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Anchors Away: Media Framing of Broadcast Television Network Evening News Anchors

Paul R. Brewer and Timothy Macafee

Between 2002 and 2006, six newcomers took the anchor chairs at the evening news programs of ABC, CBS, and NBC. Collectively, they received extensive news coverage. This study uses content analysis to examine how three national newspapers framed the new anchors. A frame casting the anchors as competitors in a ratings game was especially common. At the same time, the newspapers regularly framed the anchors in terms of their reporting experience and reporting style, as well as in terms of personal characteristics such as personality, appearance, age, and sex. The newspapers were more likely to frame female anchors in terms of their sex; apart from this, no consistent differences across sex emerged. All three newspapers followed broadly similar patterns in covering the anchors, though some differences across sources emerged. Patterns in news media framing of anchors may carry implications for public opinion about anchors and the news media.

Keywords: *framing; anchors; television news; ratings*

From 2002 to 2006, the evening news programs of the broadcast television networks underwent transitions that ended a long period of stability in their anchor positions. In May 2002, NBC announced that Brian Williams would replace Tom Brokaw; two years later, the succession took place as planned. In March 2005, Dan Rather left the anchor chair at CBS. His “temporary” replacement, Bob Schieffer, served over a year and a half before Katie Couric became the official anchor. In August 2005, ABC anchor Peter Jennings died. He was succeeded by coanchors Elizabeth Vargas and Bob Woodruff, neither of whom occupied the chair for long; Woodruff was injured in January 2006 while reporting from Iraq, and Vargas stepped down in May of that year due to her pregnancy. They, in turn, were replaced by Charles Gibson.

This series of changes prompted a substantial amount of media coverage. In Couric’s case, the attention was so intense that numerous stories commented

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on the “hype” surrounding her succession. The level of attention to the anchor transitions is not surprising. To begin with, a number of news organizations routinely cover the news media (see, e.g., Fengler 2003).

Furthermore, the evening news programs of the broadcast television networks are particularly prominent within the world of news media. Though they now face lower ratings and increased competition from cable and Internet news sources, they still reach wide audiences (see, e.g., Pew Research Center 2006b). The programs are closely identified with their anchors, who, in turn, are the most visible journalists in the United States. These anchors play important roles in bringing news about public affairs to a large number of Americans, and their successes or failures can carry substantial implications for their news organizations. Historically, the evening news anchors of the broadcast television networks have been among the most trusted figures in journalism; for example, a 2002 Pew Research Center survey found that respondents rated Brokaw, Rather, and Jennings as the most believable people in television news (Pew Research Center 2002).¹

Several national polls have assessed public attention to or opinion about the new anchors. A third of the respondents in an April 2006 Pew Research Center (2006c) poll claimed to have followed Couric’s move to CBS “very closely” or “fairly closely.” A July 2006 Gallup poll found that Couric had higher favorable ratings (60 percent) but also higher unfavorable ratings (23 percent) than did Gibson (55 percent favorable and 8 percent unfavorable) or Williams (47 percent favorable and 7 percent unfavorable).² Likewise, an August 2006 Pew Research Center (2006a) poll that prompted respondents to provide one-word assessments of these three anchors showed that more respondents were able to offer an impression of Couric (66 percent) than were able to do so for Gibson (49 percent) or Williams (47 percent). The most common term for each anchor was “good,” but respondents used several terms to describe Couric—including “perky,” “cute,” “nice,” “energetic,” “bubbly,” and “fluffy”—that they did not use to describe Gibson or Williams. There was a substantial gender gap in the tone of comments about Couric, with female respondents offering more favorable comments than male respondents. No such gap emerged for Gibson or Williams.

Findings of this sort raise questions about how the media covered the new anchors at the broadcast television networks and whether media coverage shaped public perceptions. For example, one could ask whether the patterns of responses for the three anchors reflected differences across gender lines in media coverage. Indeed, a number of observers argued that coverage of Couric exhibited a gender bias when compared with coverage of her male colleagues. For example, former CBS anchor Connie Chung claimed that reporters “question Couric’s ‘gravitas.’ They comment on her looks, her clothes. They never said that about Brian Williams or Charlie Gibson.”³

In this study, we present a content analysis of how three national newspapers—the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Washington Post*—covered six anchors: Couric, Gibson, Schieffer, Vargas, Williams, and Woodruff. Specifically, we examine how these sources framed the anchors and whether framing differed across anchors. Given the allegations of gender bias in coverage of the anchors, we pay particular attention to whether the newspapers framed the male and female anchors differently. We also test whether the two “elite” newspapers (the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*) differed from the more popularly oriented *USA Today* in how they framed the anchors.

