

# An investigation into the media's genderisation of Democrat candidates during the selection process for the 2020 presidential nomination.

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2024

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**An Investigation into the Media's**  
**Genderisation of Democrat Candidates**  
**during the Selection Process for the 2020**  
**Presidential Nomination.**

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**PhD**

**2024**

**An Investigation into the Media's Genderisation of Democrat Candidates  
during the Selection Process for the 2020 Presidential Nomination.**

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## **Abstract**

This research examines, through Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2010), the way US media portrayed gender during the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election. Media coverage from debates from November 2019 to March 2020 was investigated to identify discourses which perpetuated gender stereotypes, narratives and tropes that marginalise women and other minority groups within politics and help sustain established power structures and the dominance of white, heteronormative males within US politics. Online news sites from across the spectrum of political ideology formed the basis for collecting media texts for analysis. This was carried out using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis which connects the findings to broader social and political structures of power and gender theories.

The findings reveal that women politicians were subjected to a gendered portrayal in media coverage that upheld harmful stereotypes and narratives which undermined them and their presence in the election. Further bias is examined through an intersectional perspective with the axes of ageism and sexuality both resulting in harmful media narratives for candidates. The research highlights the dominance of heteronormative white male politicians in US politics and how the media help to sustain their presence at the top levels of politics.

This study contributes to the existing literature on the representation of gender in the media and politics. Further research is suggested from an intersectional perspective around a single candidate or, candidates from other political parties. A further area for exploration is the impact of political ideology in media coverage and the context of gender. The impact of this research is informed by the evidence of bias, barriers, and discrimination women and minority candidates face in US politics, which is demonstrated in this study. Impact can be made through the dissemination of this data to the wider academic community through articles, the utilisation of this work for policy areas in gender and media literacy and, through guidance for political campaigns and media strategies.

Keywords: Gender, politics, media, critical discourse analysis, masculinity, intersectionality, feminism, women politician

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## **1.0 Introduction**

This research explores how gender is portrayed within the media coverage of electoral politics, specifically, the coverage of the Democratic party television debates which featured the candidates for the party nomination of the 2020 US presidential election. The thesis begins with the premise that gender is used implicitly by the media to create and sustain discourses that act as barriers to participation in politics, and thereby reinforce harmful biases and stereotypes within society. The research aims to evaluate the media representation of political candidates, specifically around how their gender is used to shape opinion and impact their political viability. This is shown through the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2010), which is used to reveal and analyse gendered discourses within debate coverage from a select group of 12 online news sources, positioned across the political spectrum. Further analysis of these discourses is carried out using four theories: the double bind (Jamieson 1995), symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978), gendered performance (Butler 1990), and masculinities (Connell 1995). These theories are used to evaluate and consider the dialectical relationship between the discourses and the notion of gender equality within a political context.

Media and politics are two of the most high-profile arenas which highlight the promotion and advancement of gender equality (Ross 2017) and can contribute towards understanding and evolving it within societies (Harp, Loke and Bachmann 2018). The way gender is constructed, positioned, and represented through mediated discourses is inherently political, and the media play a role in perpetuating and promoting a view in which women play a supporting role in existing power structures (Savigny and Warner 2015). This framing can shape the debate around equality during elections together with a diversity of candidates and policies. Connell (2021) suggests that gender politics have attracted attention from conservatives, such as the Republican Party in the US, who have built on narratives around the moral panics regarding several targets, such as gay marriage, feminists, sex education and women's reproductive rights.

The Party subsequently launched attempts to roll back legislation around these issues. Further to this, the Party advocates that patriarchal power structures remain in society and are supported by the world's mass media, which are persistently anti-feminist. Feminism is central to contemporary politics but the dialectical relationship it has with the mass media is one in which women are depoliticised, and feminists play a key role in perpetuating and sustaining this view (Savigny and Warner 2015). Ross (2017) believes the media use this position, along with commodification, to produce political media coverage, which consistently denies women's contributions and hence rejects them as credible politicians.

To set the scene for this research, the 2016 US presidential election provided inspiration and grounds for investigating gender at the nexus of media and politics. The election was notable for Hilary Clinton's nomination as the first female candidate to represent a major party, and the topic of her gender became an ongoing focus of media coverage throughout the election (Sorrentino, Augoustinos and LeCouteur 2021). The campaign and election of Donald Trump which Kray, Carroll and Mandell (2018) characterised as an unending spectacle of misogyny, racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, bullying, and the most venal, nationalistic, chest-thumping display of masculinity, all of which, succeeded in upending Clinton's aspirations of becoming the first woman president of the US. Gender, as an identity, a performance, a campaign strategy, a battleground, and a discourse, shaped the campaigns and ultimately the election. The historic nature of her campaign enabled Clinton to emphasise her feminine ideology through her campaign slogan "I'm with her", and she focused on her commitment to addressing and improving women's rights through policies and pledges (Valentino, Wayne and Ocen 2018). After Donald Trump accused Clinton of using her gender to advance her campaign by "playing the women card", the media mobilised discourses that undermined her arguments for gender equality, and framed her feminism as "old-fashioned", which in turn, delegitimised her as a candidate and emphasised Trump's claim of seeking special treatment for being a woman (Sorrentino, Augoustinos and LeCouteur 2022). The 2016 election provided a snapshot of candidates who presented a stark contrast on merits, and a challenge to the perceptions and model of being 'presidential'.

Gendered stereotypes, societal expectations and norms, and discourses were inherent through much of it, shaping electoral politics in the US. The 2020 election offered a chance to further examine the portrayal of a candidate's gender in US media; and as such, this research contributes to the field of politics, gender and media research.

### **1.1 Aim, objectives and research questions**

This research aims to assess how gendered the media coverage was of the televised debates for the Democratic Party 2020 US presidential candidate Party nominations, in order to investigate the ways gender is portrayed in the media, and to evaluate the significance of this portrayal. This aim will be met by addressing the following objectives:

- To identify and critically evaluate the construction of gender discourses in the media coverage of the Democratic Party nomination debates during the 2020 US presidential election (Fairclough 2010).
- To critically analyse how gendered the media coverage arising from the Democratic Party nomination debates was and to identify key themes relating to the theories selected for this research. Specifically, double bind (Jamieson 1995), symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978), gendered performance (Butler 1990) and masculinities (Connell 1995)
- To critically investigate the media landscape in the US, their political ideologies and how these correlate with aspects of gender in US politics.

To meet the aim and objectives, this thesis will endeavour to answer the following questions:

- How does the US media portray gender in coverage of the Democratic party nomination debates for the 2020 US presidential election?

- What are the key gender discourses arising from the analysis in this research and how are they constructed?
- How does the political ideology of a media outlet play a role in the way gender is portrayed in the coverage of an election?
- How might this research be useful in advancing awareness of gender equality within electoral politics and thereby potentially benefit future political campaigns of minority candidates?

An interpretivist position was adopted, in order to focus the research on the rich landscape of US politics, and ensure a wide scope for interpreting and analysing media discourse. Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010) was selected, in order to provide the foundation for analysis, as it is primarily concerned with studying both the opaque—and explicit—structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control, as manifested within language (Wodak and Meyer 2016). As Fairclough (2010) notes, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a framework which can delve into the connections between language and social-institutional practices and further to this, the relations between language as discourse and broader social-political structures.

## **1.2 Gendered politics**

The intersection of women and politics is a compelling and well-documented topic in the field of feminist research (Trimble et al 2013; Carlin and Winfrey 2009), and women have been, and remain, under-represented in politics across the globe (Paxton, Hughes and Barnes 2021, Ross 2017). The UN Women (2023) found that 15 countries have a woman as Head of State and 16 have a woman as head of government. They also found that women make up 22.8% of cabinet members who head ministries and lead a policy area, the most common being Women and Gender Equality, Family and Children's Affairs, Social Inclusion and Development, and Indigenous and Minority Affairs. This supports the interest in the field and offers a snapshot of the issue, albeit on a global scale.

Schaeffer (Pew Research Centre 2023) shows the US offers a similar picture with women making up 25% of the Senate and 28% of the House of Representatives. However, there appear to have been efforts to address inequality within the administration subsequent to the 2020 US election, as 48% of Joe Biden's current cabinet are women, the highest in history (former President Bill Clinton's was 41%) and three of the top cabinet posts are all being held by women for the first time. Certainly, there has been an increase in awareness around gender, equality and women's political representation in the media, as during the COVID-19 pandemic, women-led countries had better health outcomes (Garikipati and Kambhampati 2021) and were able to employ traditionally feminine attributes, such as caring and nurturing, which resulted in positive media coverage around their leadership (Johnson and Williams 2020). The increase in awareness around women and gender in politics has also brought higher and more intense levels of scrutiny from the public with Marjanovic, Stanczak and Augenstein (2021) finding that this interest is not as respectful or sincere as suggested. They analysed data from the online forum Reddit and found that women politicians were referred to by their first name and described in relation to their body, clothing, or families – narratives which were not extended to male politicians. This suggests an increase in awareness and engagement around gender equality, but the inherent sexism and misogynistic language remain.

Literature highlights the benefits of women's representation in politics, however, the concept of justice may simply be presented as a reason. Arguments that are shaped around fairness state that women are half the population and in the interest of justice, they are due the right to participate in politics on parity with men (Lovenduski 2005, Ross 2017). Lovenduski (2005) also acknowledges that this representation must be both descriptive and substantive, in order to be fully inclusive of women and their concerns. This connects with other arguments towards equality in that, the importance of achieving parity is more complex than the concept of fairness. Ross (2017) reinforces this by stating women do politics differently and therefore complement men's behaviours in contributing something distinctly different to politics.



Politics is an important arena for decision-making around policies, budgets and expenditures in which choices inevitably disadvantage some (Paxton, Hughes and Barnes 2021); gender parity would provide perspective and balance in this scenario. Women offer lived experiences which can provide perspective on issues across the board and their presence helps to break down stereotypes and norms around female leaders (Yeshaneh 2023). Electoral systems are part of the solution however, women, and other minority groups, are currently denied a fair and equal opportunity to shape their lives as a consequence of societal conventions, discrimination and bias, which is rooted in public consciousness and political systems.

There are many barriers women need to overcome, in order to enter and succeed in politics. Structural and legal barriers exist in some countries whilst gendered gaps in education, finance and resources may also discourage women and marginalise them from the political sphere (UNWomen 2023). Incumbency advantage can also act as an underlying mechanism to deny women political gains as they are historically held mostly by men who benefit from favouritism and gendered leadership stereotypes (Meserve, Pemstein and Bernhard 2018). Social and cultural barriers to women assuming caring and household responsibilities play into the dynamics of women's participation. Household income and breadwinning responsibilities can influence a woman's candidacy and can negatively affect women's ambition particularly if they are mothers (Bernhard, Shames and Teele 2020). Electoral rules have also been shown to matter, as proportional representational benefit women candidates more than majoritarian systems (Profeta and Woodhouse 2022), of which the US is the former (Abizadeh 2021). Underlying these issues is gender bias, fuelled by deep-rooted stereotypes, which is pervasive and problematic on a global scale. In addition to the patriarchal institutions and norms that position men and women differently, stereotypes can be one of the most significant and difficult obstacles women in leadership face (Liu 2019). The United Nations Development Program issued the Gender Social Norms Index (UNDP 2023), which found that across 85% of the global population included in the report, 9 out of 10 women and men hold a fundamental bias against women in leadership.

People's expectations and perceptions of women leaders are woven into their social DNA and women often must work twice as hard to achieve half as much. Men are typically considered to be tough, decisive, rational, and assertive leaders, whilst women are thought to be more honest, caring, compassionate and trustworthy (Paxton, Hughes and Barnes 2018; Savigny and Warner 2015). These stereotypes can raise fears and doubts about a woman's political capability, and when people cannot connect the "role" stereotype with the "person" stereotype, it invites discrimination and reluctance to support them (Nawadbin 2021). As Lovenduski (2014) notes, this raises important implications for women: they are less likely to be considered leaders and, when they do enter politics, they are often placed in a situation of adopting masculine traits to gain acceptance whilst inciting judgment for appearing "less feminine". This is known as a "double bind", and as Jamieson (1995) asserts, when a woman ventures outside of her "proper sphere" she is subjected to penalties, such as disdain and social sanctions, where she is caught in a gendered trap. Beyond this, Jamieson's series of double binds are used as a cornerstone for this research, and evidence was uncovered that supports the existence of—and real consequences for—women who venture outside of perceived norms around femininity. Progress is slow and much of it lies in the hands of men who remain in control of much of society, but research—like this study and the field it contributes to—offers an opportunity to advocate for change.

### **1.3 Media, gender and the public sphere**

The concept of the public sphere is a principle used in this research to understand and interpret the discourse analysis upon which the ideological perspectives of gender are based, and to consider how these sit within the wider social and cultural discourse in US politics. The idea was proposed by Habermas (1989) as a forum in which citizens can debate relevant issues, inform themselves of societal developments, and observe and control political and economic elites (Gerhards & Schäfer, 2010). Fraser (2002) notes Habermas proposed that the public sphere was distinct from the state, as the circulation of discourses can be critical of the it.

Through historical optics, the original concept was formed around 18th-century bourgeois society and has been challenged for its exclusionary approach to the political realm, with gender being a focal issue around participation (Fraser 2002, Harp 2019, Kellner 2024). Fraser (2002) argued that Habermas' bourgeois public sphere was not inclusive of other groups in society, and instead ensured political power for the few whose ideology was dominant. As Kellner (2024) notes, the concept assumes a position that celebrates liberal diversity and tolerance when, in reality, it was dominated by white, property-owning men, which resulted in the adjacent development of other public spheres that were devoted to working-class people and women. This reflects the current structure of American politics and media, in which some men dominate, through hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995) and patriarchal ideology is situated at the centre. When considering this research, according to the public sphere, competing gender ideologies are engaged in debate within the wider mediated discourse around the 2020 US presidential election. The public sphere is a place where social meanings are created, circulated, and contested: a primary arena for hegemony and social norms which facilitates the study of the discursive construction of social problems and social identities (Fraser 2002).

Gerhards and Schäfer (2010) posit that communication is at the heart of the public sphere, with mass media possessing a well-developed organisational infrastructure that is filled with journalists and experts, and where regular citizens are positioned in a passive role to receive news and information. They suggest that this has a significant impact on society due to the reach and ability to shape opinions, however, the power to select what is published lies at the top of organisations with editorial decision-making, and is therefore often subjected to the biases of associated political and economic demands. This poses a contradiction to the demands of democracy and the public sphere, therefore this research discusses the role the media plays in constructing, disseminating, and perpetuating gendered discourses through coverage around political debates.

The importance of this practice has been highlighted through coverage of the 2016 election, in which Graber and Dunaway (2022) suggest that Donald Trump's presidency provided a contemporary example of both the power and the failures of mass media in American politics. Working on the basis that the media played an important role in the 2020 presidential election, this research is inspired to continue the examination of political media coverage, and as such, the Democratic candidates provide a comprehensive case study for the analysis of gendered discourses that emerge.

#### **1.4 Gendered representation in the media**

As women's representation in US politics has grown, 53% of Americans believe there is further to go, and many see significant obstacles (Schaeffer 2023). In contemporary times, the political role of women has changed, and advances have been made, as evidenced in the current Biden administration. Yet, when women enter politics, they are subjected to discrimination in multiple ways, with one of the most significant being the relationship between women leaders and the media (Ross 2017, Harp Loke and Bachmann 2018, Gill 2007, Dittmar 2021 and Krijnen 2020). Horowitz and Goddard (2023) found Americans do not think a woman president would do better or worse than a man when it comes to key leadership traits or the handling of various policy areas. However, they found differences in the way women and men running for higher office are treated by the media, with many thinking women candidates are criticised more than men for showing emotions and having young children at home, among other attributes. Media events structure our understanding of who, and what, we are as a society, becoming highly visible spectacles that dominate the public consciousness, maximise attention, and become shared reference points for people across the social landscape (Fiske 2016).

The representation of gender exerts significant influence over feminine and masculine ideals (Richardson and Wearing 2014) and news media across the globe remains substantially gendered in terms of representation (Gill 2007; Savigny and Warner 2015; Ross 2017 and Paxton, Hughes and Barnes 2018).

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) began researching gender in news media in 1995, and every five years measures key indicators, which include gender bias, representation and stereotyping in the news (GMMP 2021). In their most recent report, they found that women make up only 25% of subjects and sources in the media globally, with North America and the Pacific region passing 30%, however, other regions included in the research, specifically Africa, Asia and the Middle East, were below the global average. They found that only 24% of persons heard, read about, or saw women in newspapers, television and radio news. This was also reflected in digital media, with women making up 26% of internet news stories and media news tweets. These statistics indicate that men dominate narratives and news stories, suggesting they are the cultural norm and standard in many contexts, and that women are second to this (Wood 2014). The lack of representation of women, and the gendered way they are portrayed, also reinforces stereotypes that essentially deter, discourage, and suppress women across society. Much research has focused on the problematic media discourses surrounding women in politics, offering insights into the troubling ways in which women have fared in political coverage (Harp, Loke and Bachmann 2018). Women politicians are often presented in the mainstream media as women first, and politicians second, in stories that should focus on their policies, but instead foreground their personal lives, appearance and gender (Ross 2017 and Harp 2019), culminating in a “personalisation of politics” that has come to characterise political reporting in industrialised democracies (Trimble et al 2013).

This research reveals similar treatment of the women politicians participating in the televised Democratic Party nomination debates, with media coverage that focused on women’s appearance, demeanour, backgrounds, and emotions: an array of characteristics and behaviours which distract from their politics and can shape a gendered judgement from voters. The gendered media portrayal of politicians extends to men, but in a much reduced and different capacity. They were not subjected to the same harmful gendered discourses as the women politicians; however, masculinity and its associations came to light around matters of military service, age, parenthood, and some characteristics associated with leadership stereotypes, such as assertiveness and risk.

Löffler, Luyt and Starck (2020) suggest there has been a rise in the discourse surrounding masculinity and its place in society, which they speculate may be connected to political leadership. They submit that historically, masculinity operated as a de facto norm for political leadership, supported and perpetuated by gendered stereotypes and structures within society, but contemporary leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Boris Johnson and Donald Trump valorise masculinity, and thereby promote its relationship with politics. Arguably, male political leadership is a diverse display of masculinities, ranging from softer leaders, such as President Barack Obama and Joe Biden, who both present a distinctly different masculinity than that of John McCain and George Bush. It could be suggested that gender suffers from generalisation and underrepresentation in the media, with an intersectional approach lacking in the wider mediated discourse. Whilst a significant amount of research has been done over the years that looks at the representation of women in the media (Byerly and Ross 2006; Ross 2017; Harp 2019 and Paxton, Hughes and Barnes 2020), insights gained suggest that understanding the social forces that construct masculinity (i.e. a smaller field), would also have benefits towards minimising harmful narratives and stereotypes in society (Löffler, Luyt and Starck 2020).

Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) has gained traction and importance as an analytical tool that can provide insight into the power relations of race, class and gender, which intersect to affect aspects of the social world, including discrimination (Connell 2021, Collins and Bilge 2020). The GMMP (2021) acknowledges that it has become a framework for understanding how people's political, social, and cultural identities combine to create modes of discrimination and privilege, and research in the media would therefore be useful to examine their connectedness. In this study, Pete Buttigieg provides an example of how his gender as a (white) male offered advantages often associated with masculine leadership, but his sexuality as a gay man, intersected with his political identity, acting as a barrier to participation, and invoked discourses that discriminated against him purely for this reason.

## **1.5 Research context**

From the feminist viewpoint, the 2016 election was a crossroads, and America chose the wrong way, with 2020 leading it further down that road (Peele et al 2022). 2016 was a fascinating and incredibly important time for gender and politics, as the presidential campaign between Trump and Clinton unfolded in a mediated world, which documented every moment (Harp 2019). Hillary Clinton's campaign marked a crack in the glass ceiling of the presidency (Knuckey 2018), whilst Trump's campaign and presidency were characterised by misogynistic attacks and performances in hyper-masculinity (Peele et al 2022). Much has been made of the role the media played in Donald Trump's success. Whilst more than 200 newspapers supported Clinton, Trump received the backing of fewer than 20, and some felt Trump's success was a sign that the media failed to communicate the truth with enough force and ultimately gave Trump too much unfiltered airtime (Happer, Hoskins and Merrin 2019, and Patterson 2023). Morini (2020) argues that Trump has a media manipulation strategy. Days after the inauguration, then-chief strategist, Steve Bannon, gave an interview to *The New York Times* stating that the media was the opposition, not the Democratic Party (Grynbaum 2017 and Kenny 2019). This was supported by what Morini (2020) refers to as a "disintermediating" campaign, which essentially focused Trump's communication through social media, thereby eliminating the mainstream media and the cycle of presidential advisors. Further to this, they propose that (the social media site formerly known as) Twitter—Trump's social media of choice—privileges discourse that is simple, impulsive, and uncivil, an environment created through the platform's lack of formality, and whilst his engagement may have been authentic, the site favours emotional language over rational. This suggests the platform is oppositional to the traditional concept of the public sphere, in the sense that these characteristics are less than ideal for fostering democratic conversations. Fake news is not new to the current political conjuncture, but the political rise of Donald Trump has made the term ubiquitous, and raised several issues for the management of democratic political cultures (Schapals, Bruns and McNair 2019).

It can be defined as news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers (Allcott and Gentzkow 2017). Schapals, Bruns and McNair (2019) argue that Trump has subverted the concept and deployed it against his opponents, while at the same time indulging in relentless fakery himself. Trump's unorthodox media strategy, and the escalation in interest and awareness around gender, imbued the build-up to the 2020 election, where, historically, the Democratic Party fielded the most diverse set of candidates to vie for the nomination (Powell, Butterfield and Jiang 2022).

This presented an opportunity to investigate the portrayal of gender in the media during an election. People gain information on presidential elections primarily from commercial media, with public radio and broadcasts also spotlighting elections. However, the capitalist nature of commercial media can act to limit agendas, as viewer statistics and profits remain prime objectives (Belensky 2018). Taking into account the role of the media in the 2016 election, and in the interest of revealing potential political bias in coverage, a range of media outlets from across the political spectrum were selected for this research.

Further to this, decades of research show political debates are an opportunity for viewers to learn about issues and form opinions on political candidates (Winneg and Jamieson 2017), as well as offer a relatively unmediated performance of the political contenders and their policies (Voth 2017). Minow (2008) notes the debates between John F. Kennedy and President Nixon in 1960 were a world first in face-to-face encounters between major political party candidates, and that Kennedy (who was not nearly as well-known as Nixon) claims he would not have won the election without them. They have been a regular, and expected, part of elections since then, and in 2016, became a key platform for Trump to elevate his political rhetoric and campaign. The 2016 presidential debates were the most watched in US history, with 84 million viewers (Nielsen 2016), and were thus a major factor for 82% of voters: no other communication opportunity offered the reach in the audience (Voth 2017).



However, in 2016, unlike previous years, the debates featured several contextual upsets. Before the first one, Trump alleged his opponent's team had rigged the debate process, the second debate was overshadowed by the release of a tape that featured Trump making comments some regarded as an admission of sexual assault, and the final debate was dominated by his suggestion that if he should lose the election, he may not accept the result (Winneg and Jamieson 2017). Debates are not mandated, but are an intrinsic part of the election process and in 2020, they marked the beginning of the Democratic Party's attempt to win back the presidency, and show the American public their values and political aspirations. The group of candidates (Appendix 1) were diverse in terms of age, gender and geography, and the main politicians who were present in November 2019, when this research began, were: Tom Seyer, Andrew Yang, Kamala Harris, Tulsi Gabbard, Amy Klobuchar, Pete Buttigieg, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden, with Michael Bloomberg joining the race in January 2020 (Panetta and Cranley 2020).

## **1.6 Summary of research**

This research found that women remain a minority group in politics, and there is evidence of gendered discourses that contribute and sustain barriers that diminish their presence and contribution in politics. Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010) was used to reveal the construction of mediated discourses that featured throughout the media coverage of the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election.

In addition, gender-based theories—symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978), double binds (Jamieson 1995), gender performance (Butler 1990) and masculinities (Connell 1995)—were woven throughout this media coverage and are therefore highlighted in this research. Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) was introduced to this research and used to complement the previously chosen theories. This research builds on existing literature about women in politics and how gendered media portrayals can harm political viability. It emphasises the privilege hegemonic masculinity can bring into politics, through established leadership stereotypes and societal norms.

The impact of this research lies in its efforts to advance gender equality within society through analysing discourses that are constructed around gendered stereotypes and narratives that prove detrimental to political candidates. Further to this, the construction of these discourses is analysed to gain insight into how they work to inform and perpetuate bias within the wider political discourse. This research can be used to aid minority candidates in forming strategies that negate the impact of these biases on their political campaigns, and thus present an image that is representative of their opinions, beliefs and politics.

This chapter has introduced the research topic by providing information on gender in politics, the media and the US political landscape. The setting of the case study used is explained, both with reference to the US media and the presidential election of 2020. Wider situational factors, such as the 2016 presidential election and the candidate campaigns are also noted. This provided a rationale for the research by emphasising the disparity and bias of gender within US politics. The chapter also provides the aim, objectives, and research questions for the study itself.

The second chapter presents a review of the literature relating to the disciplines that inform this research. An understanding of the US media landscape and an appreciation of literature around past elections, particularly within the US political system, were fundamental to this study. The purpose of this was to develop an understanding, not only of the relevance of the literature within these disciplines and topics, but of the relationships which exist between these disciplines.

The third chapter of the thesis presents a review of key theories that were selected for the research. Key theories, including the double bind (Jamieson 1995), symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978), gendered performance (Butler 1990) and masculinities (Connell 1995), are discussed in relation to their value towards this research. Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) is also included, whilst this framework was not initially part of the early stages, it emerged naturally through the literature as a constructive way to support deeper analysis of gender within the data.

The fourth chapter offers an explanation and justification of the methodological approaches taken within the research. It provides a background to the qualitative research paradigm used: Critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010). It also addresses the construction of the methodological tools, such as selecting a corpus of texts, sampling, and coding, and explains both how, and why, these were developed.

The fifth chapter presents the findings of the research about the debates, which were part of the case study. These findings are conceptualised using Fairclough's CDA (2010), and a summary is provided to highlight the notable discourses and themes that were uncovered.

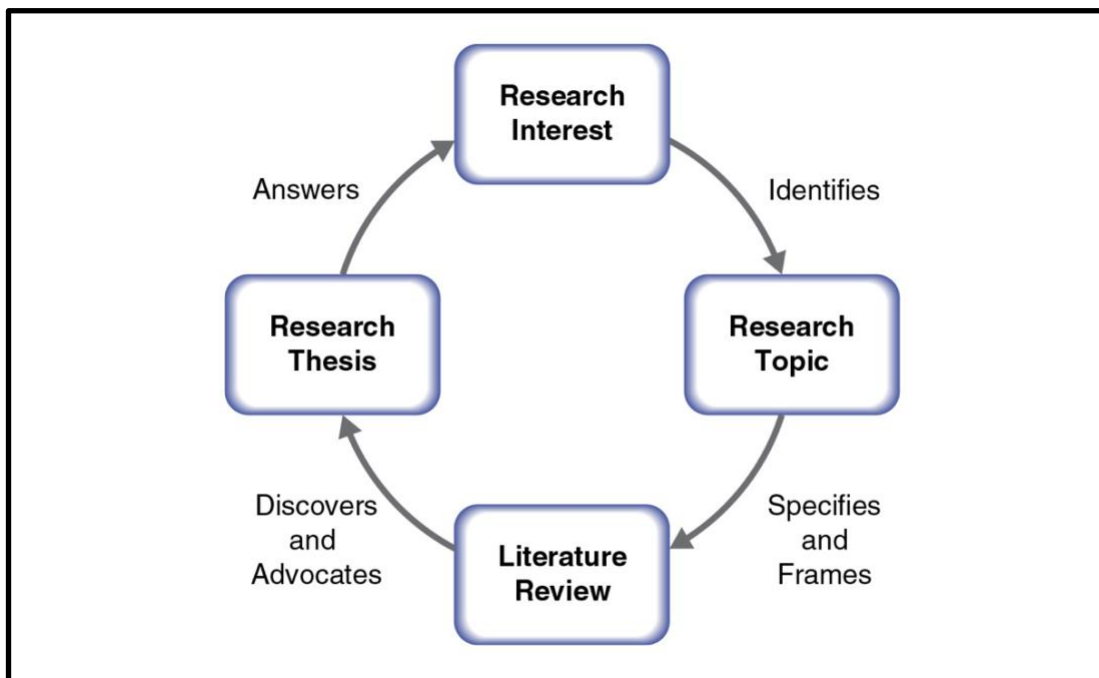
The sixth chapter identifies and discusses the key insights from the research and relates them to the literature. Lastly, the seventh chapter concludes the thesis. It reflects on the theoretical contributions made by the thesis, identifies the limitations of the research, provides suggestions for future research in related areas and discusses the potential impact of the study.

## **2.0 Literature review**

A thorough, comprehensive literature review is the foundation and inspiration for substantial and useful research (Boote and Beile 2005). A review also identifies a gap in existing literature, creating independence and originality in the research (Creswell 2009, Durdella 2019). The purpose of this exercise is to develop a case, in order to establish the thesis (Machi and McEvoy 2016), position the study within the larger field of literature, and provide a framework for establishing a gap in the research and the importance of the study (Creswell 2009). Literature is fundamental to the design and process of this research, providing grounding, context, and creating a cohesive summary of existing knowledge within the field of gender, media, and politics. Additionally, this exercise also works to provide a robust lens through which analysis and interpretation are carried out (Durdella 2019), and provides a benchmark to compare results, which enhances the explanatory power of the findings (Creswell 2009).

Secondary research has been carried out through an extensive analysis of literature, in order to give an overview of gender theory in relation to the media landscape in the US, along with their political ideologies and how these correlate with aspects of gender in US politics. The sections within this literature review outline and present context for investigating the way media portray gender within media coverage of electoral politics, specifically the Democratic Party debates that were held for the party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election.

This research follows a combination of the diagram below, by Boote and Beile (2005), which shows the flow of the process and steps laid out by Creswell (2009) to conduct a review of the literature.



**Image 1 - The Literature Review (Boote and Beile 2005).**

Beginning with the research interest of gender, media, and politics, topics were defined, including any potential keywords that might have emerged through identifying the topic and with an initial read of the literature (Creswell 2009). The following topics were decided upon to lead the search:

- Gender in the media
- Politics in the media
- Gender in politics

This provided a frame for the research to begin. The search was then carried out through the RGU library system, to locate academic journals and books, as well as on Google web search, to find further literature on the topics, such as reports from organisations like the United Nations and OECD, along with other charities that fund research into the field, such as Emily's List and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in the Media. Longitudinal studies, such as the GMMP, along with governmental websites and news media, were also found through Google searching and guidance from the supervisory team.

The key topics were further refined to include the terms "masculinity, feminism, US media, US politics, Democratic Party and Republican Party", and the "2016 US presidential election". This focused the research within the context of US politics and shaped the rationale for using the 2020 US presidential election as a case study.

Through reading the literature, key theories that had historical precedence within the fields of gender, politics and media were selected, in order to add to the framework of the study and build on the methodology. These were Jamieson's double bind (1995), Butler's gender performativity (1990), symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978) and Connell's masculinities (1995). The research began in 2019 and research around the 2020 US presidential election was added to the literature review, as it emerged throughout the stages of the study.

With a focus on gender in the media, sub-sections exploring literature around media power and agendas, and the way women and men politicians are portrayed in the news, are explored. Following this, a section around gender in politics is included, with subsections encompassing feminism and masculinity within a political context, along with a further sub-section, which looks at women's representation in politics, and the concepts of the glass ceiling and the glass cliff: barriers unique to women and often cited in literature around female politicians. Finally, the remaining sections contain a review of literature on US media, the emerging literature on the 2020 US presidential election and the concept of Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), which was uncovered as a significant perspective for this study, and is featured prominently throughout contemporary research within the field of gender, politics and media.

This research fills a gap that incorporates perspectives from gender, media, and politics, within the context of a political election, and draws a specific focus on Democratic Party candidates and political debates. Currently, no research exists which encompasses all these areas in unison. The literature review uncovered research at the intersection of gender in the media: the longitudinal research from GMMP (2021) and Ross et al (2016).

In the political context, research by Byerly and Ross (2006), Ross (2013 and 2017), Haraldsson and Wängnerud (2018) and McKay (2020a) provide insight. The area of women in politics is also well established by Celis and Childs (2011), who examined Sarah Palin in the 2008 US presidential election, Plumb (2017) who investigated Hilary Clinton, and Paxton, Hughes and Barnes (2021) who looked more broadly at gender ratios, as is the area of men's representation in politics by Coe et al., (2007) who examined George Bush's communications, Cannen (2013) who looked into Obama's media portrayal and Smith (2016) who investigated the 'new man' discourse around British prime ministers Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and later, David Cameron. Studies around feminism in politics exist (McRobbie 2011; Loke, Bachmann and Harp, 2016 and Banet-Weiser 2018), including an examination of a partisan split in feminist ideology in the US, by Hansan and Dolan (2022).

Again, this is followed by research uncovered that explores masculinity in politics from President Bush (McDermott 2016), and a significant measure of studies around President Trump and his masculinity (Johnson 2017, Smirnova 2018, Cottais and Lee 2021). The 2020 US presidential election inspired some research, with Winfrey and Carlin (2023) exploring the appointment of Kamala Harris and the glass ceiling in politics and, Graber and Dunaway (2022) analysing the media agenda and type of coverage generated by the Democratic Party nomination process. Further to this, the notion of intersectionality is explored through the lens of race by Nee (2022), who connected women's representation in politics and Kamala Harris' appointment to VP, as well as in terms of voting blocs by Cortina and Rottinghaus (2022), who analysed the discourse around the Latino population, along with Chen, Nguy and Masuoka (2022), who focused on the Asian-American vote and media discourse. Lastly, Magni and Reynolds (2023) investigated voter opinion and responses to Pete Buttigieg's candidacy, and how it intersected with his sexuality and religion.

## **2.1 Gender in the media**

This section provides an overview of the literature on media power, and how the news is constructed and shaped. Literature around political news and how women and men politicians are represented follows, in order to build a picture of the current key perspectives within the field, and to establish roots for this research.

