purses (Yang, 1996). This gendered frame is woven throughout coverage of Mason throughout her presidency.

As recently as the 2008 presidential election season, media analysts have raised the question of how and if a woman leader’s wardrobe is relevant to her coverage, another issue that has cropped up in coverage of Mason. After appearing during her hiring, the theme came up again in the article, “Wearing gold medallion labor of love” (Morelli, 2008d), which devoted an entire article to the presidential medallion. Although the medallion itself did hold some interest to the university community as a symbol, the medallion was described as “bling” around her neck.

As he warmed to his subject, Brian Morelli, the reporter, asked, “Does she have an alter ego as a rapper or rock star? Is she vying for a spot on the VH1 reality series Flavor of Love featuring former hip hopper Flava Flav” — a television celebrity show where women compete to date the rapper (p. 3A). The effect of this was to naturalize the gendered frame that was constructed at the time of her hiring through the use of the gendered “fact” of the medallion. Specifically, it showed this woman as “eye candy” (Reese, 2008; Carter et al., 1998).

The Hillcrest assault

Perhaps Mason’s most pressured time as a leader came during the aftermath of the Hillcrest dormitory sex assaults. During this crisis, Mason was especially susceptible to gendered catchphrases and traditional gender roles through news articles and pieces published in the editorial section.^{iv} One letter, “Leadership lacking in sexual assault case,”

included a section where author Dave Baker referred to Mason as an IOWAN, “Incompetent bimbo’s Wasting Air Nonstop” (Baker, 2008, p. 8A). Figurative language such as this presents an important frame: the word, “bimbo,” carries heavy implications for women, producing a framing theme such as Carter et al. (1998) would expect.

In another guest opinion, “Shame on the University of Iowa,” the author criticized three local leaders, Mason included. At one point in the article, the author asserted that “despite her attire,” Mason belonged to the “Good Ol’ Boys” club, a strong statement that asserts an equally strong frame (Evans, 2008, p. 15A). Here Mason’s clothing was mentioned as a wasted credential as her credibility as a leader was attacked. At this point the frame was fully naturalized, appearing as fact, without any amount of questioning or quoting (Reese, 2008).

News coverage of the Hillcrest assault case was also transmitted via gendered frames. As with any story, and as shown above in the focus on Mason’s black-and-gold wardrobe immediately after her hiring, a reporter’s choice of which quotes to use from Mason has an impact in how stories are interpreted and the frames those stories reflect. But those quotes may still have a negative impact on how Mason is perceived by the public and university community.

One event that aggravated the Hillcrest crisis occurred when the alleged victim’s mother accused Mason of not taking her phone call, of not being open and helpful in the proceedings. This came out when the *Press-Citizen* published the mother’s account in a lengthy letter that drew intense criticism from the community. In “Mason says more was withheld” (Jordan, 2008), the president was quoted as saying, “Perhaps I wasn’t sensitive enough,” as she continued to sympathize with the alleged victim’s mother (p. 1A). These

characteristics support a traditional female role, one of a caregiver and nurturer, where women are bonded first by maternity. This is the same type of stereotype Kahn & Goldberg (1991) showed is apparent in news reporting, intentional or not, when reporters place a heavy emphasis placed on portraying women as “passive,” “gentle,” or “compassionate.” These themes contribute to the definition and naturalization of a dominant frame.

By reporting Mason’s statement about sensitivity, the *Press-Citizen* was naturalizing such a frame of Mason (Reese, 2008). This frame of Mason was through the quotes of others, as evidenced in the story, “Regents to re-examine UI’s handling of assault case” (Hermiston, 2008). The first quote is from Regent President David Miles, who was seemed to admonish Mason when he said, “We intend to shine bright light on this investigation.” Mason’s only quote was an apology, which appeared after Miles’. Although, in this case, this placement may have shown Mason as subservient to the men around her, it actually just reflected her position in the university’s hierarchy (Kahn & Goldberg, 1991; Perkins & Starostr, 2001).

Mason as a revered leader

A second theme in the *Press-Citizen*’s coverage of Mason was that of a strong leader on the UI campus. This frame is most apparent in stories from the 2008 flood. At the same time as Mason was receiving much negative press for the Hillcrest case, summer flooding shut down some two dozen campus buildings, ruining many. Efforts to protect the school and residents from record flooding drew the university and Iowa City communities closer. By contrast, during the Hillcrest scandal, only one article from the Hillcrest incident had suggested that Mason might have been an asset to the UI, “UI fortunate to

have Sally Mason leading the way,” a guest opinion by UI administrator Michael O’Hara. His was the only voice in the paper up to that point that refuted the notion of a cover-up of the scandal and the only to directly state his confidence in her leadership.

By contrast, during the 2008 flood the *Press-Citizen*’s coverage of Mason’s leadership in these events provided a much more flattering portrait. In “Women lead charge against Mother Nature” (Morelli, 2008g), Mason was described as a gutsy leader. The story observed the roles of three women leaders during a natural disaster. Mason “chose to shut down,” much of the campus, which was quickly realized as “the right choice.” Unlike articles during about the Hillcrest assault, Mason’s decision-making ability was not questioned as the articles’ sources lined up to praise her leadership and strength. The story bucked many framing trends, first in devoting such a significant amount of space to these women leaders (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Furthermore, the women who appeared in the story, Mason included, were described as strong, not despite being women or because they are women; they simply are. This is a stark contrast to the way Mason was described in the Hillcrest coverage, where her sensitivity is drawn into question (Kahn & Goldberg, 1991). She is also reported on without reference to her spouse, unlike the theme that appeared multiple times in coverage of her hiring (Carter et al., 1998).