We find that a frame casting the anchors as competitors in a ratings game was especially common in newspaper coverage. We also find, however, that the newspapers regularly framed the anchors in terms of their reporting experience and reporting style, as well as in terms of personal characteristics such as personality, appearance, age, and sex. The newspapers were more likely to frame female anchors in terms of their sex; apart from this, we find no consistent differences across sex. All three newspapers followed broadly similar patterns in covering the anchors, though some differences across sources emerged. We conclude by discussing the potential implications of the framing patterns that we observe for public perceptions regarding the news anchors and their programs, as well as their broader implications for public life.

Media Frames for News Anchors

According to Entman (1993: 52), “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” Along similar lines, Gamson and Modigliani (1987: 143) define a frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them.” Numerous studies have shown that exposure to frames in news media coverage can shape the beliefs and opinions of audience members (e.g., Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Iyengar 1991; McLeod and Detenber 1999; Nelson et al. 1997; Rhee 1997).

Research on news media frames for political candidates provides a useful starting point for considering how the news media may frame anchors. More than one news story drew an explicit comparison between the anchor transitions and political campaigns. For example, the *Washington Post*'s Howard Kurtz wrote that “public fascination with the anchors has reached the point that Gallup recently polled about them, as if they were presidential candidates.”⁴ Similarly, *USA Today*'s Peter Johnson quoted Tom Rosenstiel's claim that “Couric and CBS are in the same position as a popular political candidate. They have to dampen [ratings] expectations.”⁵

One common finding in the literature is that the “horse-race” frame pervades coverage of political candidates (e.g., Benoit et al. 2005; Broh 1980; Fallows 1997; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007; Johnson 1993; Kerbel et al. 2000; Patterson 1980, 1994; Robinson and Sheehan 1983). This frame presents candidates as competitors by focusing on who is winning, who is losing, and how they are playing the game of politics. In addition to covering the horse race, the news media often frame political candidates in terms of their credentials, leadership qualities, and personal characteristics such as personality, appearance, or dress (Farnsworth and Lichter 2007; Jamieson and Waldman 2003; Just et al. 1999; Kerbel et al. 2000).

To the extent that news organizations apply the same norms and practices and are subject to the same economic pressures in covering both political candidates and anchors, patterns in the framing of the latter may be analogous to patterns in the framing of the former. For example, the horse-race frame for political candidates may have a counterpart in a ratings frame for anchors that focuses on the competition among anchors for viewers. Similarly, frames revolving around candidate qualifications and leadership styles may have parallels in frames revolving around the journalistic experience and reporting styles of anchors, just as frames revolving around candidates’ personal characteristics may be echoed by frames revolving around anchors’ personal characteristics. With all of this in mind, we ask the following research question:

Research Question 1: What frames do the news media use in covering broadcast television network evening news anchors?

Drawing on research into the framing of political candidates, one might expect the dramatic and conflict-oriented ratings frame to be especially common in coverage of anchors.

Of course, the news media might not frame all anchors in the same way. Thus, we ask a second research question:

Research Question 2: How, and to what extent, does news media framing differ across anchors?

Again, we are particularly interested in differences across sex in the framing of anchors, which leads us to ask the following research question:

Research Question 3: Do the news media frame female anchors and male anchors in different ways?

Even leaving aside the aforementioned claims of gender bias in the coverage of Couric, there are precedents for expecting such differences in news media coverage. For example, a number of studies have found that the news media use personal frames to cover female candidates more often than they use such frames to cover male candidates (e.g., Aday and Devitt 2001; Devitt 1999; Heldman et al. 2005; Kahn 1996). Moreover, research suggests that the news media sometimes use a gendered “first woman” frame to cover female politicians—as in the case of Elizabeth Dole, who campaigned for the 2000 Republican nomination (Heldman et al. 2005).