### **2.1.1 Media power**

Habermas (1989) argues that the dynamics of mass communication are driven by the power of the media to select—and shape the presentation of—messages, and by the strategic use of political and social power to influence agendas, as well as triggering and framing public issues. The concept has become influential in debates about how structures can be created and maintained to ensure that people can communicate freely. For example, public broadcasting services like the *BBC*, *ABC* and *PBS* are, to an extent, constitutionally and legislatively protected from interference from governments in their daily operations (Balnaves, Donald and Shoesmith 2009). The exception to this status lies during times of national crisis such as World War II, when responsibility for the *BBC* was moved from the Postmaster General's Office to the Ministry of Information. A move which brought the corporation mostly under governmental control, in order to shape broadcasts for political and security reasons, with some suggesting it was used for propaganda purposes, whilst others suggest the move was to inspire unity and fighting spirit among the British people (Stourton 2018).

In the contemporary media environment, there are multiple channels and alternative versions of news readily available, and citizens can make choices between them for themselves (Meikle and Redden 2011). However, Branston and Stafford (2010) have observed this widening of the media environment, and they stress that the increased importance of news and its reach within society matters, particularly for democratic governments in which citizens have access to reliable and accurate information and analysis.



Indeed, through critiquing Habermas's public sphere theory, Lunt and Livingstone (2013) point to a democratic deficit during the 1960s and 1970s, in which a crisis in civil rights, politics and protests led to problems of political apathy, representative democracy and the welfare state softening class divisions and increasing intrusion of public administration into private lives. They argue that these changes in the public sphere led to Habermas identifying a more destructive role for the media, and instead of promoting public autonomy, the press became a vehicle for established power. They draw attention to the media organisations that were converging across borders while genres became hybrids, platforms digitised and audiences diverged within—and across—cultures, leading to a mass media that was interactive, networked across the globe, and commercially driven.

The media is an important source of information for citizens, and is a channel of communication between policymakers and the electorate (Esser and Strömbäck 2014). This, and the fact that politics is mediated, forms the cornerstone for any perspective on media influence—or media effects—on political communication (Thesen 2013). Given that the media hold the key to the public sphere and can have a major influence on public opinion formation, by political actor or institution can afford not to consider the media (Esser and Strömbäck 2014). McComb (2006) observes that for nearly all concerns on the public agenda, citizens deal with a second-hand reality structured by journalist's reports about these events and situations. He emphasises that through the selection and dissemination of the news, the news media focus attention on, influence perceptions about, and influence the salience of, these events.

Iyengar and Hahn (2009) demonstrated that demand for news varies with the perceived affinity of the news organisation to the consumer's political preference. They discovered that Conservatives and Republicans preferred to read news reported by *Fox News*, and tend to avoid *CNN* and *NPR*, whilst Democrats and Liberals exhibited the opposite behaviour. Edgerly (2015) builds on this, arguing that media choice is the most defining characteristic of the current media landscape, leading to concerns about the state of democracy, due to the fragmented nature of news across several outlets.

The research highlights the tendency for audiences to gravitate towards sources that reinforce their ideological viewpoints, which are often diluted, and of lower quality and accuracy. The study found that whilst some citizens have clear, ideologically based repertoires spanning multiple media platforms, some were found to consume both conservative and liberal news sources: however, the sources were classified as "soft news", such as late-night talk shows and television dramas, rather than news media. Oh, Park and Wanta (2011) used the concept of hostile media perception to explore differences in perceived media bias during the US presidential elections in 2000 and 2008. They established that both Republicans and Democrats held hostile media perceptions in both elections, with electoral engagement and political identity being strong indicators however, the rate was higher among Republicans overall. Morris (2007) highlights *Fox News* as a key beneficiary of news fragmentation, due to perceived political media bias. The research examined data from four Pew Research Centre surveys on media consumption across 2003/2004 and confirmed perceived media bias in favour of each audience's partisanship, with *Fox News* being the primary source for Republicans. In addition to political bias, the *Fox News* audience also had a different view on the state of international affairs, particularly, that the war in Iraq was progressing well. This research suggests that Americans were getting different versions of the same issues and events, which may hinder the chances of political moderation, encourage polarised views and entrench factions between the mass public. More recently, Hollander (2018) conducted research into conspiracy theories that were reported in the news media in the US, and how the practice threatens the health of democracy, especially for those citizens who also suspect powerful forces work against their interests. The study used national survey data, which demonstrated such beliefs have both partisan and individual difference explanations, and whilst generic news exposure offered little insight, a key finding was that exposure to *Fox News* programming led to greater beliefs in theories that are critical to Democrats. This contemporary study could be viewed as a realisation of McCombs (1972) work around the agenda-setting function of the mass media. McCombs investigated the agenda-setting capacity of the mass media in the 1968 US presidential campaign, and tried to match what Chapel Hill voters *said* were the key issues with media content produced at the time.

100 voters were interviewed and media content was analysed, finding that the media appeared to exert a considerable impact on voter's judgements of what they considered major issues of the campaigns. This emphasises the strong relationship between the two, and it is plausible that an agenda-setting function exists within the mass media.

The mass media can have a crucial influence on the way citizens think about, and relate to, politics (Eberl, Boomgaarden and Wagner, 2015). The Pew Research Centre (2020) found that roughly 9 out of 10 adults receive at least some news online, and the online space has become a host for digital homes for both legacy news outlets and new, "born on the web" publishers. Levin (2019) notes that most newsrooms and journalists have done a very poor job of upholding the tenants of their profession, and many millions of Americans do not respect them or trust them as credible, fair-minded, and unbiased new sources. Levin cites a poll by Gallup (2018) in which nearly 80% of Republicans distrust the media, while nearly 80% of Democrats trust the media. He believes that it suggests the public's attitude towards the modern media is largely divided along ideological lines and political associations.

### **2.1.2 Constructing the news**

News is an inherently dynamic entity, shaped by social environments (Berkowiz and Liu 2019), and the media are crucial to the circulation of discourse and information within the public sphere (Fiske 2016).

Habermas' public sphere provides the cornerstone of the relationship between media and democracy (Whal-Jorgenson 2019), however within the media, the selection of which stories are published and the construction of these, lies with editors. In addition, the construction of news is based on a consensus from shared values from inside an organisation (Berkowiz and Liu 2019). As Meikle and Redden (2011) further explain, the concept of "gatekeeping" is used by journalists and news staff as a process to filter information, and ultimately choose to privilege one story over another, creating as *The New York Times's* slogan suggests "all the news that's fit to print".

Bednarek and Caple (2017) suggest the degree of newsworthiness, or persuading an audience that an item is worthy of being published and therefore, of their attention, is based around the concept of news values. They cite, for example, factors such as proximity, negativity, superlativeness, timeliness and unexpectedness, which can all be included in the construction of news. Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig (2003) investigated how gender affects professional news selections, finding that a scale of newsworthiness, not influenced by gender, exists inherently, due to decades of male-dominated newsrooms, and is a function of audience interest. They argue that wider cultural changes through the 1980s and 1990s led to a higher number of women readers, and would therefore increase the relevance of news that reflects women's interests, regardless of the gender dynamics within news organisations. The traditional criterion of selecting the news revolves around the newsworthiness of the story. Ruoho and Torkkola (2018) state that gender is present in the processes, practices, images and ideologies of journalism and its power distributions.

The study of women's representation reflects the gendered patterns in which women are underrepresented, and the biases and assumptions of those who define the agendas (Gallagher 2001). As the Global Media Monitoring Project has shown, women are only 25% of the subjects and sources of news stories (GMMP 2020). This highlights the falsehood in the news media's claim of offering a truthful and objective reflection of reality when they, in fact, only offer a male perspective (D'Heer et al 2019). The role of objectivity as a dominant norm in US journalism can be viewed as problematic in itself as (Schmidt 2023) it often fails to account for subjectivity, fails to acknowledge social inequalities for marginalised groups and fails to address concealed structures of power. Further to this, research by the Reuters Institute measuring women in leadership within global media markets, shows only 22% of the top editors in 240 media brands are women and they make up only 40% of journalists within these companies (Eddy et al 2023).

Gallagher (2001) notes that although the connection between content and the individuals who produce it is accentuated by other factors, such as economics, policies and professional values, it is possible to view the impact of content produced by women. This recent research recognises the importance of leadership that reflects the diversity within societies.

### **2.1.3 Gendered Mediated Politics**

Graber (2005) suggests political communication can be defined as the construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that have a significant direct, or indirect, impact on politics. They specify that the defining point of a message is the political effect it has on the thinking, beliefs and behaviours of individuals, groups, institutions, and whole societies. Supporting this, Savigny (2016) suggests that a more inclusive approach considers citizens not as passive receptors, but rather, as agents that may choose to resist, reframe, rewrite, and recommunicate these messages politically. Indeed, this is reflective of Hall's model of mass communication (1980), in which he highlights the hegemonic reading of mass media texts. The audience, through an active role, may decode the meaning in different ways. Hall proposes three ways: dominant, where the reader fully shares the codes, and accepts and reproduces the preferred reading; negotiated reading, in which the reader partly accepts the code, but sometimes resists and modifies it in a way that reflects their own position, experiences and interests; or, oppositional reading, in which the reader understands the text, but does not share the code and rejects it, bringing them to an alternative frame of reference. This implies the concept is fluid, with the media positioned as both the interpreter and the carrier of political communication. As Sanders (2009) observes, the mainstream media are political actors in the contemporary political landscape, with their position granted due to their ethical foundations within the democracy of the public's right to know. Chadwick (2017) suggests actors in this system are building relationships with the media that are consistently changing, and are based upon mutual interdependence, and simultaneous concentrations and diffusions of power.

He states the defining characteristics of these relationships are the ability to create or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals, and in ways that prioritise themselves above others, within a range of older and newer media settings. This dependency positions media visibility as an index of power for politicians, and in turn, media organisations and journalists are afforded the privilege of being the people's tribune (Sanders 2009). Coren (2015) argues that the media can influence political discourse during elections, promote transparency and determine the importance of political information for citizens. He believes it is the primary source for citizens to gather information on the performance of political institutions and adjust their attitudes accordingly. Mazzoleni and Shulz (1999) believe politics have become "mediatized", in the sense that it has lost its autonomy, has become dependent on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media. Savingny and Warner (2015) suggest the media holds particular power in constructing the public sphere on information and editorial decisions, on coverage and on events that are dependent on their suitability and adaptability to the rules of the media system.

This revolving door between media and politics is responsible for much of the coverage surrounding politics, and many women politicians are subjected to a different standard of media portrayal (Ross and Byerly 2006; Campus 2013, Ross 2017 and Loke, Bachman and Harp 2018). The media are potentially powerful channels of information in a society: the messages they transmit can change or reinforce social norms and behaviours, provide frameworks for interpretation, mobilise citizens to take progressive actions, and of course, entertain (UN Women 2023). Many of these functions are reinforced during election campaigns, where the media becomes the principal forum in which electoral competition is played out (Chadwick 2017). However, whilst there has been much progress globally in women's equality, two areas in which development is slow, are the representation of women in media and in politics (Byerly and Ross 2006 and Ross 2017). The UN Women, a United Nations entity working for the empowerment of women (2023), observes that, ideally, the media should strive for accuracy and impartiality, but in reality, there are often imbalances in coverage – particularly in terms of gender, and within an electoral context.

They emphasise the fundamental importance of the need to preserve pluralism of information, and for citizens to have the right to be able to take stock of the political options, the candidacies, and their proposals. The GMMP (2020) provides further detail in their research that found political stories dominate the news (24% of their total sample) however, only 20% of these feature women (GMMP 2020). The report also draws attention to the further lack of diversity within this representation, by suggesting the marginalisation is multiple, when considering other factors, such as race, ethnicity, disability, immigration status, sexuality and religion (GMMP 2020 p.28). Ross et al., (2016) used data collected for the 2015 GMMP, within the UK, to reveal that in addition to the gendered discrepancy in representation, women are also portrayed within the private sphere as wives, mothers and victims, rather than experts and professionals. They concede that women do feature in some political coverage, but media representation did not map to the presence of women who hold positions within national parliaments, and that the media still select male politicians to appear in their publications.

#### **2.1.4 Women politicians in the media**

Much of the research within the field of women, media and politics has found that media coverage of women in politics is regularly stereotypical, sexualized, and sexist, with discourses that cast gender as a burden for females, rather than as an asset or a neutral trait (Harp, Loke and Bachmann 2018). Several studies have found that women candidates are far more likely to have their gender marked in news coverage than men (Byerly and Ross 2006; Carlin and Winfrey 2009; Gervais and Hillard 2011 and Dittmar 2016), suggesting that media narratives and gender stereotypes may not have evolved as much as previously thought, and that they are deeply entrenched in society. Sanghvi and Hodges (2015) found that female politicians, when compared to males, faced biased media coverage and more attention was paid to their physical appearance. A woman's appearance is used as an indicator of her character flaws and becomes a point of reference for determining whether she is performing an intelligible and acceptable version of gender in the public realm.

They concluded that the unrelenting objectification of her appearance makes a female candidate seem less competent or effective, and can create significant disadvantages for female candidates that negatively impact election outcomes.

Aaldering and Van Der Pas (2018) conducted a large-scale content analysis of Dutch newspapers from 2006 to 2012 to study gender differences in the portrayal of political leaders. Traits including tough, independent, assertive, knowledgeable and effective were considered for males, and traits such as passive, gentle, compassionate, honest and attractive were considered for females. The results showed that men politicians received more coverage on male leadership traits, which they believe has electoral consequences and may contribute to explaining the underrepresentation of women in politics. Mavin, Bryans and Cunningham (2010) further this by advocating that women leaders face a dilemma of either being feminine or "business-like": babes or bitches, and in turn face assumptions around their competency, which manifests itself in negative perceptions of them. They considered the UK media coverage of female politicians around the time of the 2010 UK election, in which David Cameron won for the Conservative Party, against Gordon Brown for the Labour Party, and in which a historical 142 women MPs were voted in. They found evidence of women politicians, such as Theresa May, who was Home Secretary at the time, and Harriet Harman, the Deputy Labour leader, were perceived as doing gender well, when they were associated with, or evaluated against, other women in their field or when they were demonstrating "communal" behaviours, such as family or women's issues. Further evidence of this came from the women's appearance and dress when they aligned with gendered expectations and femininity. Ultimately, this portrayal resulted in under-reporting of the women leaders engaging in political debate or international relations, and marked them further from the male leadership ideals; and therefore inappropriate for roles in politics. Research on similar issues conducted by O'Neill, Savigny and Cann (2015), questioned if UK media coverage over 20 years constructed men politicians as the social norm, reducing the visibility of women in politics, and if this acted as a deterrent for women taking part in parliamentary politics.



Overall, they found a refreshingly good mix of coverage, however there were periods of time when women were becoming less visible as the proportion of women politicians increased. This insight mirrors that of Ross et al., (2016), as mentioned earlier, in that increased political representation did not result in increased public exposure. They also found periodically, the UK press resorted to misogynist, gendered stereotypes or frames, such as emotional fragility and humourless harridan, which were tactically employed to undermine women in public life.

The literature suggests that political status does not impact or improve the gendered angle of media representation for women politicians. McKay (2020a) examined the media representation of two key political figures, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, and her opposition Johan Lamont, after a televised debate during the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum. Using critical discourse analysis, the Scottish media yielded evidence of generalisations of a feminised political style and the belief that a woman's political performance should adhere to specific behavioural expectations. Problematic discourses were uncovered, such as alluding to women sounding shrill in their "incessant rantage" of arguments, and being portrayed metaphorically as animalistic (as a catfight) and intoxicated (sounding like a dentist's drill on Dexedrine). This coverage implies that they failed to debate the political issues and draws focus to problematic gendered discourses.

Similarly, in Canadian politics, Thomas et al., (2020) specifically focused on women as Canadian heads of government, in terms of representation within the media, assuming that given the importance of the position, attention would be granted towards political issues, rather than adopting the gendered differences presented throughout the literature. However, they found significantly more use of feminine vocabulary used to describe female heads of government in the media, and they received more attention towards families and spouses than men. The implications drawn from this study are comparable with those of McKay (2020a), in that it evaluates women as "inauthentic and ineffective" because they are women, and quantifies the media representation of women politicians.

Moving into literature that examines American politics, similar discourses have historically surrounded other women politicians, as Carroll (2009) found with Hilary Clinton and her 2008 campaign for the Democratic nomination. Clinton succeeded in establishing herself as “strong”, to counter the perception of women being weak, however this strategy led the media to highlight her lack of humanity, warmth and humour. Harp, Loke and Bachmann (2016) analysed articles from eight US news websites covering Clinton’s congressional testimony as U.S. Secretary of State in 2013 about the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya. They found that the news discourse employed stereotypical feminine frames, questioned her competence as a leader and hinted at a new bind, pitting competence against authenticity, with Clinton’s emotional displays during the hearing deemed as either a lack of control that undermined her capability or an insincere show of emotion to escape blame for the situation. Research stemming from her 2016 presidential campaign against Donald Trump also supports Clinton’s strategy of adopting a masculine performance and found media coverage focused on emotions, and positioned candidates as outsiders or insiders depending on gender (Harp 2019, Harmer, Savigny and Siow 2020). Cassese and Holmman (2018) fixed their study on an accusation from Trump that Clinton was “using the gender card”, in order to gain support and defame him. They found that Trump’s rhetoric around the statement triggered more support from his followers and created a widespread discourse of hostile sexism towards her, which held accusations of Clinton seeking special favours because of her gender, and which was ultimately relatively effective in damaging her political chances.

Sarah Palin, the Conservative governor of Alaska and former Vice Presidential candidate, also features in literature around gender and American politics, often in comparison to Clinton. Media coverage, specifically from *The New York Times*, of the 2008 US presidential election, was analysed for gendered traits and revealed stereotypical trends that heavily emphasised the women’s novelty in politics and gave more attention to masculinised content that favoured the male candidates (Meeks 2013). Despite the women representing opposing political parties, they faced the same barriers to political participation, because of their gender.

Both women represented significant progress towards shattering the glass ceiling, but despite shortcomings in each campaign, the mediatized sexism was part of the national dialogue, with numerous examples of stereotypes around motherhood, appearances and leadership styles (Carlin and Winfrey 2009). Gervais and Hillard (2011) found that whilst Sarah Palin's appearance and mannerisms were often regarded as appropriately feminine, they violated descriptive norms for leadership roles. When considering her gender performance during her campaigns, she served as an example of a complex blend of masculinity and femininity (Harp, Loke and Bachman 2010), drawing on elements of masculinised leadership characteristics; a representation Clinton has also been found to present (Carol 2009, Harp 2019, Harmer, Savigny and Siow 2020).

The literature discussed above demonstrates the breadth of barriers women in politics experience that can act to prevent them from participating equally in politics. However, some literature points to a more favourable portrayal of women in more recent times, for example around leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Johnson and Williams (2020) looked at the displays of masculine and feminine leadership traits during the pandemic, finding that men political leaders drew upon their traditional role as "head of the household", displaying forms of masculine protectionism, whereas women leaders drew on their traditional motherly role, to display forms of feminine protectionism, such as caring for the sick. They found media coverage was more favourable towards women leaders than it had been previously, and demonstrated these leaders had managed to leverage a woman's role within the home to their advantage within the political sphere. The authors cite Trump and his administration as a perceived failure of masculinity for drawing criticism around the way the pandemic was handled in the US, and contrast this with New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Arden, who led with empathy and comfort, suggesting New Zealanders be kind and caring to fellow citizens. Other women leaders who drew praise for their approach were Norwegian Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, who held a press conference specifically for children, in order to answer their questions, and German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who has a PhD in quantum physics and won plaudits for her clear explanations of the infection spread rates.

Media coverage praised women leaders, however they continued to draw from traditional gendered stereotypes by describing them with adjectives, such as "kind", "caring" and "sincere", while also mentioning their attire, such as "Arden was wearing a sweater". The difference is that these narratives are usually used as a way to disadvantage women in politics, by underlining their gendered differences from men leaders, whereas the pandemic meant they were now celebrated as more "relatable and sincere".

Focusing on a time outside of the pandemic, Hayes and Lawless (2015) conducted content analysis of local newspaper coverage from 350 US House of Representatives districts, combined with nationally representative survey data from the 2010 midterms, and found that journalist's portrayals and citizen's assessment of women candidates stemmed primarily from partisanship, ideology and incumbency, rather than the sex of the candidate. This suggests the campaign environment is likely to be more favourable for current and future generations of women in politics, as these factors potentially leave less room for gender to exert influence over a political campaign. Similarly, Andrich, Bachl and Domahidi (2023) looked at the media portrayal of US politicians and the correlations with stereotypically gendered traits. Using a sample of over 5 million US news stories, published between 2010 to 2020, covering 1095 politicians, they found that overall, men politicians were more strongly associated with masculine and integrity traits, and women were more strongly associated with feminine physical qualities. This mirrors much of the literature, demonstrating gendered differences in media coverage of politicians, with a disadvantage to women. However, they also found that whilst some gender differences remained the same over time, some have shown a positive trend toward gender-equal media representation. Specifically, the decline in gender differences around physical attributes, which became more equal in representation, and the increase in women being associated with male personality attributes and leadership traits. Fernández-Rovira and Giraldo-Luque (2021) looked at the media representation of women politicians in Spain, France and the United Kingdom. Using two leading digital newspapers from each country during November 2019, they found the women analysed were predominantly neutral and positive in coverage, rather than negative, contrasting with much of the previous literature on the matter.

Although the study does not compare the treatment and portrayal of men politicians, it does provide some insight and support to the notion that gendered media coverage is becoming more neutral in some countries.

Zulli (2018) examines Hilary Clinton and how she balances her femininity whilst employing masculine traits in her political career, which has led to inconsistent and conflicting portrayals of her in the media. Content analysis of articles in the New York Times from 1969 to 2016, showed that gender labels and traits, and mentions of physical appearance were not overly associated with her, and she was also not excessively cast as a novelty or norm challenger. The study shows gender was not overly employed as a descriptor for Clinton, which can act as a limitation on political viability, and she was able to overcome some of those disadvantages associated with gender and leadership. Her femininity was more likely to be discussed in positive terms, and her masculine political agenda increased in coverage alongside her advancement to executive positions, where she was more often quoted in articles where policy had been more traditionally attached to men politicians. Arguably, this could be indicative of her appointment to Secretary of State, a position responsible for national security and foreign policy, and previously held by men. Overall, these findings further reflect the trend towards more gender-neutral media coverage, as found by Fernández-Rovira and Giraldo-Luque (2021), and Andrich, Bachl and Domahidi (2023).

These studies highlight an alternative perspective within the literature, where the media depicts women politicians in more positive ways, and in more coverage, than their male counterparts in some instances. Overall, the literature shows there are gendered differences in the coverage of men and women politicians, and that many factors can influence this. For example, incumbency of a candidate, public profile (are they well known to the electorate?), age and race may also shape gendered coverage. This coverage may be positive or negative in tone, and may be minimised by these other factors, however more contemporary portrayals represent progress for women in politics, reflecting a more normalised attitude towards their participation.

### **2.1.5 Male politicians in the media**

Haraldsson and Wängnerud (2018) surmise that coverage of women politicians is false or a twisted portrayal, and that the media agenda follows men candidates' political agendas more, and is more likely to question the chances women have of winning. Whilst a wealth of research exists, covering the lack of, and type of, media representation of women politicians, there are relatively fewer studies regarding male politicians in the media (Bjarnegård & Murray 2018a, Smirnova 2018 and Smith 2021, 2022). Bjarnegård & Murray (2018a) consider the gender gaps in politics, with a critical focus on the dominance of men to reframe the argument around women's underrepresentation and marginalisation. They suggest that the symbolic representation of women is marred by the pervasive stereotypical reporting in the media, and that the reverse may apply to men. Men politicians are considered the norm, so any signals and messages conveyed through the media, often go unnoticed and unconsidered. The authors argue that constructions of masculinity may also be stereotypical, but are close to that of power and strength, and can be conflated with political leadership—in contrast to women within the political sphere—making masculinity more visible and therefore normalised. Similarly, Conroy (2015) suggests that the media perpetuates the reverence afforded to masculinity and politics, and consequently, in this context, disregard femininity. Further, they suggest media coverage of presidential candidates and elections favours men, due to media norms, such as prioritising stories and framing information and bias, which reinforces gendered stereotypes.

Some studies examined the connection between masculinity and politicians, in terms of media representation. Messner (2007) looked at the construction of masculinity of Arnold Schwarzenegger when he was governor of California, and determined that due to his past career as an actor, he presented a credible portrayal of hegemonic masculinity, foregrounding strength and toughness, due to his action movies, but that this was followed with displays of compassion, like his character in the film Kindergarten Cop.

This characterisation of masculinity was promoted by the Republican Party to gain voters' trust, in times of fear and insecurity, and to project feminised stigma onto liberal candidates. Coe et al., (2007) examined coverage of President George Bush's communications, following the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and argued that masculinity was used as a communication strategy to assert dominance and strength in a time of crisis and gain increased circulation within the media. Cannen (2013) argues that presidential masculinity changes when looking at the media representation of President Barack Obama, in that he succeeded in institutionalising the "war on terror", which Bush began, but he also presented a hybrid masculinity with elements of a "post-hip-hop, ghetto style cool". Combined, these operate as a sophisticated hegemonic masculinity, emphasising his race and the barriers he finally broke by becoming elected, but yet, also embodies and camouflages similarities found within Obama's US foreign policy and that of Bush. Smith (2016) argues that politician's gender performances mirror social changes, such as the emergence from the impact of second-wave feminism, of the "new man", where youthful, dynamic male leaders extol their feminist-friendly credentials, for political gain and show a "softer" approach to masculinity. Using Obama's masculinity as a case, his mediated persona demonstrated an emphasis on his role as a father and family man, while his "new man" persona was woven with "statesman-like" qualities, such as speeches given whilst touring Europe and visiting troops in Iraq, befitting from his historic election victory.

The election of President Trump has elicited much analysis of masculinity and media representation, with research focusing on comparing the gendered portrayals between him and Clinton (Kray, Carroll and Mandel 2018, Harp 2019). Harmer, Savigny and Siow (2020) offer an analysis of his performance of masculine leadership, which utilised violent rhetoric, along with emotions, to frame his identity in masculinist terms. Smirnova (2018) examined political cartoons in the media, in order to determine how heteronormative assumptions of gender, sexuality and race equated to scripts of hegemonic masculinity with associations to Trump and the presidency.

Most of the research conducted around US presidents affirms they are positioned, by the media, as the culturally celebrated and privileged versions of masculinity, which sustain their presence and power in the political sphere.

In the UK, research has uncovered similar outcomes regarding the mediatisation of politics and masculinity. Smith (2021) considers the Labour Party leadership election in 2015, analysing news items for gendered framing. They found masculine metaphors and imagery were used more often to describe men politicians and the construction of their political identities as "insiders" of the political sphere, whilst women were "outsiders". The male candidate's use of gender in self-presentation to the media, acted to reinforce their status as "insiders", working in their favour when "playing the gender card". Whereas women who refer explicitly to their gender are viewed as contrasting themselves against leadership norms. The "new man" discourse, which presents men politicians as balancing domestic roles, such as their experiences with fatherhood and family, is discussed in literature, citing many UK politicians as examples. Smith (2021) argues that UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, epitomised the concept, by conducting interviews in the family home and by often talking about making time in his busy schedule for his children.

After Blair stepped down as Prime Minister, Gordon Brown moved away from this tactic, as he maintained privacy for his young family and in doing so, distanced himself from his predecessor's persona, and expressed his desire to place the impetus away from "celebrity politics" (Smith 2008). However, David Cameron also moulded his political image in a similar way to Blair, when modernising the Conservative Party, when he was patting his wife's pregnant stomach on stage and conducting online interviews at home, while washing the breakfast dishes (Smith 2021). An extension of the "new man" discourse, Yates (2010) discusses another form of masculinity that utilises the feminine trait of flirtation to describe the seductive nature of political spin and the desire for men politicians to try and woo audiences.



Looking at the UK press and Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Barack Obama as examples, there is a focus on personality, celebrity and authenticity, rather than substantial political issues, and the performance of emotion is used to engage with voters. Within the media, the political modes of flirtation that take place, are related to both the content and performance of the message, and the illusion of intimacy is promoted by the increased focus on a politician's personality. Yates (2010) connects this process to a loss of faith in traditional masculinity, where flirtation represents a metaphor for the fluidity of the message and the context. However, some leaders continue to portray themselves in the traditional masculine guise, such as Vladimir Putin, who was shown, stripped to the waist on a fishing trip, which suggests no fluidity or ambiguity around the masculinity portrayed. Smith (2021) looks at the media coverage of the 2019 UK general election between Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn, in which campaign imagery overwhelmingly used masculine visuals to shape their political identities. Johnson demonstrated elements of "hypermasculinity" to exaggerate his strength and dominance, whereas Corbyn relied heavily on traditional, working-class masculinity.

The literature suggests political masculinity is constructed in layers, a hybrid mediatisation of behaviours and characteristics in which, hegemonic masculinity is awarded the prime position of dominance in politics. As shown, it can blend with other masculinities to the advantage of male politicians, for example, as the "new man", which is acceptable to women, but does not surrender the benefits of the patriarchy (Smith 2016). Hegemonic masculinity relies on domination, functioning as a reference point deeply entrenched in society, which operates to produce and disseminate male supremacy, and the subordination of femininity and other masculinities (Connell 1995, Smith 2021).

## **2.2 Gender in politics**

The OECD (2021) proposes that a country's leadership should reflect the population they serve, but achieving gender equality requires more than equal representation in politics. They suggest that inclusive work environments, access to a variety of roles and addressing socio-economic barriers, can all contribute. Arguably, this would be helpful, however, research around the issue reveals many more ways in which gender becomes a tool for discrimination and marginalisation within the political sphere. The literature on gender in politics is broad, and primarily addresses the inequality across the political spectrum from recruitment procedures (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Bjarnegård & Kenny 2015 and Dhima 2020), and gender quotas (Baltruanaite et al., 2014; Verge and De la Fuente 2014; Paxton and Hughes 2018), to the representation of, and bias against, women politicians in the media (Byerly and Ross 2006; Ross 2013; Harmer, Savigny and Siow 2020). The central concern around political recruitment is why some politicians succeed in moving themselves, not laterally, but to the highest offices, and although the process is viewed as "democratic" in many countries, inter-party procedures and rules can impact the pool of candidates (Lovenduski and Norris 1995).

Bjarnegård & Kenny (2015) assert that much of the process for candidate selection and recruitment is governed by informal practices, power relations and party rules, and that understanding and navigating these can help to manage the underrepresentation of women, and explain, in part, the dominance of men. Contemporary research offers an encouraging perspective. Dhima (2020) looks to the power held by political elites as a mechanism for controlling and shaping the candidate pool, with research from Canada that uncovered a pro-women bias in selecting candidates. They found a correlation between female elites and left-leaning parties, which suggests they were open to increasing female political representation. In the US, Crowder-Meyer (2018) considers how political ambition developed in ordinary American citizens, following the surge in women candidates after the 2016 election, citing this as a factor in party recruitment.

The intersection of gender, education and social status has been studied, as women are faced with balancing home life and families, gendered expectations, and political engagement with a lack of resources being possessed by elite women. They found the opposite to be true, with the correlation of men's willingness to run and their political ambition increasing with marriage, education, and political participation. This speaks to the illusive barriers and discrimination women face in entering politics, and the resultant gendered imbalance in candidates.

Another mechanism that featured in the literature and was designed to increase women's representation, is quotas. Paxton and Hughes (2018) consider the importance of the gender ratio in politics and the impact of men making political decisions. They argue that most laws are gender-neutral in principle, and constituents should be considered equally, regardless of gender, however, in practice, this behaviour often masks an imbalance and substantial gender inequality. One of the reforms introduced to address gender inequality, is gender quotas. Verge and De la Fuente (2014) analysed the effectiveness of these in Spain, looking beyond the distributive logic they afford women politicians and examining the informal power structures within parties. They found that quotas may partly address unequal patterns of party members and that they were not adequate in subverting the automatic male power already existing, but that they are useful as a part of a layering strategy to increase women's representation in politics. Lombardo and Meier (2013) include the examination of gender quotas, in a shift towards a more comprehensive concept of gender equality, in acknowledging that other barriers exist, such as party recruitment procedures and the functioning of politics itself. Focusing on the implementation process of quotas, rather than the effectiveness, they note that they can activate public debate around the social position of women, and benefit the overall understanding of inequality and prejudice within society.

They also note that quotas can be blind to the intersectional differences between women, and can still act to privilege the dynamics of exclusion around race, sexuality and other factors.

When considering education intersectionally with gender, Baltruanaite et al., (2014) found that the introduction of quotas in Italian politics resulted in an improvement in the quality of politicians, through a higher number of elected women, who were, on average, more educated than men; and through a reduced number of low-educated men. The literature suggests gender quotas can be effective in increasing descriptive representation and addressing some of the intersectional barriers that prevent women from participating, however, as one participant interviewed in research conducted by Verge and De la Fuente (2014) said, "even if women had many aces, the game is being played with different cards".

### **2.2.1 Feminism in politics**

Feminism is a political movement that—at its core—is focused on gender equality (Loke, Bachmann and Harp, 2016). Although feminism has no single or agreed definition, it is broadly seen as an ideological and political standpoint that has the practical goal of ending discrimination against women, and enabling them to take an equal place in society with men (Ross 2017). The act of women collectively presenting public claims, based on their gendered identities as women, provides a means for them to make their gender-conscious ideas public; to participate in achieving their goals; and to change public policy and the state (Mazur, McBride and Hoard 2015). Women's issues as a legitimate topic of political debate increased in importance internationally, after three UN conferences held between 1970-1985 in Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi that brought together women from all over the globe (Ghodsee 2010). In 2020, the UN acknowledged that while there had been progress since then, there was still a long way to go towards achieving gender equality, and empowering women was the unfinished business of our time, as well as the greatest human rights challenge in our world (UN Women 2020).

Mazur, McBride and Hoard (2015) acknowledge that women's movements in Western democracies have a long history, and Loke, Bachmann and Harp (2018) concede that defining feminism in contemporary US culture is difficult, and that the term represents varied ideological perspectives, and is therefore better understood in the plural form.

