'My husband; my hero': selling the political spouses in the 2010 general election

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Abstract

In spite of a record number of female parliamentary candidates, the 2010 general election campaign became notable for the intensity of coverage given to the female spouses of the three main party leaders. We find that this resulted from a combination of party communication strategy, established media discourses, and the agency and visibility of the wives themselves. First, Labour and the Conservatives were the most prominent in integrating their leaders' wives into their campaigns, often to counter the less marketable qualities of the leaders themselves. Secondly, while mainstream media outlets– particularly newspapers – sought to cover all three women,they did so drawing upon established gender-based conventions, focussing on the wives' physical appearance and apparent dedication to their husbands. Thirdly, while the wife of the Liberal Democrat leader opted for limited and strategic contact with media, the wives of the Conservative and Labour leaders exploited a range of new media platforms, combining official party websites, personal blogs and webcasts. We argue that any assessment of the role of the spouses of party leaders has to look at media-driven priorities only alongside the various strategies open to parties and individuals in managing media activities. We also suggest that there is room to use the coverage of leaders' spouses to explore the development, limits and gender politics of any shift towards presidentialism.

Keywords: political leaders;David Cameron;presidentialism; campaigning; gender; media discourse; masculinity; new media

Introduction

Of the innovations to emerge through the 2010 campaign, the use of the major party leaders' wives is one of the most prominent. On 9 May, after the election, *The Sunday Times* reported that there were far more column inches devoted to the leaders' wives during the election than to all of the female candidates added together (White, 9 May 2010). In different ways and to varying extents, Samantha Cameron, wife of Conservative Party leader David Cameron; Sarah Brown, wife of Labour Party leader, Gordon Brown; and MíriamGonzálezDurantez, wife of Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg were prominent elements of the discourse around their parties' campaigns.

Yet their places in the campaign occasioned some controversy and scorn. As an example of this, drawing upon its tradition of intertextual play in its covers, the satirical magazine *Private Eye* alluded to the "readers' wives" section of soft-core porn magazines with a banner headline "Leaders' Wives", labelling the three "Saucy Sarah", "Sexy Sam" and "The Other One" and proclaiming "Yes! It's the cor! vote". This was not meant to be a complementary or reflective portrayal: the homophonic pun *cor* is used widely by red-top tabloids as a colloquial interjection to express gleeful surprise or, more relevantly here, sexual appreciation. In *The Observer*, Carole Cadwalladr (2010a) summarises the overall tenor: "Samantha Cameron looks good in trousers; Sarah in skirts. Both women confine themselves to exchanging pleasantries while their aides reveal where they bought their outfits". The conceit of the *Private Eye* cover, and a substantial proportion of the media comment that attended it, is that the wives are intended to provide some sexual spiciness to the election campaign for those sections of the media industry accustomed to trading in sexualised images of women (Macdonald, 1995).

Political spouses: a history of formal and informal power

In large part, the role of the leaders' wives in the 2010 campaign reflects a longer-term increase in focus on political personalities. Alluding to a shift towards what Mughan (1993) describes as "presidentialism", King (2002: 1) notes that "almost every casual conversation during a national election campaign contains reference to the personal characteristics of major party leaders and candidates". Bartle and Crewe (2002: 71) describe a concentration on the image of the leader as an "axiomatic" component of UK political campaigning. In Street's (2010: 74-5) terms, the leader is presented as a "personality" to be invested with particular, voter-friendly, styles and meanings; and the spouses have become part of this. The political profitability of wife and family rests upon their association with ordinariness and the capacity for empathy, good character and moral worth (Smith, 2008). And this portrayal of the politician as reassuringly family-oriented operates at every point on the political scale: family group photographs are often a feature of election literature and spouses routinely accompany candidates on constituency walk-abouts.

Stanyer (2007: 74) accords the United States with a longer history of prominent political spouses than the United Kingdom. A profile published in a 1907 edition of *Munsey's* reflects warmly on "the home life of [Democrat leader] William Jennings Bryan … with his wife and his children … a picture of simple American domesticity" (in Ponce de Leon, 2002: 141). O'Connor, Nye and van Assendelft (1996) look at what they see as the increasing influence of the First Lady in the US White House towards establishing the political power of the domestic realm, placing its development on a par with the constitutionally-approved position of the Vice President. In a demonstration of this informal power, Eleanor Roosevelt broadcast her endorsement for Adlai Stevenson in 1952, presuming to act as the conduit of the political spirit and integrity of the late president Theodore (Jamieson, 1996: 43). More recently, Hillary Clinton

appeared in the advertisements for Bill's election in 1992 (Jamieson, 1996: 496) in a campaign that emphasised her role in the slogan "Two for the price of one".