Our final research question centers on the potential for differences across sources in the framing of anchors. Here, we focus on the distinction between “elite” newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, on the one hand, and more popularly-oriented newspapers such as *USA Today*, on the other (see, e.g., King 1990). By way of precedent, a number of studies have shown that different sorts of newspapers sometimes frame political candidates in different ways (e.g., Buell 1987; Patterson 1980). Of particular relevance for our study is King’s (1990) finding that *USA Today* provided more horse-race coverage and less coverage of candidates’ personal coverage than did the *New York Times*. At the same time, one might also expect similarities in framing across newspapers given that all may share the same journalistic culture and the same economic pressures. Indeed, King (1990) found that horse-race coverage dominated in both *USA Today* and the *New York Times*. We extend this line of investigation to the framing of anchors by asking the following question:

Research Question 4: How, and to what extent, does news media framing of anchors differ from elite newspapers to newspapers that target a broader audience?

Data and Methods

The data for this study came from a content analysis of items in three newspapers: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. The analysis focused on the six broadcast network evening news anchors who began their tenure between 2002 and 2006: Katie Couric, Charles Gibson, Bob Schieffer, Elizabeth Vargas, Brian Williams, and Bob Woodruff. The sample for each anchor consisted of the news stories, columns, and editorials that discussed the subject in the context of being an evening news anchor. Articles that mentioned the subject as being an anchor but provided no other discussion were excluded from the sample, as were articles in which the mention of the anchor was tangential to the story. The time period under study for each anchor began with the announcement of the anchor’s assignment and ended with the anchor’s departure (except for Couric, Gibson, and Williams, for whom the

Table 1

Article in the sample by anchor and source

Anchor	Time Period	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Washington Post</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	Total
Katie Couric	4/6/06–11/8/06	31	29	39	99
Charles Gibson	5/24/06–11/8/06	9	21	23	53
Bob Schieffer	2/3/05–9/1/06	19	21	18	58
Elizabeth Vargas	12/6/05–5/24/06	17	16	15	48
Brian Williams	5/29/02–11/8/06	63	33	49	145
Bob Woodruff	12/6/05–1/30/06	7	6	4	17
All anchors		146	126	148	420

time period under study ended on November 8, 2006; see Table 1 for the dates used for each anchor).

The number of articles per anchor (see Table 1) varied from a high of 145 (for Brian Williams, whose time period spanned four and a half years) to a low of 17 (for Bob Woodruff, who was an anchor for only two months). Couric had the highest rate of articles per month with 99 articles in seven months, which may help to explain why more respondents in the July 2006 Gallup poll and the August 2006 Pew Research Center (2006a) poll were able to offer impressions of her than were able to do so for Gibson or Williams. All told, the sample included 420 observations (but fewer articles, as some articles were coded for multiple anchors).

The coding procedure identified the presence or absence of eleven frames: ratings, reporting experience, reporting style, personality, family, appearance/clothes, age, sex, salary, race/ethnicity, and politics. Table 2 presents the coding scheme in more detail. Each article could include multiple frames (or no frame). A team of trained coders completed the analysis. Each article in the sample was examined by two coders, allowing for the calculation of intercoder reliability coefficients (Cohen's kappas). These coefficients indicated adequate to excellent reliability levels in the coding procedure (see Table 2). All disagreements in coding judgments were subsequently resolved by discussion among the coders.

Results

Within the entire sample, a clear hierarchy emerged among the frames that the newspapers used to cover the anchors (Research Question 1).⁶ The ratings frame, which appeared in almost half of the observations (48 percent), was more common than any other frame. Put another way, the newspapers covered the anchors first and foremost as competitors in an ongoing battle for viewers. The second most common frame was the experience frame (34 percent), followed by the reporting style frame (21 percent). Thus, the newspapers also framed the anchors in terms of their characteristics as journalists. The personality (15 percent),