They suggest that feminism gained prominence after critiques that the "second wave" feminist movement in the US represented the views of white, middle- and upper-class women, and ignored issues of race and class. Narratives within this movement focused upon popular, yet limited, voices, as appointed by the media, who were almost exclusively white, heterosexual, well-educated women (Maxwell and Shields 2018). From the second wave in the 1960s and 70s, feminism's goals have evolved, and the movement has become increasingly fractured. And today, those familiar with feminist discourse, point to various tenets under the basic notion of gender equality, including post-feminism, radical feminism, and black feminism (Loke, Bachmann and Harp, 2016). Showden (2009) defines Postfeminism as suggesting that feminism's time has come and gone. Robinson and Richardson (2015) highlight the emergence of a discourse claiming that gender equality has been successfully addressed, which has led to claims of a "post-feminist" society, in which many of the issues that feminists have traditionally highlighted, are no longer relevant. Banet-Weiser (2018) proposes that post-feminism is a set of ideologies, strategies and practises that take liberal feminist discourses, such as freedom, choice and independence, and incorporate them into a wide array of media, merchandising and consumer participation. In media culture, celebrations of "girl power" and successes were sat alongside intense hostile scrutiny of women in the public eye, as the growth of "lad culture" and assertions of the redundancy of feminism, led to a fragmentation of normative femininity, in which a prevailing sense of female autonomy and agency pervaded the media landscape (Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg 2019). McRobbie (2011) regards this media portrayal of women as a symbolic power, which can be understood as post-feminist, as it infers that feminism has been taken into account, so that it can pass into history, citing the media-framing of feminists, such as Germaine Greer and Alice Schwartz, as unglamorous, old and in the past. Core features of postfeminism included an emphasis on individualism, choice and a renewed focus on the liberation of a woman's body (Banet-Weiser 2018); these are the seeming gains of second-wave feminism and imply change, rendering feminism irrelevant (McRobbie 2011).

The feminist movement ebbs and flows, experiencing periods of growth, as well as limitations and backlashes (Martin and Smith 2020). Robinson and Richardson (2015) observe a revitalized interest in feminism emerging in parts of the world that challenged “postfeminist” accounts by highlighting how gender inequality persists. Whilst reflecting on current manifestations of feminism in society, media and politics, Banet-Weiser (2018) believes that in contrast to postfeminism, the current iteration of feminism is spectacularly visible and refers to the concept of popular feminism. They suggest this phenomenon manifests itself in discourses and practices in mainstream media, such as blogs, social media and broadcast media, with its popularity being cemented by the approval and status it holds within groups of like-minded people: one of the most visible examples of this, are the “me too” and Times Up movements.

The “me too” Movement (2020) was founded in 2006, as a grassroots organisation to support survivors of sexual violence. In 2017, after the allegations against Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein, surfaced, the viral #MeToo sparked a global online conversation. A year later, the movement was joined by the Time’s Up movement (2020), which launched to help change culture, laws and companies, in order to create a society free of gender discrimination in the workplace. Although they are separate organisations with different goals, they overlap in the broader movement against sexual harassment and gender imbalance (Langone 2018). Otero (2018) critiques the movement’s origins and attachment to Hollywood and Washington politics “fantasy lands”, where past feminism has stalled against male discrimination, and argues that it should be applied to the male power within other work centres around the world, to limit overexposure of the feminist movement and protect its integrity. De Benedictis, Orgad and Rottenberg, (2019) used content analysis to examine the first six months of newspaper coverage of the “me too” movement in the UK. The study demonstrated that the coverage expanded and amplified the movement in important ways, attesting to the pivotal role the media plays in disseminating global issues and debates for a national audience.

However, the research also highlights that whilst the coverage increased, they seemed to follow and reinforce familiar patterns, namely, with past reporting on sexual violence supporting feminism and highlighting the experiences of celebrities who are predominately white and wealthy. The study also found coverage was largely consistent with the media's traditional ideological alignments: left-leaning coverage supported the movement, but offered no critique, and the conservative press held a negative tone throughout their articles. Hansan and Dolan (2022) also identified partisanship as a factor in supporting the movement within America. They found the position of the two parties on gender issues (cultural conservatism, on the Republican right and advancing women's rights, on the Democrat left) acted as a cue to influence and shape evaluations of the movement, with Republicans raising concerns around false accusations and the rights of men, whilst Democrats were more supportive of identifying abuse and punishment.

Popular feminism and the political impact of the "me too" movement can be viewed as an extension of fourth-wave feminism, which Munro (2013) believes is characterised by its diversity of purpose and its reliance on the internet. They maintain that the medium has facilitated a global connection between women for discussion and activism, and creates everyday rhetoric within the media that challenges sexism and misogyny. Marron (2020) refers to Munro's work on fourth-wave feminism, in order to investigate the changed nature of women's activism and focus on social justice; they also reference the "me too" movement as an example of such feminism. Politics can be credited with the resurgence of interest in feminism, with Chira (2020) arguing that Donald Trump's election victory in 2016 galvanised women into political action, prompting a resurgence of feminism, whilst capturing a familiar dynamic that threatened women's rights and their representation in the political sphere. Presently, the backlash towards feminism is lagging behind, and the 2016 election has catalysed intersectional feminist activism concerning issues of racial, socioeconomic, disability, LGBTQ+ and justice, to name a few (Martin and Smith 2020). Indeed, the current iteration of feminism, according to the literature, is driven by its diversity of activism, with attention falling on intersectional feminism.

It combines aspects of past waves with the idea that there are “different axes of oppression” that intersect, including race, ethnicity, class and sexuality (Marron 2020). Gökarıksel and Smith (2017) discuss how Trump’s presidency and his policies have sparked an opposition, led primarily by women, that has highlighted intersectional feminism. By using the women’s march of 2017, they identified racial, ethnic, religious and other differences through U.S flag hijabs and pink pussy hats, which were used as symbols, and some signs that were formulated with intersectional feminism in mind, stating “love is love/black lives matter/immigrants make America great/women’s rights are human rights”. These visuals embodied the experience of the march itself, highlighting the fraught challenges of protest, but demonstrating they are crucial sites used to form solidarities that can drive a feminism that includes intersectionality. Moni (2020) also referenced the women’s marches in 2017 and 2018 as points of intersectional feminism protesting against a conservative, white-supremist, transphobic, heterosexist, patriarchal political establishment. Citing the diversity of the leadership, and the slogans and banners, to suggest that the importance of the viewpoint is being recognised, and centring non-white, and non-middle-class women’s struggles in substantial ways, to shift the historical praxis of feminism.

### **2.2.2 Women in politics**

The number of women in politics and policy has always been relatively small (Lovenduski 2005 and McLaughlin et al 2018), and women who do enter politics—where men usually dominate—are subject to behaviours and views that set the conditions for women’s participation and their rise in status (Skard 2015). As Genovese and Steckenrider (2013) assert, a woman’s rise to power is similar to that of any person, in that she will encounter obstacles and restrictions, however, she will also have to navigate barriers unique to her gender, which stem from marginalisation, and develop gender-specific strategies to overcome them. Much research has focused on the barriers women face in rising to such positions and the wider effects equality has on society. McLaughlin et al., (2018) consider macro and micro-level factors that impede women from achieving equality.



They discuss micro-factors, such as media coverage of women leaders that scrutinises details about appearance, rather than messaging; the lack of role models and male dominance in certain industries; and the unconscious bias, gender stereotypes and double bind, all of which contribute to the lack of women in power. Macro-factors, such as institutional barriers, like the gender wage gap and fewer development and stretch opportunities, can hinder careers and make it more challenging for women to reach the top. However, Paxton, Hughes and Barnes (2020) discuss how women's participation has increased dramatically over the past 100 years: citing statistics that demonstrate that women's representation in global politics had doubled between 2000 and 2010, from 11.7% to 19.4%, and increased to 22% in the next decade, highlighting the importance of this trend. Pitkin (1967, 2016) described a four-category concept of political representation, including formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic, which provides crucial tools and concepts for analyses and critiques around political processes and society (Celis and Mazur 2012). Franceschet, Krook and Tan (2018) note that historically, the first step in women's politics was their legal right to participate alongside men, removing the barriers to voting, and being elected, but, that this did not automatically result in equal representation. For women, formal representation required that the legal barriers be removed, in order to allow access to politics, which can be viewed as a measure of social justice, in that rights and equality were gained (Paxton and Hughes 2018).

The increase in women's participation in the political sphere has grown significantly over the last century; and Paxton, Hughes and Painter (2009) explored the impact of this on democracy, electoral systems and how gender quotas influence the trajectory of women politicians. They found that quotas do influence a country's growth in political representation, but not always at levels described by law: electoral systems also affected levels positively, but only when countries were not in periods of one-party rule, coup, or other legislative breaks. They also advocate that high levels of early democracy and growth in democracy over time, increase women's representation, with political rights and civil liberties acting as catalysts.

Dolan, Deckman and Swers (2022) describe descriptive representation as elected bodies that share the same characteristics as those who elect them, and argue that women, as half of the population, should be reflected in government. They suggest that underpinning this representation is the notion that women and marginalised groups are considered to be uniquely suited to represent themselves, due to their shared position in society and their lived experiences. Literature around this concept draws on gender, and questions if this drives voter decisions and participation. In the UK, the 2010 British general election served as a case study for Campbell and Heath (2017), in order to investigate if candidate sex was a driver for voting behaviour. They found a relatively small group (9%) of women were more likely to vote for a female candidate, but this was conditional on them valuing descriptive representation. To summarise, they found women do not react in a homogenous way to a candidate, based on their gender. The salience of gender as an issue in public discourse, is suggested as a factor in shaping voters' behaviour and intentions, but overall, the concept is too simplistic in its assumptions. In the US, Wolak (2019) provides a recent analysis of responses to the Cooperative Congressional Election Study from 2006-2014, but found little reaction to women as a whole group. In conclusion, they suggest that greater empowerment may come when combined with other factors, such as intersectionality, and political information, such as policy positions.

The literature suggests there is a connection between descriptive and substantive representation. As Dolan, Deckman and Swers (2022) propose that due to the masculine dominance within politics, which creates real barriers for women who bring feminine viewpoints to the table, substantive representation is more likely to occur when there are departments that are either entirely dedicated to women, or are at least more heavily skewed towards women's issues. There is an emphasis on advocacy, rather than presence, as Pitkin (1967, 2016) challenges the notion that "standing for" is not the same as "acting for" (Paxton and Hughes 2018). Much research centres around the idea that women in politics advocate for changes that pertain to women's interests and introduce policies with a feminist agenda (Celis and Childs 2011). However, the literature suggests that there are nuances in the appeal of a woman candidate.

Ideology and policy position can affect support for women candidates, with conservatism being the largest differentiating factor (Celis and Childs 2011, Plumb 2017 and Martin 2018). Plum (2017) compared the UK and Australian parliamentary debates around reproductive rights and same-sex marriage, and found that whilst some actions during debates could be understood as substantive, many reforms that were proposed, supported women more traditionally and were not in sync with liberal attitudes. Further, a group of female MPs did not seek to advance women's rights at all, reflecting the representation of their (Conservative) party interests. Martin (2018) examined US politics and ascertained that women generally prefer a female candidate, but that support decreases significantly, when they hold contrary ideological or policy positions. Citing Hilary Clinton's 2016 election loss as an example, the assumption that women vote based on gender is overly simplistic, and assumes women are a homogenous group whereas in reality, women hold differing experiences and positions on political issues.

The final form of representation that Pitkin (1967, 2016) proposes is symbolic representation, which involves the feeling of being fairly, or effectively, represented (Paxton and Hughes 2018). This idea focuses on the communication and perceptions of women's presence—or lack thereof—within politics, as otherwise described as an effect of descriptive representation (Lombardo and Meier 2019). Verge and Pastor (2017) state that the concept gives new meaning to gendered social constructions and women's abilities to take on leadership roles, and analysed media coverage of eight female firsts in senior positions within the Spanish government, which had traditionally been dominated by men. Spanning from 2000 – 2015, the themes "novelty" and "role model" were uncovered, which suggests a link between descriptive and substantive representation. Novelty signifies women's presence in a space that is no longer exclusively male; and role model implies an effect by providing an example of success that may stimulate changes in perception and attitudes. Further themes around the increase in profile of these politicians' work and advocacy for women's policies, speaks to substantive representation; and being framed as "agents-of-change" in the media, implies they are expected to affect the way politics operates, which connects to symbolic representation.

Ultimately, the media coverage used for Verge and Pastor's study, heavily diluted these women's successes with gendered-stereotyping, and reproduced politics through a male viewpoint, which marginalises all forms of representation for women.

Pitkin's taxonomy of representation offers a framework to explore how women and other marginalised groups participate in politics. The literature demonstrates their salience and endurance in the field of gender and politics, and how the broader concept of intersectionality may help critique the advancement of gender equality in political systems. As Paxton and Hughes (2018) suggest, increasing women's representation adds to the pool of talent, and by enhancing diversity, political decision-making should be more flexible and balanced when progressing.

### **2.2.3 The glass ceiling**

Kroeber et al., (2018) acknowledge the advancements in women's representation in politics, but question the longer-term perpetuity of them, due to the presence of a "glass ceiling", which prevents women from progressing, and thus threatens gender parity. The term "glass ceiling" originated in 1978 when it was used by female workers at Hewlett Packard, and was used onstage at a panel discussion by an employee of the New York Telephone Company, to describe the inability of white-collar women to rise beyond middle management, due to invisible barriers (Bennett 2019). Whilst this may be evident in many industries, Folke and Rickne (2016) argue its presence, within a political context, implies discrimination exists within political parties and systems, and increases in severity towards the top levels of power. They used Sweden as a case study, a global leader in women's representation, to establish whether a glass ceiling is holding women back from the upper levels of political organisations. Beginning with the premise that the glass ceiling represents a specific pattern of career disadvantages that can explain the lack of women in top positions, they found that the number of women shrinks towards the top of the political hierarchy; that women's promotions were also slower than men; and that gender inequality was more pronounced at top levels, where the career paths of men and women diverged, as women were prevented from advancing.

The research succeeded in applying methodological rigour to the metaphor that is often used as a blanket statement, arguably demonstrating that if a glass ceiling exists for women in Sweden, it is likely to exist elsewhere.

Thomas and Adams (2010) comparative analysis of the elections of Michelle Bachelet, in Chile, and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, in Liberia, revealed that gender ideology is complex and more flexible in presidential elections, as both women pursued electoral strategies that enabled them to confront doubts about gender, and take advantage of specific advantages of their identity and experiences that would qualify them for presidential status. The analysis found that both leaders were able to capitalise on the electorate's dissatisfaction with male leadership, by setting a contrasting, positive spin on gendered beliefs about a woman's ability to lead: more specifically, through ideas about women's greater commitment and focus to the general interests of the community, and to bringing peace and an end to violence in their countries. They both lacked connections to high-profile political elites or political dynasties, which may have aided their status as political outsiders and helped reinforce agendas for change, in a stance against older leaders. Incidentally, these examples are in contrast to Jalalzai (2013), who found one of the most prevalent commonalities of women leaders was a historical family connection to power, particularly in Latin America and Asia.

The analysis also highlighted a connection between women's movements and political opportunities for women. Bachelet drew explicitly on the women's movement during the struggle for democracy in Chile and promised more inclusion for minority groups, a gender-balanced cabinet, and a push for legislation regarding gender quotas. In Liberia, women have taken leading roles in peace processes and Johnson-Sirleaf's campaign was able to capitalise on the discourses popularised by these organisations; and having herself been directly involved in some of these issues, was thus able to emphasise her strengths and differentiate herself from other politicians. Overall, the research suggests that to overcome gender expectations in politics, the ability to confront gendered disadvantages, while promoting gender advantages, is crucial to success.

Jalalzai (2013) conducted a comparative analysis on a much larger scale, using a list of countries that had successfully inducted female executives into politics – a total of 147 countries from 2000 to 2010. An array of factors that influence women's power were identified, ranging from institutional (electoral systems and governmental structures), structural (women's education and professional statuses), cultural (gender stereotypes and family demands), and historical (the timing of women's suffrage, previous female leaders). After probing these, it was found that although some countries had experienced women rulers, some have not, and as such, the glass ceiling has been shattered in some contexts, such as Finland, but has only been cracked in the UK, and remains firmly intact in the United States. Further analysis revealed that most women executives served as prime ministers, not presidents, highlighting a distinction between the route to power, in that parties select a prime minister, and the public votes for a president. Winfrey and Carlin (2023) looked to the 2020 US presidential election, with the highest number of women vying for the Democratic nomination, which resulted in Kamala Harris shattering the second highest—and hardest—glass ceiling by becoming Vice President. They note that sexism remains in politics and in media coverage, with real-world implications for evaluating candidates and their chances of winning the presidency.

#### **2.2.4 The glass cliff**

The glass ceiling has hindered women's efforts to participate in politics and true gender equality remains an aspiration, however, there is evidence to suggest that women are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions in a time of crisis and when the risk of failing is higher, thereby in turn, reinforcing negative stereotypes about female leadership (Bennhold 2015 and Ryan, Haslam and Kulich 2010). Initial research by Ryan and Haslam (2005) scrutinised an archival study that examined the performance of top FTSE 100 companies, before and after the appointment of a male or female board member. They found that women were more likely than men, to have been appointed after the companies had experienced consistently bad performances in the preceding five months, exposing an invisible hurdle for these women to overcome in the workplace.

The result of the investigation revealed that when women do achieve top-level positions, they are more likely than men to find themselves on a "glass cliff", occupying a risky position. The concept has been applied to women in large enterprises, such as Marissa Mayer of Yahoo!, whose tenure was fraught with turmoil and Mary Barra, who was CEO of General Motors, which was struggling after a bankruptcy bailout in 2009, although examples in politics are rare. In 2016, Theresa May became Prime Minister in the UK amid the turmoil of the EU referendum, fitting the paradigm perfectly (Rohrich 2019). Historical research by Ryan, Haslam and Kulich (2010) highlighted the theory within a political context. Using the 2005 UK general election, it was discovered that in the Conservative Party, there was a strong preference for a woman, rather than a man, to contest a seat that was deemed hard-to-win and presented a tougher political challenge.

The way these findings have been digested over the years suggests that society now lends more credence to the idea that, in the context of leadership, women are treated differently from men (Barratt 2018). Robinson et al., (2021) investigated the underrepresentation of women in individual states in the US, using election data from 2011 – 2016. They define "glass cliff" conditions, as elections in which women, ethnic, racial or minority candidates run for office in conditions of crisis or scandal, or, face disproportionately worse elective odds than that of a male candidate. Reasoning that the low numbers of women could be related to the increased likelihood of facing "glass cliff" conditions in elections that they are more likely to lose, they found the outcomes were worse for Republican candidates, but Democratic women were more likely to win when running in these conditions. They suggest motives for choosing a candidate are structured by traditional versus progressive party leanings, and can account for a variation in the shape of a glass cliff and the consequences around election success. The study provided evidence that "glass cliff" conditions are an important factor contributing to the inequality of women in leadership and consideration could be paid to choosing a better seat.

### **2.2.5 Hegemonic masculinity**

Power is fundamentally gendered and throughout history, leadership has been closely associated with masculinity (Keohane 2016, Cottais and Lee 2021). This is particularly true of politics and is fed by several well-rooted stereotypes, such as emotional vs. rational (Ross 2017), lack of "male" traits like toughness and assertiveness, or stressing a woman's caring attitude or honesty (Campus 2013 and Meeks 2013), and being too feminine or too masculine (Keohane 2016). The slow admission of women into electoral democracy and politics may no longer be exclusively the domain of men, but, it remains an overwhelmingly masculine realm (Fletcher et al 2018).

Society's understanding of power relations across the globe is informed by gender, and hegemonic masculinity is considered to be the crucial concept residing in the heart of socially dominant men (Beasley 2008). Connell's (1995) research on masculinity is widely regarded as influential in pluralizing the concept, and developing multiple "masculinities" (Beasley 2008; Fletcher et al 2018 and Whitehead 2019). Whitehead (2019) argues that within every male, masculinity will correspond, sometimes problematically, with a host of other identity variables, when combined to create an individual "man". Connell (1995) observes that masculinities are not equal to men, but that they concern the position of men in a gender order, and can be defined as the patterns of practice by which people engage in that position. In assessing the political domain, Connell (1995) asserts that public politics, by almost any definition, is men's politics, and the women who break through, do so by an exceptional use of men's networks, not women's. The male domination of the political arena affords masculinity a prime position as a key theme in leadership and power; an observation that Connell made many years ago, but which remains true in most of the world (Coe et al., 2007 and Cannen 2013), and, which is supported by this research.

Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as the configuration of gender practices that legitimise the patriarchy, guaranteeing the domination of men and the subordination of women. It holds authoritative positioning over other masculinities and historically has dominated other types in social contexts (Beasley 2008).



Khan and Blair (2013) examined how traditional gender notions served to reinforce hegemonic discourses about groups that already occupy political power and dominance, by using former US President Bill Clinton's role reversal as a political spouse for Hilary Clinton's Democratic nomination bid in 2008. Using media framing as a tool, they found the media framed Bill Clinton as the popular, patriarchal head of the Party, focusing on his celebrity and political prowess, and in turn, these actions served to marginalise Hilary Clinton's campaign, thus highlighting the connection between the US presidency and hegemonic masculinity. Smirnova (2018) also draws on the connection between masculinity and the US presidency in research that used Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse a sample of cartoons, memes and Tweets from social media during the 2016 campaigns. By evaluating these examples of popular political humour, the normative assumptions about gender, race and sexuality equated to dominant narratives regarding hegemonic masculinity and the presidency. Both studies also reveal how these discourses promote hegemonic masculinity in society, and serve to reinforce and underpin patriarchal power structures within politics. Elevating the association of masculinity and the presidency, and placing it within a contemporary context, Johnson (2017) analysed the 2016 Trump campaign, arguing that the rhetorical form of his appeals constituted demagoguery, by a reliance on white, victimised, toxic masculinity. Trump's capacity to frame his audience as "at-risk", and construct a precarious and socially segregated America, helped to undermine the feminist stance and possibilities for a female president.

Once his audience was hostile to the prospect of a female president, casting their vote for him validated their feelings of anger and legitimised their sense of victimhood. Cottais and Lee (2021) also examined the former president, who they suggest staged his virility and overplayed his masculinity, sometimes violently or authoritatively. They purport that Trump built his political identity around the discourse of fear of loss of male privilege and power, specifically, the decline of the white man. This tension, adopted by Trump as a political strategy and rhetoric, thrived on the fear that egalitarian demands by women, LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities and migrants would erode the rights of white men, when in reality, these are only privileges.

He asserted himself as the defender of a conservative society, and relied on an assumed virility and a will for power over others, thus embodying hegemonic masculinity in politics. Dignam et al., (2019) considered the gendered self-presentation of Trump during the 2016 election and in pre-election interviews, and were able to ascertain how voters construct politicians, based on gender. Trump supporters justified their allegiance by praising his politically incorrect spirit, glorifying his entrepreneurial spirit and celebrating his fighting spirit. They conclude that this construction of Trump was not constrained by cultural norms or political influence, but accounts of why his supporters favoured him were built around the cultural ideas of masculinity, valorising his manhood and, aligned with his political ideology, as he presented similarly to authoritarian populists. Conroy, Martin and Nalder (2020) also drew from the 2016 US election, in order to explore the gendered descriptions of candidates through surveys of voters. They found Hilary Clinton was described in more masculine terms than feminine, Bernie Sanders was described in more feminine terms than masculine, and Trump was described by voters in overwhelmingly masculine terms. These gendered descriptions connect gendered attributes to the candidates, which for Clinton, was consistent with the double bind theory, but for Trump, the masculine attributes enhanced the perception of his leadership abilities, and thus suggested that masculinity is still closely associated with the presidency.

American politics is a substantially gendered space, where masculinity and femininity affect and define multiple areas, such as electoral contests, governing, policies and issues, and the images and positions of the two major political parties (McDermott 2016). McDermott (2016) observes that in American politics, issues like healthcare and education are seen as feminine, and issues like foreign policy and national defence are unmistakably masculine and seen through a masculine-gendered discourse. For example: President George W. Bush landed in a fighter jet on the deck of an aircraft carrier, in order to announce the end of combat in Iraq, leading to comparisons with the macho fighter pilots in the film *Top Gun*. Voters hold a range of stereotypes based on candidate gender (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2008) and whilst some may be useful in reinforcing certain characteristics and policies, some may be damaging (Lips 2013).

For example, if a man who is in a position of public leadership displays qualities that are seen to be too feminine, he risks criticism and loss of respect for being too "soft". Anecdotally, crying in public can be seen as a loss of control, and is often considered a political error. Margaret Thatcher was denounced in 1978 for feebleness, when she admitted she cried at home after a bad day sometimes, and each of the past US presidents admittedly cried in office, Obama, on at least five occasions (Benedictus 2016). More recently, in 2019, Democratic candidate, Andrew Wang, cried when he spoke about gun control at a forum in Iowa (Cillizza 2019), and in contrast, Trump is widely known for bravado and machismo being his preferred sentiments, and refers to his detractors with nicknames, such as "crying" or "little" (Bardella 2018).

Although men dominate in powerful political positions, they may also suffer under the scrutiny of gender stereotypes. McLaughlin et al., (2018) maintain that men who do not represent or display typical manly traits, often change their behaviour in ways that reinforce masculine stereotypes, by exaggerating their masculinity and avoiding behaviours that may be construed as feminine. They suggest that the alternative would be to leave these positions, meaning that the men who hold these positions are the ones comfortable in carrying out and endorsing these hyper-masculine activities and reinforcing the connections between them and power. The more reinforced this concept becomes, the harder it becomes to champion and accept change.

### **2.3 US media**

When considering media power and optics, a quote from Malcom X, excerpted from his autobiography in 1965, offers a succinct summary of the media and the power it holds:

"The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses" (Malcom X 1965, CBC News 2015).

The American media hold a position of authority, influence, and controversy in society, and because they are shaped by internal prejudices, they in turn, help to shape the prejudices of the nation (Blanchard and Burwash 2013). The US media helps to integrate and homogenise society, by outlining cultural values that audiences accept and adopt, as being typical of American life (Graber and Dunaway 2022). McChesney (1993) marks the beginning of the commercial nature of broadcasting, as being the advancement of radio in the 1920s, which had developed into an advertising-dependent system by the end of that decade. The passing of the *Communications Act* of 1934, which remains the reigning statute for radio and television, ensured that any opposition to commercial broadcasting was terminated, and this model became entrenched economically, politically and ideologically within American society. Wilhite and Houmanfar (2015) state that consumerism is a foundation of the American cultural landscape, noting that many products Americans interact with are aggregate products of organisations, such as media companies that function to influence culture, including swaying consumer behaviour, which in turn, then reinfluences the decisions of news media personnel.

Graber and Dunaway (2022) note that ownership and control of the media in America falls under private and public ownership, with the former being the predominant model and operating as profit-led businesses. Expanding on this, consolidation of ownership has given very large organisations control over the news that reaches the American public, which elicits concerns over the diversity of viewpoints, the uniformity of social norms, the neglect of local needs, and a slant towards political ideology. The nature of the control and structure of the news media is an explicitly political issue, in that when considering the strength of democracy, commercial broadcasters are often less likely to adhere to a higher social ethos, than that of their business instincts (McChesney 1993). Indeed, a primary function of the mass media is to provide citizens with sufficient information to evaluate leaders and their policies, in order to vote, however the US media tends to shirk this task, particularly when it competes with entertainment news or other commercially appealing events (Dunaway 2008).

Partisan media bias is also prevalent throughout the US media landscape: a political or ideological slanting of the news, in a way that favours, criticises, emphasises, or ignores certain political news (Schultziner and Stukalin 2019). As Wilhite and Houmanfar (2015) explain, when news staff make decisions about, and report, the "news", they are doing so with all the assumptions of their personal or cultural experiences influencing the presentation and framing of the information.

Further to this, the bias is interlocked with external factors such as economy, audience and organisational demands, and policies. Peacock et al., (2020) examined partisan behaviours in the recent era of the emergence of fake news, and concluded that strong partisanship, from both Democrats and Republicans, was connected to exposure to hyper-partisan news. Further to this, such exposure encouraged involvement from right-leaning citizens towards their political party, but, on the left, it produced a negative involvement towards the Democratic Party. This suggests political news is a valid concern of political polarisation, and that there are commonalities between partisans and their political attitudes and opinions. Much of the literature around news media and politics questions the quality of coverage (Dunaway 2008 and Dunaway and Lawrence 2015), identifies a polarisation of politics within audiences (Iyengar et al., 2019; Wilson, Parker and Feinberg 2020 and Zhang 2021), and suggests that slanted content plays a major role in influencing and shaping attitudes and behaviours (Wilhite and Houmanfar 2015; Guess et al., 2021 and Hassell, Miles and Reuning 2021).

Dunaway (2008) argues that the quality of political news, particularly within the detail of information, is affected by media ownership and market contexts. Looking at state-wide elections in 2004, and considering ownership structures of media companies, it was determined that public-owned, corporate news organisations provided less substantive news coverage. The type of coverage found was framed as a "horserace" or game coverage, focusing on the positioning and strategy of candidates, in favour of coverage around policies and issues.

This study offers observations on the influence of media ownership, and which found evidence that has implications for American democracy, while more recent research by Dunaway and Lawrence (2015), with data from three election cycles (2004, 2006 and 2008), found that news organisations continue to rely on the same type of coverage that lacks political depth. Focusing again on “game-framing”, as applied by the media to view campaigns primarily from a sports game perspective, organisational factors were found to shape campaign coverage, along with extra-media factors, such as the size and geographical reach of an outlet. Speculation around the centralisation of resources and a singular profit orientation, were cited as possible reasons for the difference, however the prevalence of this throughout American media is considered to be less healthy for democracy.

Wilson, Parker and Feinberg (2020) define the term “political polarisation”, as the degree to which political partisans dislike, trust and avoid the opposition, which can be split by the viewpoint of individuals, or, at the level of institutions, such as political elites and media. They contend that changes to the US media landscape produced a proliferation of dubious online news sources, which use their bias to stand out from other sources and appeal to audiences. Speculating that this polarised media selects and rewards actors, who are willing to express extreme views, thus reducing the space for more moderate opinions, and filling it primarily with extreme views that impact and shape viewpoints. Iyengar et al., (2019) attribute several features of the contemporary environment to increased partisanship, also citing high-choice media environments and the proliferation of partisan news outlets, which they argue, activate partisan identities and consequent feelings towards political parties. They maintain that these outlets often depict the opposing party in the harshest terms and focus disproportionately on scandals (real or fake) to encourage hostility towards the other group. Evidence of this was found by Guess et al., (2021) who adjusted internet browser patterns and social media-following patterns, to boost the likelihood of encountering right-leaning news (*Fox News*) or left-leaning news (*Huff Post*) during the 2018 mid-term elections.

The resultant data from 19 million web visits by respondents indicated that a change in news consumption lasted for around eight weeks, and whilst no direct impact on political attitudes or beliefs was found, the cumulative effects may contribute to a lasting and meaningful decrease in media trust.

The literature suggests media are part of the issue, if not the root or primary cause, and is generally reflective of the tastes of audiences, and can therefore represent and reinforce political opinions (Iyengar et al., 2019 and Zhang 2021) possibly encouraging support for political parties out of disdain, rather than objective principles and policies (Wilson, Parker and Feinberg 2020). On this point, Zhang (2021) believes that it is the political parties, rather than the media, which lead and continuously exacerbate the divide, and that journalism may provide assistance in closing the gap. They propose if extreme journalism can widen the divide, then moderate journalism that emphasises common ground, can help people balance their opinions and attitudes.

Literature around the issue of partisan bias draws attention to how it operates within news production, with Wilhite and Houmanfar (2015) identifying a link between advocacy journalism, a non-subjective style, and the political polarisation of the American public. They cite research from the Pew Centre (2014), which found people who consistently express ideological viewpoints regarding politics had risen from 10% to 21%, between 1994 and 2014. This has widened further, as recent research found Republicans have increased their distrust in more traditional news outlets, with the largest erosion being found in ones that President Trump often decried. For example, CNN went from 33% to 58%, and *The New York Times* from 29% to 42%, among Republicans (Pew Research Center 2020).

Hassell, Miles and Reuning (2021) questioned if the ideology of the newsroom affected the political slant of news. Surveying 700 newsrooms in the US, they found that newsroom ideology has an effect, even when discounting consumer preferences. Political journalists were asked to place their newspaper on an ideological scale against seven other outlets. The reporting was found to be consistent with estimated newsroom ideology, which was found to be connected with the production, slant or how the news was covered.

It was also found that content was not produced that would appeal to a broader audience outside of this established readership. The study provides a comprehensive picture of how ideology can influence the way news is covered. Moreover, features such as framing of news, and selection of what, and how, to cover news, influenced the production of this content, and had implications for individual behaviours and democratic institutions.

### **2.3.1 America's alternative media**

A transient and rapidly changing media landscape has given rise to successful alternative media enterprises, which can be characterised as conservative, libertarian, populist or right-wing on a political scale (Haller, Holt and La Brosse 2019). Fuelled by the success of right-wing or populist political movements, this type of media has gained online presence and to some extent, influence on public discourse and elections (Schulze 2020).

Haller, Holt and La Brosse (2019) note that some platforms have significant reach in terms of audience, and are gaining prominence, such as Breitbart News Network and blog, and The Gateway Pundit, gaining access to the White House press corps, after Donald Trump's election in 2016. The literature reveals that the common trait these news organisations share, is that the news and content they present stems from the belief that their perspective is not fairly represented in the mainstream political sphere, and so they must counter this representation (Beiner 2019, Haller, Holt and La Brosse 2019 and Nadler and Bauer 2019). Building on this, Haller, Holt and La Brosse 2019 identified an emerging trend within the expansion of alternative media: an interdependent relationship with populist or right-wing politicians. Research exists around the populist ideology of Steve Bannon, a propagandist from Breitbart News, Trump's 2016 political campaign manager, and later, Trump's chief strategist and senior counsellor during his presidency (Alexander 2018, Beiner 2019 and Steffek and Lasshof 2022). When analysing his ideology, Alexander (2018) frames Trump as a radical, who is determined to affect revolutionary, radical change, by using an apocalyptic sensibility and the binary of good versus evil.



They found he positions himself as an outsider of mainstream politics and engages in a strategy of “othering” those, whose existence is threatening to his supporters, whom Bannon describes as “real Americans”. Bannon’s ideology and influence in politics has resulted in a new ideology, “Bannonism” (Beiner 2019 and Steffek and Lasshof 2022). This type of doctrine subtly instils fear around immigrants, glorifies an illusionary past, exalts machoism, and mocks leftism. Moreover, Bannon’s political career afforded him symbolic power within Trump’s presidency and framed him as a serious political thinker (Steffek and Lasshof 2022). During his time at The White House, Trump acted as a political avatar to influence policy and presidential rhetoric stemming from Bannon and his beliefs and ideology (Beiner 2019). This literature underlines the relationship between US politics and the alternative right-wing media, normalising and legitimising their movement within the mainstream political sphere. It also demonstrates that they can bypass traditional media, in their messaging to citizens, thereby gaining success and generating support for right-wing politics (Haller, Holt and La Brosse 2019).