Partly owing to the absence of a role equivalent to that of the US First Lady, the place of the (usually female) spouse of the UK Prime Minister has been more complex than in the US, although no less contentious. Margot Asquith, for instance, was considered remarkable because "unlike most prime ministers' wives, she confided freely in other politicians" and so contributed to the political realm in her own terms (Jallard, 1986: 202). Stanyer (2007: 74) notes that the broad expectation that the Prime Minister's spouse will remain "firmly behind the scenes", began to change with Mary Wilson (1974-1976) and, most notably, with Cherie Blair (1997-2007), who pursued a career as human rights lawyer and occasional campaigner. Cherie's independence was a point of discussion across media, and she flitted between a range of press identities, from the domestic role of "wife" to the professional position of "barrister", bridged by the combined role of "working mother" (Page, 2003). Reyes (2003) looks at how these multiple roles were often used to question the seemliness of Cherie's conduct, pointing in particular to her gendered portrayal in the right wing press as a scheming "Lady Macbeth" character. Walter (2010: 224) argues that the perceived threat of Cherie stemmed from her refusal to occupy a position of silent commitment to her powerful husband. Walter compares the hostility directed towards Cherie with the approval given to the "reassuring first wives Sarah Brown and Michelle Obama, who have decided to give up paid work [and] … receive admiration not for their incisive intelligence and active careers, but for their toned arms and great clothes". It seems that media sanction is accorded to the more traditionally passive, decorative spouse, while their career and status prior to their husbands' election is given comparatively less regard.

The drive for ordinariness through the domestic realm

There are a number of common factors that run through the use of the leaders' wives. One is that they offer a way into the domestic realm, adding elements of "ordinariness" to their husbands' political persona. Writing in the *Observer* of 14 March, just prior to the announcement of the election date, Day anticipates that the three main parties' spouses will be called upon to express a necessary balance between a conventional idea of respectability and reassuringly shambolic domesticity. In the lead up to and through the campaign, it is easy to detect strategies to humanise the candidates by referring to such a domestic hinterland. Sarah Brown's party conference speech in 2008 included intimate confessions of Gordon's "messy" habits, an admission that probably owes much to Michelle Obama's affectionate revelations concerning Barack's supposed untidiness. This was later echoed by Samantha Cameron, who mentioned her husband's endearing disorderliness in her first television interview. In the absence of Míriam, it was left to Nick Clegg to comment on his own messy credentials, which he did in an interview on BBC Radio 4 (28 April) by confessing his occasional failure "to keep his papers in order". As Sands (2010) commented in the *Independent on Sunday*, "untidiness has become a euphemism for generosity, high-mindedness, and possibly, virility".

This is all played out against developments in feminism and society in which women can claim relative equality in terms of employment and law but, in line with Faludi's 'backlash' manifesto (1992), are confronted by increasing moves towards a re-traditionalisation of feminism (Smith, 2011; McRobbie, 2009; Whelehan, 2000). This reflects nostalgia for a lost, uncomplicated past where there were clearly defined gender roles, whilst allowing women respectable levels of professional attainment. In this way, the high-flying career women married to aspiring political leaders are acceptable only if they cheerfully relinquish their personal ambitions on their husbands' election to office. Hence the demonization of Cherie Blair, who remained committed to her high-profile legal career, whereas Michelle Obama was

lauded as 'Mom-in-chief' in the American press when she gave up her legal career before entering the White House.

"The war of the wives" and its conscientious objector

Not only had the role of the wives in this particular campaign been anticipated; it had been given a name. Picking up on an expression coined by Andy McSmith as far back as 2006, the *Sunday Times* of March 14 declared that the campaign would involve a "war of the wives" (Mills, 2010), a formulation widely repeated subsequently (eg. Moir, 2010a).However, as the 2010 campaign progressed, it became apparent that the main protagonists in any war were to be Sarah Brown and Samantha Cameron, with a lesser role for Míriam Gonzales. Instead of occupying a seat on her husband's campaign bus, Míriam continued as leader of the trade department of an international law firm, giving her few interviews in a professional rather than domestic environment (Day, 2010). Míriam was also the only one of the three wives not to issue public statements during the campaign and not to be featured on the party website. Even in the televised debates, where Gordon Brown and David Cameron arrived at the studios hand in hand with their spouses, Nick Clegg was unaccompanied.