Table 2
Coding categories

Frame	Description of Frame from Coding Sheet	Reliability
Ratings	Discusses the anchor in connection with ratings, viewership figures, or competition for ratings and/or viewers	.77
Experience	Discusses the credentials or jobs in journalism that the subject had prior to becoming an anchor	.68
Reporting style	Discusses how the anchor tells news stories or conducts interviews	.64
Personality	Discusses the anchor's personality, either in general terms or in terms of specific character traits	.69
Family	Discusses the anchor's spouse, child (including mentions of pregnancy), or other relative	.89
Appearance/clothes	Discusses what the anchor looks like or wears	.87
Age	Discusses how old the anchor is (beyond simply mentioning the anchor's age in years)	.74
Sex	Discusses the anchor's status as a man or a woman (beyond simply using the words "woman" or "man" or gender pronouns such as "she," "he," "him," or "her")	.72
Salary	Discusses how much money the anchor makes or will make	1.00
Race/ethnicity	Discusses the anchor as being white, Hispanic, Latino, or Asian American	.89
Politics	Discusses the anchor's political views or perceptions thereof in terms of being "partisan," "ideological," "liberal," "conservative," "Republican," or "Democratic"	.93

Note: Reliability coefficients are Cohen's kappas.

family (15 percent), appearance/clothes (14 percent), age (12 percent), and sex (12 percent) frames were less common, though each appeared in more than one-tenth of the observations. Less common was the salary frame (6 percent). Of the eleven frames, the rarest were the race/ethnicity (2 percent) and politics (2 percent) frames.

Our next analysis tested for differences across anchors in the frequency of each frame (Research Question 2). The percentage of articles that included the ratings frame ranged from 69 percent for Schieffer to 25 percent for Vargas (see Table 3). Perhaps more striking than this variation, however, is the finding that all six anchors received substantial levels of ratings coverage. The following quotations illustrate such coverage:

The new duo [Vargas and Woodruff] will be competing with 46-year-old Brian Williams, whose *NBC Nightly News* leads the ratings pack, and possibly Katie Couric, 48, if CBS's aggressive effort to lure her from *Today* to succeed Bob

Table 3
Frames in media coverage of anchors, by anchor

	Couric (N = 99)	Gibson (N = 53)	Schieffer (N = 58)	Vargas (N = 48)	Williams (N = 145)	Woodruff (N = 17)	All (N = 420)
Ratings	.49 ^b	.40 ^{bc}	.69 ^a	.25 ^c	.50 ^b	.35 ^{bc}	.48
Experience	.66 ^a	.42 ^b	.24 ^c	.15 ^c	.19 ^c	.35 ^{bc}	.34
Reporting style	.30 ^a	.09 ^b	.24 ^a	.08 ^b	.21 ^a	.41 ^a	.21
Personality	.28 ^{ab}	.08 ^d	.14 ^{cd}	.08 ^d	.10 ^d	.29 ^{bc}	.15
Family	.21 ^{ab}	.08 ^c	.10 ^{bc}	.33 ^a	.09 ^c	.29 ^a	.15
Appearance/clothes	.23 ^{ab}	.11 ^{bc}	.05 ^c	.15 ^{abc}	.10 ^c	.35 ^a	.14
Age	.05 ^c	.09 ^{bc}	.26 ^a	.23 ^a	.08 ^{bc}	.18 ^{ab}	.12
Sex	.34 ^a	.04 ^c	.03 ^c	.21 ^{ab}	.01 ^c	.06 ^{bc}	.12
Salary	.24 ^a	.02 ^b	.00 ^b	.00 ^b	.01 ^b	.00 ^b	.06
Race/ethnicity	.00 ^b	.02 ^b	.02 ^b	.13 ^a	.01 ^b	.00 ^{ab}	.02
Politics	.04 ^a	.02 ^a	.02 ^a	.00 ^a	.01 ^a	.00 ^a	.02

Note: Table entries are proportions. For each row, proportions that do not share superscripts (a, b, c, d) differ from one another at $p \leq .05$.

Schieffer is successful. The ABC newscast has maintained its second-place ranking under Vargas and Woodruff.⁷

Having Gibson in ABC's anchor chair, and having former *Today* star Katie Couric, 49, join *The CBS Evening News* in September, will make for an exciting race this fall, says *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams. *Nightly News* continues to be the top-ranked newscast, followed by *World News* and *The CBS Evening News*, which have been dueling for second place.⁸

In short, the newspapers framed each of the anchors as a competitor in the ratings game.