Literature also exists that defines and discusses some of the characteristics of alternative right-wing media organisations, drawing distinct differences from traditional media, and highlighting strategic tactics that disseminate agendas and ideologies. Bauer, Nadler and Nelson (2021) examined *Fox News* and argue that the network produces coverage that regularly frames scholarly research as “culture war fodder”, and which falls short of idealistic standards and professional norms of information standards, by engaging in blatant misinformation campaigns. They suggest that this type of journalism aligns *Fox News* more towards propaganda than news, and that its relationship with misinformation and how it produces news, makes it a politically and culturally important, if not suspect, part of the right-wing media sphere. The assertion around scholarly research is supported by Mayerhöffer & Heft (2021), who analysed the in-article referencing strategy used by right-wing alternative news from six countries (UK, US, Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Denmark).

They found that whilst journalistic logic was used to fact-check and ensure context, it revealed a very limited use of sources (primarily of a political persuasion similar to their own), plagiarism and substantial internal referencing, which drew on material previously published to re-emphasise issues.

## **2.4                    2020 election**

Graber and Dunaway (2022) established that the media coverage of both candidates in the 2016 election was decidedly negative, and that it focused on horseraces (42%) and controversies (17%). They maintain that the pattern of the media's fascination with Trump and his campaign continued into the 2020 election and went beyond conservative news outlets, finding the ratio of Trump/Biden aired statements was 60:40, from *Fox News* and 70:30, from CNN. They reasoned that the failures of the press during the Trump era do not stem from advantaging one candidate over another, but that the decisions journalists make about what to cover are driven by audiences and ratings, with little regard for wider social ramifications, as connected to the wider political economy position outlined earlier.

McKinney (2021) considered the presidential debates from the 2020 cycle, which were noted for their chaos and confusion, contrasting them with the debates from the Democratic Party primaries, which were successful in presenting the candidates to the public, and working to shape the field to an eventual vice president and presidential nominee for the party. Noting that the stresses of campaigning during a global pandemic, did not deter Trump from his strategy of seeking to circumvent, control or destroy, the rules and regulations around elections, he initially refused to participate in the CPD (Commission of Presidential Debates) sponsored debates, claiming the body favoured Joe Biden, and that holding the event virtually, was simply an excuse to "cut his mic". When both candidates did hold a debate in person, Trump ignored the rules and interrupted a total of 128 times, a rate which exceeded more than once a minute. This resulted in candidate microphones being off during their competitor's speaking time, in future debates, to allow a fair commentary.

All of this contributes to precedence that potentially contravenes the ability of debates to inform the electorate, and undermines the practice itself and the value it provides.

Hinck et al., (2021) used politeness theory to study the 13 Democratic primary debates in 2020, with comparisons to previous debates from the 2012 and 2016 election cycles, including Republican Party debates. Their results indicate that Democratic candidates were less aggressive in their attacks than Republicans in 2012 and 2016. They found many threats were targeted towards Trump, particularly his character and leadership, and when targeting each other, the Democratic candidates demonstrated equal treatment of both disagreement and affirmation, towards their fellow candidates suggesting a somewhat civil discussion. Suggesting a three-phase campaign playing out across the debates, it began with an early phase of the candidate's creating an appealing image, with limited attacks on others, then moved towards a phase of criticising Trump as the opposition and communicating a joined-up vision for the Party, followed by a final phase, in which the remaining candidates sought to determine who might be best to lead, and win, against him.

Furthering this research, Hinck et al., (2023) offered a comparison between male and female candidates' discourse from the 2020 Democratic primary debates. Using content analysis across 12 debates, findings revealed that women candidates were less likely to be targeted on threats and questions of character, leadership and policy. Women were also more critical of Trump, which is contrary to gendered expectations around women being "nice", and may be best understood within a specific context that could be reactionary towards Trump's misogynistic behaviour and his policies aimed at women's rights. Arguably, this may be demonstrative of the enduring double binds women face in politics, with women incorporating more masculine behaviours and adapting a politeness strategy, in order to bolster their leadership image.

## **2.5 Intersectionality in 2020**

Intersectionality in media coverage of the 2020 election was examined through the lens of race, by Soto-Vásquez & Gonzalez (2022). The authors investigated the media narrative of declaring that the Latina/o/x electorate was “not a monolith”, and how this discourse helped to shape this traditionally underrepresented group into a politically marketable category. Using content analysis across 159 media texts, produced within the first two weeks after election day, their importance during an anti-immigrant and racist campaign by Trump drew the attention of the media, who characterised them with metaphors, such as a “cresting wave” and “sleeping giant”, both implying homogenisation. However, they found that divergent and unexpected results across the states demonstrated that Latina/o/x voters were not in step as a monolith voting bloc, which led to coverage around a decisive regional Latina/o/x vote, and aspects of their culture and history, such as religion and machismo, which the media believe explained voting behavior. Overall, they conclude that the media and politician’s interest, in understanding and capturing the Latina/o/x vote, is growing in importance and that the group is nuanced in terms of regional, religious, generational, and other differences. These differences represent new political battlegrounds for parties, and the authors proposed that candidates should consider them as micro-constituencies, when attempting to appeal to voters. Research which further builds on the differences within the Latino community and their voting behaviour was conducted by Cortina and Rottinghaus (2022), who explored the belief of conspiracy theories and their connection to supporting Trump in a group of Texas Latinos. They suggest Latino voters are of importance within Texas, accounting for more than half the population growth in the state since 2010 and making up 30% of registered voters. Selecting three conspiracy theories, from Spanish-speaking media outlets, and asking Trump supporters, they found a correlation between the two. They found that 41% of those asked, agreed that Biden was under the influence and control of Black Lives Matter and Antifa; 35% believed the deep state was out to ruin the Trump presidency; and 39% believed that powerful people intentionally planned COVID-19.

The research singles out older Latinos in particular, as they are more reliant on Spanish-language media outlets and have less variety in their media exposure.

The Asian-American vote was also investigated by Chan, Nguy and Masuoka (2022), who regard 2020 as a unique election year, with a noted rise in anti-Asian attitudes, due to Covid 19 therefore note the importance of Kamala Harris's opportunity to be vice president. The study established that turnout was notably high for the 2020 election, showing that a majority across the six largest Asian national origin groups voted for the Democratic Party. This could be attributed to the chance to vote for a ticket with a candidate of Asian-American heritage, as Kamala Harris' mother is Indian and suggests a growing importance of this potential voting bloc to the Party. Kamala Harris' selection as Joe Biden's running mate, and her subsequent Vice Presidency, has produced research around her political campaign, her viability as a candidate, and how her alliance with Biden shaped voting in the 2020 election.

Looking at the underrepresentation of black women in US politics, Liebenow, Boucher and Cassidy (2022) sought to identify factors that affect voters' evaluations of these candidates, and may therefore contribute to their marginalisation. Agency and communion were found to be the most prominent traits black women typically experience backlash against, if they exhibit behaviours that deviate from gendered expectations. Harris was found to be more agentic than communal. When supported by political ideology, this resulted in higher expected success with Liberal voters than Conservative. Conservative voters expressed higher levels of expected success when she was perceived to be more communal. Agency is associated with independence and competence, which for black women can map towards anger, rather than leadership, disadvantaging black female candidates. This suggests political ideology may provide a buffer in terms of gendered evaluations and shows ingroup favouritism, but the authors argue that this also underlines the importance of communality for black women, which may be key to overcoming penalties created by their agency, thus contributing to favourable evaluations and support.

Nee (2022) explored the intersection of gender and racial stereotypes on Twitter around Kamala Harris and her nomination for vice president. Once chosen by Biden as his running mate, she faced scrutiny and media attention, and became the target of commentary and conspiracies. Using content analysis of Twitter posts from August 12th, 2020, when she was announced as Biden's running mate, until November 7th 2020, four days after the election, 50,000 tweets were collected. Six frames were identified, the most popular being inauthentic/ambitious. She was framed as violent/dangerous, tough/anti-black, sexually promiscuous and a loser. Advancing how the intersectionality of black women can be used to discredit them as political candidates, stereotypes and frames were employed, many of which have been used historically, as a way to oppress intersectional candidates.

Some research has been produced which looks, intersectionally, at Pete Buttigieg as a candidate and his sexuality as an openly gay man. Magni and Reynolds (2023) conducted a survey of 6000 likely voters during the primary stages of the election, asking how much they favoured Buttigieg, and who they would support between Trump and him. They found overall, voters penalised Buttigieg for his relationship with his husband, a penalty which was increased when his religion, as a Christian man, was highlighted. In contrast, his military background mitigated voter discrimination when he was presented as a veteran married to a man. Further research by Gibson and Hester (2023) examined Buttigieg's sexuality and the way it intersected with his religion as part of his political identity. A computational analysis of 2.6 million Tweets from March 2019 until March 2020 showed more interest in his sexuality than religion. They acknowledge that Buttigieg is a self-identified member of the Christian Left, the lesser-known counterpart to the Religious Right, and sought to determine how Twitter reacted to his emphasis on both parts of his identity. The findings noted that the number of tweets about his religion was less than anticipated, whilst five times as many tweets around his sexuality were found.

Whilst smaller in volume, the religion-focused tweets demonstrated higher amplification through twice as many shares and likes, which was attributed to a contentious challenge between Buttigieg, Mike Pence (who was Vice President at the time), and evangelist Franklin Graham, both of whom questioned whether an LGBTQ+ person could be a true Christian. The virality of this exchange was considered the driver of the amplification, however it was determined that Buttigieg's religion did not result in a very substantial discussion around the role of religion in politics or the intersection of religion, sexuality, and political identities.

These studies emphasise Buttigieg's complex political identity, in which his religion, sexuality and veteran status, shaped his viability in the 2020 presidential election. It reveals the double standards around homosexuality and heterosexuality, which penalise gay candidates; the importance of military service within American society and the strength of its associations with the presidency; and suggests that his religion was not as important to voters, as these other factors.

Much of the research that emerged from the 2020 election was shaped by an intersectional lens and analyses of the mass media. This may have been in response to the diversity of the candidates within the Democratic field, including the historic appointment of Kamala Harris as Vice President, and the increased prominence of gender, race and other societal issues within US public discourse. The importance of voter identities, and how race can influence political messaging and policies, is emerging too, as past elections have shown predictions around ethics, demographic and gender metrics are changing. At the heart of many of the issues that inspired this body of research, is the notion of power. Who has it, how they sustain it, how it can be diversified in the challenge for equality, and the role the media plays in shaping it. The next chapter looks at the key theories within the field of gender that were selected for this research, in order to support the analysis and findings.

### **3.0 Key Theories Underpinning the Research**

Theory and theorising are not linear, and there is no single method to adopt, nor a single way of interpreting theory (Hammond 2018). The theories discussed in this section offer a perspective and framework through which to examine how gendered the media discourse is, around the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election. The following theories were selected for this research: Jamieson's double bind (1995), which encapsulates the positioning of women in a situation whereby two—and only two—choices, elicit a penalty, no matter which one is followed. Butler's gender performativity (1990), which asserts that gender is not determined through biology, but through a series of acts and deeds, which are learned. Symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978), which is concerned with the portrayal of women in the media and their underrepresentation. The commonality of double binds, the underrepresentation, or misrepresentation, of women in the media and the scrutiny of women's femininity in politics, is created by the ubiquitous barriers, stereotypes and biases they must contend with: a phenomenon which is well established and documented. It was expected to find evidence of such treatment of women politicians within the data, and these theories helped to reveal the ways media discourse controls and influences political representation and equality.

Connell's masculinities (1995) joins these theories as a framework, in order to analyse the discourse around the men political candidates within the data, and offers an evaluation from the opposite side of the gender binary. The candidate field may be diverse, however, in order to fully consider and evaluate the portrayal of gender, the men candidates and their masculinity offer an interesting debate around how it is depicted by the media, and how it is used to model political power and capability.

They are all rooted in the prism of gender, politics and media, and have been widely adopted in research within these areas. They provide a way to engage with, and interpret, the data and offer a structured way of looking at the findings.



They form a normative aspect to the research in that, it was expected to find examples of gendered portrayals in the media coverage that fit within the margins of each of these theories. Looking at this research through the lens of these theories is subjective, and extends some explanatory tools to capture the perspectives on the phenomena (Hammond 2018) and assists in defining the gap in literature, which this study aims to fill.

### **3.1 Symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978)**

Cranford et al., (1979) reviewed Tuchman's pioneering research (1978) reflecting on their impact on America during the time. They noted the study investigates three related social issues in America: the effects on attitudes of mass media portrayals of women, the nature of those portrayals, and the media's influence on public opinion of the women's rights movement. The review comments on the symbolic annihilation of media coverage of the women's rights movement, which was evidenced by coverage in which leaders were trivialised (resigned short copy on women's pages) or reproached by coverage showing angry, aggressive, and "unfeminine" pictures. Tuchman's study was framed as providing "hard-hitting" answers to this portrayal, highlighting male dominance within the media industry, who use their control to perpetuate the social and economic status quo, lest their male supremacy be disrupted. This innovative research is the underlying framework that has remained relevant throughout decades of social, political and technological development, and forms a cornerstone of the theoretical approach to this study. Graham (1988) observes the modern feminist movement came of age through the 1970s and much of the future of the women of the era lies not in national politics and policy, but in the rich lodes of popular culture, social and economic life, intellectual and professional development, and women's organisations and advocacy. Although this statement was made decades ago, the reflection remains true. The portrayal of women in the current media landscape remains gendered, as only 25% of sources and subjects are women (GMMP 2021). This suggests Tuchman's concept of symbolic annihilation is highly appropriate within research in this field and that the media are integral to advancing agendas for gender equality (Savigny and Warner 2015; Ross 2017 and Harp 2019).

Tuchman's work drew upon Gerber's (1972) concept of "symbolic annihilation" to demonstrate the underrepresentation of women in the mass media (Schneider and Hammen 2019). Tuchman adapted the concept of symbolic annihilation within the context of feminist media analysis, in order to explain women's absence in the mass communication content, using the term to explain how powerful groups in society suppressed the less powerful by marginalising them to such an extent that they are rendered virtually invisible as a representable group (Harp 2019). As Tuchman (1978 p.150) states: most media portray, if at all, women in traditional roles: homemaker, mother, or, if they are in the paid workforce, as clerical or other "pink collar" jobs. The study revealed that women were mostly invisible in news discourse and when they were featured, they were infantilised, with men required to watch over them, and/or with a focus on the private sphere of the family/home life (Ross 2013). The impact of such representation is concerning due to the role the mass media play in shaping attitudes and expectations of women, and consistent repetition of these can be expected to maintain women's subordinate position within society (Tuchman 1978 p.150).

Contemporary research shows representation of women has progressed (GMMP 2021, Ross 2013, Stanley 2012, Verge and Pastor 2017), as have media and cultural landscapes, but through stereotypes and social norms, women and other minority groups remain marginalised within mass media coverage (Dunaway and Graber 2023). In the decades since, women are presented in stereotypical ways, including with a focus on appearance, passivity, and nurturing, and within the context of domesticity (Harp 2019). Stanley (2012) investigated the progress of women's representation since Tuchman's research in the 1970s and found that it had increased, but attributed this to a change in journalism, which saw newspapers reporting more on fashion, entertainment, and lifestyle areas within which women had equal coverage to men.

As Harp (2019) acknowledges, this kind of erasure of women, along with their linkage to their husbands, is not a new problem at the intersection of media content, women and politics. Further to which, Tuchman's concept has relevancy within contemporary research and has impacted the broader area of analysis, due to the role the media plays in influencing socialisation (Dunaway and Graber 2023).

The concept has also been used within a political context as evidenced by Everbach (2017), who examines the media narratives and coverage around Monica Lewinsky and her affair with then-President Bill Clinton in 1998. Stereotypical generalisations of young women, and women who have extramarital affairs, were levelled at Lewinsky to shame her, reflecting her association with Clinton. Her true character, and her truth, were absent from the coverage. Schneider and Hamman (2019) also used the concept to examine frames that emerged through media coverage of sexual misconduct within the context of the US 2016 presidential election. They found that whilst there was space devoted to the narratives around the stories, the accounts of individuals were absent. On politics, Tuchman (1978) suggests that whilst much media coverage is given to people in power, women featured are often the consorts to famous men, and are not portrayed as subjects of political and social concern in their own right.

The world of politics has advanced and now, there are currently 26 countries where women serve as heads of state and/or government (UN Women 2023). It is questionable, and one of the main threads of this thesis, as to the quality and diversity reflected in this increased representation. Certainly, as Dunaway and Graber (2023) concluded, much research acknowledges that although there have been advances in media portrayals of women, there remains a lack of multidimensional roles, and more nuanced depictions of women that intersect with race, sexuality and other factors which would improve overall representation. Tuchman described women's denigration, victimisation, and trivialization in mass communication content, as ways that symbolic annihilation function, and as such, this research aims to reveal occurrences in contemporary politics and the mainstream media in the US.

### **3.2 Gendered performance (Butler 1990)**

Blumenfeld and Breen (2017) argue that Butler's work, including her theory of gender performativity (1990), have had a profound effect on people's understanding of gender and sexuality, politics and activism. Roden (2017) suggests that Butler's work has shaped the discipline of gender studies and queer theory, and made terms such as performance, performativity, and performative, central terms in the discussion around gender and identity. Butler acknowledges this within later editions, writing "it would constitute an 'intervention' in feminist theory and become one of the founding texts of queer theory" (Butler 1990). Gender is recognised as a category of socialisation, with biology and anatomy used to classify as male or female, a binary view that does not include the notion of other genders, such as non-binary, transgender and others (Klysing 2019). Butler's theory of gender performance (1990) starts from the premise that gender roles are not rooted in biology, but in codes of behaviour that are learned and then re-enacted throughout life. According to Butler, it is performatively enacted, not fixed or stable, but a continuous process of a "gender performance", which makes one a woman or a man (Robinson and Richardson 2015). With the media's tendency to view politics through the male gaze (Ross 2013, Sullivan 2023), gendered stereotypes often define political viability and success (Campus 2013, Jamieson 1995). Attributing gendered ideals to politicians reinforces the binary of male and female, and underlines the uniqueness of women in the political sphere, which, if they are performing their gender correctly, positions them as outsiders, and not competent enough for the role (Klysing 2019).

This research uses Butler's theory as a way of examining the media discourses around the politicians, in terms of accepted feminine and masculine norms, such as appearance, the way they sound and how their emotions are portrayed, and overall political viability. Research within the field of gender, media and politics exists, where Butler's theory is used to analyse how gender performances are constructed, some of the possible influences that shape them, and considers the impact on discourse and society. Sullivan (2023) examined the construction of the gender performances of Canadian mayors to assess how stereotypes influence them.

They found both would display mixed gender performances, however women mayors would use avoidance strategies, such as self-censorship online to avoid cueing their femininity, which suggests sexism remains a barrier for them. Further research on social media, conducted by Norocel (2018), also examines the discursive performance of gender around female conservative politicians in Hungary and Romania, finding they draw upon idealised motherhood and feminine toughness. This demonstrates the nuances within a gender performance, and suggests some element of partisanship would influence which characteristics would be emphasised and which avoided. Following on, Harp, Loke and Bachmann (2010) examine the discursive construction of Sarah Palin in news media during the first week of her nomination as Republican Vice President candidate. They found a complex blend of both masculinity and femininity, in which Palin's masculinity is celebrated, but remains rooted in more traditional notions of femininity.

When considering women as a political subject, feminism is a political movement around bettering the lives of women (Lloyd 2007), and Butler (1990) challenges the categorisation of gender identities within the binary framework of heterosexuality. Within this research, it was expected to find examples of gender performativity from the Democratic candidates, which fall into the binary of heteronormativity, such as feminine and masculine traits, and behaviours familiar to political candidates who work to shape their identities within the election. By considering gender as a performance of several "acts", analysis of the media coverage around the debates and candidates can reveal the structures of discourses in detail and widen the scope towards an intersectional approach regarding gender. It is acknowledged through intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) that gender is not the only dimension of identity that produces exclusion and oppression (Savigny and Warner 2015). This will also reveal the stereotypes and biases that are ascribed to these genders by the media, and how they influence political identity and acceptance from voters. For example, to Butler (1990), lesbian and gay are a discursive product from the belief that heterosexuality is a matter of imitation and parody, and essentially unstable. It is within this instability that the possibility of resistance and change is enabled; a re-articulation of gender.

This theory proved useful in encompassing a full analysis of Pete Buttigieg, the openly gay Mayor from Indiana, and current Transport Secretary in the Biden administration (Porterfield 2021), as he presented a combination of gendered acts, which differ from other candidates.

This study aims to help define gender performances of political candidates and illuminate the penalties administered within media discourse, when candidates do not remain within the established social norms. Butler's theory places emphasis on the thinking around heteronormativity, with a path to highlighting exceptions. Their view of the body and gender requires a shift away from identity politics, and a move towards politics of the identity. This is problematic for regimes of power and discourse, as politics operates around grouping people, rather than individuals, and as evidenced, gender groups define the hierarchy within society (Connell 1995, 2021). The very premise of equality is one that is continually being fought for by minority groups within politics. Gender experiences and performativity may go towards a "remapping of sexual difference" (Butler 1990), and along with this research, may provide a way for politics to begin to address the marginalisation of under-represented groups.

### **3.3 Double Bind (Jamieson 1995)**

Jamieson (1995) outlines the double bind as a strategy perennially used by those with power, against those without, and the overwhelming evidence shows that historically, women are usually these targets. They suggest it is a rhetorical construct that posits two alternatives, with one, or both, penalising the person who is faced with them. Explaining further, many women find themselves trapped in situations where they are "damned if they do, and damned if they don't" (Jamieson 1995 p.4). Within the concept, power is understood to be a masculine domain, whilst being feminine is to lack power (Harp 2019). Indeed, masculine and feminine gender norms are not simply a theoretical discussion, as they have a considerable bearing on real life, and this is particularly true of politics, where expectations around the idea of leadership are aligned with masculine traits (Campus 2013 and Harp 2019).

Werhane and Painter-Morland (2011) describe how in leadership, women often face competing demands where they are assumed to align with a communal style of leadership, but are often considered lacking in capability, and therefore abdicate the communal style in favour of more recognisable leadership traits associated with masculinity, which results in being viewed as unfeminine. This illustrates the double bind of femininity and competence, which looks at the construction of unrealizable expectations of women, by requiring both femininity and competence in the public sphere, but defining femininity in a way that excludes competence (Jamieson 1995 p.18). Jamieson identified five double binds in total; the remaining four are discussed further in this section, in relation to the context of this research. However, these two particular binds regularly appear, underpinning and identifying ubiquitous forms of discrimination within the field of gender, media and politics (Ross 2013, Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018, Harp 2019). As Skard (2017) notes, double binds have consequences for female politicians, and invite scepticism around competency, which creates a double standard of women being subjected to closer scrutiny and stricter expectations than men. Altogether, Jamieson's double binds offer considerable foundation and latitude in examining how the media portray gender in the coverage of the Democrat Party nomination debates, and they provide a succinct framework within which to illustrate the double standards around women politicians, which is expected to be found within this research.

Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth (2018) describe a double bind as a type of bias in which leadership attributes that contribute to success are proportionately more difficult for women than men to achieve, resulting in a gendered discrimination. They specifically found that ambitious women in politics were penalised, relative to men, around the issue of family responsibilities, and that although voters preferred candidates who were married with children, women shouldered a greater burden and were viewed less favourably. This bind is concerned with the womb and the brain, together with place and power, as the use of the uterus is associated with the private sphere, and the use of the brain the public sphere. Those who use their intellect in public life risk disturbing the "natural order" of the family and risk their essential womanhood (Jamieson 1995 p17).

Harp, Loke and Bachmann (2016) consider the double bind as a rhetorical frame that highlights the gendered expectations of women politicians as discursive constructions, and draws focus around their femininity, thereby diminishing their competency and emphasising their gender, in order to underestimate their intelligence. Using Hilary Clinton as an example, the bind emerged through media coverage of the 2013 Benghazi hearings, in which her emotions were referenced in gendered ways and portrayed her as lacking in her abilities as a politician. The study also revealed a potential new bind, as media coverage also questioned the genuineness of her emotions, drawing questions of capability against her sincerity.

Other research looks towards women who represent right-leaning political parties. Bast, Oschatz and Renner (2022) build on leadership stereotypes that consider gender against a competence/warmth dimension, specifically within right-wing populist women politicians. They showed that the women presented themselves as colder, but more competent than their male colleagues in social roles, but warmer and more competent in their non-verbal behaviours. They argue that the double bind of womb and brain does not exist for these women, as they employed a different strategy in minimising their family lives and displayed warmth through other means, such as closeness to citizens. This invites speculation around political party affiliation and gender roles, with further research demonstrating similar findings. In the US, Sarah Palin was able to harness positive connotations of motherhood in her vice-presidential campaign in 2008 with five children at home, and in 2010 through her cadre of "mama grizzlies" faction of conservative women, who drew on the fierceness and protectiveness of the animals to protect their voters from the government (Stalsberg and Kleinburg 2016). In France, Snipes and Mudde (2020) found that media framing of Marie Le Pen, president of the populist right French National Rally Party, combined the frame of a harder radical right politician with that of a softer, women politician, resulting in less biased coverage for her. Party affiliation may be a factor in the construction of a double bind for women politicians and may benefit from further investigation, however for the purpose of this research, democratic party candidates were chosen for analysis and Jamieson's double bind framework proved to be informative in evaluating media portrayals around the candidates and gender.



Jamieson identified five binds in total, two are discussed around existing literature within the field, the remaining binds point to discrimination around gender for women who pursue ambitions outside of the accepted social norms. The following bind considers women's public speech and the efforts they must make to surmount gendered bias: women who speak out are immodest and to be shamed, whilst women who are silent will be ignored and disregarded. This encapsulates research around women politicians who experience bias when they use their voice, physically or metaphorically to advance their ambitions. Campus (2013) notes women have a more intimate style of speech, noting Clinton's campaign was styled around a "conversation", rather than a conventional political speech. This strategy intentionally plays on her gender to frame her politics and campaign, whilst the media discourse around her campaign posed the opposite view of her voice. As Harp (2019) notes, one article labelled her "Hillary, Killary, Shrillary. She who yells too much". The nature of this bind is particularly useful for this research, as the analysis focuses on the reporting of spoken events in which women feature throughout.

Women are seen to be subordinate, but whether they claim to be different from men or the same, is a further bind that presents a "no-win" situation; as Jamieson (1995 p 106) acknowledges, a female politician is still viewed as an outsider in politics who offers an affinity with disenchanted voters, who believe they may be empathetic to their own experiences. Difference represents an advantage to women in this scenario, however they remain faced with overcoming the other binds, in order to prove their worth, and ultimately remain "othered" within the political sphere.

Finally, Jamieson suggests that as men age, they gain wisdom and power; as women age, they wrinkle and become superfluous. The GMMP (2021) measured the representation of age in the media and found that over time, women over 50 became more invisible, with only 3% of women aged 65-79 represented, compared to 15% of men. In politics, assumptions around age may be used to form opinions of younger women who may seem lacking in authority or competence, or as shown in media representation, older women may seem irrelevant and redundant (McKay 2020).

The binds draw their power from their capacity to simplify complexity, as human nature is to split apart elements, and the assumption is that a person can't be both at once, as well as somewhere in between (Jamieson 1995). For this research, femininity is constructed in dichotomous opposition to masculinity, with the double binds operating as rhetorical mechanisms that advance gendered discrimination and enforce barriers for women's representation in politics. As McKay (2020b) suggests, double binds of gendered assumptions may deter women from politics and impact on mediated representations of political personas.

### **3.4 Masculinities (Connell 1995)**

In the 2000s, the field of gender research was mainly focused on, and developed by, women, and within building this body of work, masculinity and men have become more visible as part of the research debate (Connell, Kimmel and Hearn 2005). Connell's (1995) research on masculinity is widely regarded as influential in pluralizing the concept, and examining the development and implications of multiple "masculinities" (Beasley 2008; Fletcher 2018 and Whitehead 2021).

Including, and building, masculinity within the field of gender research is important to Connell's theory, as it is regarded as a relational concept, with meaning to femininity, a social demarcation and cultural opposition (Connell 1995 p.44). The achievement of gender equality is seen as a societal responsibility that lies with men, as well as with women (Connell, Kimmel and Hearn 2005), as in 2004, the UN recognised the role of men and boys in achieving this goal, and encouraged them to participate fully in associated efforts (Unwomen.org 2004).

Whitehead (2021) argues that within every male, masculinity will correspond, sometimes problematically, with a host of other identity variables when combined to create an individual "man". Connell (1995) observes that masculinities are not equal to men; they concern the position of men in a gender order and can be defined as the patterns of practice by which people engage that position.

The theory critically examines male domination, but not by condemning all men (Wedgwood 2009). The theory also suggests the existence of multiple masculinities within a hierarchy, and that practices and relations within the gender order of society construct the main forms of masculinity.

Using Gramsci's concept of hegemony, by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in society (Gramsci et al 1971), hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of gender practice that embodies the current accepted answer to the legitimacy of patriarchy, and guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell 1995 p.77). This type of masculinity is formed when there is a connection between cultural ideal and institutional power, with the top levels of business, military and government providing an unquestionable example of areas in which women and feminism have yet to make serious inroads. It works to privilege some men over others, with wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual, ethnic-majority men enjoying numerous advantages, while men who do not conform to this, are either marginalised or excluded from the political process (Bjarnegård & Murray 2018b). In the context of this study, and considering the diversity of the Democratic Party candidates, this concept forms an interesting strand of analysis, which was likely to have predictable outcomes, as the ties between men and the presidency are particularly strong, within Connell's observations regarding men and their dominance. However, due to the presence of Pete Buttigieg, an openly gay mayor who campaigned for the nomination, an opportunity was presented to examine gay masculinity, and how it intersects with power and leadership, and competes with hegemonic masculinity.

When evaluating masculinity and politics, Connell (1995) considers the other types of masculinity, which have a definitive relation to the position, and dominance of hegemonic masculinity within the political sphere. Masculinity therapy considers the response to feminism, framed as "healing the wounds done to heterosexual men by gender relations".

Issues raised by the Women's Liberation movement at the end of the 1960s around masculinity and the male role, were reinterpreted as therapeutic issues, by psychologists and psychiatrists who purported that men should not accept the blame for inequality, and that they should acknowledge and celebrate their differences from women. This movement, often referred to as the mythopoeic movement, was largely inspired by the American poet Robert Bly, who asserted 'finding the inner man' as a remedy for the damage done to masculinity (Gottzen 2011). This concept of emphasising a version of hyper-masculinity runs deep into American politics, as examples are numerous. Arnold Schwarzenegger's celebrity status as a "1980s tough guy" contributed to an idealised version of the "American man" masculine persona, which was effective in his gaining of political power that helped to win the Governorship of California (Messner 2007). Donald Trump demonstrated ostentatious displays of masculine excess during his political career and his preferred frame is one of a "hard-bitten, alpha male" (Smith and Higgins 2020). This form of masculinity rejects the politics of social equality, and emphasises an arena of emotions with a lack of consideration towards intersectional elements of masculinity, such as race, class, sexuality and cultural differences (Connell 1995 p.209).

Connell also references the gun lobby, in their role as a defence to hegemonic masculinity, and notes their significant influence over US politics. The National Rifle Association (NRA) is a 147-year-old lobby/hobby group that has the power to mobilize grassroots support and influence politics in the US (Rushe 2018). In analysis of the group's power, Lacombe (2021) asserts the group crafted a specific gun-owner identity among its members, and cultivated an ideology in which gun rights are intrinsically connected to politics, and other political issues, such as crime and military defence. In 2020, a record year for gun sales, it was observed that gun sellers' views of this increase was framed as the reasonable and responsible response to political instability; a reinforcement of apocalyptic masculinity that circumvents democracy and stands as the mark of a "real" man (An and Carlson 2022). This type of masculinity is nurtured by the narratives the NRA draws attention to, such as: national security, family values, religion, individual freedom and international competitiveness.

Further to this, the successful maintenance of a competitive and dominance-orientated masculinity in politics is viewed to offer a collective power that reinforces hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995 p.216). Through structuring the defence of hegemonic masculinity as such, and considering the scale and history of these narratives, dominance by a particular group is achieved.

Homosexual masculinity is a further form, which gained agency in the 1960s, when the gay liberation movement challenged established political power, and named straight men, patriarchy, the family and heterosexism as the sources of gay oppression (Connell 1995 p.219). As Connell notes, this is the main type of subordinated masculinity in the contemporary gender order, and creating their space within the political system has been arduous, with gay men pictured as an army of lawbreakers, violating God's commands, threatening the family and the larger social order. Oppression positions gay men at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men, with gayness easily assimilated to femininity and some men expelled from the power of hegemonic masculinity. Homophobia often adopts themes that feminise gay men, and the politics of this masculinity, whilst not oppositional, are turbulent, and continue to make practical and theoretical challenges to the gender order. Connell argues there is a definitive politics of masculinity around contemporary men's homosexuality, and the growth and advance of gay rights revolves around the ability of gay representatives to observe convention within the political sphere.

Connell (1995) acknowledges that men dominate, and are sustained by, several barriers, such as legal frameworks, recruitment rules and a rich variety of biases and assumptions that work in their favour. Further to this, the power of masculinity in politics lies within this dominance, and the capacity of certain men to control social resources through gendered processes and the resulting society these produce. It remains a crucial resource for politicians, and is a key theme in leadership and power, and Connell's views and ideas around this concept provided structure and support in the media coverage analysis within this study.

The inclusion of this concept within this research offers a framework that establishes the various ways in which masculinity presents within the media discourse of the Democratic Party nomination debates. It also lends itself towards examining the construction of these, and illuminates the ways in which masculinity shapes political identity within the media.

