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For Chris Matthews, misogyny pays

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Tongues are still wagging over *The New York Times Magazine's* [cringe-inducing cover story](#) about MSNBC talker Chris Matthews. The cringes came courtesy of the name-dropping Matthews, whose raging insecurities danced across nearly every page of the piece. As [Digby noted](#) after reading the opus, "He fulfills every single Village media cliché: obsessive social climbing, deep personal insecurity, primitively sexist and racist and just plain dumb."

Question: Is [Chris Matthews](#) the [Michael Scott](#) of political talk show hosts? And if so, does that make MSNBC the [Dunder Mifflin](#) of cable news?

Matthews has harvested a bumper crop of outrageous remarks during this extended primary season. Specifically, fueled by his obsession with the Clintons (he can't recall attending a single Beltway party where the couple has not been discussed), Matthews has unleashed a flood of sexist commentary.

On that front, of course, the *Hardball* host has not been alone. This election season, we've seen a cavalcade of white, middle-age men express their deep, personal contempt for the first serious female contender for the White House. Contempt, of course, that has nothing to do with Sen. Hillary Clinton's policies or her beliefs. Instead, it's been an oddly personal disdain dressed up as political analysis.

The way Mike Barnicle on MSNBC [said](#) Clinton "look[ed] like everyone's first wife standing outside a probate court." The way Bill Kristol on Fox News [said](#) that among the only people supporting Hillary Clinton were white women, and "[w]hite women are a problem, that's, you know -- we all live with that." The way CNN's Jack Cafferty [likened](#) Clinton to "a scolding mother, talking down to a child." The way Fox News' Neil Cavuto [suggested](#) Clinton was "trying to run away from this tough, kind of bitchy image." The way MSNBC's Tucker Carlson [announced](#) that "when [Clinton] comes on television, I involuntarily cross my legs." The way Christopher Hitchens on CNBC [described](#) Clinton as being "sort of alternately soppy and bitchy."

That's all taken place in open view. And while a [blog swarm](#) did engulf Matthews in January, followed by a forced, pseudo-apology by the host -- and his attacks did prompt some women activists to carry picket signs outside the MSNBC studios -- the openly sexist comments have produced very few condemnations from within the industry and even less soul-searching from the (mostly male) press corps. In fact, in Matthews' case, the sexist outbursts have helped propel his career. That's how he landed on the cover of the *Times* magazine.

Why? Because misogyny pays.

Question: If Chris Matthews had been forced to apologize to Sen. Barack Obama for divisive, personal comments the host had made about the candidate, and if the comments had prompted civil rights groups to protest outside the MSNBC studios, do you think Chris Matthews, three months after the fact, would be photographed on the cover of *The New York Times Magazine* with an [uproarious grin](#) on his face?

For me, there were two key takeaways from the *Times* opus. The first was that Clinton-bashing -- and specifically, misogynistic Hillary-bashing -- pays off in the form of magazine cover stories. And second was that political journalism is a farce.

It's a farce because Matthews has clearly been crowned the Hot Journalist of this election cycle. He's already received loving, Page 1 [treatment](#) from the media-centric *New York Observer*, as well as a February ["valentine"](#) from *The Washington Post's* [Howard Kurtz](#). And now the *Times* piece, which clocked in at 8,000 words, the type of space the prestigious magazine usually sets aside to profile presidential candidates and heads of state. Keep in mind that within the Beltway's ego-driven media culture, with its all-publicity-is-good-publicity view of the world, there's no question that kind of cover treatment by the *Times* is seen as a coveted status symbol, no matter how many cringes the actual article may have induced. The cover story conferred a very simple message: Chris Matthews has been anointed a media star.

It's just so sad. Remember when campaign cycles generated Hot Journalists who actually accomplished something? Who actually practiced the craft and helped change journalism for the better by providing us with a deeper understanding of unfolding campaigns, who painted vivid portraits of the players involved? For instance, the way Richard Ben Cramer [famously captured](#) the 1988 race and how Sid Blumenthal and Joe Klein left their marks on the 1992 contest?

Other than to insult Hillary Clinton, what, exactly, has Chris Matthews done during 2008 to be crowned

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