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THE GENDERED PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN ONLINE MASS MEDIA DISCOURSE

Summary. The article explores the gendered nature of women politicians' representation in media and the double standards of political leadership where women with political ambitions are still measured by masculine norms. The research focuses on verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal features – hidden and overt – of the largely stereotypical media portrayal of female leaders. The study of the media discourse reveals that traditional assumptions embedded in society, reflected in language and shared by journalists discriminate women leaders and portray them as less qualified political players than their male counterparts.

Key words: online mass media discourse, women politicians, language sexism, gender stereotypes.

The successful implementation of global female empowerment policies has resulted in the increased numbers of women leaders around the world (Pew Research, 2017), greater gender equality in the workplace, elaboration of guidelines for gender-fair language (e.g. introducing a singular gender-neutral pronoun *they* as an alternative to *she* or *he* into the written language). Nonetheless, despite the declining novelty of women in politics and other public spheres, the progress, which has been made in covering male and female politicians similarly [1], our research of British and American mass media discourse demonstrates that current media make little effort to neutralize the stereotypical coverage of female public figures. The media, including highly reputed newspapers and distinguished news organizations, continue to construct them in a gendered way.

Gender stereotypes in the mass media discourse have been the focus of attention in a number of studies carried out by political scientists who examine how media stereotyping impacts political campaigns (K. Dolan 2014, D. Hayes & J.L. Lawless 2016), social linguists who have produced an impressive body of research on language stereotypes (J. Baxter 2017, D. Cameron & S. Shaw 2016, J. Coates 2013, M. Meyerhoff, and J. Holmes 2003, P. Eckert 2003), conversation analysts and social psychologists (Julia T. Wood 2009, E.L. Haines 2016) who systematically document the overt sexism and subconscious bias towards women leaders and examine changes in the positions of women in society, and their integration into political life.

The aim of the present research is to examine the verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal features in representation of female public figures in the British and American newspapers *the Telegraph, the Guardian, the Time, the Daily Mail, the Financial Times, the Huffington Post, the Washington Post,* and other online newspapers between 2009 and 2018. Our study focuses on the media coverage of British Prime Minister Theresa May, Democratic Party presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, and other prominent women leaders.

As new, highly interactive media genres (e.g. social networks, visual platforms) emerged, journalists began to work with new ways the news messages are constructed, delivered and shared in socially mediated environment. With the real and virtual worlds becoming increasingly intertwined, gendered messages are being transferred into the virtual communities targeting women leaders specifically. Since there is no prior comprehensive linguistic research done on media portrayal of women politicians in the new media, we see the practical value of the research into the subject.

Gender appears to be one of the main criteria when it comes to the assessment of women public figures. We have observed that news media's disproportionate focus on female politicians' character traits, appearance, behaviour, voice, sexuality, and family roles is marked by gender stereotypes. The over-emphasis on personal characteristics with regard to women in high office seems to overshadow their political efforts and aspirations.

In their coverage of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Theresa May media constantly refer to her personality traits raising the question about her fitness for the political post. The British prime minister's surname, which coincides with the modal verb *may* expressing uncertainty and possibility, has been very productively used to create word plays with modal adverb *maybe* to show the low degree of confidence in her fence-sitting Brexit policy:

Theresa Maybe, Britain's indecisive premier (The Economist, Jan. 7, 2017).

Theresa MAYBE not (Raddington Report, June 10, 2017).

Media attempts to dehumanize a woman politician were made regarding Theresa May to mock her repetitive answers and lack of emotion when in public. For this purpose, British journalists blended the prime minister's name *May* with the second part of the word *robot* creating the neologism *Maybot*. Similarly, the U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was nicknamed a *Robot* when she didn't react to a fly on her face during a presidential debate. This was reflected in a neologism created by a word-formation by analogy when the politician's maiden middle name, Rhodam, was replaced with phonologically close *robot*. The following headlines are also indicative of the frequent media practice of putting the emphasis on trivia and downplaying the seriousness of the issue under discussion during the presidential debate by a woman candidate:

Hillary 'Robot' Clinton: Conspiracy theories suggest democratic candidate been replaced by a cyborg (The Sun, Sept. 30, 2016).