### **3.5 Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991)**

In the 1990s, Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) gained traction through catching a change in the political landscape where women's movements had become fragmented in their thinking over issues of sexuality, race and gender policies: the result was a rearranging of feminism (Connell 2021). Bell Hooks (1984) explored what she regarded as the limitations of feminism in the 1980s: that it centred around white women of the leisure class, and reflected race and class biases that reinforced white supremacy. She proposed a new perspective that included the recognition of racial and class hierarchies, and examined the relationship of how these women are oppressed by institutional power structures, such as politics. By highlighting differences in lived experiences of sexism, Hooks, as in the title of her book, *feminist theory from margin to centre* (1984) was on the margin of feminist theory that considers women as more than a single homogenous group. This supports the concept that Crenshaw termed intersectionality (1991). The concept suggests there are multiple perspectives representing the outlook of different groups of women, especially those who are marginalised due to their race, sexuality, or class (Robinson and Richardson 2015, Connell 2021). Crenshaw ascertains that race, gender and other elements of identity are often framed in mainstream liberal discourse as "vestiges of bias and/or domination to exclude those who are different". Considering the experience of violence against women, which is often shaped by other dimensions of identity, such as race and class, the contemporary discourses of feminism and anti-racism, fail to consider intersectional identities. Crenshaw advocates a need to consider multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed.

This research aimed to use Crenshaw's work as an analytical tool across the data, and as a supporting framework to provide a deeper analysis reflecting the way biases and gendered discrimination are compounded with other factors, such as Buttigieg's sexuality and the advanced ages of Biden and Sanders. Race, albeit a significant factor in research around this topic, was not found within the data, as diversity was diminished early on, with Kamala Harris withdrawing from the race in December 2019, Andrew Yang holding little traction during the TV debates and ensuing coverage, and Cory Booker suspending his campaign in January 2020 (Coransaniti 2020). Although the candidate field was initially lauded for its diversity, by December 2019 only white candidates remained, suggesting attitudes towards race and gender were already shaping the contest for the party nomination (Nelson 2021). Cassino (2021) also emphasises the growing importance that gender and race hold for voters, by pointing towards political polling, which consistently failed to predict the election. When conducting a post-2020 election review, race, which increased in dominance as a concern for voters after Trump's 2016 win, was joined by gender as a decision-making factor, suggesting intersectional attitudes are gaining importance.

Crenshaw's theory is grounded in feminism, however there is a broad application in the understanding of intersectionality as a way of examining and understanding the relationships between different forms of disadvantage and experiences in inequality (Robinson and Richardson 2015). Harp (2019) uses the perspective to discuss the way experiences shape masculinity, and suggests in the context of US politics, the men who are most advantaged by hegemonic masculinity are at the intersection of white, cis-gendered, middle-to upper-class educated, able-bodied, males. Locke and Joseph (2021) focused on the selection of Kamala Harris as Vice President to Joe Biden in 2020, and acknowledged that choosing a black woman challenged notions of the presidency, but suggests there is a difference in her intersectionality than that of other black women within the Democratic Party, such as Stacey Abrams, a former Georgia gubernatorial candidate. They argue that this choice is symbolic of change within politics and would promote interests around black representation inside the White House.

They analysed the political positions of these women and determined that Abrams showed intersectionality through a praxis for coalition building and promoting democratic values, whilst Harris represented intersectionality as a long-awaited win for black women; a large and loyal demographic for the Party. This underlines the emphasis intersectionality places on the uniqueness of experience and reveals variances within a political context. From the perspective of voters, Bejenaro et al., (2021) used data around race and gender, collected post-2016 US presidential election, to suggest which political candidates mattered to minority voters and how intersectional political identities influenced them. They found that a shared gender and racial identity was highly associated with how voters formed their perceptions of a candidate and their beliefs that a candidate would represent their interests, underlining the importance of this approach for increased diversity within politics.

Intersectionality comprises a foundational support to the other theories within this research, all of which have the capacity to present a monolithic view of the data. By revealing gendered discourses and their construction through this approach, a balance is struck between similarities and differences of candidate identities, and the narratives within the media coverage. The utility lies in the increased detail and interpretation of the data, which yielded a more rounded discussion and conclusion.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In summary, the theories discussed in this section form a scaffold to support this research. Collins and Stockton (2018) believe that epistemology and methodological diligence and integrity are fundamental to qualitative research, with the influence of theory permeating almost every part of a study. The theoretical framework is therefore based on existing literature, and may reflect important personal values or beliefs, as well as an understanding of the nature of knowledge and how it exists (Wilkins, Neri and Lean 2019). Collins and Stockton (2018) discuss the power of normativity, inherent to different degrees in one's own life, as creating tensions when viewing the world through critical perspectives.



Furthermore, they argue that the layers of social power and dominance within identity, shape the vantage point from which the creation of knowledge and the pursuit of understanding are formed. It should therefore be noted that the researcher identifies as a white, straight woman, which influences the shape of this research, and carries weight in determining the selection of theory and its use within this study. The inclusion of feminist theories addresses the need for more representation and knowledge within politics; and through increased understanding of white privilege, the addition of more inclusive theory (masculinities, Connell 1995 and Intersectionality, Crenshaw 1991) was deemed advantageous to this research.

The theories chosen for this research are well-established within the fields of gender, politics and media. Their inclusion offers some implications around the findings in this research, and as Wilkins, Neri and Lean (2019) state, they can be used to map out the relationships between different phenomena. This is of importance when addressing the research gap that is specific to the 2020 Democratic Party nomination, the candidates and political debates. The inclusion of Jamieson's double bind (1995), Butler's gender performativity (1990), and symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978) are used to highlight gendered bias and discrimination towards candidates; and Connell's masculinities (1995), whilst also capable of analysing bias, underpins the work that gendered privilege does within US electoral politics. The addition of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) offers a framework for a more inclusive analysis, broadening the scope and originality of this study.

These theories determined what was analysed, thereby helping to form a structure for the findings and discussion, and supporting the rationale, aims and objectives (Wilkins, Neri and Lean 2019). Together, with the researcher's analysis, they provided an articulated lens to show how the researcher processed and presents new knowledge (Collins and Stockton 2018). Their practicality and precedence within the field delivered tools for in-depth analysis of the data, and they enabled a well-rounded, logical and meaningful explanation of the gendered portrayal of political candidates within the media.

## **4.0 Methodology**

This chapter sets out the methodology used for this research through the following sections, starting with an introduction that describes the aims and objectives, along with the research context, leading to the researcher's philosophy. The approach to research section focuses on the framework chosen for analysis: Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (2010), with the subsequent sections explaining how CDA was adopted within this study. Following this, the rationale for selecting the chosen news websites is explained and the context of political debates is discussed. The chapter then moves into a summary of how the corpus of texts was collected. A pilot study was carried out in November 2019, following the debate, to test and refine the analysis process; which is discussed, with changes highlighted. The chapter ends with an evaluation of the methodology, with its strengths, limitations and overall effectiveness being considered, from which conclusions are drawn.

### **4.1 Introduction**

A methodology refers to how knowledge is gained and how research data is gathered (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2020), or simply as the way problems are approached and the way answers are sought (Taylor, Bogdon and DeVault (2016). This research aims to assess how gendered the media coverage of the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election was, in order to investigate the ways gender is portrayed, and to evaluate the significance of this. There are four questions which underpin this aim:

- How does the US media portray gender in coverage of a Democratic debate during the 2020 US election?
- What are the key gender discourses arising from the analysis in this research and how are they constructed?
- How does the political ideology of a media outlet play a role in the way gender is portrayed in the coverage of an election?

- How might this research be useful in advancing awareness of gender inequality within electoral politics and thereby benefit future political campaigns of minority candidates?

The following research objectives were formulated, in order to operationalise the aim and questions, and to develop the methodology:

- To identify and evaluate critically, the construction of gender discourses in the media coverage of the Democratic Party nomination debates during the 2020 US presidential election (Fairclough 2010).
- To analyse critically, how gendered the media coverage arising from the Democratic Party nomination debates was and identify key themes relating to theories selected for this research (double bind (Jamieson 1995), symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978) and gendered performance (Butler 1990) and masculinities (Connell 1995)).
- To investigate critically, the media landscape in the US, their political ideologies and how these correlate with aspects of gender in US politics.

This research focuses on the representation and interpretation of language, as it is used to construct discourses. The US media coverage, and the US political landscape of 2020, may be considered the social environment, with the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the US presidential election in 2020, serving as the context for this study. The subjects are the Democratic candidates campaigning for the party nomination and a selection of US online media publications from across the political ideological spectrum. This approach encompasses key areas of qualitative research, which aim to understand the meaning of social actions within the context in which people live, and emphasises the importance of interpretation and observation in understanding the social world (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2017). Brennen (2019) explains qualitative research is interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature. Taylor, Bogden and DeVault (2016) suggest that it refers in the broadest sense to research that provides descriptive data and examines how things look from different vantage points.

By examining a corpus of texts from news sites across the political ideological spectrum, and considering the central positioning within the 2016 election, gender was expected to be a recurring and central theme in the discourse surrounding the 2020 election.

The methodology for this study is rooted in the researcher's philosophical perspective, which influences the way this research is carried out (Hennink, Hutter and Bailey 2020). Brinkmann (2018) notes philosophy is an inquiry into the foundations of ethics, politics, aesthetics, and human knowledge, but also views it as a practice: a way of life that inspires the researcher. Understanding the researcher's key assumptions is important in determining the methodology and strengthening the quality of the study, in terms of comprehension, engagement and presentation of the main findings and outcomes (Scotland 2012 and Alharasheh and Pius 2020). The following sections discuss these and how they shaped the methodology for this study.

#### **4.2 Research Philosophy**

Scotland (2012) asserts that a paradigm consists of ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. They describe each of them as follows: ontological assumptions are concerned with reality, in that researchers must consider how they believe things really are, and how they work. Epistemological assumptions consider how knowledge can be created, acquired, and communicated. Methodology is a strategic plan of action, which lies behind the selection and use of specific methods, chosen to collect and analyse data. The researcher's ontological assumption towards gender inequality is that it exists, and is observable, as shown through much of the literature (Jamieson 1995, Connell 1995, Ross 2013 and 2017). It is also assumed that politics, elections, and mass media function in a way that sustains its existence and reality, and as such, these views are fundamental to carrying out this research. Indeed, ontologically, "gender" or "gendering" as a process, matters within this research.

As Maruska (2010) suggests, rather than investigating the *product* of social construction (the binary of masculinity and femininity), “gender-as-power” approaches examine the process itself, and can reveal the power play that transcends the individuals involved and how this affects society more widely. Epistemologically, gender inequality and the representation of gender in the media and US politics, are assumed to impact society and be implicitly connected. This research is rooted in feminist epistemology and philosophy that aims to serve the interests of women and other minority groups within society (Anderson 2020), and provides an assessment of contemporary politics and media, which are traditionally shaped by a masculine perspective and favour the portrayal of masculine leadership.

There are many different paradigms to qualitative research however, when considering the researcher’s philosophical assumptions, an interpretivist perspective was adopted for this research, which endeavours to understand social phenomena from the complexities of meaning through symbols, language, and social interactions (Putnam and Banghart 2017). O’Reilly (2009) explains that Max Weber (a sociologist, 1864-1920) was an early advocate for interpretivism, as he believed that people do not always have automatic responses to stimuli, but that they would pause, think, and consider their actions before deciding on a response. Furthermore, interpretive understanding (*Verstehen*, as Weber referred to it), would inevitably draw on personal values or beliefs that would shape, but not affect, responses. Scotland (2012) observes that an interpretivist methodology is directed at understanding phenomena from an individual’s perspective, investigating individual’s interactions, as well as the historical and cultural contexts people inhabit. Additionally, it aims to bring into consciousness hidden social forces and structures. Following on from this, Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2010) was selected as an empirical research strategy, as it can be characterised by its ability to analyse relations between discourse and social processes, and is not simply descriptive, but is normative, in that it aims to address social wrongs in their discursive aspects and suggest possible ways of righting or mitigating them (Fairclough 2010 p. 11).

Ontologically, this research adopts a constructionist position, which regards the social phenomena studied as “made real” by the activities of actors and the meanings that observers attach to them (Bell, Bryman and Harley 2022). Crotty (1998) proposes that meaning is not discovered, but constructed—a process unique to the researcher—contingent on human practices, and developed and transmitted in essentially social contexts. The social context within this research are the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election; the human practices come from the candidates and the media coverage of their debate performances, which are transmitted through the resulting discourse, as constructed by the media. CDA is used to determine how gender is used by the US media to construct discourses around the election. By engaging with the texts collected for this study, the researcher constructed an overview of gender, media and politics, whilst building knowledge through evaluating the research findings and drawing conclusions. When considering the researcher’s feminist viewpoint, Maruska (2010) advocates a connection between gender inequality, politics and a shared intersubjective ontology that assumes feminist theorists are interested in suggesting, interpreting, and understanding the relations of power that have led to the gendered political realm, as we understand it.

#### **4.3 Research approach**

As stated, this study used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to answer the research questions posed and meet the aim of determining how gendered the media coverage of the Democratic Party nomination debates was. Wodak and Meyer (2016) note that the concept emerged through a small symposium in Amsterdam in 1991, which was attended by scholars who have since become considered instrumental in advancing the field, to discuss the approaches to CDA. It can be defined as research that primarily studies the way social power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimised and resisted, by text and talk, in social and political contexts (Van Dijk 2015). Fairclough (2010) provides further focus by including the dialectical relations between discourse and power, and their effects on other relations within the social process and their elements.

This research considers gender inequality as a social wrong; and US politics is considered a societal power structure within which this social wrong is sustained, with news coverage from the US mass media serving as text through which inequality is enacted, reproduced, legitimised and resisted.

There are different approaches to CDA from each of the theorists mentioned, however they share these tenets:

- It primarily looks to explain discourses (Van Dijk 2015). As Fairclough (2010 p.4) explains, CDA is an analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other elements, objects, or movements, as well as an analysis of the internal relations of discourse.
- CDA addresses social problems (Wodak and Meyer 2016) by focusing on the way discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimise, reproduce, and challenge dominance in society (Van Dijk 2015).
- The critical analysis of social problems is *multidisciplinary* (Fairclough 2010, Van Dijk 2015, Wodak and Meyer 2016).

Broadly speaking, the school of CDA regards these issues as central to the framework and how it is applied in research. Another tenet central to CDA, particularly the critical impetus, is power and ideology. Wodak and Meyer (2016) observe that the critique typically aspires to reveal structures of power and expose ideologies. Mumby (2004) explains that this is part of the legacy of the "enlightenment project", created by scholars such as Marx (1967), Gramsci (1971), Adorno (1973) and Habermas (1984), who provided written critiques of capitalist structures of power, to emancipate citizens from forms of oppression and domination that are produced and reproduced by these systems. CDA considers that power is not always enacted in obviously abusive ways, but in a myriad of "taken-for-granted" everyday actions in life, which often appear disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies, lending themselves to the framework and study of linguistics (Van Dijk 2015 and Wodak and Meyer 2016).

Within the school of CDA, power is commonly perceived in the Foucauldian sense (Wodak and Meyer 2016), and bears similarity to Fairclough's approach, which sets out to reveal not only the connections between texts and social processes, but also the relations to power and ideologies that are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret the texts (Fairclough 2010 p. 132). Foucault's approach focuses on power relationships and language, and how these shape society: as Wodak and Meyer (2016) describe, this perspective views discourse as a consequence of power and domination, but also as a tool to exert power. Foucauldian discourse looks beyond the linguistic dimension and is concerned with how communication constructs knowledge: an ordered set of polemical and strategic facts and truths, which in turn shape society (Foucault 2019 p.13). Foucault's main point about power was not about the nature of governments, but of the presence in modern history of a repertoire of techniques of power, which do not bear the distinct emblem of the regimes – fascist, socialist and communist – that use them (Faubion and Hurley 2019).

Coupled with the inclusion of power, ideology is a central concept and category of CDA (Fairclough 2010, Van Dijk 2015 and Wodak and Meyer 2016). Ideology can be defined as a coherent and relatively stable set of beliefs or values, and again, CDA is concerned with the veiled ideas and beliefs that form an accepted normality in daily life (Wodak and Meyer 2016). Mumby (2004) states discourse, as a social function, does ideological work in shaping relationships with the world. They suggest it may influence people towards certain sense-making actions or norms, but ideological meanings are generally contested and challenged by society, thus CDA is concerned with ideological struggles and how social realities are produced, reproduced, resisted and changed (Mumby 2004). Fairclough (2010) believes the concept of hegemony (Gramsci 1971) is central to ideological struggle and provides a framework for analysing ideology/discourse. Gramsci (1971) suggested power over society was exerted by the ruling class through ideology – a political society monopolised by a specific group. In terms of CDA, Fairclough (2010) asserts hegemony is ideological power over society, constructing alliances and integrating, rather than simply dominating, but is never achieved more than partially or temporarily.

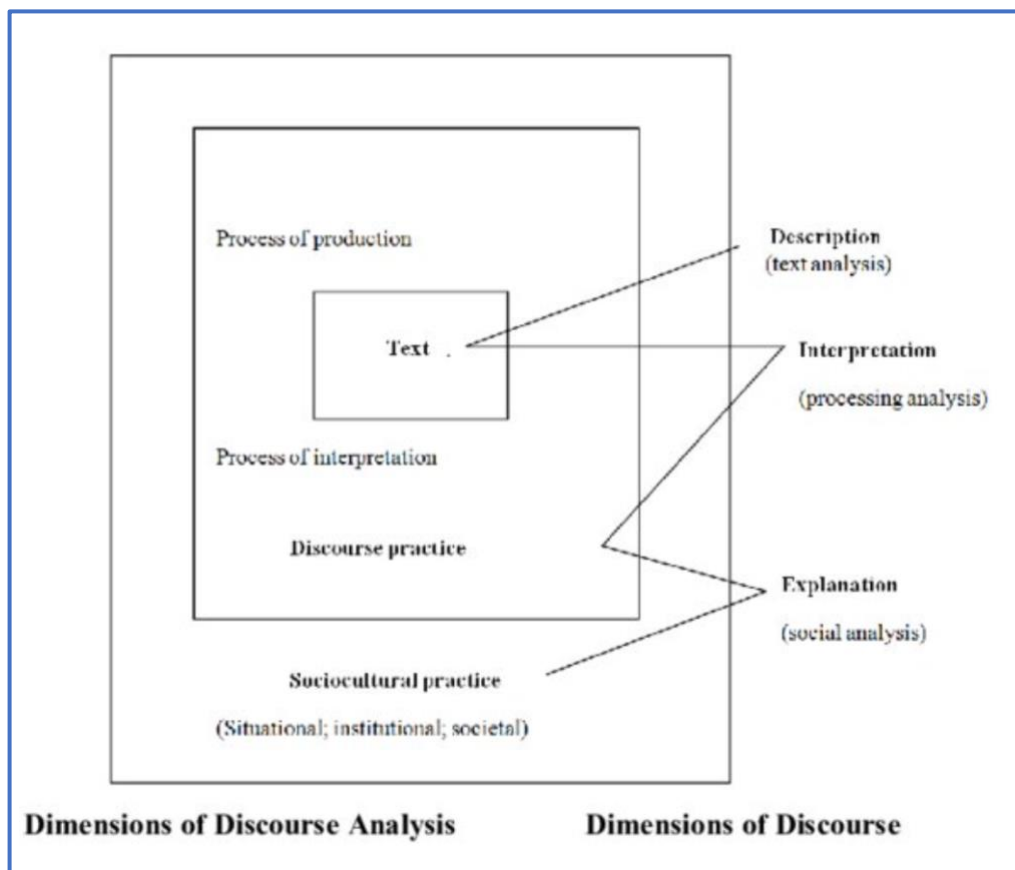


Within this research, the notion of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) is an example of the domination of a particular type of masculinity, which is accepted and normalised within society, whilst exerting power through sustaining its position in institutions, such as politics and media, and the dissemination of cultural assumptions and stereotypes which uphold this domination. It can also be true that the command is contested through the advocacy of gender equality, and of the advancement of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and diversity.

#### **4.3.1 Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis (2010)**

Fairclough regards his work with CDA as a means to understand how contemporary capitalism, in some respects enables, but in other respects, prevents or limits human well-being and flourishing, in order to overcome this central obstacle and barrier. This foundation is also fundamental to the impetus, reasoning, and structure of this research. As laid out at the beginning of this study, gender inequality is considered to be one of the greatest global social issues of our time (United Nations 2020), and with politics dominated by men across the globe, established power structures in the political sphere remain a challenge for women and minority groups.

Johnson and McClean (2020) suggest CDA attempts to make links across micro-, meso-, and macro-scaled social phenomena, and map discourses across these scales correspondingly. Fairclough (2010) proposes a three-dimensional conception of discourse and a corresponding method of CDA, which is shown in the diagram below:



**Image 2 – Dimensions of discourse from Fairclough (p.133 2010)**

Fairclough (2010) explains that discourse is simultaneously viewed as a language text, which is either spoken or written; and discourse practice, in the form of text production and text interpretation and sociocultural practice. Furthermore, discourse is embedded within sociocultural practice at several levels: the immediate situation, the wider institution and the societal level. As shown in the diagram above, the method of discourse analysis includes a linguistic *description* of the text, an *interpretation* of the relationship between the discursive processes, and an *explanation* of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes.

He suggests micro-level analysis involves analysing texts to describe language, such as vocabulary, structure and grammar, intertextuality, rhetoric and other literary devices used. This stage can be seen in Chapter 5, Findings, where after analysis, the language within the media texts is described and instances of metaphors, intertextuality and rhetoric are noted. At the meso level, the analysis aims to investigate the processes of production underlying the discourse, and interpret the relationship between the discursive processes (productive and interpretive) and the text. This can be seen within Chapter 6, Discussion, where the discourses that have been identified by linking together micro-analysis are discussed. At the macro level, Fairclough (2010) suggests that an examination of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes be carried out. Larger-scale social processes, such as the election, the party nomination, gendered power structures that are in place within the political sphere, and the political ideology of a media outlet, can be considered within this level and are located in Chapter 7, Conclusions.

Within this research, this approach to CDA is taken in conjunction with Fairclough's dialectical-relational methodology. Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach to CDA is a methodology of four stages, which Fairclough begins by making a terminological point around the definition of *discourse*. Acknowledging that the term is used in multiple ways throughout levels of society, *semiosis* is proposed to encompass the concept's most abstract and general sense, and has the advantage of including the suggestion that discourse analysis may be concerned with a wider source of "semiotic modalities", of which language is one, with other examples being cited as visuals and body language. Furthermore, semiosis is viewed as an element of the social process that is dialectically related to others, enabling CDA to focus on the relationships between them. For example, this research is concerned with the media coverage of the debates for the Democrat Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election as semiosis, and the relationships between gender ideologies, media institutions, political institutions, and political candidates. Fairclough continues, specifying that this approach requires CDA to be *transdisciplinary*: combining disciplines and theories for the purpose of the research, and to develop insight and new solutions to a problem.

This research uses CDA and other theories around gender, as covered in Chapter 3, to meet the study's aims and objectives through critical analysis and evaluation. Fairclough poses this question to encapsulate the methodology:

"What is the particular significance of semiosis, and of dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements, in the social processes (issues, problems, challenges), which are under investigation?" (Fairclough p.90, Wodak and Meyer 2016).

To answer this, the approach has four stages, which can be further elaborated as "steps":

1. Focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspects.
2. Identify obstacles to address the social wrong.
3. Consider whether the social order "needs" the social wrong.
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles.

#### **4.3.1.1 Gender inequality, the social wrong**

As a form of critical analysis, CDA draws a focus on the nature and sources of social wrongs, which Fairclough (2010 p.235) defines as aspects of social systems, forms or orders that are detrimental to human well-being, and which may be improved or eliminated. Additionally, the notion is subjective, as to what constitutes a social wrong, with examples cited as poverty, racism, and forms of inequality. The social wrong identified by this research is gender inequality. The issue is sustained by veiled power structures in society, such as the patriarchy, is well-established in literature and practical solutions, and has remained a prominent discourse in the public sphere for decades. There is an ideological struggle at the centre of much of the existing discourse, particularly within politics. The Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election was considered to be a suitable case study that would encompass politics, media and a diverse field of candidates. It can also be approached in a transdisciplinary way, encompassing gender theories, media and CDA for analysis, all of which implicitly question and challenge the central issue.

There are dialectical relationships between gender inequality, politics and media, with semiotic moments comprising the debates, which have generated ample media texts to support the usage of CDA for an investigation into these relationships.

#### **4.3.1.2                      Obstacles to addressing gender inequality**

The second stage of analysis asks “what prevents gender inequality from being addressed?” The beginning of this discussion is conducted through the rationale for constructing the research and the review of literature in Chapter 2. From the perspective of society, formal and informal power structures, legislation or practical measures, stereotypes and attitudes, all work as obstacles to achieving gender equality. Much of these are prevalent in media materials, which contribute to the discourse around the ideological struggle.

The selection of texts for this study was gathered from online news outlets and in accordance with the methodology in the following sections of this chapter (4.6 and 4.7). Coding and identifying themes were conducted through a strategy described by Given (2008), as created or imposed by the researcher who derives them from the literature, or may be influenced by the literature, in their creation. The grounded theory approach by Glaser and Strauss (1999) offers an explicit set of techniques for coding data, which begins with open coding and moves to focused coding. Given (2008) suggests this strategy begins with “open” coding, as the initial stage of making sense of the data, line-by-line, and identifying possible concepts through attaching codes and marking potentially relevant points of interest.

This was carried out in the pilot phase of the November debate, which is discussed in section 4.7, as well as on the later debates, as a starting point from which to gather the main gendered themes within the data. This process was supported by reviewing the literature beforehand, and forming the research topic, questions and objectives, as prior knowledge can be helpful if biases are acknowledged (Williams and Moser 2019).

The next step, as proposed by Given (2008), and following the strategy proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1999), moves to a more focused coding, in order to identify the salient categories that will be central to the primary topic, and it is through this step that relationships and links emerge, and categories and themes are solidified. This process refined the data and identified themes around gender, which within Fairclough's CDA, can be assessed as barriers to addressing the social wrong of gender inequality. Following this, obstacles are further identified through CDA of the media texts in Chapter 5, Findings. Gendered discourses were revealed, which supported and perpetuated obstacles to addressing gender inequality, and highlighted the dialectical relationships among gender theories. In addition, the case study of the Democratic Party nomination debates provided depth to the CDA and are further discussed in Chapter 6, Discussion.

#### **4.3.1.3 Is the challenge of gender inequality required within the social order?**

In this study, the social wrong is gender inequality. This stage in the methodology considers if gender inequality is inherent to the social order, and whether it can be addressed within it, or only by changing it (Fairclough 2010 p.237). Arguably, change may be justified if major social wrongs exist within society. This leads to further reasoning around ways to address the issue, and how to dismantle the forces and resources that might be deployed against it, and if change is even desirable at all. In the context of this research, this step is addressed within Chapter 6, Discussion, and further in Chapter 7, Conclusions. Gender inequality presents one of the most contested and complex debates in society, with nuances in definitions, ideology, attitudes, solutions, and consequences. This step connects with questions of ideology, as Fairclough (2010 p.239) asserts, discourse is ideological, insofar as it contributes to sustaining particular power relations and domination. The discussion and conclusion examine the dialectical relationship between the gender theories used in this study, the gendered mediated discourses uncovered, and how these work to sustain male dominance in politics, whilst marginalising minority groups because of gender.

#### **4.3.1.4 Possible ways past the obstacles**

The final step in this approach is to critique the findings and discussion, as Fairclough (2010 p.239) advocates: by identifying possible strategies within the existing social process for overcoming obstacles, in order to address the social wrong in question. Chapter 7, Conclusions, seeks to deliver deductions and reflections on how gendered the media coverage of the Democratic Party nomination debates was, and how gender was portrayed. This was achieved by demonstrating how the identified discourses are constructed and by offering a critical analysis of their impact on society. It also sought to answer the research aims and objectives, which make suggestions for ways to address gender inequality within the political context.

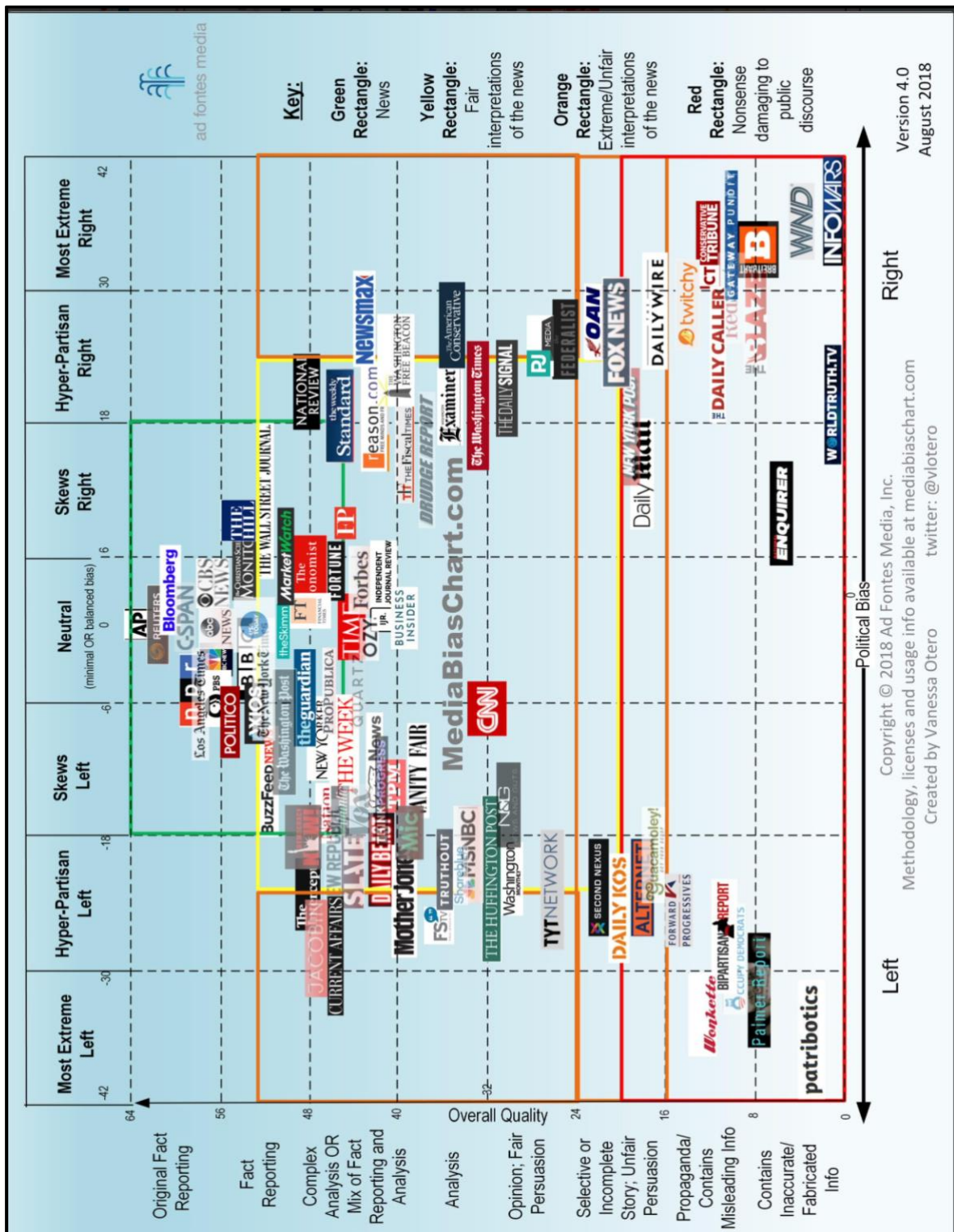
#### **4.4 Selection of news websites**

This section establishes the way news outlets used in this research were selected, and provides some background to their position and function within the US media landscape. Entman (1991) discusses the illusion that American democracy benefits from a vigorous marketplace of ideas, facilitated by a "free press", which stimulates citizen's interest in political affairs and provides information to hold governments accountable. They suggest, instead, that the US media is restricted by the limited tastes of the audience, and reliant on political elites for most information, which places journalists in an interdependent news system, rather than one of free ideas. Despite this, the news media holds significant influence over politics (Hamilton 2004). As Sanders (2009) suggests, during political campaigns they can "prime" voters by focusing on specific policies of candidate attributes, can set agendas through coverage, which may influence public support, and can frame issues and candidates. As Hamilton (2004) notes, although the media market is highly segmented in terms of demographics and tastes, enough political information seeps into regular and marginal news stories" voters are still able to draw conclusions as to where a candidate stands in politics. All documents of material culture, including newspapers, are produced under specific political and economic conditions, and they can provide insights about society at a particular historical time and place (Brennen 2017).

Fairclough (2010 p.73) regards media texts as specialised for meaning-making between texts, and more abstractly, between social practices, fields, domains and scales of social lives. Principally, some news articles may contain facts and some are written as an interpretation of events, meaning newspapers are considered both a primary and a secondary source of data (Ross and Matthews 2010), which can communicate meaning in multiple ways.

In summary, this suggests that the online news outlets selected for this research contain political news and substantial coverage around the Democratic Party nomination debates, which may have been shaped by audience preferences and a drive for profits, but which are representative of the US mass media systems and reflective of news coverage of presidential elections, and are therefore suitable for analysis. A sample of 12 news websites, four representing each political ideology (left, right and neutral) were selected by purposive sampling (Ross and Matthews 2010), and can be seen in Appendix 2. Website analytics and political ideology were cross-referenced to ensure a balanced sample, with sufficient audience levels and relevance to the American public that would be most useful for this research. A list of media outlets has been created using a media bias chart (Figure 1). Ad Fontes Media (2019) created the chart by analysing and ranking news content, and then laying out the US media on two axis: quality and bias.





Four outlets were selected from each area, for this research, which were further supported with analytics from Alexa.com (2019), in order to ensure a sufficient web presence, a healthy relevant readership and regular political coverage. These can be seen in Table 1 below.