Throughout that summer, her authority and leadership were continually lauded in print with the vast majority of the articles in which she appeared offering no competing frames or sources opposed to Mason’s leadership. Although in broad terms, President Bush praised Mason’s—along with all Iowans’—role during the flood, in “Bush praises flood efforts and says help is on the way.” “Oftentimes,” he continued, “ you get dealt a hand you didn't expect to have to play, and the question is not whether you're going to get dealt

the hand, the question is how do you play it? And I'm confident the people of Iowa will play it really well" (O'Neil, 2008, p. 1A).

Later in the summer, Mason reported being unclear on the status of fall semester classes, saying it was too early to begin tallying damages to the UI. With two dozen buildings under water on campus, she was essentially offering nonspecific answers to the largest questions of the story regarding the fate of the coming fall semester. Later, an indirect quote from Mason read, "'It is too early to even ballpark damage estimates,' Mason said." Still, Mason went unquestioned throughout the story (Morelli, 2008e, p. 3A).

Mason's authority went unchecked again in, "Mason: Mayflower will be open," in which she reversed the projections of cleanup crews and other authorities. Her first quote read, "'I am not hopeful. It *is* going to happen,' Mason said, emphasizing the word 'is.'" (Morelli, 2008e). The only other source in the story was Von Stange, UI housing director, who provided only factual information about the building and more details on Mason's decision. In both that story and "Fall semester remains up in air" (Morelli, 2008e), she appeared as the most important source given the most space, more than the men who controlled the Hillcrest coverage (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

What this means is that throughout her coverage in flood stories, the theme that appeared most often was one that constructed Mason as a leader to be relied on, not someone who may not be worthy of her power, as Zoch & VanSlyke Turk have shown (1998). Further, these stories all appeared during times of particularly strong news salience. The summer floods were unprecedented in the University of Iowa and Iowa City communities in terms of damage caused by a natural disaster. But despite the public interest in the "news," unlike Mason's coverage in Hillcrest or at her own hiring, she

appeared to escape the dominant gendered frame she had experienced in the Hillcrest scandal (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

Conclusions

Through its analysis of the coverage of President Mason's management of these crises, this study has shown empirically that dominant cultural themes about gender affected the press's representations of Sally Mason as a woman in power. Indeed, in each of these critical moments, gender and framing interacted with the dominant cultural-historical themes of a particular cultural context. In the Hillcrest sexual assault coverage, the *Press-Citizen's* staff reported an unflattering frame of the president, showing Mason as a woman who was diminished despite her position of power within the university. Meanwhile, during the flood, which was framed as a natural disaster beyond her control, Mason was afforded the opportunity to define her leadership. Prior to these events, she was studied as a traditional woman, but not a serious leader.

That such framing devices exist is unsurprising (Armstrong, 2006); despite Mason's increasingly common role as a woman in power, she was still misrepresented in the media. As Merrit & Gross (1978) showed, even in at-large metropolitan papers, men and women tend to select stereotypical, traditional female stories for women's pages. To be sure, there are limitations on reporters, as well as traditional reporting tendencies that affect coverage of a woman leader. These must be recognized before the industry can work to reduce their effects on leaders such as Mason and her public image. Although some of the troubling gendered frames assigned to Mason came from her own quotes — as the subject of the news, she still cannot be excused from dominant culture — Mason cannot be held culpable for the way she is presented in the media. This is evidenced by some of the

letters to the editor, Mason's placement within stories, and how she is covered in feature stories (Fiegen, 2007, p. 3A; Morelli, 2008d).

The process of constructing gender bias is most apparent in the framing processes of reification, transmission, and naturalization (Reese, 2008). The evidence of the present analysis suggests that the coverage in all three periods of the case studied shows that the meanings assigned to Mason's place and actions as a woman in an elite position were interpellated existing cultural themes. In the case of such "reification," The same can be said of the reporters, whose reversal of field from the Hillcrest story to the flood coverage showed a shift in the use of sources to relate the dominant frame or "transmission." Throughout, the reporters—male and female—used frames or related devices as facts within their coverage, imbedding the historical and cultural meanings of those cues into the definition of "news" (Reese, 2008).

Given this analysis, if the framing of gender is imbedded in the practice of writing the news as a cultural effect—and it *is*—how might journalists avoid the pitfalls of letting the context of a story—here, a Hillcrest or flood crisis—define the meaning of a woman's place and power in it? We have found no evidence in the news texts or otherwise that these reporters intended to perpetuate patriarchal values in their work. Indeed, where Heider (2000) describes the "incognizant racism" he observed among whites in American newsrooms, we propose that the cultural dominant persists because of the incognizant *sexism* that is immanent in news routines.

What can be done in the face of such power? Currently, no policies on how to ameliorate this gender dichotomy are in place at U.S. newspapers, even in light of an American Society of Newspaper Editors "emphasis on newsroom diversity" (Armstrong,

2006). That would mean hiring more feminist women — and men — in the news room, journalists who might be aware that their reportorial routines hold the power to either reproduce dominant culture or to write the news with the consideration that women stand before them as leaders, as citizens, and as sources of a different kind of news.

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ⁱ The flooding devastated nearby Cedar Rapids, as well, but Mason's involvement was limited to Iowa City and to the University of Iowa campus.

ⁱⁱ On all references, we will refer to Ken Mason as "Ken Mason," and we will continue to refer to Sally Mason as "Mason."

ⁱⁱⁱ Because it was soon after her hiring, an oversaturation of the information on her background was likely not the reason for that placement decision.

^{iv} This was particularly characteristic of letters to the editor on the subject. Although the letters were not composed by staff members at the *Press-Citizen*, they were all filtered, edited, and approved by the editor and are therefore relevant to this discussion.