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## Sexism, Politics and Equal-Opportunity: Media Doesn't Just Pick On The Girls

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The Clinton camp is complaining bitterly that Hillary's campaign was done in by rabid media sexism. Maybe so. But a little perspective says it comes with the territory - and both genders are fair game.

No doubt, being female was a factor in coverage. There was a parade of subtle digs about the reasons for her choice of dark pants suits. Animated cartoons on the Web were not subtle at all. Neither was Maureen Dowd from the *New York Times* who, writing about Clinton in Iowa, referenced "a long parade of unflattering outfits and unnervingly changing hairdos." MSNBC's Chris Matthews upped the ante with an analogy about a stripper who needs attention.

But then, gender works both ways.

When the senator choked up on cue to win New Hampshire, she was a girl crying on the shoulders of female voters. When she knocked back shots of Crown Royal in Pennsylvania, she was a cool broad hanging out with the fellas. To paraphrase Patrick Henry: If this be stereotyping, make the most of it.

Bill Clinton's keening laments about media sexism paints his wife as a special case. She's not.

If Obama hit the weights to bulk up his boney frame and grew out his hair to offset his protruding ears, would the media notice? Of course -complete with before and after pictures and bloggers hinting of steroids.

Eight years of macho posturing did not escape media notice. Many questioned how the current president's manly high-plain squint and his cotton-mouthed Texas drawl somehow emerged from those years at Andover, Yale and Harvard. There has been ample speculation that his gun-fighter strut masks deep insecurities.

Bill Clinton - the pudgy years - had to endure the painful photos of his jiggly white thighs encased in those Richard Simmons jogging shorts. Donuts anyone?

There was the John Kerry - did he or didn't he - Botox Debate. Don't forget Al Gore's switch from down-home to preppy in a bid to appeal to women, and his weight watch: if he loses weight, he's going to run.

More recently, there is the resurrected evidence of John McCain's tough-guy temper -- publicly calling his wife a trollop and, well, it gets worse from there.

Like the coverage that left the Clintons sputtering about anti-female cable television, none of the reporting had little to do with policy positions or experience.

The question then: when does a discussion of a candidate's physique, dress hairstyle or temperament or personal behavior cross the line from observation to sexism? When does it illuminate (ok, maybe entertain is a better word) and when does it trivialize?

That's a trick question. There is no line.

In a celebrity-obsessed, media-saturated culture, candidates are no less subject to the rules of celebrity than Misses Lohan, Hilton and Spears. Their jobs are more important, but their personal lives are equally fair game.

Politicians can become media chew-toys for all manner of failings. Any candidate is just a cell-phone camera away from a disastrously unguarded moment.

Sexism? Nope: just cultural reality.

To any woman who wants to run for high office: hitch up your pantsuit and deal with it.