Couric was the clear leader in terms of coverage of reporting experience. Two-thirds of the articles that covered her used this frame to do so, a proportion that was significantly greater than that for any other anchor. In addition, Gibson received a significantly greater proportion of experience-based coverage (42 percent) than did three of the other anchors (Schieffer, Vargas, and Williams, each of whom was under 25 percent). Much of the coverage of Couric's and Gibson's experience discussed their moves from morning news shows (*Today* for Couric; *Good Morning America* for Gibson) to the evening news and, in Couric's case, from one network (NBC) to another (CBS). For example, Howard Kurtz wrote that "[d]espite her years of experience interviewing presidents and world leaders on the *Today* show, Couric has faced skepticism rooted in her singing, dancing, cooking and other morning high jinks—even though press reports about Gibson rarely mention the lighter shtick he did during 19 years on *Good Morning America*."⁹ The other anchors made less dramatic transitions: Williams moved

from MSNBC's *The News with Brian Williams*, while Schieffer, Vargas, and Woodruff were already familiar faces on the shows in which they were promoted to anchor.

Four anchors—Woodruff, Couric, Schieffer, and Williams—received coverage of their reporting style in a substantial proportion of their articles (21 percent or greater):

Since his first night as coanchor, on Jan. 3, Mr. Woodruff has crisscrossed the globe, from Tehran to Jerusalem to northern California, and back again to Jerusalem, in an effort to imbue the program with an on-the-scene immediacy and vitality.¹⁰

Katie's first stop on the Cash-Lined Road: The Land of Tough Interviews. . . . See Katie make important people squirm, including President Bush the Elder, Bob Dole, Pat Robertson, Colin Powell, Wacky White Supremacist Guy, Laura Bush.¹¹

On other hand, the newspapers seldom framed Gibson (9 percent) or Vargas (8 percent) in terms of how they reported stories or conducted interviews.

Two anchors stood out for the proportions of personality coverage that they received. Couric received a significantly greater proportion of personality coverage (28 percent) than did Gibson, Schieffer, Vargas, or Williams (each of whom was under 15 percent). Several articles discussed her in the context of her alleged "perkiness." Others discussed her personality in greater detail:

She clearly hasn't shed any of her girl-next-door demeanor. Last week, she composed and recited, with camp girl enthusiasm, doggerel for a Matrix award presentation to her pal, Cynthia Leive, the editor of *Glamour*.¹²

Those who question whether she can curb her ebullient persona to fit the more sober role of news anchor were given a clue yesterday: all those highlight reels of Ms. Couric's career revealed just how tough-minded and flexible she is behind the carefree, girlish facade.¹³

In addition, Woodruff received a significantly greater proportion of personality coverage (29 percent) than did Gibson, Vargas, or Williams.

Vargas, Woodruff, and Couric received substantial levels of family coverage (33 percent, 29 percent, and 21 percent, respectively). For example, Kurtz wrote, "Woodruff has four children, ranging from 12 to 5-year old twins, and he and Vargas often talk about the struggle to balance family with their new jobs."¹⁴ Likewise, Peter Johnson noted that Couric had "lost her husband, Jay Monahan, to colon cancer."¹⁵ The percentage for Vargas also reflected coverage of the pregnancy that eventually resulted in her departure as anchor. By comparison, Gibson, Schieffer, and Williams received low levels of family framed coverage (less than 10 percent for each).

Among the anchors, Woodruff (35 percent) and Couric (23 percent) received the most appearance-framed coverage. Much of the coverage of Woodruff's appearance centered on him being good-looking. One article described him as a "pretty boy android";¹⁶ another called him "clean-cut and wrinkle-free as a Pixar animation."¹⁷ In Couric's case, over half a dozen articles specifically mentioned her legs, and several cited a controversy about a promotional photograph that had been digitally altered "to make her look about 20 pounds lighter."¹⁸ In addition to discussing her appearance, the coverage of Couric also described her clothes with some regularity. For example, Tom Shales wrote:

Couric, who began the newscast standing up and promoting what was to come, oddly wore a white blazer over a black top and skirt, the blazer buttoned in such a way as to make her look chubby, bursting at the button, which we know she isn't. It was a poor choice.¹⁹

In contrast, only 10 percent of the articles about Williams and 5 percent of the articles about Schieffer used the appearance frame.