Míriam's absence was not at the behest of the media. Daisy Leitch (2010), who acted as a press assistant on the Liberal Democrat's campaign tour, observes how even the rare appearances of Míriam on the weekends of the campaign led to a palpable excitement amongst journalists.I n Spain – the country in which Míriamwas born – Celia Maza of *El Confidencial* wrote that, after the first leaders' television debate in which the Liberal Democrat leader was widely thought to have triumphed, "only one person has been able to rob the spotlight from [Nick Clegg]. And she has done so by hardly appearing" (quoted in *The Guardian*, 2010). Yet, we should be wary of assuming that the perception of

Míriam's absence accorded with the reality. While Míriam's appearances were fewer in number, she did accompany Nick on a number of public engagements and contributed an interview to an ITV television special on her husband. In large part, however, Míriam's reluctance to occupy the conventional role of political spouse, participating in routine news events and photo opportunities, had the affect of lessening the frequency of her appearances in the day-to-day news election coverage.

Characteristically, Míriam's lack of visibility is portrayed as itself a political act. The weekly women's glossy magazine, *Grazia*, ran an "election special" edition during the campaign and featured all three leaders' wives. However, whilst Sarah Brown (in what was billed as her "first ever" interview) and Samantha Cameron spoke directly to the magazine, Míriam only appeared through the words of her husband Nick, where he is called upon to defend her choice to concentrate on her career, in response to the suggestion that she seeks only to protect her formidable earning power (Cadwalladr, 2010a). So while, as Janice Turner's (2010: 14) account in the same *Grazia* issue suggests, Míriam's refusal to occupy the spotlight can be seen as admirably restrained, accusations of careerism echo those that had been directed towards the independent and professional Cherie Blair. However, whatever restraint there was on Míriam's part was not common across the campaign.

Samantha Cameron: intimacy and technology

A number of the wives appeared more frequently in the campaign, and acted to enhance the images of their husbands; and this is certainly the case with Samantha Cameron. Samantha's entry into the fray was heralded by an announcement by David on the 10 March edition of ITV's *The Alan Titchmarsh Show*. Describing a snapshot of domestic life, David said Samantha had told him over breakfast of her wish "to get out there", before promising that "you are going to see a lot more of her on the campaign trail, so

Britain get ready" (quoted in Walker, 2010). Even before then, in an attempt to add to what Gareth Smith (2009) describes as David's overall "brand" as a socially inclusive and emotionally competent family man, public appearances of David and Samantha have been characterised by embodied displays of affection. At the 2006 Conservative Party conference, for example, during the ritual basking in the delegates' applause, David patted Samantha's heavily pregnant stomach in the performance of what Angela Smith (2008: 564) describes as "youthful fecundity".

The fact that Samantha was again pregnant during the 2010 campaign featured in much of the coverage of her input (see Little, 2010), with the Camerons using a webcast to joke that "the bump" was receiving more attention than they were. Samantha's choice of maternity clothing was also minutely examined by the media (eg, "Samantha Cameron shows off growing bump – and style cred – as David launches Tory election manifesto", Abraham, 2010; "Samantha Cameron voted best-dressed woman in politics", Alexander, 2010). Significantly, discussion also fixed on her Smythson-designed handbag – noting the particular design of bag shares a name with the Camerons' daughter Nancy – a line that served to highlight Samantha's professional role as Smythson's creative director. Confining her job at Smythson's to one or two days a week, Samantha was regularly seen at her husband's side during the campaign, culminating in a startlingly intimate photo of the two of them lying snuggled together on the campaign bus, which was published in the *Daily Mail* the day before the election with the comment that it looked "like a still from a romantic film" (Moir, 2010a).1 Drawing upon this mix of personal chic and easy intimacy, Samantha was treated as a marketable asset by the Conservative Party throughout the campaign.

Samantha's role was also an object lesson in the use of new media for political purposes. Throughout the campaign, videos of Samantha were featured on the front page of the Conservative Party website.