Likewise, the German chancellor's hard position and austerity policy towards Greece and Spain earned her a nickname blended from her name and a cruel movie killer cyborg Terminator:

The Merkelator – Germany's unflappable Angela Merkel has risen to the most powerful seat in Europe (The Evening Standard, June 21, 2012).

Personal traits not relevant to the professional competence make their way into the news coverage not only with the help of journalists but also male fellow politicians. Women with sharp intellect are viewed as emotionally cold as they violate traditional perception: men signify reason, women – passion [2, p. 9]. The whole spectrum of negatively charged terms and idioms from the low end of temperature range stressing women's unfriendly, controlled emotions, dispassion, and hostility are used metaphorically in the media discourse. A cold temperature metaphor is often used by male politicians in descriptions of powerful women. Theresa May was called '*a bit of an Ice Maiden*', while Hillary Clinton was dubbed '*the Ice Queen'* – both metaphors denoting an unfeeling and emotionless fairy tale characters:

Ice queen perched on the steps, she cast her refrigerator glare upon them as one peer after another rose to modify her plan to put Britain in the freezer (The Guardian, Feb. 23, 2017).

'A manifesto of chaos!' The day ice queen Theresa May lost her cool (The Telegraph, May 22, 2017).

Theresa May's inability to show emotion to the public proves that she isn't fit to be Prime Minister. It is symbolic of the fact that she is a cold fish. At the moment, the British people aren't looking for a cold fish. They want someone to offer them some leadership in emotional times (The Independent, June 17, 2017).

A mythological metaphor '*sphinx'* is used to compare Theresa May with an enigmatic and inscrutable female creature that challenges people with riddles putting their (in our case the country's) future at stake:

Her sphinx-like approach is becoming difficult, with the press questioning which way she will jump (The Guardian, Sept. 16, 2016).

But the Democratic Party is at risk of being sidelined from the debate, paralyzed by the Sphinx-like silence of its presumptive 2016 nominee (The Huffington Post, May 15, 2014).

Women politicians face double standards and are caught between conflicting expectations. When women aspire to share the political stage with men, they need to adjust their behaviour, rhetoric and communicative style to those typical of male politicians not to be perceived as weak. But when women leaders adopt that style, they are accused of breaking feminine standards and portrayed by the media as unfeminine [3, p. 204]:

She [Hillary Clinton] *didn't look soothing and she didn't speak reassuringly. She didn't look soft or girlish. She looked and sounded like a piece of work; she took the stage and held it (Hartford Courant, Feb. 17, 2016).*

The double standard, placed on a female politician, is vividly exemplified by the criticism of the First Lady Michelle Obama, who did pushups in a TV show to promote her campaign for physical fitness of Americans. Conservative male politicians and media representatives were quick to describe her as unladylike for failing to uphold traditional expectations of a First-Lady's role.

Another discrepancy in representation of male and female politicians is observed when media write about paraverbal behaviour of famous politicians. Male politician's 'shouting' is ascribed to his style of speech delivery and his strong voice is often interpreted using adjectives with positive connotation:

Watch Bernie Sanders Inspiring DNC Speech (Rolling Stone, July 25, 2016).

Rep. Lewis' passionate speech against GOP bill (CNN, Mar. 27, 2017).

Bernie Sanders just gave the most powerful speech of his campaign: Why his socialism address was a defining moment (Salon, Nov. 20, 2015).

George W. Bush's ardent speech on democracy, in 3 minutes (The Washington Post, Oct. 19, 2017).