Three anchors—Schieffer (26 percent), Vargas (23 percent), and Woodruff (18 percent)—were covered in terms of their age in a substantial proportion of their articles. Schieffer was covered in terms of being older than his colleagues; one article described him as an "elder statesman."²⁰ Vargas and Woodruff, on the other hand, were covered in terms of their relative youth. Meanwhile, fewer than 10 percent of the articles about Couric, Gibson, and Williams framed them in terms of age.

Both Couric (34 percent) and Vargas (21 percent) were frequently framed in terms of their sex. A common theme in the coverage of Couric was her status as the first solo female anchor. In a variation on this theme, Ann Oldenburg quoted Connie Chung's description of Couric's succession as "a great moment for women in television news."²¹ Articles about Vargas, in turn, compared her to Barbara Walters and Chung, who had also been paired with male anchors. Alessandra Stanley wrote:

[Vargas] is only the third woman ever chosen to co-anchor the network evening news, and her predecessors did not have an easy time of it. Both were accused by critics of being more frivolous and infotainment-minded than their male counterparts. And the men were not team players. ABC's Harry Reasoner visibly chafed at having to share his desk with Barbara Walters from 1976 to 1978. Dan Rather of CBS resented Connie Chung, who was named co-anchor in 1993.²²

None of the male anchors was covered in terms of sex in more than 6 percent of his articles.

Only one anchor, Couric, was covered in terms of salary with any frequency. A quarter of all articles about her discussed her salary—many of them focusing

on the large amount. Likewise, only one anchor, Vargas, was framed in terms of race or ethnicity with any regularity. Not coincidentally, she was also the only anchor of the six who was not Anglo-American. Of the articles about Vargas, 13 percent discussed her as being Hispanic. The miniscule proportion of political-framed coverage did not vary significantly across the anchors.

The evidence was mixed regarding whether the newspapers framed female and male anchors in different ways (Research Question 3). One difference was clear: Couric and Vargas were framed in terms of their sex more often than were Gibson, Schieffer, Williams, and Woodruff. Thus, the female anchors were regularly framed in terms of being women, whereas the male anchors were rarely framed in terms of being men. Apart from this finding, however, there were no consistent patterns across sex. Both Couric and Vargas were framed in terms of family in 20 percent or more of their articles, and appearance in 15 percent or more of their articles, but the same was true of Woodruff. Vargas received the lowest percentage of ratings-based coverage, whereas Couric was in the middle of the pack for this frame. Couric was at or near the high end for the experience, reporting style, personality, and salary frames, whereas Vargas was at or near the low end for these frames. The pattern was reversed for the age and race/ethnicity frames—Vargas was at or near the high end, whereas Couric was at or near the low end.

As for comparisons across newspapers in the frames used to cover the anchors (Research Question 4), the similarities were more pronounced than the differences (see Table 4). For each of the three newspapers, the ratings frame was the most common one, followed by the experience frame and then the reporting style frame (though the contrast between the ratings frame and the experience frame was not significant for *USA Today*). Use of the ratings, reporting style, family, sex, salary, and politics frames did not differ significantly across the newspapers. Some differences did emerge, however. Specifically, *USA Today* used the personality (8 percent) and appearance (7 percent) frames less often than did the *NewYork Times* (16 percent and 14 percent, respectively) or the *Washington Post* (22 percent and 22 percent, respectively). In addition, *USA Today* used the experience frame more often (41 percent) than did the *NewYork Times* (28 percent), the age frame less often (9 percent) than did the *NewYork Times* (16 percent), and the race/ethnicity frame less often (0 percent) than did the *Washington Post* (5 percent). Thus, *USA Today* was, in a number of respects, less likely than the other papers to cover anchors in terms of personal characteristics, but equally (if not more) likely to cover them in terms of ratings and journalistic qualities.

