



MEMO:

To: News Division Heads, Editors in Chief, Bureau Chiefs, Political Directors, Editors, Producers, Reporters, and Anchors

From: UltraViolet

Re: Sexist coverage of Nancy Pelosi and other women leaders

Following CNBC's Jim Cramer's clearly sexist and wholly inappropriate attack on Speaker Nancy Pelosi, countless journalists reported on the story and included the phrase "Crazy Nancy" in headlines, social media previews, articles, segments, and more.

This only served to perpetuate Cramer's attack and ensure that what began as one moment of name-calling reached hundreds of millions of people through repetition by Associated Press News, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *Forbes*, ABC News, local news stations across the country, and even *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. This is unacceptable and shows that the media must do the work to ensure that it represents women, people of color, and other leaders from underrepresented communities fairly and without bias. By repeating Cramer's insult verbatim, even in articles that chastise him and CNBC, media outlets are perpetuating a common line of attack against women politicians--that they are emotionally unstable and, therefore, unfit to lead.

Alternative options for covering the Cramer story without perpetuating sexism include naming "crazy Nancy" as a sexist insult often levied against women that relies on tropes and stereotypes and specifically avoiding the word "crazy" in headlines, instead saying Cramer apologizes for his sexist insult of Pelosi.

The media plays a critical role in how women candidates and elected leaders are perceived by voters and the public. Headlines, photos, social media previews, and the content of an article can be used to spread racist and sexist ideas and encourage or legitimize disinformation. This decreases voter confidence in diverse candidates and discourages women from entering politics. The media must do better, and it is the responsibility of newsrooms, headline writers, journalists, marketers, and editors to get this right.



Despite a recent increase in the number of political leaders who are women and/or people of color, there's still a long way to go until our nation's elected officials truly represent our population. Women make up only 25% of the Senate and 23% of the House, despite being 51% of the U.S. population.

Last month, UltraViolet, in conjunction with ACRONYM, Color Of Change PAC, Disinfo Defense League, EMILY's List WOMEN VOTE!, NARAL Pro-Choice America, Planned Parenthood Votes, SumOfUs, Women's March, Strategic Victory Fund, GQR Digital, and #ShePersisted, launched [Reporting in an Era of Disinformation: Fairness Guide for Covering Women and People of Color in Politics](#).

The guide makes specific recommendations designed to help journalists and platforms identify and avoid unintentional sexist and racist bias or disinformation when interviewing, writing, or moderating content about women and people of color who are running for/or hold political office.

The guide includes recommendations that could have prevented the spread of harassing language regarding Speaker Pelosi, the highest ranking woman in U.S. government, such as:

- Avoid using terms that equate emotion with weakness or being "crazy" and stoicism with being cold.
- Women are often penalized as being too emotional and seen as cold if they fail to show emotion, creating a double bind that doesn't apply to men. Avoid using terms like mean girl, ice queen, bossy, feisty, unlikeable, abrasive, aggressive, irrational, and emotional.
- Consider biases that are at play when it comes to race, gender, ability, orientation, and other protected statuses, and question and debunk stories and language that perpetuate bias.
- Ask yourself how this strand of disinformation is targeting those who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, LGBTQ people, women, Muslims, immigrants, and other marginalized groups.
- Write headlines and social media posts as if they are the only things people will read. Headlines that sensationalize disinformation and racist or sexist attacks help to spread



Equality at a Higher Frequency

disinformation and attacks when the headlines circulate on social media and in news aggregators.

It's time for the media to do better when it comes to reporting on underrepresented people who are running for/or hold political office.

In August, with the release of our media guide, we set the standard for avoiding sexism, racism, and disinformation in political news coverage. Today, in light of the news coverage of Cramer's attack on Speaker Pelosi and other recent examples of the perpetuation of sexism, racism, and disinformation, we demand that newsrooms make [Reporting in an Era of Disinformation: Fairness Guide for Covering Women and People of Color in Politics](#) required reading for all staff.