This use of social media was a development of David's already-established strategy of using the webcast site *YouTube* both to offer glimpses of what Goffman (1971) describes as a "back stage" persona, invested with candid sincerity: extending "WebCameron" (a play on "webcam") to "Web*Sam*Cameron". These webcasts expressed a concern with social action and inclusion, providing a response to accusations of eliteness and privilege directed towards the privately-educated David, still suffering from the circulation of a student-days photograph in which he poses with other member of the exclusive "Bullingdon Club". The WebSamCameron debut was on 4 Aprila nd labelled "Samantha Cameron hits the campaign trail", and on it she describes her visit to a London youth club. While the visit received only limited coverage in the broadcast and print media at the time, it was revisited by the main media outlets later in the campaign as part of a discussion on Samantha's clothing and her affectionate relationship with her husband (eg,Little, 2010). Subsequent webcasts included "Samantha Cameron visits Yorkshire" (9 April), "Samantha joins with the Bengali community in Camden" (14 April) where she expresses a wish to "hopefully help cook some curry", "Samantha visits the Avon riding centre" (26 April) and a visit to a social enterprise scheme called "Bookdonors" in the Scottish borders (17 April).

Sarah Brown: agency and intervention

Sarah Brown was also heard through the campaign, using a mix of social and mass media, although a significant intervention later in the campaign was to draw upon a conventional media platform. Unlike the other two leaders and their spouses, Sarah and Gordon Brown were married while Gordon was already a major figure in government. As Sarah Macaulay, she had been a partner in a successful PR agency, Hobsbawm Macaulay, which was well-known for its high-profile left-of-centre clients. Sarah resigned from this partnership after her marriage to Brown in August 2000. Drawing quietly on her skills in public relations, Sarah became central to the reconfiguration of her husband's public image,

helping to project a less intense and more human version of Gordon. As a couple, they came to public attention in media reports covering the birth of their first child and the tragedy of that child's death ten days later.

Some time before the 2010 campaign, Sarah also joined Gordon in some political stagecraft. As we saw in the discussion of Samantha Cameron, it has become conventional for the leader's spouse to join them on stage after their speech to the party conference. However, in an unusual twist subsequently repeated the following year, the 2008 Labour Party conference saw Sarah Brown take to the stage first to give a short speech of her own and then announce Gordon's entry onto the podium: "my husband, my hero, your prime minister". Referring back to the first time she had done this, Sarah told *Grazia* that far from an orchestrated piece of political theatre, it "just felt like the right thing to do" (Turner, 2010: 16), a point reiterated later in the biographical account of her time in Downing Street (Brown, 2011). These qualities of "spontaneity" and "authenticity" are emphasized in the *Grazia* interview to such an extent that it begins with an apology from Sarah for "being overdressed", as she is on her way to the final leaders' debate.The deployment of Sarah as an ideal figure to directly address members of the Labour party carried on from the previous two conferences into the election campaign, where a direct-to-camera appeal to party activists was made available on the official party website throughout.

Sarah's relationships with media are well established. Prior to the election, she had gathered a reputation as an effective user of the individualised information-sharing network Twitter, having attracted a record number of "followers" (that is, users that had signed on to be informed of updates from Sarah). When the extent of Sarah's popularity on Twitter became clear, *The Guardian* newspaper noted that her 775,000 followers amounted to "five times the entire Labour party membership" (Summers, 2009). While continuing to use Twitter throughout the election campaign, Sarah also

maintained a daily web-blog, hosted on the Labour Party website, detailing and commenting on her and Gordon's activities, often including personal reflections on their political significance (Brown, 2010b). Drawing upon conventional media too, Sarah wrote an "election diary" for the *Sunday Mirro r*newspaper throughout the campaign, where she adopted a style and tone designed to personalise and humanise the Labour Party's policies.

We have already referred to the media space devoted to Samantha Cameron's fashionable maternity clothing, and much of the coverage of Sarah in the early part of the campaign focused on her personal style, comparing this unfavourably with the others. While there were examples of comparisons between all three women, such as a short feature in *The Guardian* on their similarities in hairstyle (Cocozza, 2010), the great majority of discussions looked to Sarah Brown and Samantha Cameron.

One notable feature that dealt exclusively with Sarah was in the *Observer Food Monthly*. In an article that credited Sarah as author, she discussed the vegetable plot she maintained in the back garden of 10 Downing Street, and offered recipes for tomato soup, rhubarb crumble and (in collaboration with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's wife) roast lamb (Brown, 2010a). Underplaying her professional background, this casts Sarah in a traditional role of caring and responsible wife, firmly based in the cosiness of the domestic sphere when not at her husband's side. There are echoes here of the domesticated image Michelle Obama sought to promote after her husband's election to office, with television cameras regularly called in to report on the progress of vegetables she was growing in the grounds of the White House. Such an image of resourceful domesticity is certainly designed to offset the popular portrayal of Gordon Brown as curmudgeonly and overly-driven, while drawing upon his reputation for canniness and prudence. Just as Samantha consolidates David Cameron's commitment to social inclusiveness, Sarah provides an ordinary and humanising setting for Gordon Brown.