When a female politician demonstrates assertiveness communicating the message in public, her vocal tone, smile, and laugh are portrayed as unappealing, generating a plethora of sexist attacks. Hillary Clinton has been held to two contradictory standards illustrated in the following examples:

Men Told Hillary Clinton to Smile During Her DNC Speech (Fortune, July 29, 2016).

Someone has to tell her: Don't smile. (The NYT, Oct. 10, 2016).

Though a great number of men ran for the presidency as fathers and grandfathers, there were no speculations about their facial expression, family role, age and the ability to govern [4, p. 94]. In the media, Hillary Clinton is either criticized for not smiling enough or being told not to smile with explicitly sexist reference to her "disappointed mom smile", "grandmother smile", and "creepy grandma grin". Media dedicated a large amount of space to ridicule Hillary Clinton's laugh using similes "a record scratch" and "a broken record" – sounds considered unpleasant to the human ear. Clinton's laughter was also compared to a hen's cackle, the sharp noise or cry characteristic of a hen, especially after laying, and was branded "The Clinton Cackle":

But nothing particularly funny had occurred; it was, instead, a deployment of the Clinton Cackle (The NYT, Sept. 30, 2007).

Theresa May might be stocking up on cough remedies after battling through a croaky voice during her Conservative Party conference speech – but could the prime minister have done anything to fix her faltering voice? (BBC, Oct. 4, 2017).

Women leaders' strength, determination and a political hard stance are stereotypically interpreted in the media as masculine traits. The essence of this stereotype is captured in gendered metaphoric adjectives referring to metal or other hard material:

Angela Merkel: The triumph of Europe's Iron Lady (The Telegraph, Oct. 28, 2011).

True, the gloss has come off her premiership, but never ignore the fact that Mrs. May retains a granite-strong integrity and sense of public duty (The Daily Mail, July 15, 2017).

The following example exploits the double meaning conveyed by the metaphoric use of the word 'steel' to describe Theresa May's metal-toed shoes and her strong character:

It's the STEEL lady! Theresa May dons £215 Russell & Bromley black suede flats with metal toe caps to deliver a tough Brexit speech in Birmingham (The Daily Mail, Oct. 2, 2016).

Women leaders are compared with tough movie characters implying that they need superpower to survive in man-dominated politics:

Condi Rice, warrior princess (The Globe and Mail, Mar. 28, 2017).

Hillary Clinton, the Vampire Slayer . Meanwhile, we've been hoping that Hillary Clinton will be the pantsuit-wearing Buffy Summers who saves us all (Quartz, Nov. 4, 2016).

It has become a common practice for the news media journalists to write articles about women public figures focusing intently on physical features and appearance [5, p. 183]. They rather criticize "frumpy", "mismatched", "ill-fitting" suits of Angela Merkel, "hideous", "unfeminine" pantsuits of Hillary Clinton and "outrageous" footwear of Theresa May than their political

ideas and decisions. Though it's not relevant to women's competence and performance, their fashion choices are closely scrutinized and deconstructed by the media with close attention to price, brand, colour, embellishment, etc. At the same time the small amount of news coverage about appearance is directed at men:

Dazzling Ms Markle wore a chic black Alexander McQueen trouser suit and white Tuxe blouse, which she teamed up with black stilettos and a clutch bag. Prince Harry looked equally as smart in a blue suit and tie (The Evening Standard, Feb. 1, 2018).

The stylish two-piece suit by British designer Amanda Wakeley that Theresa May had picked for her first White House visit, in Republican red, appeared to perfectly match the President's (Trump) bold crimson tie (The Express, Jan. 27, 2017).

During her time as the First Daughter, Ivanka Trump's wardrobe has shown that she's well-aware that what she wears matters. And much like her actions since she's become First Daughter, her wardrobe has given the public plenty to discuss (The Time, Dec. 28, 2017).

Hillary Clinton wore a $12,495 Armani jacket during a speech about inequality (CNBC, June 6, 2016).