<b>News Website</b>	<b>Global Internet engagement rank</b>	<b>US Engagement Rank</b>	<b>Daily Time on Site (Minutes)</b>	<b>Bounce Rate %</b>	<b>Site Traffic from the US</b>
<b>Right</b>					
<b>Fox News</b>	219	52	5.59	42.9%	85.5%
<b>The National Review</b>	7497	1222	2.50	66.4%	84.2%
<b>News Max</b>	6519	1618	2.49	43.6%	76.6%
<b>The Washington Times</b>	8814	1957	2.08	76.1%	78%
<b>Center</b>					
<b>BBC</b>	76	68	3.58	51.6%	25%
<b>USA Today</b>	398	116	2.56	66%	79.4%
<b>ABC News</b>	1242	306	2.40	63.5%	77%
<b>CBS News</b>	858	270	2.15	74%	75.6%
<b>Left</b>					
<b>The New York Times</b>	100	28	3.19	54.4%	63.2%
<b>The Washington Post</b>	173	59	3.11	38.2%	62.1%
<b>Politico</b>	1252	248	3.14	67.8%	83.1%
<b>Vox</b>	1296	313	2.11	78%	69.7%

**Table 1 – News media statistics (Alexa.com 2019)**

#### **4.5 Debate selection**

During an election, politicians compete in a crowded field where messaging needs to be clear, attractive, and paradoxically, repetitive (Sanders 2009). Campaigns are shaped by a range of communication channels, which vary in terms of degree of control around the messaging, debates being one form that has become a centrepiece of the presidential nominating contest (Galdieri 2020). Mediated debates serve as one of the few remaining campaign events, with a mass audience role in democratic elections (Turcotte and Goidel 2014) where broadcasters can provide a platform that is informative, educational and entertaining for the public (McNair 2018). Debates offer an opportunity for citizens to learn about candidates, their stance on issues or policies, and act to inform the electorate and engage them in ongoing campaigns (Gottfried et al., 2016). During the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination process, there were several primary TV debates, which showcased some changes to the previous format. For example, The Democratic Party adjusted the inclusion threshold to include donations from a minimum of 65,000 people and candidates must achieve at least 1% across 3 national polls which measured name recognition, rather than candidate preference (Galdieri 2020). These measures lowered the requirements for candidates and aimed to increase diversity within the field.

However, despite the changes in internal regulations, the first TV debate for the Party nomination was held in June 2019, and drew 15.3 million viewers across *NBC* (8.67m), *MSNBC* (5.87m) and in Spanish on Telemundo (719,000), outperforming past election cycles of 2008 and 2012, but falling shy of the 24 million viewers who watched Trump make his debut at the Republican debate in 2016 on Fox News (Joyella 2019). In comparison, other shows, such as the Grammy Music Awards, had 18.69m viewers and the Academy Awards 23.57m (Bauder 2021), suggesting the primary stage debates for the Party nomination warrant the interest and investigation of this research.

Due to the research timeline, which began in January 2019, the first debate selected for this research was held in November 2019, and the remaining debates—through to March 2020—were captured for analysis. A summary of each debate is shown in Appendix 3, in chronological order.

#### **4.6 Corpus of texts**

Corpus linguistics (CL) uses corpora as the primary data and starting point for analysis, from which it draws the full evidence of the research phenomena, analysing them for probabilities, trends, patterns, connections and groupings of features (Cheng 2013). Paquot and Gries (2020) suggest that compiling a corpus involves designing a strategy, collecting texts, encoding the corpus, assembling and sorting the information, and marking up or noting extra linguistic characteristics, when necessary. Mautner (2016) suggests this method can make a good ally for CDA, from the perspective that language variation is both systematic and functional; and that it can incorporate a large volume of texts within a study, which inherently broadens the empirical base and helps to minimise researcher bias. They also submit that within qualitative research, this approach can provide a picture of collated environments, patterns, and discourse functions. Although this method is typically carried out using software, for this research, it was determined that the researcher would conduct the analysis manually, which is explained, step-by-step, in the following sections. Technology may have reduced the manual labour involved, however this approach emphasises the advantage of the researcher being able to make choices tailored to the research questions and objectives (Mautner 2016, Paquot and Gries 2020).

For the context of this study, the internet is the source of the required texts, and the 12 news outlets identified are the locations for gathering them. The internet is one of the biggest sources of static raw data that is easily available (Parvez et al., 2018), and can be a key resource for building a corpus (Mautner 2016). Paquot and Gries (2020) explain that transparency in the collection strategy is paramount in assembling a corpus from a large source, such as the internet.

They state that the criteria for selection must be clear and consistent, and that bias about the research interest should be explained and acknowledged. For this research, news outlets were selected to represent the spectrum of political ideology, using metrics that ensure a substantial reach to the audience, and that the data from the news websites selected is of suitable quality and authenticity to build a corpus. The multimodality of online news was considered, as video and image often sit alongside text, however this would have expanded the methodology to include other frameworks and reduced the focus on language. Although CDA allows for various dimensions of discourse through media texts, including images, the single focus on text was determined to be optimum for this research and CDA was deemed the most suitable way to address the aim, objectives and questions. These are shaped around language and power (media and political), and whilst images are an important communication tool in reporting news, it was decided that further studies would be required to incorporate a multi-modal approach, in order to complement this area of research. Incidentally, post-data collection, the images that were used to accompany the articles within this research were found to be standardised pictures of the candidates posing, rather than "action" shots, taken to convey a more pointed meaning, and some of the same images were found to be used in more than one of the media outlets, albeit in articles of news reporting, rather than opinion pieces, which may have carried a more significant meaning behind them. Ultimately, with 865 articles, it was determined that adding images would increase the complexity of the study and that language should remain the focus. Once articles are published, whether accurate or not, they are within the public domain for consumption by the American public. However, it must be noted that authenticity and quality were not a concern, as truthfulness and fact are not central to this study. Further to which, political ideology may result in some manipulation of information and the way it is presented, but analysis using CDA aims to highlight these instances.

There were two steps to collecting articles and this process was tested using the November 2019 debate. The first step involved using keywords (noted in Table 2) in the search function on the news websites, in order to locate articles relating to coverage of the debate.

Pre-debate, a draft list of keywords was produced. These were selected for their high frequency and relevance to issues in the current news cycle leading up to the debate and from topics covered in earlier debates during the election. Topics of discussion are typically decided by current issues and questions are formed by the host media outlet (Galdieri 2020). However, whilst there is no format to predict the debate discussions, it was felt that the words selected covered as many potential topics as possible and could be added to/adjusted, if needed post-debate. The second step involved saving the resulting articles in PDF format into a database for further reference and analysis. This was carried out using human “copy and paste”, which is the most common and traditional approach for extracting information from internet sources (Parvez et al 2018), and has greatly facilitated the process of “data capture” (Mautner 2016). The work of locating, copying and saving by the researcher was no small task, however driven by the aims of the study, this was considered the best way to gather the appropriate amount of data with which to yield substantial results.

A Boolean search was used, which enables a combination of search terms using the Boolean operators (“and”, “or” and “not”) to limit, broaden or define the search (Burns 2011). For example, Table 2 shows key search terminology used for this research during the pilot in November 2019.

	Boolean Operator	
Debate/November	And/Or/Not	Democrats/election 2020/ healthcare/climate change/ abortion/pro-choice/ pro-life/ women’s rights/ racial inequality/ gender violence/ LGBTQ+/ transgender/ income inequality/ pay gap/ gun control/ big tech/ taxes/ impeachment/ immigration/ boarder security/ Education/ Supreme Court/ gender/ politics.

**Table 2 – Key search terminology for data collection**

The PDF articles were organised under each news outlet's name, and a master list was created in Excel with information, such as dates, journalists, headlines, keywords, internet hyperlinks and a brief note of anything that the researcher noticed could be significant to the study. For example, if gender was a prominent theme (discussions about candidates or policy were often headlines or topics) or examples of theory were noticed at first glance. Coding was carried out by systematically reading, noting matching incidences of gender and documenting additional codes that emerged. Fielding, Lee and Blank (2017) state that although manual coding is slow, complex sentence structures can be recognised and ambiguous texts may be interpreted, providing an in-depth investigation, which is well-suited to this research. This step enabled the researcher to begin organising and collating themes, and highlighting specific areas of interest. A theme is considered to be a thread of underlying meaning that organises a group of repeating ideas, enabling the researcher to answer the aim and objectives (Vaismoradi et al 2016). Wodak and Meyer (2016) suggest that looking beyond the text aids in unearthing social meaning and context, which can be engaged in socially transformative work and contribute to CDA. The quality of the themes identified depended somewhat on the researcher's creativity and grasp of the theory around the research. The articles were read more than once during the pilot, and as the study proceeded and more literature was covered, this process was enhanced. Once the database was complete, articles were further inspected and reread for relevance, themes and theories, which were then triangulated, in order to form a smaller group of articles—the final corpus of texts—which were suitable for CDA.

#### **4.7 Data collection pilot**

Wodak and Meyer (2016) suggest that during the data collection phase of research, a pilot study should be performed, in order to identify indicators of particular concepts, expand concepts into categories and form a basis for further data collection. A pilot was carried out using the Democratic debate from November 20<sup>th</sup>, which was held in Georgia, and was hosted by MSNBC and *The Washington Post* (Zhou 2019b).

Although 17 Democrats remained in the race, nine qualified for the November debate: Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Andrew Yang, Tom Steyer and Cory Booker (Astor et al., 2019). The research methodology was tested on this debate and data was collected from the chosen news websites on the morning of the day after the debate. This was an opportunity to develop, clarify or improve the process, in anticipation of conducting the research against a debate in 2020. A total of 11 codes were identified, 340 times, within the articles. The summary shown below outlines the political ideological split, along with the preliminary codes identified from reading through the data, the candidates that were mentioned and an indication of which theory they may be relevant to.

<b>Code Number</b>	<b>Code Title</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Centre</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Theory –</b>	<b>Candidate in Articles</b>
1	A Women president	6	15	9	30	DB, GP, SA	Amy Klobuchar, Pete Buttigieg, Joe Biden
2	A Candidate's background	11	25	14	50	DB, GP, SA	Kamala Harris, Joe Biden and Amy Klobuchar
3	Groups of voters	5	12	4	21	DB, SA	Kamala Harris
4	Paid Parental Leave	4	10	7	21	DB, GP	Elizabeth Warren, Andrew Yang
5	Gender pay gap	3	7	5	15	DB	Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Andrew Yang
6	Abortion rights	15	11	15	41	SA	Elizabeth Warren, Cory Booker
7	All female moderator panel	4	5	4	11	DB	
8	Candidate gender	14	25	11	50	DB, GP, SA	Pete Buttigieg, Tulsi Gabbard,
9	Argumentative / aggressive tone of the debate	6	9	6	19	DB, GP, SA	Tulsi Gabbard, Pete Buttigieg, Kamala Harris
10	immigration	8	25	8	39	DB, GP, SA	Elizabeth Warren, Bernie sanders
11	Violence against women	10	18	10	43	GP, SA	Joe Biden,
<b>Total</b>		<b>82</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>340</b>		

**Table 3 - Summary of data collection pilot, November debate**



To begin with, the researcher marked and coded the articles methodically for mentions of gender, collecting quotes and collating potential discourses that emerged to correlate with theories and build results. This amounted to a hyper-detailed amount of analysis, which eventually became a base from which to elicit a set of codes that became a template for future debates. Themes began to emerge through identifying repeated topics and coding provided text examples to use for CDA. Driven by the aim and objectives, along with the gender theory covered in Chapter 2, key themes were established. As this was such a large corpus of texts, this was carried out primarily using Word documents, with summary tables to keep track of significance and relevance. Some themes, such as "women in politics", were highly notable throughout the data and demonstrated nuances within the topic. These were noted, along with quotes or particular language, metaphors and such, that were of interest. For example, the challenge around perceived gender discrimination between Klobuchar and Buttigieg, fit within the theme of "women in politics", but so did comments around Tulsi Gabbard and the choice to wear a white suit for a debate.

The themes were sometimes broad, with sub-themes forming but, ultimately, proved fruitful for CDA and further analysis. In future debates, the theme of "masculinity" was also broad, in that there were examples of hegemonic masculinity through Biden, Bloomberg and Sanders, but Buttigieg emerged as a significant masculine theme, which evolved into a new theme of "intersectionality". Throughout the data analysis, several drafts of notes, collating texts about each theme, and highlighting instances of theory and suspected political bias, were all assembled and reworked to refine the data into the most relevant themes for the study.

The pilot provided some observations about the methodology, which in practice, required adjustment. The primary concern was that the plan to use keywords to locate relevant articles was not necessary, as due to the nature of a news cycle, a majority of coverage was positioned on the homepage of news websites and easily accessed. However, the keywords were a useful check for any articles not immediately noticeable and provided a second opportunity to make sure a full corpus was gathered for each debate.

Some other observations were around the prominence of video, rather than written articles on the right-leaning news media and a focus on Trump's pending impeachment, which was a significant news story, and possibly drove attention and coverage away from the debate. However, these did not impact the design of the methodology, and it was determined that the same process would be followed for further debates, in order to gather data and use the keywords as a "sense-check", to ensure a full corpus. To test the validity of the approach, the researcher requested a second opinion to carry out the exercise of coding and identifying gendered instances within the data. This came from a Canadian female, aged 49, who works in social care. A portion of the articles (50% - 167), were re-read and coded against the same matrix from the original. The results were as follows:

Code Number	Issue	Original Analysis	Accuracy Check
1	A Women president	3	3
2	A Candidate's background	1	0
3	Groups of voters	2	2
4	Paid Parental Leave	1	1
5	Gender pay gap	1	1
6	Abortion rights	1	1
7	All female moderator panel	1	1
8	Candidate gender	2	1
9	Argumentative / aggressive tone of the debate	3	3
10	immigration	1	0
11	Violence against women	1	1

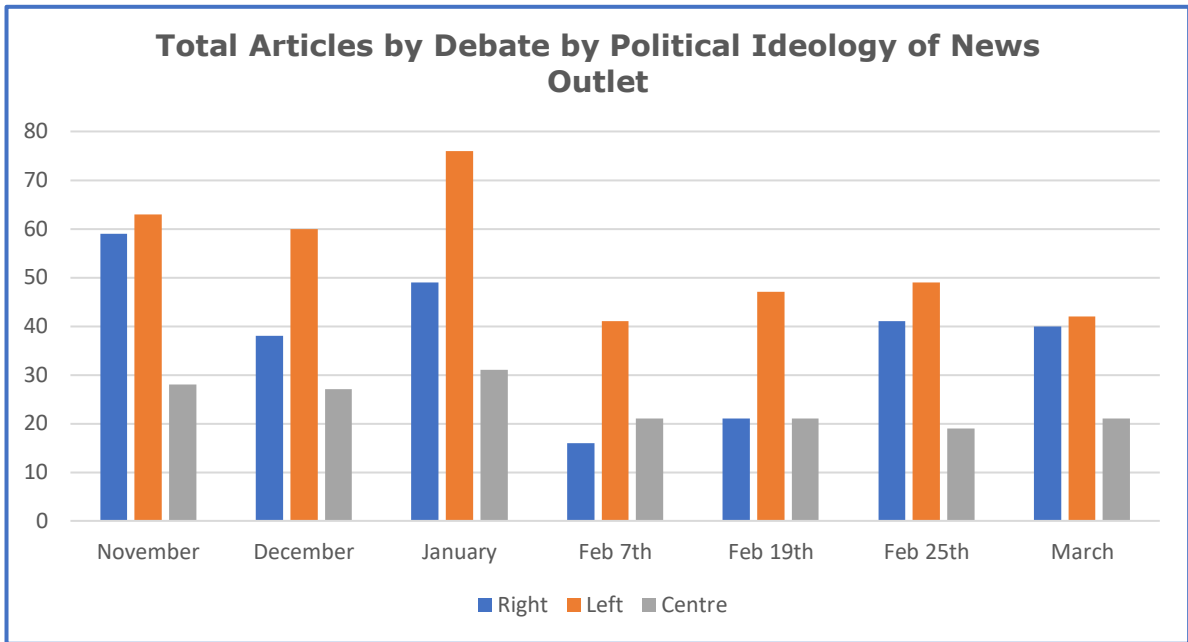
**Table 4 – Coding validity check**

The codes mostly matched in identification and location within the text. The candidate's background as a gendered reference was missed by the tester from an *ABC News* article, which quoted a heated exchange between Harris and Gabbard that referenced Gabbard's military background. The tester did, however, pick up on the tone and aggression within the reporting around the challenge and considered it "gendered" towards both women. The other code missed was a mention of immigration in an article from *CBS News*. Elizabeth Warren was asked about removing the wall Trump was building along the border with Mexico, and she commented on the government policies that separate families and the conditions people were kept in, including nursing mothers. The comments were gendered, in the sense that they used motherhood and the notion of family to invoke sympathy, empathy, and emphasis on the human cost of immigration policies. Overall, the exercise concluded with 17 instances of codes identified in similarity out of 19, or 90% correlation.

Data was collected from future debates, using the same methodology, with the adjustments made after the pilot. Mentions of gender were coded, adding new codes when they emerged. The table below shows the total articles collected from each debate, by political ideology. The left-leaning media produced the most articles, with the debates from November, December and January, showing a higher amount of coverage, which correlates with the narrowing of the field of candidates.

<b>Debate</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Centre</b>	<b>Total</b>
November	59	63	28	150
December	38	60	27	125
January	49	76	31	156
February 7th	16	41	21	78
February 19 <sup>th</sup>	21	47	21	89
February 25th	41	49	19	109
March	40	42	21	103
<b>Total</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>810</b>

**Table 5 – Total articles collected**

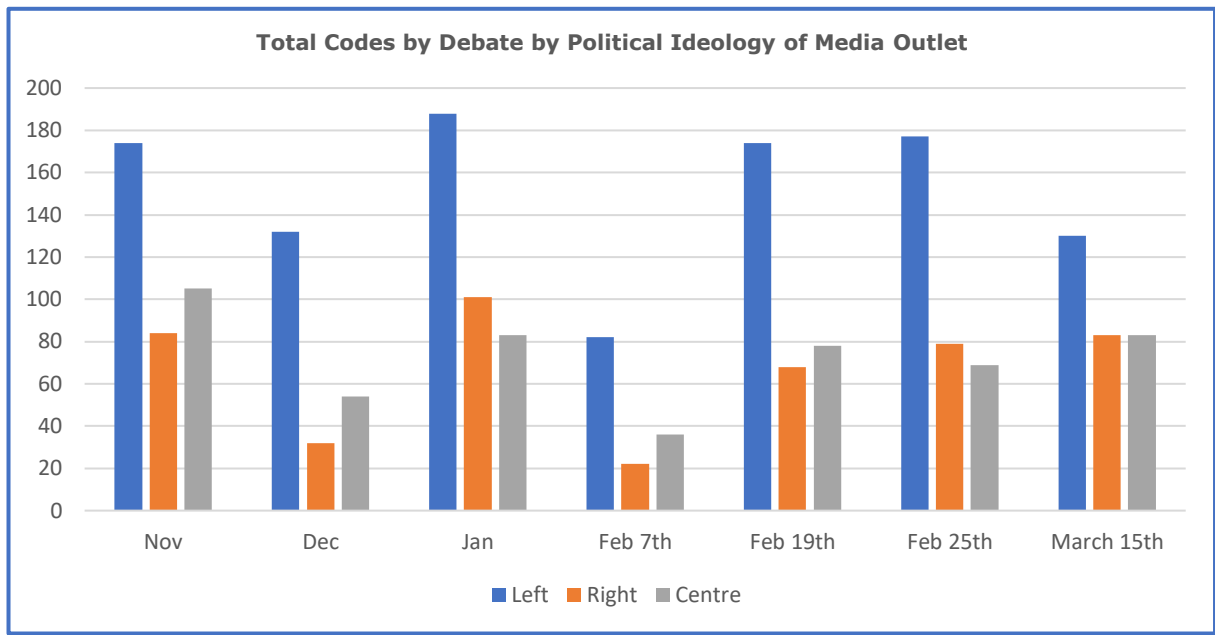


**Graph 1 – Total articles collected by media outlet / political ideology**

The table below shows the total times codes were identified in the articles, and again, the totals indicate a parallel order with the number of articles collected from each group, with the left-leaning media showing a higher total in both.

Debate	Left	Right	Centre	Total
November	174	84	105	363
December	132	32	54	218
January	188	101	83	359
February 7th	82	22	36	140
February 19th	174	68	78	320
February 25th	177	79	69	325
March	130	83	83	296
<b>Total</b>	<b>1057</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>2034</b>

**Table 6 – Code totals by debate and media outlet / political ideology**



**Graph 2 - Code totals by debate and media outlet / political ideology**

As the debates progressed, the line-up of candidates and the discussions changed, according to the news cycle and the election, so new codes were found and logged alongside the original list from November. The chart below shows the final list of codes, by debate, with a total of 20 unique gendered codes logged from 810 articles, amounting to 2034 mentions of gender throughout the texts.

CODE	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb 7 <sup>th</sup>	Feb 19 <sup>th</sup>	Feb 25 <sup>th</sup>	March	TOTAL
<b>A woman president</b>	30	34	107	26	44	36	5	282
<b>A candidate's background</b>	50	45	98	38	69	76	52	428
<b>Bloc voters</b>	21	20	53	19	46	42	46	247
<b>Childcare Policy</b>	21		7			1		29
<b>Gender pay gap</b>	15	7	4			1	2	29
<b>Abortion rights</b>	41	1	1	6		11	12	72
<b>All women moderator panel</b>	11	1				2		14
<b>Gender of candidate</b>	50	46	43	16	26	14	7	202
<b>Aggressive tone of debate</b>	19	4	5	7	46	36	11	128
<b>Immigration</b>	39	5	2		11	4	13	74
<b>Gender violence</b>	43	1			3	5	2	54
<b>Healthcare policy</b>	10	15	14	12	15	16	42	124
<b>Climate change</b>	13	12	5		5		17	52
<b>Impeachment</b>		10	4	4				18
<b>Leadership and gender</b>		17	3					20
<b>Foreign policy</b>			26	8		17	9	60
<b>Economic policy</b>					28	25	22	75
<b>Gun control policy</b>				4	5	28	7	44
<b>Law and police</b>					22	11	8	41
<b>A woman as a VP</b>							41	41
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>2034</b>

**Table 7 – Codes identified**

Working through the texts gathered by each debate, the articles were read multiple times, as Given (2008) recommends, moving from first impressions to established codes relevant to the research aims, objectives and questions. The most significant codes that came from the media texts were the idea of a woman president, a candidate's background, bloc voters, the gender of a candidate, the aggressive tone of a debate and healthcare policy.

These represented patterns within the text and from across the debates, and formed the basis of the themes that were developed for CDA. The key macro themes identified were: women in media, women in politics, diversity in the Democratic Party, and politics and pop culture. These form the over-arching threads of genderised coverage, with the codes within them as follows:

- **Feminine identity** - All women moderator panel, a candidate's background, gender of candidate, aggressive tone.
- **Intersectionality** – A candidate's background, gender of candidate and leadership and gender.
- **Masculinity** –Gender of a candidate, leadership and gender, and aggressive tone.
- **Politics and pop culture** – Candidate's background, candidate's gender, and leadership and gender.

Due to the size and complexity of coding the texts, some of the codes featured in more than one of the larger themes, as nuances within them were found during the meso- and micro-level analysis, meaning that they sit within more than one theme. For example: a candidate's background was marked as a recurring code in multiple articles, across many debates, and included mentions of the women's past careers, and for both genders: political experience, mentions of marital status and military service. The code "gender of a candidate", also crossed over macro themes in similar ways, for example: the challenge between Klobuchar and Buttigieg around gendered discrimination within politics; Buttigieg's sexuality; Bloomberg's masculinity; and the coverage around the women politician's appearance, voice and choice of attire. These sub-groups can be seen in the following chapter, Findings, where they are discussed further.

This step also formed the subset of articles, which were the most appropriate and useful for this research. For example, some articles had no codes and were therefore disregarded, and as the patterns developed, the number of texts was refined to form a corpus, which showed evidence of gendered themes and formed the base for CDA. The table below shows a breakdown, by debate and by media outlet political ideology, of the subset of articles selected, after coding, to form a corpus of text for CDA.

<b>Debate</b>	<b>Left</b>	<b>Right</b>	<b>Centre</b>	<b>Total</b>
November	6	2	1	9
December	8	1	4	13
January	12	3	5	20
February 7th	5	1	2	8
February 19th	10	2	3	15
February 25th	5	3	1	9
March	6	3	4	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>87</b>

**Table 8 – Breakdown of media outlet / political ideology within corpus of texts**

The collection of texts leans towards most articles coming from left-leaning media outlets and is carried through each process of the methodology. Many reasons could influence this, from the agendas and editorial decisions, what is considered newsworthy within the outlets' political ideology, resources or budgets, and the existing news cycles happening around the debates. Overall, it could be speculated that the debates are to decide a Democratic Party nomination, and therefore the issue is closer to—and of higher importance to—readers, from left-leaning media, rather than right-leaning readers, who would not necessarily seek out or need to hear political discourse from this perspective.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

The methodology laid out in this chapter was an excellent fit and was effective at meeting the aim and objective of this research. Shaped by an interpretivist perspective, the meeting of gender, politics and media as a research topic is competently investigated through the data gathered. The debates, as part of the Democratic Party nomination process, were a good standard of political events that generated a significant amount of coverage across the US media and showcased a diverse selection of candidates for analysis. This is an important contribution towards the originality of this study, in that the diversity of a range of candidates, rather than a single candidate, contributes to the uniqueness of this research.



The data collection was carried out in real-time, a part of the methodology that is essential to reflect the nature of the research topic. Politics and media are both dynamic, conflicting and cooperating, and always fascinating. The size and nature of the corpus were unknown at each step and on reflection, the researcher was led by a determination to cover a range of media for a "full-circle" picture of bias and a balanced approach to the corpus. The proliferation of online news delivered a diverse set of news outlets to include, all amply meeting the criteria of political ideology and coverage of the 2020 US election. The quality and range of articles gathered created a large corpus, rich with coverage suitable for CDA and inclusive of the key interest in this study: gender.

Although confident in the selection of news sites, through carrying out the study, it became clear how vast the US media landscape is and how it differed from the native UK media. Layout, tone, agenda choices and assumptions around bias/gender were all of interest, but also widened the outlook and enhanced the study. The researcher was also singularly focused on the perspective of women/feminism when developing the research and carrying out the initial stages of the methodology, however through the pilot and the practice of coding/developing themes, masculinity and intersectionality were deemed equally important in answering the aim and objectives. To begin with, they presented as a foil to the women/feminist examples of gendered bias encountered, but further into the methodology—and the election—they arose within the discourse, and a fuller understanding of gender within the context of the 2020 election became clearer.

The pilot in November 2019 was a positive step in further developing the methodology. Adjustments were made to improve the effectiveness, and the researcher was able to assess time/effort/focus before embarking on future debates. The base of coding and themes created from this was proof of interesting findings and the appropriateness of CDA as a framework for data analysis.

CDA was well-suited to analyse the texts and draw out gendered discourses and aspects of power, adding depth and weight to the findings. Several key discourses were uncovered, all of which can be related to the gender theories within this research, and form a comprehensive picture of the way media portray gender during an election. The findings from CDA are presented in the next Chapter (5), with a broader discussion in Chapter 6. This follows the second stage of Fairclough's dialectical relational approach to CDA, which identifies obstacles to addressing the social wrong.

## **5.0 Findings**

This research looks at how gender is portrayed within media coverage of the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election. This chapter relates to the research questions: How does the US media portray gender in coverage of a Democratic debate during the 2020 US election? And what are the key gender discourses arising from the analysis in this research and how are they constructed?

Examining news coverage of debates from November 2019, through to March 2020, the following sections cover the key themes that emerged from the texts and the way gender is constructed within them.

- **Feminine Identity** - with sub-sections:
  - Women in Media
  - Amy Klobuchar, Pete Buttigieg, and a Duel of Double Standards
  - Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, and Lying and Truth
  - Women's work
  - A Public Voice
  - A Choice of Attire
  - Appearance
  - Miss World Comparison
- **Intersectionality** – with sub sections:
  - Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders & Elizabeth Warren - Ageism in Politics
  - Pete Buttigieg and LGBTQ+ Identity in Politics – with sub-section:
    - Pete Buttigieg and the Glass Closet
- **Masculinity** – with sub-sections
  - Michael Bloomberg and Toxic Masculinity
  - A Portrayal of Parenthood
  - The Military
  - Gender and the Presidency
- **Politics and Pop Culture**

Many themes emerged from texts that were gathered post-debate, coded and analysed, for patterns and relationships around gender that would be relevant to this study. From these, there are three macro themes of Feminine Identity, Intersectionality and Masculinity, and one meso theme of Pop Culture, which are included in this chapter and represent the most significant findings.

The identification of these themes formed the base for a corpus of texts on which Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 2010) was used, in order to identify discourses and determine how language creates and perpetuates, existing gender discourses within US politics. CDA is used to map systematic analyses of spoken or written texts onto the systematic context of events (Fairclough 2010). Within this research, written texts are the news articles, and the events are the debates, with the overarching Democratic Party nomination process for the 2020 US Presidential election featuring as the wider context, within which the findings are situated.

When discussing each media outlet, a key was used to present the political ideology of each. Left-leaning media outlets (L) are *Vox*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Politico*. Right-leaning media (R) are *Fox News*, *Newsmax*, *The Washington Times*, and *The National Review*. Centre-leaning media outlets (C) are *BBC News*, *USA Today*, *ABC News* and *CBS News*. This key will be used as a marker within the themes to further the discussion of political bias and ideology, as it relates to the findings and how gender features within these. This will be addressed in the following chapter, in order to answer the research objective of investigating critically, the media landscape in the US, their political ideologies and how these correlate with aspects of gender in US politics.

## 5.1 The debates

Table 9 shows a summary of the debates in chronological order.

Date/Location	Candidates	Key Events	Key Themes
November 20 <sup>th</sup> 2019, Atlanta, Georgia, hosted by <i>MSNBC</i> and <i>The Washington Post</i> .	Joe Biden, Cory Booker, Pete Buttigieg, Tulsi Gabbard, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Tom Steyer, Elizabeth Warren, Andrew Yang	All-women panel of moderators.	Klobuchar challenges Buttigieg on his political experience, alleges preferential treatment in media due to his gender.  Diversity in the election – Buttigieg and his sexuality and overall lack of women candidates.
December 19 <sup>th</sup> 2019, Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Hosted by <i>PBS Newshour</i> and <i>Politico</i> .	Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Tom Steyer, Elizabeth Warren, Andrew Yang	On the 18 <sup>th</sup> of December, Donald Trump was impeached. Booker, Harris and Castro all ended their campaigns and Bloomberg joined the race.	Parenthood – Klobuchar aligns her skills of managing a busy job and being a mother. Wine Cave Pete – his sexuality brought into it due to rich gay donors. Military – Buttigieg speaks of own experience, invoking masculinity. Gaffe prone Joe – ageist metaphors. Stutter. Miss World competition 2020.
January 14 <sup>th</sup> , 2020, Des Moines, Iowa, hosted by <i>CNN</i> and the <i>Des Moines Register</i> .	Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Tom Steyer, Elizabeth Warren	Impeachment proceedings continue for Trump with articles sent to the Senate and international tensions arise when the US assassinated Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani.	Is a woman president possible, challenge between Sanders and Warren. Truth vs Lying. Klobuchar challenges Buttigieg – bias Buttigieg talks of watching fellow soldier leave his young family behind and invokes masculinity and emotion. Parenthood – Biden talks about being a widower and single father. Warren & Klobuchar use motherhood.
February 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2020, Manchester, New Hampshire, hosted by <i>ABC News</i> and <i>WMUR</i> .	Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Tom Steyer, Elizabeth Warren, Andrew Yang	Held whilst awaiting the results from Iowa, an important caucus, delayed due to a malfunction in a voting app. Trump acquitted of impeachment.	Diversity in the party – ageism towards Sanders and Biden. Buttigieg – towards his ability to fundraise and his marriage was at the grace of the Supreme Court. Klobuchar drawing comparison to Pete again. Cartoons comment alludes to his age.
February 19 <sup>th</sup> 2020, Las Vegas, Nevada, hosted by <i>NBC</i> , <i>MSNBC</i> and the <i>Nevada Independent</i>	Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Tom Steyer, Elizabeth Warren, Mike Bloomberg	First to feature Bloomberg who is self-financing his campaign and only just met donor thresholds to qualify.	Bloomberg's debut – Cincinnati ref, Warren challenges him on treatment of women – faces backlash about being angry. <i>Politico</i> – say it's what makes her – Arya Stark and less 'fluffy Warren'. Sanders – ageist metaphors. Klobuchar and Buttigieg continue to clash – her hair vibrating with emotion. Lack of diversity in the line-up, aligns Bloomberg with white privilege.
February 25 <sup>th</sup> 2020, Charleston, South Carolina, hosted by <i>CBS</i> .	Joe Biden, Pete Buttigieg, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Tom Steyer, Elizabeth Warren, Mike Bloomberg		Bloomberg again – Warren challenges him on his abortion stance after telling employee to 'kill it'. Diversity – ageism against Biden – old folks home and diaper aisle, crabby codger. Buttigieg – first 'openly gay' president.
March 11 <sup>th</sup> 2020, Washington DC, hosted by <i>CNN</i> and <i>Univision</i> .	Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders	No audience, Covid - election into uncharted virtual terrain.	Diversity, ageism towards Sanders – old coot, socialist grandfather. Race between 2 white men, Warren missed on banking policy she should get credit for. Woman for VP.

**Table 9 – Debate summary**

## **5.2 Analysis of the media coverage**

The following sections show the patterns of gendered media coverage found within the texts for this research. They are organised into three broader macro themes: Feminine Identity, Intersectionality and Masculinity, all of which emerged from the analysis, and encompass the various genderised ways the candidates were portrayed by the media. Finally, a smaller, but significant, theme of pop culture is included, which discusses the way pop culture references were used by the media to portray candidates in a gendered way.

### **5.2.1 Feminine identity**

Significant patterns within the Feminine Identity section show how women are underrepresented and consistently “othered” in politics. To begin with, women’s position and agency within the media industry emerged as a theme, due to the first all-female moderator panel featured in the November 2019 debate and the corresponding debate coverage. As Byerly (2014) suggests, women’s voices have been marginalised, as the disparity of women at the top levels of the media is reinforced by existing power structures. The panel provided a unique opportunity to document the portrayal of women conducting a political debate, and the way this uniqueness is highlighted, demonstrates the historical under-representation of women in these prestigious roles. Following this, the theme of women in politics is presented, with findings on the concept of truthfulness and gender, and the gendered portrayal of Klobuchar, who raises the issue of discrimination that women candidates face in politics, and highlights perceived examples through Buttigieg’s campaign. In addition, sections on how the women candidates were portrayed in terms of their appearance, voices and past careers, are included and demonstrate further gendered bias within the media.