However, Sarah was required to intervene on Gordon's behalf in a much more direct manner. This arose from the aftermath of a televised conversation between Gordon Brown and a Rochdale pensioner called Gillian Duffy on April 28, in which Mrs Duffy raised the controversial topic of immigration. Afterwards Brown, who had neglected to remove his microphone from a preceding TV appearance, was recorded privately expressing his annoyance that Mrs Duffy had been introduced to him, describing her as "a bigoted woman".

That Gordon Brown had committed an error in insulting a voter in private, having been courteous to her in public, was immediately portrayed as an indication both of hypocrisy and of his volatile personality. However, the only national paper not to run a condemnatory front page headline was the *Daily Mirror*, which instead included an interview with Sarah Brown with the headline, "My Gord's so sorry". There is a continuation of the humanising strategy used throughout the campaign. The use of an abbreviated first name for the prime minister draws the reader into the same frame of familiarity as Sarah, with the strategic absence of quotation marks (Tuchman, 1972: 668), signalling Sarah's supposed sentiments rather than indicating a direct quotation. (In the event, Twitter followers would know she shortens her husband's name to "GB" rather than "Gord".) In the body of the report, Sarah continued to bear witness not only to Gordon's regret, but also the aspects of his character that much of the rest of the media was calling into question, saying:

> People may say many things about Gordon, but they cannot say he doesn't care. He phoned me as soon as it happened and was absolutely mortified. He went to see her because he hated the fact he had hurt someone. His apology was from the heart. (quoted in Roberts, 2010)

Sarah was not only used to insist upon the sincerity of Gordon's apology to Mrs Duffy, but also to testify that his need to apologise stemmed from personal qualities of empathy and conscientiousness; the virtues his detractors insisted were lacking.T hese qualities are stressed at length in Sarah's *Grazia* interview (Turner, 2010). In a very calculated way, then, Sarah responded to and counteracted Gordon's unsellable qualities. In the "bigotgate" case, she was able to draw on a persona of dutiful and caring wife, well-known to her Twitter followers (and the many millions more who had read her tweets courtesy of their frequent reproduction in the wider media);a woman whose sincerity and insights into the character of Gordon Brown could be relied upon.

The First Lady factor

While we have discussed how the wives contributed to the image of the leaders, it is also necessary to consider what Smith (2008) highlights as the increased portrayal of 10 Downing Street as a nationally-significant domestic space, as well as the official residence of the Prime Minister. Thus considered, the Prime Minister's family takes on a greater symbolic importance than the means for the Prime Minister to demonstrate social inclusiveness and empathy. Certainly, Stanyer and Harmer (2010) find that the United States, where the figure of the First Lady has a greater historical pedigree, is also the country in which coverage of the leaders' wife and family features most prominently. What may amount to a recasting of Number Ten as the nation's own domestic realm brings with it a focus on a prospective Prime Minister's spouse similar to that accorded to would-be US first Ladies. While this is subject to alteration, the current UK electoral system made it unlikely that a leader of a third party such as Nick Clegg would become Prime Minister – although he was to become Deputy Prime Minister in a coalition arrangement – which in turn means that Míriam was the least likely to occupy the Prime Ministerial

residence. In short, the obligation to present the leaders' wives for public scrutiny might be, at least in part, governed by the need to assume a UK equivalent of the First Lady.

Given this context, it is appropriate to consider that what critical scrutiny there is of leaders' wives may be motivated by a concern for the democratic arrangement. Just as there is resistance to the development of a presidential style of politics in the UK, so there are signs of hostility to the notion of a First Lady. A claim repeated through the hostile coverage of Cherie Blair's professional status was that she might be tempted to influence her husband on issues of policy (Reyes, 2003), and the second time Sarah Brown introduced her husband's speech to the party conference in 2009 was less well-received as novelty appeared to give way to habit. Aside from the gendered aspects of how the leaders' wives are routinely represented, it is therefore important not to understate the extent to which hostility towards a professionally or politically active de facto First Lady is rooted in the principal that significant government positions of influence should be occupied only by those elected to office.