Conclusion

Our analysis revealed several patterns in how national newspapers framed six newcomers to the anchor chairs at ABC, CBS, and NBC. One particularly dramatic finding was the prevalence of the ratings frame, which was present as

Table 4
Frames in media coverage of anchors, by source

	<i>New York Times</i> (<i>N</i> = 146)	<i>USA Today</i> (<i>N</i> = 148)	<i>Washington Post</i> (<i>N</i> = 126)	<i>All</i> (<i>N</i> = 420)
Ratings	.53 ^a	.45 ^a	.46 ^a	.48
Experience	.28 ^b	.41 ^a	.32 ^{ab}	.34
Reporting style	.21 ^a	.19 ^a	.25 ^a	.21
Personality	.16 ^a	.08 ^b	.22 ^a	.15
Family	.16 ^a	.12 ^a	.19 ^a	.15
Appearance/clothes	.14 ^a	.07 ^b	.22 ^a	.14
Age	.16 ^a	.09 ^b	.11 ^{ab}	.12
Sex	.12 ^a	.10 ^a	.15 ^a	.12
Salary	.08 ^a	.06 ^a	.05 ^a	.06
Race/ethnicity	.02 ^{ab}	.00 ^b	.05 ^a	.02
Politics	.02 ^a	.01 ^a	.02 ^a	.02

Note: Table entries are proportions. For each row, proportions that do not share superscripts (a, b) differ from one another at $p \leq .05$.

often as not. Based on our results, it would be reasonable to conclude that the same norms, practices, and pressures that foster horse-race coverage of political candidates (Bennett 2006; Gans 1979; Graber 1993; Price and Tewksbury 1997) foster a similar style of coverage for anchors. The newspapers that we examined also paid considerable attention to the personal characteristics of anchors, including their personality, appearance, age, and sex. Here, too, the culture and economics of journalism may help to explain the patterns in framing. At the same time, the newspapers frequently framed the anchors as journalists: Fully 45 percent of the observations included a reporting experience frame, a reporting style frame, or both.

The newspapers did not frame all of the anchors in the same way. In one regard, our findings corroborate the claim that the news media treated female anchors differently than their male colleagues: The newspapers frequently framed the former in terms of their sex but almost never framed the latter in such terms. This result parallels findings from research on news media framing of politicians (see, in particular, Heldman et al. 2005). Regarding other personal characteristics, however, we found no consistent differences between the framing of the female anchors and the framing of the male anchors. In some respects, the framing of one female anchor, Couric, differed substantially from the framing of the other female anchor, Vargas.

Given that all three newspapers presumably shared the same journalistic culture and faced many of the same economic pressures, it is not surprising that they tended to resemble one another in their framing of the anchors. Still, the more popularly oriented *USA Today* differed from its elite counterparts in

several respects. Both findings fit well with previous research on newspaper coverage of political candidates (see, in particular, King 1990).

In drawing these conclusions, we should note several key limitations of our study. First, it focused on a limited number of anchors at the broadcast networks. It did not examine coverage of Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, and Dan Rather, three male anchors who dominated the evening news for many years. Nor did it examine coverage of Barbara Walters or Connie Chung, two female anchors from earlier times. It might be useful to extend our analysis to include these earlier anchors. Likewise, it might be useful to examine news media framing of other prominent figures in television news, including cable news anchors (e.g., Wolf Blitzer and Brit Hume), cable news talk show hosts (e.g., Larry King, Chris Matthews, and Bill O'Reilly), and even "mock news" anchors or hosts (e.g., Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert).

Another limitation of our analysis rests with the sources that we examined. Given that we focused exclusively on national newspapers, future research might examine how other sorts of print sources (e.g., regional newspapers and news magazines) frame news anchors. Future research might also examine how television news sources—including not only traditional news sources but also "soft news" programs such as entertainment news shows and late night talk shows (see Baum 2003)—frame news anchors.

Yet another limitation of our study is that we only coded for the presence or absence of certain frames. We did not examine other dimensions of anchor coverage, such as the tone of coverage. Further research might reveal additional patterns, including differences across sex. One plausible scenario is that the news media frame the personal characteristics of male anchors and female anchors in different—and perhaps gender-stereotypical—terms. Even when the prevalence of a frame such as the personality frame or the appearance frame is similar for male and female anchors, the specific content of the frame may differ. For example, the news media may cite more stereotypically feminine personality traits (e.g., perky, bubbly) in describing female anchors and more stereotypically masculine personality traits (e.g., calm, stoic) in describing male anchors.

Given the extensive evidence that news media frames—including analogous frames for political candidates—can shape public opinion, it seems reasonable to speculate that frames for anchors can do the same. Most obviously, differences in framing across anchors could produce differences across anchors in public perceptions. For example, the finding that Couric received more personality-framed coverage than did Gibson or Williams could help to explain the differences that the Pew Research Center (2006a) found between survey respondents' descriptions of Couric and their descriptions of the two male anchors. Similarly, the gender gap that the Pew Research Center found in the tone of comments about Couric (but not Gibson or Williams) could reflect, at least in

part, the tendency of the news media to frame her (but not her male colleagues) in terms of her sex.