### **5.2.1.1 Women in media**

The underrepresentation of women in the media industry emerged as a theme in the data from the November debate. The debate featured all the candidates who qualified, but an all-female moderator panel was selected for the first time, as previously, the role had been dominated by male journalists. This led to coverage extolling the virtues of a women-led agenda, and crediting the journalists with highlighting gender issues on an influential political platform. The women moderators were framed as unique and ground-breaking within political communication. This speaks to the issue of gender parity in news production and leadership where historically, patriarchal norms, masculine workplace cultures and socio-economic barriers, such as maternity policies and the gender pay gap have contributed to the inequality in gender within the media industry (Carter et al., 2019, Byerly and Ross 2006 and Milner and Gregory 2021). Research from the Pew Research Centre (2020) notes that all the moderators since 1960 have been prominent broadcast journalists. However, the uniqueness of the women-only panel in this debate shows that historically, women have been overlooked. Research conducted by Time's Up, a non-profit that works to support victims of gender discrimination (Times Up 2022) found that, out of 132 debates from 1996 to 2106, 44% did not include a woman moderator and that none of them featured more than two women (Gender on the ballot 2019).

In a newsletter for *The Washington Post* (L), Jacqueline Alemany (2019) subverted the phrase "A woman's place is in the house", to form the headline "A woman's place is on the debate stage". The language would be familiar to voters, and is often used to reinforce rhetoric surrounding gender inequality. The coverage continues by highlighting the position of women in the election:

'Women took centre stage in last night's Democratic debate. Not just because of the record number of women running for president who graced the big stage but also in terms of the issues discussed that affect women and families.' (Alemany 2019).

The article noted that the women candidates took “centre stage”, employing the discourse of drama and theatre, in order to frame the women at the forefront of the debate, and highlight their gendered and “starring role” in the production of the political debate. The media framed the women moderators as supporting this, suggesting that specific issues covered during the debate were attributed to the increase in women’s presence and their ability to lead the agenda, implying that their gender drove the discussion towards policy that affects women and families.

Vox (L) followed in a similar tone and published an article entitled “Gender equality was at the forefront of the fifth Democratic Debate”, written by Zhou (2019a) which argued that having women leading the debate “changed the conversation”:

“In a marked contrast from several past debates, gender equity took centre stage at Wednesday’s Democratic debate, which featured a wide-ranging discussion about paid family leave, abortion rights, and the higher standards that women candidates must meet” (Zhou 2019a).

Again, the idiom “centre stage” was used as a discursive device to employ the discourse of drama, as a way to illustrate that women occupied a central role in the debate and to add dynamism to the writing. Zhou (2019c) refers to the “marked contrast” from historical debates, alluding to the lack of diversity in the role of moderators historically, and the ability of the women panel to lead the agenda towards a discussion around gender equality. They also referenced the “higher standards women candidates must meet”, highlighting the gender bias women face in politics (Byerly and Ross 2006; Loke, Bachman and Harp 2016 and Ross 2017). This was echoed by *USA Today* (C) (Behrmann 2019), who offered a “special hat tip to the women moderators” for asking questions on abortion, childcare, housing and white supremacy, all subjects it was suggested had been “largely ignored” in previous debates. The women moderators were seen as a collective actor in the construction; however none were afforded media coverage on an individual basis, but their joint presence was deemed special, unique, and worthy of adopting a prime position within the debate.



This reflects the shape of the media industry in which men are often overrepresented in positions of power (Byerly and Ross 2006; Shor et al 2015, and Carter et al 2019).

The news coverage credits the agenda and content of the debate to the women moderators, implying that these issues have been historically overlooked by male moderators, and by factors resulting from gender bias, such as workplace culture and production decisions by leadership (Shor et al., 2015). *The Washington Post* (L) newsletter by Alemany (2019) featured a quote from Liz Plank, a journalist, author, and expert on gender policy, known for her feminist perspectives on politics and gender issues. She is quoted to add legitimacy to the framing of women in politics and their influence in leading the discussion in the debate:

“When women are setting the agenda, the priorities are different. We got a specific question about paid leave for the very first time on the debate stage this cycle. We got not just one, but several (and a follow-up question!) about abortion” (Plank, cited by Alemany 2019, *The Washington Post*).

Her quote also gives authority to the discourse and will resonate with the public, as Fairclough (2010 p.63) asserts that texts are open to ambiguity, which is reduced or eliminated by interpretive practices, which draw upon configurations of discursual elements, as part of their interpretive procedure. In this instance, her quote acts to reduce ambiguity around the interpretation, as the discourse is configured in a familiar way to readers, in that women are able to assert a different agenda and perspective than men. Although speaking from her perspective, the use of “we” aligns Plank with the electorate, creating a sense of union between women voters and herself. The use of “we” as a collective pronoun, functions as a form of synthetic personalisation, in which inclusive language is used to communicate a sense of personalisation to a mass audience (Fairclough 2010). The communication is in one direction, from text to audience, and the choice of pronoun is used to indirectly engage the reader in the cause, which is women’s rights.

The intention is to foster a group of women who support the women's presence on the moderator panel, and their efforts to lead the questions and agenda, whilst it also serves to correct patriarchal norms within these events. Enthusiasm is communicated through the comments, specifically for the questions asked during the debate, adds gravity to the issues, and credits the moderators for leading the discussion towards them.

The breadth and depth of coverage found within the texts, placed an emphasis on the uniqueness of the situation and highlighted the absence of women's presence and voices historically. *Vox* (L) surmises:

"It's a dynamic that spoke to the expansive representation of both the journalists and candidates onstage" (Zhou, 2019a).

The "dynamic", meaning the women moderators, who highlighted gender disparities that exist in America, not only in the media, but also in politics. As Ross (2013) argues, news media, particularly television, is a central factor in creating and perpetuating cultural norms through their gendered framing of public issues, and in the gendered discourses they persistently promote. The liberal/left-leaning media (*Vox*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*) covered the women moderators in this tone, making a strong case for the benefits of gender equality in the political processes, and how they are presented by the media to the electorate.

#### **5.2.1.2 Amy Klobuchar, Pete Buttigieg, and a duel of double standards**

Beginning in the November debate, and continuing in the following months, Amy Klobuchar challenged what she perceived to be, a double standard in the way Pete Buttigieg had achieved and sustained his position in the race. In the debate held in November 2019, she drew attention to his perceived lack of political experience (he was mayor of South Bend, Indiana) and the bias women candidates faced in the election.

*The Washington Post's* (L) coverage of the exchange, featured in a newsletter format by Alemany (2019), who was mentioned in the previous section covering the all-women moderator panel, offered an analysis of the debate. Klobuchar is quoted as follows:

"Pete is qualified to be up on this stage, and I am honoured to be standing next to him. But what I said is true. Women are held to a higher standard. Otherwise, we could play a game called name your favourite female president, which we can't do because it has all been men. If you think a woman can't beat Donald Trump, Nancy Pelosi does it every single day." (Klobuchar 2019 cited by Alemany 2019, *The Washington Post* 2019).

Alemany (2019) used the quote to highlight the ongoing scepticism female candidates have faced from voters because of their gender. Klobuchar's statement draws the audience's attention to a gendered double standard posed within presidential elections and uses Buttigieg as an example to highlight that the discourse of political leadership is typically, heavily in favour of male candidates. When considering Klobuchar's decision and motivation to focus her attention on Buttigieg specifically, the media coverage presented two key strands to explore" his perceived lack of political experience and a bias in media coverage. Both issues fuelled Klobuchar's criticism on the debate stage, and enabled her to voice her belief that Buttigieg benefitted from male privilege in the race.

In the December debate, Klobuchar began to draw attention to the alleged gender bias that she believed Buttigieg was benefitting from:

"The senator, returning to her clash with Buttigieg, took aim at one of his perceived vulnerabilities (experience) before touting her record of success as a campaigner in swing areas of the country". (Verhovek and Karson 2019, *ABC News*).

The coverage from *ABC News* (C) reported Klobuchar's political credentials in support of her argument against Buttigieg. Noting that she had a "trove of passed legislation, which is proof of pragmatism, and victory in conservative parts of Minnesota, as proof she can beat President Donald Trump". Asserting her "proof of pragmatism" as a key leadership component, the text framed her collaborative approach and success in Republican areas, as an attractive asset that was integral to her chances of success in the 2020 election. Women politicians are often subjected to closer scrutiny of their private lives, marital status, and an over-emphasis on their appearance by the media (Campus 2013). This commentary by *ABC News* contradicts this gendered approach by reporting on her achievements and career accomplishments.

Following the thread of career experience, *The National Review* (R) (Geraghty 2019a), framed Klobuchar in an aggressive light, mentioning she 'took shots' at Buttigieg, 'accusing him of not respecting the experience of the other candidates on the stage'. The phrasing, 'took shots', invokes a battle image with weapons, possibly guns, and connotes violence and hostility from Klobuchar. She was consistently framed as the aggressor in the challenges throughout the coverage and across future debates.

*Politico* (L) (Harris 2019) also framed the exchange in forceful terms for Klobuchar, resulting in victimising Buttigieg:

"This debate also made clear how eager rivals are to haze Buttigieg and halt his recent rise in the Iowa and New Hampshire polls. In addition to the shots at the mayor from Warren, Klobuchar seemed both genuinely offended and grateful for an occasion to get in his face when he said his views on immigration flow from life experience and weren't formed in committee rooms in Washington. She told the 37-year-old mayor he sounded "dismissive" and lectured him sharply on the substantive achievements she and others who have served in the Senate have produced". (Harris 2019)



**Image 3 – Klobuchar and Buttigieg participate in the November debate (North 2019, Vox.com)**

Hazing, often connected with US university fraternities and the military, refers to a test of the male body to prove masculinity, frequently involving extreme levels of alcohol consumption, as part of an initiation ritual for new members of the group (Kessler 2021). *Politico* drew on the discourse of toxic masculinity to frame Klobuchar in an aggressive light, which also implicitly alludes to Buttigieg's sexuality. As Harrington (2020) notes, the term is often used to characterise homophobic and misogynistic behaviour and speech from men. The term hazing was used as a metaphor, for the tensions between Buttigieg and the other candidates - positioning him as the new candidate being subjected to brutal challenges, in order to prove his political worth. A metaphor as an aspect of meaning, acts as a cue to the reader to interpret the text in a particular way (Fairclough 2010 p. 60), in this instance, Buttigieg is the victim, and is to be sympathised with for enduring Klobuchar's challenge. This also undermines Klobuchar's point, and she is framed as relishing the opportunity to challenge Buttigieg: 'getting in his face' suggested a readiness to confront, and 'sharply lecturing' suggested she berated him in a patronising way.

These phrases describe aggressive, but distinctly masculine, behaviour from Klobuchar, invoking the double bind of femininity and incompetence (Jamieson 1995). She was consistently portrayed in coverage in this manner, and her assertiveness in addressing the perceived bias is framed in a damaging way, making her appear incompetent in her debate performance.

During February, the reporting continued to frame Klobuchar as the instigator of confrontations on the debate stage - focused, again, on her challenges with Pete Buttigieg. Karson et al., (2019) reported for *ABC News* (C) that she had delivered a strong performance - portraying her as an effective debater among the other candidates, who had succeeded in using the recently concluded impeachment trial to further criticise Buttigieg's lack of political experience:

"You said it was exhausting to watch and that you wanted to turn the channel and watch cartoons. We have a newcomer in the White House and look where it got us. I think having some experience is a good thing." (Karson et al 2019, *ABC News*)

Klobuchar referred to a comment from Buttigieg in the lead-up to the debate, which she successfully used to draw attention to his youth and lack of political experience. It also speaks to his stamina on the issues, which are crucial in maintaining the integrity of presidential politics - something to which voters were assumed to expect a serious commitment.

The coverage continued into the following debate with the BBC (C), reporting on an exchange in which Buttigieg reminded Klobuchar she forgot the name of the Mexican President in a recent interview:

"One of the most vicious series of exchanges was between Klobuchar and Buttigieg. She accused him of mocking her intelligence. He said she was belittling his mayoral experience. "Are you trying to say that I'm dumb or are you mocking me here, Pete? I wish I were as perfect as you, Pete," Klobuchar said with barely concealed contempt. The two did not shake hands when it was all over". (Zurcher 2020a).

Klobuchar is again, framed as the antagonist, with the word 'vicious' implying a deliberately cruel approach to her response, whilst the phrase 'barely concealed contempt' signifies that she was unable to contain her disdain for Buttigieg. The focus within the coverage is on the way Klobuchar handles and displays her emotions, a gendered approach that diminishes and attempts to dismiss her argument.

The second strand of this discourse drew on the perceived media bias that Klobuchar believed favoured Buttigieg and his campaign. In an article published by *Vox* (L), North (2019) suggested the challenges between the two candidates revealed a bias regarding media attention towards male candidates. They suggested Buttigieg and another male candidate, Beto O'Rourke, gained more coverage than female candidates, and that it was focused on their credentials, and experience - despite, in some cases, being less experienced politically than the women. The article cites former candidate Beto O'Rourke and Buttigieg as examples:

"Early in the primary race, both O'Rourke and Buttigieg generated breathless media coverage despite limited political résumés. For O'Rourke, it was a *Vanity Fair* cover story in which he memorably said of the nominating contest, "Man, I'm just born to be in it." (O'Rourke later suggested his words were taken out of context.) For Buttigieg, it was discussion of his affection for James Joyce's *Ulysses*" (North 2019).

The word 'breathless' infers excitement and anticipation towards these candidates, whilst the basis for this coverage, according to North (2019), seems to be based on slim evidence, with the women candidates not being afforded the same attention. For O'Rourke, the quote appeared on the cover of the *Vanity Fair* issue around the time of his campaign launch, in March 2019 (Hagan and Leibovitz 2019), and drew criticism for showcasing male privilege and his sense of entitlement (Mahdawi 2019). Dettmar (2019) notes Buttigieg was asked on Twitter to name the book that had the greatest influence on him, which he tweeted was James Joyce's *Ulysses* - a book he believed was a difficult text, even if its subject matter was significantly democratic.

As North (2019) indicates, both candidates gained significant and valuable media coverage for these insights:

“The men are given the most generous interpretation possible about who they are and what they want to do, and the women are held to the most sceptical, cynical standard possible”. (North 2019)

The article signalled that male candidates are given a ‘generous interpretation’ by the media, while, contrastingly, women are subjected to ‘sceptical and cynical’ standards, which expose gendered bias in the media. Research into media representations of women in general has supported this commentary (Carlin and Winfrey 2008 and Kay 2020), with coverage limited to aesthetics, and lacking in characteristics that could level the field with male politicians, and limit the bias of unfavourable stereotypes. O’Neill, Savigny and Cann (2015) looked at the way women politicians were depicted in UK press coverage and found they were less visible, but also found that stories with a personal focus, were double that of male politicians, and often contained frames and stereotypes that made them appear less serious and diminished their work. Jansans (2019) looked to Australia and the sexist media coverage of its first female Prime minister, Julia Gillard. Gillard, and other high-profile women politicians, were presented as a challenge to the hegemonic masculine norms; and this public narrative served to diminish their status and power in government, in the eyes of the electorate.

The challenge between the two candidates continued from the December debate through to February, when both ended their campaigns and featured throughout the data. The tone, narrative and framing continued to portray Klobuchar as the instigator or aggressor, and Buttigieg as a victim of her annoyance, frustration and ire. *Vox* (L) noted that the dispute and ongoing hostility between the candidates could damage their images and campaigns:

“Klobuchar and Buttigieg sharpening their attacks on each other might make for good television. But electorally, it may not amount to more than mutually assured destruction”. (Beauchamp et al 2020).



There is an acknowledgement that the performative nature of the debates, and the theatrical drama of the exchanges, would draw viewers and provide material for the media. However, politically, the behaviour and subsequent coverage could prove damaging for the candidates. The dynamic between Klobuchar and Buttigieg featured in *Politico* (L), which asked 14 experts for their opinions on the February 19th debate. Sophia Nelson, an author, political strategist and former House Republican Committee counsel, offered her opinion on the candidates, and concluded that the continuous arguments amounted to a potentially damaging narrative for each candidate. She used imagery that belittled them, and undermined Klobuchar's accusations of sexism and bias, from which this all stemmed:

"Klobuchar and Buttigieg were like a teenage brother and sister fighting at the dinner table. It was ridiculous. I lost a lot of respect for Klobuchar Wednesday night, with her temperament and lack of composure"  
(Nelson 2020, *Politico*).

Likening the conflict to a 'teenage brother and sister fighting at the dinner table', diminished the underlying misogyny that Klobuchar had been trying to expose throughout the debates. In addition to this, the consequences of the loss of respect and highlighting her lack of composure, are placed squarely on Klobuchar. The fact that this criticism came from a woman is also significant, as this acts to support patriarchal power systems around gender, by undermining Klobuchar, which directly opposes her argument that women are held to a different standard than men in politics. Belittling Klobuchar, and referring to her 'temperament and lack of composure', extended the discourse through from previous coverage around her displays of emotion. She was consistently portrayed as showing her frustrated emotions and temper, as mentioned previously: 'sharply lecturing', 'getting in his face' and 'barely concealed contempt'. This invoked the discourse of women being too emotional for politics, which undermined her credibility and distracted from her campaign efforts.

*Politico* (L) used this moment to assess Klobuchar's performance in the debate, acknowledging that Klobuchar took a risk, by repeatedly talking about the gender bias women face in politics. It highlighted the shame vs. silence double bind (Jamieson 1995), which suggested if she had remained silent, she would have been powerless, but by challenging what she believed to be male privilege, as shown in this section, she was belittled, undermined and infantilised by the media. This is an example of both sides (left-leaning and right-leaning) of the media producing coverage similar in many aspects, and overall critical of a woman politician trying to highlight the gendered discrimination within the political system. The left-leaning media have generally been supportive of women's issues, however they portray the challenge between Klobuchar and Buttigieg in a damaging way, which weakens her point and diminishes the argument around gender inequality in US politics. *Vox* (L) highlighted the favourable media coverage that Buttigieg and Beto O'Rourke had during their campaigns, whilst no such exposure was awarded to the women politicians. *Politico* (L), however, offered a critical view from a conservative personality that drew upon the discourse of a woman politician as being too emotional to be competent at her job. Whilst the right-leaning media are established in their conservative values, here, the left demonstrate a more subtle, and perhaps unconscious, bias towards the issue.

The risk Klobuchar took in outlining, consistently and strongly, her beliefs, and her experience of gendered discrimination, was noted below. She had 'the most powerful moment of her campaign' and the media acknowledged the risk she took in discussing the bias she faced as a woman candidate:

"It was a tricky thing to do, female candidates and candidates of colour often shy away from so explicitly talking about such prejudice — but her answer was a thoughtful rallying cry for female voters". (Korecki et al., 2019).

This alludes to the damage some candidates face for confronting gender bias – the most recent example being Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, which provoked a wave of misogyny directed at women who assumed traditionally male roles (Beinart 2019).

Also in the US, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a 30-year-old Latino congresswoman of the Democratic Party, had been framed by the media as 'a wonder woman to the left and a wicked witch to the right', making her the second most-talked about politician in 2019, after Trump (Alter 2019). As a politician, she had endured sexist treatment throughout her career, from criticism of her appearance and insults about her intelligence, to questions regarding her qualifications for her position as Congresswoman for New York's 14th District. (Times Up 2020). These examples speak to the pervasive nature of sexism in US politics, and echo Klobuchar's experiences and her discussions during the debates. Mary Ann Marsh (2019), a Democratic political analyst who regularly writes opinion pieces for Fox News (R), framed Klobuchar as a 'winner' of the debate in her analysis:

"She had her best performance by emphasizing her experience, productivity, electoral successes. She also emphasized the fact that women are judged by a different standard than men, citing her criticism of Buttigieg's lack of experience while he was being hailed as a front-runner last week" (Marsh 2019).

The positive coverage of this issue in a right-leaning news outlet, alludes to the gender bias women face stretching across political ideologies, and suggests it is considered by the media to be ubiquitous throughout politics - not just within the Democratic Party nomination race.

#### **5.2.1.3 Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and lying and truth**

Harsin (2021) notes that 'post-truth politics' often focuses on 'fake news' and lying, which are then addressed by policies in media literacy, new regulations, and increased focus on a platform owner's responsibilities, by providing more robust and ethical journalism. People who engage in the strategy of 'post-truth', aim to delegitimize the truth to minimise the impact of legitimate facts on shaping public opinion, with the most significant example of this behaviour in contemporary politics being Donald Trump's presidency (Buffaci 2020, Harsin 2021) and the UK's referendum to leave Europe, Brexit (Rose 2017), both of which were criticised for misrepresenting facts to voters.

Salgado (2018) notes that political debates are prime examples of 'post-truth politics', which embody situations where fabricated untruths are masqueraded as truth, and some truths are combined with exaggerations to incite and provoke reactions from an audience. This can make the output complex to assess, in terms of gender representation and the January debate contained just such an example, with *The National Review* (R) reporting on what they characterised as a 'Great Progressive Presidential Candidate Duel', in reference to a challenge between Warren and Sanders:

"Sanders offered a rather vehement denial that he had told Warren in private conversation that a woman couldn't defeat Donald Trump. "How could anybody in a million years not believe that a woman could not be president of the United States?" (Geraghty 2020a).



**Image 4 – The tense exchange between Warren and Sanders in January 2020 (Wood 2020, *Politico*)**

The framework of rhetoric features throughout the analysis, but both metaphor and hyperbole are used here, to contribute to the discourse of Sanders' innocence. Using the metaphor of a duel, suggests a political spectacle with the two candidates pitched against each other to battle for their sense of honour. Kellner (2003) suggests US presidencies are staged and presented to the public in cinematic terms, using media spectacle to sell the policies, person and image of the candidate to the electorate. He proposes that the media are complicit in this, reducing politics to image and story, structuring it as a form of entertainment. Ultimately, this undermines participatory democracy, and renders politics as a mode of spectacle in which codes of media culture determine the form, style and appearance of presidential politics. The narrative around Warren and Sanders was shaped, by the media, as a duel, implying that the critical nature of the statement and the consequential impact on campaigns, could be extreme, as duels typically end in death. Hyperbole was also included, by suggesting 'how could anybody in a million years not believe a woman could not become the president'? This discursive device was used by Sanders and quoted in media texts, drawing on the statement a 'million years', which is an impossible length of time to imagine, and an overstatement that served to emphasise Sander's innocence.

Sanders' denial was reported in multiple outlets, displaying his disbelief and insistence that he was innocent. 'Sanders offered a rather vehement denial' and 'Sanders offered his emphatic disavowal' from *the National Review* (R), along with 'Sanders explicitly denied making this comment and reiterated his longstanding backing for Warren along with other women candidates', reported by Vox (L). In contrast, Warren was framed as an aggressor, a liar and was accused of stirring tensions for her own gain. For example, *The Washington Post* (L) declared she 'tossed a hand grenade his way and stirred the embers of smouldering resentments from '2016'.

The metaphor of a grenade suggests aggression and signals that Sanders was taken by surprise by the comments. *The New York Times* (L) published an opinion piece in which several political journalists awarded a grade for the candidate's performance after each debate.

A majority gave positive reviews to Warren, however Liz Mair, a centre-right communications operative (Lizmair.com 2022), insisted:

“She should consider herself lucky no one pressed her on whether Sanders said what her campaign is alleging — if she said he had, I’m not sure many people would have believed her”. (Mair 2020, *The New York Times*).

This questions Warren’s integrity and frames her as a liar, implying Sanders’ innocence. It also suggests she would not be believed if she was drawn on the matter. This uses interdiscursivity to draw on past controversy about her Native American heritage. In 2019, Warren made repeated claims throughout her career that her mother was part Cherokee, and wrote that she was an American Indian, on a 1986 registration card for the State Bar of Texas, even though Warren was not (Nilsen 2019). The issue appeared in the media after Trump accused her of lying to gain preferential treatment as a law professor and a subsequent DNA test revealed her innocence, but brought a backlash against her for undermining tribal interests (Martin 2018). A documented Cherokee ancestor, not genetics, is a requirement to enrol in the Cherokee Nation - a mistake that Conservatives and Trump chose to exploit in framing her as a liar in the media (Nilsen 2019).

The comment from Mair (2020) in *The New York Times* above, illustrates that there are still specific gendered discourses around the concepts of lying and truth that emphasise the expectation for women to behave a particular way. Research has found that women politicians are perceived to be more honest (Dolan 2013, Schneider and Bos 2013, and Eggers, Vivyan and Wagner 2018) and are also perceived as less likely to engage in corruption (Barnes and Beaulieu 2018). Barnes and Beaulieu (2018) suggest that the electorate values honesty, and when exploring the rhetoric surrounding a candidate who engaged in scandalous behaviour that involved dishonesty or deception, found there was a significant decrease in positive evaluations when the candidate was presented as a woman, versus a man.

This suggests the bias towards women regarding the concept of truthfulness plays a role in how the public evaluates them, which can be seen in this research in the way the discourse holds Warren to a higher standard of integrity and honesty than Sanders.

*The National Review* (R) contributed to the discourse of Warren being dishonest by drawing on a sweeping generalisation and publishing an article with the headline 'Women Lie Too' (Harasanyi 2020). The article discussed a research study, which they claim, proves women are more prone to lying, albeit in a less self-orientated way than men. Harasanyi (2020) used this as grounds to argue that Hilary Clinton, who he regarded as an excellent liar, still did not impact his gendered expectations that women should have the highest standard of religious honesty, like the Mormons:

"Deceiving people is a skill that is more often, and effectively, utilized by elected officials than foot doctors. And Hillary Clinton, the highest-profile woman politician of our era, has already proven to be a far better liar than, say, Mitt Romney, and yet I still don't assume women are less truthful than Mormons." (Harasanyi 2020).

The article interdiscursively alludes to past right-leaning coverage of the Democrats' previous presidential candidate, Clinton and her alleged dishonesty throughout her 2016 presidential campaign. Clinton was consistently framed in the media as being untruthful during her 2016 campaign, for lying repeatedly about her emails and her health (Thiessen 2016). Zurcher (2016) explains that an investigation in 2016 by the FBI, deemed her use of a private email server, during her time as Secretary of State from 2009 to 2015, as not illegal, but in violation of government policy, which created security risks to classified information. It is also noted that the media controversy centred around the issue of public trust in her as a presidential candidate, who ultimately made her communications more susceptible to hackers and foreign intelligence for the sake of her 'convenience' of using personal devices. Further to this, towards the end of her presidential campaign in 2016, Klein (2016) notes a viral video showed Clinton leaving a 9/11 memorial ceremony early, unsteadily getting into a van with the support of Secret Service agents. After

contradictory and incomplete explanations from Clinton's campaign team, right-leaning media questioned her truthfulness, and her physician was prompted to reveal a pneumonia diagnosis. Neville-Shepherd and Nolan (2019) investigated the media response to the incident and argued that attempts to turn her health crisis into a sign of bad character demonstrated a gendered bias towards women in leadership. They further equate this to the double bind of ageing women, who become weaker and invisible, rather than male candidates, who enjoy wisdom and power with age (Jamieson 1995).

Clinton has become a notable and contemporary case of a woman politician who provided the media with an underpinning for employing and disseminating gender bias that privileges hegemonic masculinity in leadership (Neville-Shepherd and Nolan 2019). As Greenberg (2016) notes, she has been tracked by a sense of inauthenticity throughout her career, with the perception she is selling herself as something she isn't: a trait that they argue has a long and ignoble lineage in American presidential politics. *The National Review* (R) article draws further on the interdiscursivity, citing evidence of Warren behaving similarly:

"Warren, of course, has already been caught pushing a "self-oriented" lie that was used to bolster her career for decades, so she is clearly not above being dishonest." (Harasayni 2019, *The National Review*)

The reporting around the challenge framed Warren as a liar, and used the existing discourse around women and truth to question her integrity, her honesty and to reinforce the gender bias towards women. By sustaining this discourse, it shows women are consistently held to a higher standard in the political sphere when truth is contested, unlike men. For example: Bill Clinton denied his affair with Monica Lewinsky, but was later impeached for lying under oath about it (Time Inc. 2008), and Trump's baseless allegations of election fraud in 2020, claimed he won against Democrat candidate Joe Biden, but that votes for him had been switched by the machines (The Associated Press 2023).



Arguably, both men continued in politics with minor damage to their careers or public opinion of them, whereas the findings prove that when women face accusations of untruthfulness, the discourse lingers and is damaging to their political careers.

#### **5.2.1.4 Women's work**

Gordon et al., (2021) suggest a woman's past career and experience can motivate participation, influence their political identity and provide them with skills suitable for political office. However, as shown in this analysis, these factors may also be used by the media to portray them in a way, such as to depoliticise them, detracting from their debate performances.

Harris's legal background was invoked by the media as a show of skill and strength in her exchange with Gabbard. According to *Fox News* (R), she gave a 'prosecutorial dissection of Gabbard', and in a separate article Gutfeld (2019) writing commentary and opinions for the outlet reported:

"Then there was the cop, Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., pretending to be something she's not. Yeah, it's unfortunate Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Hawaii, had the guts to go on TV and face tough questions. Maybe you should throw her in jail". (Gutfeld 2019 *Fox News*).

Harris's background in the legal profession was framed as part of her political identity and as a threat to Gabbard. Neatly tied to this element of Harris's identity was the image 'throw her in jail', which evoked the Clinton and Trump debates from 2016. During the campaigns, Trump threatened Clinton with a criminal investigation into her use of a private server for emails, during her time as Secretary of State, and to send her to jail (Appelbaum 2016). Trump assigned the nickname 'crooked Hillary' when threatening her and his supporters chanted 'lock her up!' at his campaign rallies in 2016 (Zapatosky 2016).

The intertextual reference featured against Harris in another debate when *The New York Times* (L) also connected Harris to the world of law, reporting:

“They had lost count of how many times she said “criminal,” which was not a good look for those who already view her as little more than prosecutor in chief”. (Vivion Brooks 2019, *The New York Times*).



**Image 5 – Ratings award to Harris after her ‘attack’ on Gabbard –**  
Other Democrats gave a ‘C’, Independents gave a ‘D’ and the Republican Party  
awarded her a ‘F’ (Musto 2019, Fox News).

In both instances, the media framed Harris in more masculine terms, by drawing on her legal career to portray her behaviour. She is aligned with Trump’s behaviour of threatening to use his (potential presidential) power to damage another candidate, and in the second instance, her professional achievements are diminished. This alludes to the double bind of femininity and competence (Jamieson 1995), as her career success in a traditionally masculine discipline is being used to diminish her debate performance and impact her campaign.

Warren's background as a teacher and professor was featured in later debates, with *Newsmax* (R) (Fitzgerald 2019) commenting: 'Warren is the best student in class with plans galore'. Saul (2019) notes Warren began teaching law in the late 1970s in Texas, and has spent nearly 40 years deepening her academic research into bankruptcy and becoming an expert in consumer advocacy. By the 1990s, she was a Harvard professor and provided her expertise to the US government on a special commission to review the banking system. Before her career as a law professor, Warren spent only a year in a public school in 1971, a job which she refers to regularly during her campaign, in relation to her claims to have been forced out of it due to her pregnancy (Ujifusa and Blad 2019). Warren's work as a teacher remained a crucial part of her identity, self-presentation, and communication style (Traister 2019), and continues to feature in media coverage of her. *Fox News* (R) commented:

"She was the smartest person on stage. And by the way, she knows it, she knows you know it, and she gets a little annoyed that the other candidates don't seem to get it. If this was a race for high school chemistry teacher, she would win it hands down (meaning no disrespect to high school chemistry teachers)" (Gingrich 2020, *Fox News*).

The tone of the commentary was sarcastic, insinuating that Warren is smug about her intelligence and exasperated by her fellow candidates' failure to acknowledge it. This invoked the discourse that she is known for being detail-orientated, has several well-thought-out policies, and is often cast as a 'wonk' or something of a geek (Perticone 2019). Warren was never a high school chemistry teacher, she taught law, however, they are both subjects which are regarded as highly academic, and the reference could be alluding to her trait of being a wonk or geek. Also in the January debate, *The New York Times* (L) compared her to a teacher:

"Bernie is Bernie. But if Elizabeth Warren looked over the top of her glasses at me like she did at him, I'd confess. He had different math teachers than I did — he needs to show his work on Medicare for All". (Leonard 2020, *The New York Times*).

The teaching metaphors are used to portray her intelligence, and although they are mocking in tone, they emphasise her thorough and detailed approach to policy and her campaign. It could be argued that since the commentary extends to her past career, something the male candidates are not subjected to in this tone, it depoliticised her and undermined her political credibility. This exceptionalism of women politicians positioned them within a specific role and portrayed them as a novelty, outside of the norm of what voters expect a politician to be.

#### **5.2.1.5 A Public voice**

*The National Review* (R) criticised Warren's voice in the debate and compared her to another candidate, Marianne Williams, who had since ended her campaign. Nordlinger (2019a), who is a senior editor at the right-leaning National Review and a music critic for the New Criterion (Nationalreview.com 2022), acknowledged the bias of commenting on women's voices:

"Here's the rule: You must never, ever criticize a woman's voice. That is out of bounds. That is furthering sexist stereotypes', I really don't care. I am a writer, and a critic (of music, mainly). I comment on women's voices, men's voices — aliens' voices." (Nordlinger 2019a, *The National Review*).

Whilst the criticism towards Warren is explicit, it is framed as a microaggression: a subtle and nuanced form of discrimination aimed at minority groups of society (Torino et al 2018). Through this, the writer attempts to justify and trivialise the harm within his meaning, specifically by insisting he comments on 'women's voices, men's voices – aliens voices'. He used his position as a music critic to circumvent the gender bias within his writing, however the subtext reads as amplifying his statements and exposes his prejudice towards Warren.

Nordlinger continues by comparing Warren to another candidate, Marianne Williamson:

“One of Marianne Williamson’s gifts is a beautiful voice — a beautiful speaking voice. That is not one of Elizabeth Warren’s gifts. Hers can be quavery and oddly beseeching. Almost desperate. Again, it is not an asset.” (Nordlinger 2019a, *The National Review*).

Kay (2021) suggests the trope of a ‘nagging wife’ follows the public speech of political women and does not belong in the public sphere. Referencing Clinton’s 2016 speeches from her presidential campaign in which the media criticised her for being too ‘shrill, loud or unlikeable’, and Margaret Thatcher who employed a vocal coach to make her voice sound more ‘authoritative’ and less ‘shrill’, points to the expectation that women who do not acquiesce and smile, are framed as ‘nags’ in the media. This gender bind is shown in the text through Nordlinger’s criticism of the way Warren sounded: ‘quavery and oddly beseeching’, and his praise of Marianne Williamson’s voice, which he found ‘beautiful and a ‘gift’. The word ‘quavery’ suggested shaky, nervousness or old, emotion and ‘beseeching’ implied desperation and again, heightened emotion from Warren.