The tabloid media preoccupation with women's sexual attractiveness reduces a woman politician to a sexual object evoking negative assumptions about the relationship of gender to power. The allusion *May-dy in Red,* is coined after the phonologically similar name of Chris De Burg's song *The Lady in Red*:

May-dy in Red: The glamorous Home Secretary – usually better known for her choice of shoes – wore a low-cut orange dress as she sat two along from George Osborne on the Government frontbench (The Sun, Apr. 5, 2016).

Theresa May was subjected to degrading, sexist comments about her body when she appeared in a low-cut dress in the House of Commons on budget day. The tabloid produced alliteration of initial stressed syllable to create a catchy headline shifting the focus from the budget itself:

Busty Budget: As Osborne speaks to Commons Twitter goes into meltdown over Theresa May's cleavage (The Sun, Mar. 16, 2016).

Using the verbs with negative connotation "flaunt" and "parade" implying that women politicians use the sexually provocative outfit as a strategic political tool to attract attention and influence the predominantly male audience:

MPs who flaunt their, er, agendas: Feminists may howl, but there's always a reason ladies of the House parade their curves (The Daily Mail, Mar. 16, 2016).

In the following example the author uses the paronymic pair "destruction/distraction" to create a neologism based on the military term *weapons of mass destruction* implying that the chancellor uses her low-cut dress as a weapon to distract men's attention.

Weapons of Mass Distraction: German Chancellor Angela Merkel shows off plunging neckline (The Daily Mail, Apr. 14, 2008).

Another example of intended sexualizing occurred when *the Daily Mail* posted an article headlined *Never mind Brexit who won Legs-it* featuring a meeting of the British Prime Minister Theresa May and the Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon on the front page with a close-up of the politicians' legs. The author coined a nonce-word *Legs-it* from the blend term *Brexit (British + exit)*, meaning Britain's departure from the EU and the noun 'legs'. We assume that the journalist could also be implying the informal phrase 'leg it' meaning "to run in order to escape from someone or something" [6] stressing Britain's relatively quick decision to leave the EU.

Successful women irrespective of their professional sphere still cannot break free from patriarchal culture. Gender is injected when women are compared to famous male figures, both real and fictional. The following anthroponymic metaphors compare women to successful men stressing that men are unique individuals in their field and holding high profile women to male standards:

During her four years as the nation's top diplomat – and particularly during her final year in that post – Clinton fashioned herself as something of a George Clooney of global affairs, spending almost as much time up in the air as she did on the ground (The Atlantic, Jan. 29, 2013).

Edward Snowden has made his feelings known about Theresa May, describing the British Prime Minister as "a sort of Darth Vader in the United Kingdom"(The Independent, Sept. 13, 2016).

Hillary Clinton Is America's Machiavelli (The Time, Aug. 30, 2016).

She (Hillary Clinton) has, from her college days, sought ever-increasing power and money. In the process, she became both Faust, the eternally dissatisfied "scholar", and Mephistopheles, the paragon of evil (The American Thinker, Oct. 28, 2017).

Kamala Harris: the 'female Obama' plots her course on the road to Washington (The Guardian, Jan. 14, 2015).

Moreover, female athletes who navigate in a competitive male-dominated environment face a similar male reference. Their success is unfavorably evaluated through athletic performance of their male counterparts:

At just 19 years old, Simone Biles is already being called the Michael Jordan of gymnastics (People, July 08, 2016).

Meanwhile Katie Ledecky, who is being touted as the female [Michael] Phelps, has broken her own world record to win gold in the Women's 400m freestyle (The Daily Mail, Aug. 8, 2016).

Similarly, while pursuing a career in the music industry, female musicians are often measured against talented male musicians. The online newspapers are rife with examples of such stereotypical portrayal of women musicians:

After her debut at Birdland Jazz Club NYC, Rose has been dubbed by music critics as the "female Sinatra" (The Broadway World, Sept. 5, 2017).