This last possibility touches on a broader normative question: What sort of frames in news coverage of anchors would best serve the public? Given the widespread criticism of horse-race frames and personal frames for political candidates, one logical assumption might be that ratings and personal frames for anchors are similarly problematic. Just as the former could foster cynicism about news (and, perhaps, fuel a television news counterpart to the “expectations” game in politics; see Patterson 1994), the latter could lead audience members to evaluate anchors in terms of arguably irrelevant qualities. Extending the same logic, one might argue that the reporting experience and reporting style frames provide the most useful information to audience members. In the absence of research on the effects of news media frames for anchors, however, such claims must remain in the realm of speculation.

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Notes

1. Respondents also ranked these anchors as being more credible than the four most recent presidents of the United States.
2. Data came from the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut.
3. Quoted in Peter Johnson, “It’s Couric’s Time: Can She Shine?; Expectations Soar for CBS’ New Anchor,” *USA Today*, Aug. 16, 2006:1D.
4. Howard Kurtz, “Up Close and Too Personal; Katie Couric, Center of Attention, Says She Just Wants to Do Her Job,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 14, 2006:C1.
5. Peter Johnson, “It’s Couric’s Time: Can She Shine? Expectations Soar for CBS’ New Anchor,” *USA Today*, Aug. 16, 2006:1D.
6. Here and below, we based our conclusions on two-tailed difference of proportions test using the .05 significance level.
7. Howard Kurtz, “Anchor Duo To Succeed Jennings at ABC News; Bob Woodruff, Vargas Rare Network Pairing,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 6, 2005:C1.
8. Peter Johnson, “For Gibson, Anchoring Solo Feels ‘A Little Bit Naked,’” *USA Today*, June 26, 2006:4D.
9. Howard Kurtz, “Up Close and Too Personal; Katie Couric, Center of Attention, Says She Just Wants to Do Her Job,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 15, 2006:C1.
10. Richard A. Oppel, Jr. and Jacques Steinberg, “ABC News Anchor Is Badly Injured by Bomb in Iraq,” *New York Times*, Jan. 30, 2006:A1.

11. Lisa de Moraes, "Katie Couric's Farewell Tour," *Washington Post*, June 1, 2006:C1.
12. Jill Abramson, "When Will We Stop Saying, 'The First Woman to _____'?" *New York Times*, Apr. 19, 2006, Section 4:1.
13. Alessandra Stanley, "A Sentimental Send-Off, and a Bit of Sendup," *New York Times*, June 1, 2006:E1.
14. Howard Kurtz, "Two for the Road: ABC's Elizabeth Vargas and Bob Woodruff, On the Job but Often Away from Their Desk," *Washington Post*, Jan. 29, 2006:D1.
15. Peter Johnson, "Couric Leaves *Today* with Tears, Gratitude; Next Stop: Solo Anchor at *CBS Evening News*," *USA Today*, June 1, 2006:3D.
16. Maureen Dowd, "Can Mommy Know Best?" *New York Times*, Dec. 10, 2005:A15.
17. Tina Brown, "The Future Face of Network News," *Washington Post*, Dec. 8, 2005:A15.
18. Peter Johnson, "CBS Puts Couric on a Digital Diet; Altered Photo Raises Some Weighty Questions," *USA Today*, Aug. 31, 2006:3D.
19. Tom Shales, "No News Not the Best News for Katie Couric's Debut," *Washington Post*, Sept. 6, 2006:C1.
20. Alessandra Stanley, "Among the Chatty Anchors, a Voice of Civility," *New York Times*, Aug. 9, 2005:E1.
21. Ann Oldenburg, "Maury and Connie Appear Unfazed; Couple Give Off a Cozy Vibe, Despite Pending Sexual Harassment Lawsuit," *USA Today*, Apr. 27, 2005:3D.
22. Alessandra Stanley, "Debut at ABC News: 2 Anchors, No Hitches," *New York Times*, Jan. 9, 2006:E5.

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