Conclusion

This article has tried to show the need for a multi-layered and nuanced analysis of the coverage of political leaders in campaigns, as well as their spouses. On the one hand, much of the media attention given to political leaders at election time is driven by their public appearances, often in "battle bus" style tours. While partners have historically featured in such media events along the way, the examples of Sarah Brown and Samantha Cameron have shown how much spouses are able to engage in parallel campaigns of their own. To a great extent, the contribution of any campaign to electoral success, however limited that may be, depends upon the terms of its mediation and interpretation by mainstream media (Sanders, 2009: 165).We have seen that participation and non-participation in

campaigning is open to a variety of interpretations, and just as the coverage of Sarah and Samantha can be motivated by fashion as much as politics, Míriam's occasional and selective participation in the election has generated both admiration and disapproval. Crucially however, we have also shown the need to move beyond mainstream media, emphasising that the development of new media forms such as blogs and webcasting in campaigning are vital components towards comprehending how the role of the leaders spouse is likely to develop. As the examples of Sarah and Samantha show, new media enables the effective communication of a parallel set of campaign activities capable of constructing the wives as political personalities in their own terms.

From the perspective of gender politics, it is easy to see how the use of leaders' wives is regressive (see McRobbie, 2009), harking back to firmly entrenched ideas of a woman at her husband's side, and subject to his personality. Yet one feature that unites of all the leaders' wives is a personal history of high professional attainment; they have careers independent to those of their husbands, and have the option of shunning the role of the traditional constituency wife who holds the fort whilst her husband works in Westminster. A minority of media commentators used the period of the campaign to question this clichéd model of the political wife whose principle occupation is to stand at her husband's side, praising Míriam's determination to forego four weeks of intensive campaigning to retain her position as a professional working woman. However, the bulk of media sentiment and campaigning practice favoured the traditional arrangement that prompted Sarah Brown to give up her public relations job shortly after marrying Gordon, to concentrate instead on charity work. Indeed, as the example of Cherie Blair has shown, professional independence in a leaders' wife may be difficult to sustain in the powerful environment of Downing Street. All in all, the equality in the workplace for women won by second wave feminism in the 1970s has enabled the wives of all three party leaders to pursue successful careers, but

the expectations of campaigning practice, allied to the implicit role of First Lady, are such that only Míriam was seen to retain this role during the election campaign.

As to Sarah and Samantha, it is easy to follow the assumption of the *Private Eye* cover that the focus on the wives of the party leaders panders to a traditional newsroom appetite for images of photogenic women. These feed upon the narrative possibilities of framing the election campaign as a "cat fight", with both *The Telegraph* and *The Mail* offering verdicts on the most stylish wife (Alexander, 2010; Jones, 2010). However, while such comparisons might be seen as the feminised element in the wider portrayal of the election-as-competition (see Patterson, 2005), we want to argue that the spouses were used far more strategically to counter what were widely-perceived as shortcomings in their husbands' political profiles. Accusations of upper-class elitism on the part of David Cameron were in part answered by his own chummy and confessional appearances on popular television chat shows, but were also met with the popularising force of Samantha Cameron's image, from wearing High Street clothes from shops such as *Marks & Spencer* and *Zara* to the ritualistic "chat shots" with members of the public. For her part, Sarah Brown acted as the conventionally sensitive and emotionally competent side of the Brown partnership, and as both living evidence of Gordon's likability and advocate for his sincerity. What has also become apparent is the extent to which social media can be used by political personalities to bypass or provide coverage for established media outlets.

Yet the approaches to gender that run through this coverage raise deeper, potentially systemic, questions about the relationship between gender and the development of political campaigning. This proved to be a close-fought campaign in which all available resources were called into action, and the main parties were all led by straight, married men. An issue that will emerge in future campaigns, and give us cause to recall images of Margaret and Denis Thatcher, is how the marketing strategies will alter

when the leaders' spouse is same sex or a man. On-going questions therefore extend beyond watching how a leader's partner figures in future campaigns to reflecting upon how these strategies will adapt to accommodate various domestic and gender configurations. On the basis of this election, it is urgent that we think about the implications of any shift towards presidentialisation and the accompanying notion of a first family for the relationship between elected office and political influence, and between gender and democracy.

Notes

1. Andrew Parsons, the photographer, had been hired by the Conservatives to present a more media-friendly image of Cameron, a role Parsons continued until the end of 2010 when media attention on the costs of the arrangement led to its termination. The *Daily Mail* in particular had continued to use such intimate photos of the Camerons in their coverage without drawing attention to their source during the early months of the coalition government.

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