*Often dubbed "the female Mick Jagger", she (Patti Smith) still possesses the same wiry physique and explosive stage energy that drew such comparisons (**The Independent, June 11, 2008**).*

Stereotyping starts in childhood and continues through adulthood turning gender into something that predetermines the child's future academic, athletic, artistic and other skills and developing physical and intellectual inferiority of young women who see themselves compared to successful men. To do so, journalists use the adjectives "young", "next", "new" and the adjectives "little/petite + metaphoric anthroponym", e.g. *a young Picasso, the next Einstein, new Usain Bolt, little Miss Mozart*, etc.

Journalists are less respectful toward women politicians than their male colleagues. When covering women, they often drop their titles (e.g. Senator, Prime Minister) in the news headlines they use their first-name vocatives stripping women political leaders of social recognition and status while addressing men politicians with "Mr+name" or "first-name+name" toward male politicians in similar situation:

Hillary, I love you. But please go away (The Los Angeles Times, Sept. 13, 2017).

Theresa, May-be it's cold outside (The Financial Times, Dec. 22, 2017).

It's Time To Go, <u>Mr. Trump</u> (The Huffington Post, Aug. 13, 2017).

Authoritative women politicians are referred to with inappropriate diminutive forms of their names. The following headlines vividly illustrate this demeaning media practice:

After <u>Angie</u>, Uschi? – Some Germans ponder life after Merkel (Reuters, Sept. 17, 2013).

Condi Rice on Trump: 'Words do matter' (Politico, May 15, 2017).

<u>Condi</u> v Blondie (BBC, Jan. 25, 2006).

Liz Warren seeks extra credit (The Boston Globe, Sept. 16, 2017).

When covering female public figures, the media refer to their traditional gender roles. The first thing to notice when analyzing the media representation of female public figures is the reference to their family roles. The rhetoric of motherhood exerts additional pressure and creates challenges for women in public life [7, p. 119], deprives them of gender status quo, except when women use motherhood strategically to reach audience and advance themselves in their field.

Angela Merkel: Germany's <u>mother</u> (The Guardian, Sept. 20, 2013).

[Helena] Morrissey is one of the most senior women in the City – and one of its most recognizable faces. <u>The mother of nine</u> has spent more than two decades clambering to the top of Newton, the BNY Mellon-owned fund manager that oversees £50bn of mainly pension funds (The Times, July 17, 2016).

The media dismiss senior women as experienced, respectful politicians using diminutive forms derived from kinship terms, usually used by children: *Auntie May* (British Prime Minister Theresa May), *Mommy Merkel* (German Chancellor Angela Merkel), *Granny Janet* (U.S. Federal Reserve Chairwoman), *Granny Warren* (U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren). In addition, the sexist attitudes are reinforced by the implicit age discrimination:

<u>Mama Merkel</u>: the 'compassionate mother' of Syrian refugees (The Guardian, Sept. 1, 2015).

The mocking effect of pun in the following headlines is achieved by changing one component of a compound noun *commander in chief*, the highest military service rank which had traditionally been occupied by men, into the noun which stresses the female leaders' family status:

Hillary Clinton: <u>Grandmother in Chief</u> (The Atlantic, Feb. 6, 2015).

More than '<u>mom-in-chief</u>': Michelle Obama bows out as dynamic first lady (The Guardian, Jan. 6, 2017).

Additionally, animal metaphors are widely used by the media to stereotype prominent women politicians and to further promote the woman-as-mother concept in society:

Before Japan's Fukushima disaster, in any German debate on nuclear power, Chancellor Angela Merkel played the role of a cautious and conservative <u>mother hen</u> (Pacific Magazine, Aug. 31, 2011).

But colleagues have spoken of a caring May, who texts and calls if they are unwell. "She is like <u>a tigress looking after her litter</u>", one said (The Mirror, July 11, 2016).

Another example of sexist media treatment is when a female politician is performing an archetypal role in which women exercised power for centuries. These roles have a lower status with limited authority (over children, not adults) than those women actually occupy:

German conservatives turn to the cult of <u>Matron Merkel</u> (The Independent, Sept. 6, 2009).

But America is a democracy and it is not the job of the Prime Minister to act as the <u>president's Mary Poppins</u>, correcting his manners in public (Politics Home, Jan. 27, 2017).

Instances when women's age and marital status is commented upon but no or little mention is made of their career, often emphasizing connection to an influential man are widely circulating in the media discourse:

Ivanka: Key player or <u>Daddy's little girl</u> (CNN, Sept. 7, 2017)?

<u>The 35-year-old mother-of-three (Ivanka Trump) and her husband</u>, Jared Kushner, have both played influential roles in Mr. Trump's administration during his first months in office (BBC, Apr. 25, 2017).

Women face disproportionate coverage and commentaries on their marital status compared to their male counterparts. The reference, sometimes without the woman's name, employs traditional assumptions about women's roles and place in society working to the detriment of women in authority. The following example illustrates the implicit approval of President Clinton's infidelity because his wife is allegedly not capable of satisfying him: *The potential presidential hopeful on Thursday shared a fan's tweet that read "If Hillary Clinton can't satisfy her husband what makes her think she can satisfy America?" (Business Insider, Apr. 17, 2015).* Media frequently leave out prominent women's names and positions by portraying them exclusively as wives or daughters of male politicians:

Leader of the Liberal Democrats Nick Clegg, <u>accompanied by his wife</u>, arrived at a polling station in his Sheffield constituency on Thursday to cast his vote (The Financial Express, May 7, 2015).

<u>Britain's Prince William and his wife Kate</u> are expecting their third child, their office said on Monday after the Duchess was forced to cancel an engagement due to severe morning sickness (Reuters, Sept. 4, 2017).

<u>The wife of former deputy prime minister Nick Clegg</u> has launched a furious attack on David Cameron over the EU referendum (The Daily Mail, Apr. 27, 2017).

The present study has found that women who have risen to high leadership positions receive a great amount of trivializing media coverage. Though the media's fascination with the sexualization and the stereotyping of women politicians is still prevalent in the tabloid press, the quality newspapers have joined in with much of attention centered on female politician's appearance and personal traits. The nature of differences in linguistic portrayal of male and female high-level politicians is hidden in stereotypical perception of gender roles perpetuated in media culture. By using the stereotype-laden language media continue to impose outdated gender roles on women in public service distorting society's perception of a female politician, creating environment that hampers gender egalitarianism. As political discussions have extended into the realm of social media platforms where the audiences are enabled to share and comment on news content, we see the future research direction in the analysis of social media practices of women's verbal representation in leadership roles.

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Петрова Т. В. Ґендерне зображення жінок-політичних лідерок у британському та американському дискурсі електронних мас-медіа

Анотація. Статтю присвячено дослідженню вербальних, невербальних і паравербальних засобів репрезентації жінок-політичних лідерок у дискурсі англомовних електронних мас-медіа. Аналізується набір стереотипних уявлень про жінок у політиці та їх реалізація в мові.

Ключові слова: англомовний мас-медійний дискурс, жінки-політичні лідерки, мовний сексизм, ґендерні стереотипи.

Петрова Т. В. Гендерная репрезентация женщин-политических лидеров в британском и американском дискурсе электронных масс-медиа

Аннотация. Статья посвящена исследованию вербальных, паравербальных и невербальных средств репрезентации женщин-политических лидеров в дискурсе англоязычных электронных масс-медиа. Анализируется набор стереотипных представлений о женщинах в политике, а также реализация стереотипов в английском языке.

Ключевые слова: англоязычный масс-медийный дискурс, женщины-политические лидеры, языковой сексизм, гендерные стереотипы.