The gendered commentary on voices drew on an intertextual reference from Clinton’s 2016 campaign, suggesting the sound of a candidate’s voice can affect their ability to win an election. Khazan (2016) writes that Clinton’s voice has been scrutinised since her days as first lady, but criticism increased when she ran for president in 2016. They mention media coverage of her campaign that focused on her voice:

“She shouts and there’s something unrelaxed about the way she communicates, and another claimed she was going up an octave every time she speaks”. (Khazan 2016).

By criticising and focusing on the women’s voices, their message is diminished, and their professional standing within the political sphere is undermined.

It also perpetuates the discourse connecting the way a woman sounds – rather than what she says – to her electability, which disadvantages female candidates in elections.

#### **5.2.1.6 A choice of attire**

Friedman (2019) wrote a critique examining the political relevance of wearing white and its association with women's suffrage for *The New York Times* (L). The writer, Vanessa Friedman, joined *The New York Times* in 2003 as fashion director, and is known for her direct and pragmatic approach to fashion, as well as her incisive commentary on the socio-political ramifications of the role of fashion in society (Business of Fashion 2022). The article featured the headline 'Tulsi Gabbard's White Pantsuit Isn't Winning' and argued that women in politics wearing white, acts as a visual cue to champion women's rights and highlight women's suffrage:

"That it became not an item of clothing but a placeholder in a continuum that began with the suffragists, continued through Geraldine Ferraro, and resonated today. That Hillary Clinton made it a cause célèbre, #WearWhiteToVote made it a hashtag, Melania Trump made it a pointed subject of speculation, and the women of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress made it a gauntlet". (Friedman 2019, *The New York Times*).

The article continued to question Gabbard's choice of wearing white repeatedly throughout her campaign and suggested there was calculation behind it. Friedman (2019) suggested her appearance should align her to the discourse of women's rights, but that Gabbard's efforts had fallen short: 'the muted reaction was due in part to, the petty public battle with Hilary Clinton, and the fact that there are four more women on stage could also make the imagery less portent'. This was in reference to Clinton suggesting that Republicans were 'grooming' Gabbard to spoil the 2020 election, due to her centre-right politics. Gabbard retaliated by calling Clinton 'queen of the warmongers' (Lerer and Casey 2019). There is a further reference to Clinton, who popularised the choice of attire and to Williamson, another 2020 candidate, who parlayed her associations with the wellness industry by choosing white.

Friedman (2019) suggested the strongest reason for the muted reaction was down to Gabbard's motives:

"Gabbard doesn't seem remotely interested in connecting with suffragists but wants to tap into another tradition; the white knight attempting to save us all from, yet another regime change war".  
(Friedman 2019, *The New York Times*).



**Image 6 – Democratic candidates on stage at November debate with Gabbard (far left) in a white suit (Karson and Reade 2019, ABC News).**

The metaphor of a 'white knight' invokes a hero who defeats evil and restores the balance of society to good. Customarily, the white knight is male, which may frame Gabbard in a masculine way, separating her from the female candidates and distancing her from the discourse of women's rights. Further, the metaphor is used to suggest that Gabbard, in the role of a 'white knight' was 'attempting to save us all from, yet another regime change war'.

The connotations are such that it invoked male dominance of the political sphere, and the scale and force of the patriarchy within it. The article continued to draw a contrast between Gabbard and her political party:

“Her white suits are not the white suits of Ms. Clinton, nor even the white of Ms. Williamson, whose early appearances in the shade often seemed tied to her wellness gospel and ideas of renewal and rebirth. Rather, they are the white of avenging angels and flaming swords, of somewhat combative righteousness (also cult leaders)”. (Friedman 2019, *The New York Times*).

The descriptions of ‘avenging angels’ and ‘flaming swords’ referred to the first angels created by God, who are sometimes associated with using their radiance and goodness to punish wrongdoing (Delahunty, Dignen and Stock, 2010). This framed Gabbard as disingenuous in her motives for wearing white and all its associations. The continued commentary regarding Gabbard and the choice of wearing white, casts a sceptical view of her motives and implies she hijacked the cause of women’s suffrage for her gain in the debates. The symbolism of fashion within politics can be a useful tool for politicians to influence the electorate and the media, however it also opens them to gendered critique if their choices do not conform to traditionally feminine aesthetics (Jansens 2019).

#### **5.2.1.7 Appearance**

Representative Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii only qualified to participate in the November debate, despite continuing her campaign until March 2020, when she conceded and pledged to support Biden to win the nomination (Lerer and Astor 2020). The coverage for the November debate cast her as something of an ‘outsider’ within the Democrat Party with some controversial views and policies, which the media minimised by commenting on her appearance.



Nordlinger (2019a) writing for *The National Review* (R) noted that she 'may have some ugly views, but, man, what a beauty. Can I say that? Well, I have.' The comment 'Can I say that? Well, I have' suggested the journalist, Nordlinger, knew his comments were misogynistic and damaging to women, however he proceeded regardless. This is in a similar style to his writing about Elizabeth Warren's voice, in the previous section, in which he justified his problematic comments by his position as a music critic for everyone: 'women's, men's, and aliens'. Additionally, Nordlinger (2019a) continued his assessment, diminishing her political standing and framing her as insincere:

"She was disingenuous in many of her comments, but a good attacker and fun to watch. The more she talks about unification, the less credible she sounds. Emits enough chill to save the polar ice cap." (Nordlinger 2019a, *The National Review*)

This compounds the other commentary found in the texts regarding Gabbard, which noted that she provided entertainment in her challenges towards other candidates and the Democrat Party, but that her looks were more of an asset to her than her policies, and she was ultimately portrayed as dishonest and lacking in candour. The hyperbolic metaphor 'emits enough chill to melt the polar ice cap', supposes she was emotionally cold in her demeanour and appearance, which invoked the double bind theory (Jamieson 1995), in which women are expected to be warm and pleasant in their manner. The metaphor exaggerated Gabbard's disposition by reinforcing the implication that she is inauthentic in her politics and depoliticised her presence in the debates. She was portrayed as entertaining in the way she performed her political role, and the coverage drew focus to her appearance, rather than her words, policies and position in the election.

Yglesias (2019a) wrote an article focusing solely on Klobuchar, post-December debate for *Vox* (L), arguing that she offered voters similar politics to Biden and advocated for voters to consider voting for her.

The article began by noting a change in how Klobuchar came across in the debate:

“Gone was the shaky candidate with the quivering hair that Rachel Dratch parodied on Saturday Night Live.” (Yglesias 2019a, Vox).

For context, describing her as ‘shaky’ with ‘quivering’ hair is in specific reference to a narrative cultivated by the right-leaning media from the November debate, in which she appeared to shake when talking. The *New York Post* and the *Daily Mail*, right-leaning publications, claimed her ‘shaking left viewers rattled’, and suggested it could be due to nerves, poor health, or emotion (Lapin 2019). The imagery also had connotations of fragility and is similar in tone to other coverage of women candidates, such as Elizabeth Warren and her ‘quavery’ voice (Nordlinger 2019a). Drawing on the discourse promoted by the right-leaning media, her appearance was also commented upon by *Politico* (L):

“Not to be outdone, Mayor Pete coolly got Klobuchar’s hair vibrating over forgetting the Mexican president’s name and again for voting for Trump’s nominees”. (Neffinger 2020, *Politico*).

*The New York Times* (L) also made a reference to her hair:

“Her bangs weren’t shaking, but she was, spending much of the night on the ropes, as she sparred with a pot-stirring Pete. She failed to build on her strong performance in New Hampshire” (Dowd 2020a, *The New York Times*).

Vibrating hair suggests temper and a flustered Klobuchar, or as the right-wing narrative suggests, it is related to her health and ability to perform. ‘Bangs’ meaning a hairstyle with a fringe, suggest a child or infant, as this style is typically associated with youth. Both diminished her politically and mocked her debate performance, and invoke the assumption that women are overly concerned with their hair and appearance.

Walsh (2015) notes how UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's well-groomed appearance played into her portrayal in the media in a positive way - particularly her hair, which was constantly neatly styled, and functioned as an apt metonym for her legendary control over her prime ministerial brief. However, Klobuchar's hair was used to question her political credibility and, in doing so, the media trivialised her debate performance and depoliticised her. The contrasting treatment of women by the media shows the variety of ways in which their appearance can be used as a tool to communicate favourable or unfavourable connotations to the public. Negative coverage of a candidate's appearance drives down voter's evaluations and lowers their assessment of a candidate's professionalism (Hayes, Lawless and Baitinger 2014).

In the same quote from *The New York Times* (L), Dowd (2020a) labels Buttigieg as 'pot-stirring Pete', which used alliteration for emphasis and reduced the challenge between two presidential candidates to a child-like squabble. The commentary infantilised both candidates denying their maturity, experience and political calibre, whilst much of Klobuchar's efforts to expose the gender bias from earlier debates were invalidated. Other references to the challenge by Dowd (2020a) from *The New York Times* place Klobuchar 'on the ropes' and 'sparring' which suggests an entertainment spectacle. The notion of politics converging with entertainment can be attributed to Postman (1987 p.146), who suggests that in line with the virtues attached to showbusiness, the idea of politics is not to pursue excellence, clarity or honesty, but to present the illusion that you are doing so, through the use of advertising, which has become an important paradigm for public discourse. This speaks to the focus placed on a candidate's character and personal life, rather than the political party and their policies, all of which the media portray as entertainment, as seen in this example.

#### **5.2.1.8 Miss World comparison**

The December debate and the Miss America pageant were held on the same night (December 19<sup>th</sup> 2019), which prompted Stewart (2019a) to write an article for *Vox* (L) offering a comparison that drew on similarities and challenged stereotypes typically associated with each.

In 2018, the pageant changed format and management with Gretchen Carlson, former *Fox News* anchor and Miss America 1989, taking over the chair (Yahr 2018). Miss America marked its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021. However, Argetsinger (2021) notes that the pageant's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2021 was barely noticed, as the show fell out of step with changing times, despite helping to lay the foundations for modern shows like 'American Idol' and 'The Bachelor', which televise young women in competition instead. Tamilin, Quinlan and Bates (2017) suggest beauty pageant culture produces a variety of norms that comprise the idea of beauty that contestants are required to meet, and are often produced and reinforced by the male gaze and institutional powers. They note that these contests are framed around the performance of femininity and consequently, the public discourse perpetuates a narrow view of gender and womanhood.

Hinojosa and Carle (2016) believe pageants offer a path to political power for women, stating that nearly 12% of female governors elected since 2000 participated in pageants. They acknowledge that appearance is often characterised as a double bind for female candidates (Jamieson 1995 and Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018), with attractiveness posing a 'beauty bind' for women seeking election. Sarah Palin is used as a case study to show the correlation they found within the skillset: charisma, public speaking and confidence and poise, all helped substantially in her campaign for Vice President in 2008. However, Carlin and Winfrey (2009) found that this also fuelled sexist portrayals in the media, stemming from her beauty queen background. Ultimately, they found this was used to dismiss her as a serious candidate for political office.

Whilst the traditional discourse on pageants may have been used to discredit candidates, the article by Stewart (2019a) for *Vox* (L) aimed to flip the narrative and made the point that it was difficult to determine the origin of discussions from each event.

They demonstrated that political debates are a form of entertainment, and the contests had some similarities:

“Presidential candidates, meanwhile, are supposed to be judged on substance, but there’s obviously a superficial element to it, too. Ask any woman in politics whether the way she looks, sounds, and carries herself matters — or a candidate of colour how their appearance factors in. There may not be a talent competition on the presidential debate stage, but candidates there are metaphorically doing a little song and dance too”. (Stewart 2019a).

This alludes to the double bind (Jamieson 1995) of femininity and competence, in which women in politics are subjected to the scrutiny of their appearance (Teele, Kalla and Rosenbluth 2018), the way they sound (Khazan 2016) and the way they present themselves to the public (Bast, Oschatz and Renner 2022). Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) is also highlighted by Stewart (2019a), in reference to how a candidate’s race plays into the way they are portrayed by the media. Brown and Lemi (2021) look through an intersectional lens, determining that black women politicians are not always doubly disadvantaged because of their gender and race, but they have developed a distinct black female consciousness that affects their political ideologies and behaviour. However, despite this and as Stewart mentions, the portrayal of a candidate’s appearance, particularly hair and skin tone, informs their candidacies for office in the US.

The premise of the article was centred around the ‘Question and Answer’ round from candidates in both events, and found it was not always easy to tell answers from a ‘beauty queen’ and ones from a ‘candidate for the highest office in the land’. This format had specific expectations of the audience, as the success of the humour within the writing relied on previously formed and understood gendered stereotyping. By subverting the smart/attractive dichotomy, the article found humour in asking the audience to guess who made each statement. Overall, the article foregrounds the statements and speech of the political candidates and the Miss World candidates, rather than journalistic narrative.

The modality in the discourse acts to distance the media from making claims around the gendered expectations and assumptions that lead to sexism in politics. The most persuasive modality is the contrast between the two sets of candidates and the societal norms the article draws on, which the text aims to challenge. The questions and answers from candidates do the work of informing and persuading the reader, whilst highlighting the issue, and sometimes discrediting the men through the assumptions the reader makes and how they interpret the text. Fairclough (2010 p.142) observes that persuasion is a significant speech function that mainly operates covertly, which anticipates substantial inferential work on the part of the reader. Arguably, this article was produced by *Vox (L)*, a left-leaning publication whose readers would be familiar with the type of discourse around beauty pageants and politics, including the sexism, but perhaps not the connection between them. This aspect demonstrates the effectiveness of such a language device and clever way of framing an issue, such as gender inequality that speaks to the audience's preferences. The article began with a comment from Miss Connecticut:

"Miss Connecticut 2020 said 'America needs a champion right now, and I'm that champion'".

The author suggests this sounded like something Joe Biden would say, who often frames himself as America's defender from Trump, right-wing politics and diminishing rights for marginalised groups. The following comment:

"Did you know that every eight minutes, a parent, or a caregiver makes a medication error that affects a child?".

This was revealed not to be Sanders, but Miss Virginia 2020, whose talent was a science experiment. Sanders is a vocal advocate for improved and universal healthcare in America, leading the reader to connect the issue with his political policies. Stewart (2019a) challenged perceptions and assumptions of the debates, the candidates, their policies and ideologies.

The sexist and superficial connotations of a beauty pageant are discussed throughout the article, and often exist explicitly within the public discourse, however sexism in politics is often hidden, ignored, or denied by the media and society.

### **5.2.2 Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991)**

In this section, the theme of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) is discussed through the topics of ageism and LGBTQ+ identity, showing how they intersect with politics. Ageist discourse surrounding Joe Biden's age and his ability to perform the role of president, and Bernie Sanders character and age, were present and served to diminish their masculinity. Warren was also subjected to ageism in relation to her political campaign, however she responded by pivoting the issue towards gender and the fact there had never been a woman president, which alluded to the barrier sexism poses in US politics. Coverage around Buttigieg's sexual identity was used to question his viability as a candidate and drew comparisons to the barriers woman candidates face.

Race was identified as a smaller thread throughout the debate coverage, never central to the coverage, but woven throughout articles and intersecting with gender. Post-debate media coverage from February 19<sup>th</sup> included an article entitled '3 Winner and 4 Losers from the Nevada Democratic Debate' (Beauchamp et al 2020) published by Vox (L), in which diversity within the party was classed as a 'loser':

"The field began as the most diverse in history and now it contains just one person of colour; Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, and she failed to make it onto the Nevada debate stage". (Beauchamp et al 2020, Vox).

Vox (L) argued that although the field was diverse, the debates lacked authenticity and experiences, to which the electorate might relate:

“The debate featured two women and one gay man, but the dearth of diverse candidates meant the debate lacked pointed, personal responses to matters related to race and class in the few times they were brought up”. (Beauchamp et al 2020, Vox)

This invoked the concept of lived experience, in terms of gender and race, and the way these intersect with politics, highlighting a form of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978), in terms of the lack of diversity in political representation within the election and the Democratic Party. The surrounding discourse drew on the presence of minority candidates to bring perspective, authenticity and understanding to all aspects of politics. The text implied that descriptive representation of diversity was lacking within the debates, and this had an impact on substantive representation within the Democratic Party itself.

When discussing the debate from February 19<sup>th</sup>, *Politico* (L) provided a quote from Michelle Bernard, CEO of the Bernard Center for Women, Politics & Public Policy, in which she stated her belief that Bloomberg was indicative of a lack of diversity in the election, and how this impacts the wider society:

“In Bloomberg, I saw “Golfcart Gail,” “Permit Patty,” “BBQ Becky,” “Cornerstore Caroline,” and all of the white women who have called the police on black people for things like yelling instructions at their own child during a soccer match or charcoal grilling without a permit. And in Bloomberg, I saw white men scheming about ways to suppress the black vote and laughing behind the backs of women they “would do in a minute.” The emperor has no clothes’”. (Bernard 2020, *Politico*).

Nicknames ‘Golfcart Gail’, ‘Permit Patty’ and ‘BBQ Becky’, have become public shorthand for examples of racism and discrimination, by white women against black people (Farzan 2018).



Williams (2020) proposes that the nicknames are a tool to denote that white individuals use their privilege to ensure black citizens conform to notions of civility held by them. The quote implied Bloomberg would use his political power in a similar manner to suppress minorities (racial and gender) and maintain racial, and in this instance, male, dominance within the social and political systems. Bernard (2019) alluded to criticism Bloomberg faced for his mayoral policies that affected New York's non-white population, particularly his 'stop and frisk' policing policy, which disproportionately affected young black and brown men (Collins 2020), and his past treatment and discrimination towards female employees, which Warren highlighted in the debates. The metaphor of 'the emperor has no clothes' suggested Bloomberg had no substance to his campaign, and there was a collective denial from the electorate towards his credibility and lack of skill as a politician. It also inferred the Democratic Party, and its nomination system, were oblivious to the public criticism as Mayor of New York City and the issues of having another older, white, male billionaire stand for election.

The discourse of race intersects with gender, pointing to the privilege and dominance of Bloomberg as a white male in politics, and positions the readers interpretation of it within a wider context of the Democratic Party and the nomination processes. The following sections look at ageism and LGBTQ+ identity, and how these intersect with gender to discriminate against candidates.

#### **5.2.2.1 Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders & Elizabeth Warren - ageism in politics**

The age of candidates provided another dimension to the lack of diversity in the Democratic Party, and was found particularly within the media coverage of the final debate, which took place in March 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and featured the remaining two candidates: Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden.

The outcome of the race thus far, indicated that older men are still considered the default archetypal leaders in America (Monahan et al., 2021), supported by the fact that in 2020, white men held 68% of Senator positions and 76% of Governor positions, despite only making up 30% of the population in the United States (Reflective Democracy Campaign 2021). For the final debate in March 2020, with Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders, age was the prevailing characteristic used to describe the candidates across the news outlets. *The National Review* (R) expressed surprise:

“For an old coot, Bernie is amazingly crisp and disciplined. I know that Bernie and Biden are the same age.” (Nordlinger 2020b, *The National Review*).

Older adults are often portrayed as sickly, depressed, and grumpy in the US media (Edstrom 2018) and inactive with poor memory (Lytle et al 2018). Sanders was described as an ‘old coot’, meaning a harmless simple person, usually a man (Merriam-webster.com 2022), which played into this stereotype. Further, the expression of surprise that he is ‘amazingly crisp and disciplined’, revealed the low expectations of Sanders’ performance. The *BBC* (C) also noted Biden’s age, as being one of the disadvantages of his campaign:

“There is his advanced age, propensity for verbal stumbles, allegations of inappropriate physical contact and status as a two-time loser in past White House bids”. (Zurcher 2020b, *BBC*).

Much had been made of Biden’s age in relation to his campaign and his ability to carry out the role of President, and as *Vox* (L) wrote, that he often seems ‘rambling and incoherent, giving rise to questions about his age’. Coverage alluded to a discourse concerning his age and its impact on his ability to serve as president, which had been widely promoted by right-leaning media during the campaign.

*The Washington Times* (R) reported Biden was 'not a child but headed for the diaper aisle' and alluded to his demeanour:

"He is slipping but at least still has the wits to escape from the old folk's home". (Hurt 2020, *The Washington Times*).

As Law (2021) observes, age is a powerful political weapon and ageist stereotypes are ingrained in American culture, to the detriment of everyone. They argue that the stereotype of older people being frail, vulnerable and a burden on society is prevalent, despite the reality that people are living longer and with full mental capacity, due to medical advances. He was also labelled a 'crabby codger' (Schroeder 2020) in an article regarding his debate performance on *Politico* (L). The alliterative term, 'crabby codger' offered a colloquial opinion, usually levelled at older gentlemen, perhaps eccentric in appearance and with a blunt, short temper. The use of the term informalised the media discourse surrounding the candidates and the debates, emphasising a shift towards entertainment, something which Postman (1986) argues sees serious matters (such as presidential candidates) being reduced to entertainment. This informalisation of discourse undermines the role of the media in society and the function of political debates, positioning citizens as consumers of a spectacle, rather than participants in a democratic process (Talbot 2008). It also trivialised Biden and Sanders, who are the remaining candidates in a presidential election, in which, as Postman (1986) notes, the medium (which is the media) are working like metaphors to communicate their special definitions of reality and shape the discourse around the candidates.

The narrative continued in March after the final debate, when it was becoming clear that Biden would win the nomination, *The National Review* (R) alluded to the negative discourse surrounding Biden's age by referring to a digital discourse (#Bidensenile), an interesting juxtaposition with the use of modern technology.

It proceeded to list many of the ageist stereotypes ('un-gaga', too much time to talk and a stumbling mess, hidden amid more candidates/invisible), but finished by contradicting them:

"Biden seems to me pretty un-gaga tonight. I'm not sure the #BidenSenile line will work if he keeps this up. Frankly, I doubted he could hack a two-hour debate, one on one. I thought such a debate would leave him too much time to talk and that he would not be able to fill the time. That he would be a stumbling mess. I thought he was better off hidden amid eight or ten candidates. But you know? He's hacking it . . .". (Dougherty 2020a, *The National Review*).



**Image 7 – The first debate during the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. Sanders and Biden 'bumping elbows' in greeting and social distancing (Lizza 2020b, *Politico*).**

Monahan et al (2021) looked at the intersection of age stereotypes and gendered leadership stereotypes specifically, in the 2020 US presidential election. Both candidates (Biden and Trump) were men aged over 70 and were subjected to widespread stereotypes of this nature being circulated widely in the media. They found support for Biden as an assertive, elder statesman, family orientated and collaborative, however, also as senile. This correlates with the findings in this research and reflects the socially pervasive nature of ageism.

*The New York Times* (L) used metaphors as a way of describing Biden to the voters and invoked his advanced age. The first uses a car:

"He still can't speak in a straight line, instead zigging and zagging: If he were a car, his tires would constantly scrape the curb and his hubcaps would probably pop off. But they stayed on this time around". (Bruni 2019).

The relief of his 'tires scraping the curb and his hub caps staying on this time' show he is still in the running for the nomination, despite his flaws. The effectiveness of the metaphor arguably lies with Biden's gender, as mechanics and cars fall within a traditionally masculine domain, making this less effective, if writing about a female politician. The second one compared his debate performance with a high school play and forgetting the lines, which infantilised him:

"You're rooting for the players, you're grading on a curve, and you're grateful they remember their lines. But you also know it isn't Broadway". (Stephens 2020, *The New York Times* Opinion 2020).

Equating the debates to a production of a high school play undermined the election process and the function of debates to select a candidate for nomination. Again, it aligned the media discourse towards entertainment and alluded to low expectations surrounding the debates. However, the metaphors suggested that Biden has improved, but was not expected to perform well, in the debates, which communicated little optimism and hope for his candidacy.

Whilst much of the discourse around ageism was found to target Sanders and Biden, comments Warren made around her being elected president, intersected the 'woman as president' discourse, with ageism. Moderators asked candidates if they agreed with comments Barack Obama had made about women being better leaders and that 'old men' should get out of the way (Stevens 2019).

The moderator noted that Warren would be the oldest president ever inaugurated and she responded that:

“I’d also be the youngest woman ever inaugurated”. (Warren, Stevens 2019, *The New York Times*).

The exchange was presented in a factual style within the article, with a transcript offering details of the candidate’s conversation. The focal point of the article was Warren’s response, rather than commentary from other candidates, which communicated the position of women in politics in the US and highlighted their lack of representation. It invoked the discourse around the issue with a witty response, subverting the ageist discourse towards issues of diversity.

#### **5.2.2.2 Pete Buttigieg and LGBTQ+ identity in politics**

Pete Buttigieg was the focus of much coverage regarding his sexuality, and much of the way the media framed him drew on descriptive representation. The news outlets found different ways to focus on a single issue, and whilst other facets of his character were featured, being gay proved a focal point in the data. Whilst differing from his gender, his sexual identity was used to produce articles that were similar, in terms of framing and narratives of the genderised coverage of female politicians.

The label ‘openly gay white man’ was used by multiple news outlets, including *The Washington Post* (L), *CBS News* (C), *Politico* (L), *The New York Times* (L) and *Fox News* (R) throughout the data. *ABC News* (C) and the *BBC* (C) noted he would be the ‘first openly gay president’. *Fox News* (R) described him as ‘the youngest candidate in the Democratic field who, if elected, would become the nation’s first openly gay president’, and similarly, *Newsmax* (R) commented he would be ‘the first openly gay president, if elected’. These descriptions of Buttigieg being the ‘first’ play into the newsworthiness of him as a candidate, and carry and denote a sense of good news or novelty. The ‘first woman’ frame is often invoked by media when they are first political officeholders, making their sex newsworthy (Verge and Pastor 2017).

Meeks (2013) found that circumstances regarding the uniqueness of candidates in the 2008 US election extended beyond gender, to race, when Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin ran against Barack Obama, the first African American nominee for a major party. All of these historic political 'firsts', were used by the media to carry the connotations of progress and highlight the descriptive representation of a candidate. In Buttigieg's case, the media also used the ubiquitous term 'openly gay' to act as an identifier of his sexual identity, signifying a difference in him from the other candidates. Despite legal and political gains for LGBTQ people, they are still subjected to discrimination in employment, housing, and access to social services (Thoreson 2018), meaning many avoid the risks and do not live openly. The use of this metaphor implies 'self-disclosure' and a degree of authenticity in Buttigieg's political identity, a characteristic that citizens place value on (Luebke and Engelmann 2022). Whilst the term may not fit the description of a stereotype (a learned association between two social concepts that do not define each other) (Cox et al 2012), the term is used to inform inferences, regarding Buttigieg's identity and places meaningfulness on his sexuality as a political candidate. *The Washington Post* (L) reported that Buttigieg was 'seeking to become the standard-bearer of a diverse party whose most vocal activists have increasingly embraced identity politics' (Zhou 2019b). This description taps into the discourse of the Democratic Party, whose ideology sits at the liberal end of the spectrum and supports minority groups of society (Saad 2019). The statement worked in conjunction with the discourse of being a 'first' within the political sphere, and insinuated that his sexual identity would appeal to prominent voices within the Party, rather than his experience or election campaigns. Labelling him a 'standard-bearer' positioned him as the leader or head of a movement, in this context, the advancement of political candidates from LGBTQ+ groups. Tremblay (2020) suggests the media frame candidates through narrow lenses. However, the lens relating to sexual orientation is lacking in research and inspires the media to use a candidate's sexuality to cast them as 'one issue representatives' (LGBTQ+ rights in this case), and often frames them as having a 'lifestyle' that is unsuitable for politics.

This is reminiscent of women politicians, who are often framed as mothers and spouses, before leaders (Campus 2013 and Harp, Loke and Bachmann 2016), and ultimately serves to undermine their leadership skills and potential for election.

Many opinion pieces were published about the candidates throughout the debates, however whilst other candidates drew attention to their political careers and work life, for Buttigieg, his sexuality was again the focus of this type of media coverage. *The Washington Post* (L) published an opinion piece by Janes (2020), titled 'Buttigieg's Iowa success unleashes emotion and commentary on his gay identity'. It investigated his standing in the race and how his sexual identity could affect his prospects of the presidency. Positive gains in his campaign were recognised, such as financial support from gay donors, which suggested a 'reciprocal bond between his personal story and his campaign' and how his place in the election inspired other gay people:

"Buttigieg has been embracing his role as a barrier breaker in a way he rarely has before, saying Iowans' verdict should give hope to gay people, including young ones". (Janes 2020, *The Washington Post*).





**Image 8 – Buttigieg campaigns in South Carolina with his campaign merchandise shown in lower photos (Kruse 2019 *Politico*)**

Thomsen and Swers (2017) found that ideological views are important to donors, particularly Democrats, who exhibited a gender affinity when contributing towards a campaign. However, there are signs that resistance remains. The authors cite a viral story of a voter who cast her preference card for Buttigieg, without knowing he was gay, which prompted her to ask for her vote back and refer him to the Bible. Janes (2020) used this to invoke the barriers Barack Obama faced and draws a comparison:

“And much as Barack Obama in 2008 faced questions from some quarters about whether he was “black enough” — whether he fully understood or sufficiently spoke about the black experience in America — some are now asking whether Buttigieg, essentially, is gay enough.” (Janes 2020, *The Washington Post*).

The desire for Buttigieg to highlight his sexuality in the name of activism is discussed, with his lack of explicit reference to his sexuality and his hesitancy in calling his husband by his name, used to demonstrate his reticence. This article is another example of the descriptive representation of Buttigieg, in the way it frames his sexuality as a key characteristic of his political campaign, and draws a comparison to Obama, who was subjected to similar framing about his race. Fairclough (2010) considers the term intertextuality, originally coined by Kristeva (1980), as highlighting the historical view of transforming past conventions into the present, interconnecting them. He asserts that intertextuality is a way to discuss shifting articulations, genres, discourses and styles within specific texts, with the example here being that of Obama and the media coverage highlighting his race, compared to Buttigieg and his sexuality. It also alluded to the potential negative consequences for a candidate who does not conform or perform for these groups substantively. Ultimately, these politicians were viewed as homogenous to their groups, rather than heterogenous, something that white men, who dominate politics, were not subjected to.

Kruse (2019) also wrote an opinion piece on Buttigieg's progress in the election for *Politico* (L), focusing on how his sexuality would translate into popularity and votes. The headline posed the question 'Are your neighbours ready for Mayor Pete?'. The headline was in reference to research conducted by Ipsos (2019), which investigated voter attitudes towards candidates, including a candidate's gender. They found that when asked about a female president, 74% agreed they were comfortable with the prospect, however they believed their neighbours would be less accepting (33%). The question was structured to illicit a particular answer, and implies that there was a measure of discomfort, but that voters were reluctant to voice this. By using the same analogy as a headline, *Politico* insinuates that, whilst there is a perceived acceptance of people's sexuality in politics, Buttigieg's campaign may be subject to underlying doubts and similar issues that have stopped women from progressing to the presidency. The Bradley effect loosely posits that although voters supported a candidate of colour: Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, in the 1982 gubernatorial race in California, they failed to actually elect him, with the resulting speculation being that he lost, due to racism (Payne 2010).

The concept was also applied to 'shy Tory' voters, when examining disparities between polling and results, for the British 2015 general election, in that voters did not admit to supporting a party that had a social stigma attached to it (Strurgis et al 2016). The potential effect of this headline could be to challenge the norm of politics. Or, however unintentionally, the reader could react with (predictably, given the survey) alarm at the prospect of a gay man as president or any other minority candidate. Kruse (2019) further challenges the reader by describing Buttigieg's identity in contrasting terms:

"Can they accept the totality of who he is—the pragmatic, two-term mayor of a midsize Midwestern city, the earnest nerd with a facility for language and degrees from Harvard and Oxford, the Navy Reserve lieutenant who did a seven-month stint in Afghanistan ... and also the 37-year-old husband of a man who teaches Montessori middle school and with whom he hopes to parent children?" (Kruse 2019, *Politico*).

The first part of the description gave no indication of his sexuality, positioning Buttigieg as a candidate that fit between societal norms of masculinity and leadership. The second part highlighted his life as a gay man and framed his marriage in more stereotypical feminine terms, with associations of family and school. The contrast highlighted the disparity between the accepted norms of leadership and its strong associations with masculinity, and the minorities that are seeking to change this.

Voters are quoted throughout the article, all voicing concerns, demonstrating bias and pondering the dilemma they faced in choosing a candidate. Danielle Borglum, 43, drew parallels to female candidates:

"Like, are we really ready for a gay president? Like, were we ready for a woman? I thought we were, but clearly, we weren't, you know? So there's always that hesitation: Are we going to get behind somebody and then all the hate is going to come out?" (Kruse 2019, *Politico*).

The quote equated a gay man to a woman and had discursive parallels to Clinton's 2016 campaign, in which she was subjected to gendered slurs and vitriol, simply because she was a female candidate (Conroy, Joesten Martin and Nalder 2020 and Erichsen et al 2020). This voter expected the same response for Buttigieg. The discourse of religion and sexuality featured in a response from another voter; 'my mom is a devout Christian; she would never vote for a gay'. For socially conservative voters, their beliefs ran contrary to Buttigieg's candidacy and presented another barrier for him.

These quotes invoked a realism and truthfulness to the bias Buttigieg faced, reinforcing the tone of the article, which suggested that although Buttigieg's candidacy may have been groundbreaking and pioneering for LGBTQ+ rights and descriptive representation, it was limited by deep-rooted bias and stereotypes of leadership within political discourse.

#### **5.2.2.2.1 Pete Buttigieg and the glass closet**

In the same *Politico* article, 'Are your neighbours ready for Mayor Pete?', Kruse (2019) reflected on Buttigieg's youth and gay identity, as ways to set him apart from the other candidates and appeal to the Democratic Party ethos. The article suggested much of his appeal lay in his gay identity, and mentioned that a significant amount of funding came from wealthy gay supporters who believed their rights and values could be communicated and advanced by him:

"Wealthy gay supporters who were eager to back a figure who could, they believe, crack or outright shatter the glass closet". (Kruse 2019, *Politico*).

The glass ceiling is defined as artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organisational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upwards to the management level (The Department of Labor 1991). The metaphor featured throughout the data and is often used within a political context to describe the barriers women candidates face when getting elected (Folke and Rickne 2016, Jalalzai 2013 and Hora 2019).

By changing 'ceiling' to 'closet', the metaphor becomes associated with language used to describe LGBTQ+ people's self-disclosure of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Boucai (2021) notes that in everyday language, the term 'closet' denotes the unambiguous referent of concealed homosexuality. Bass, Hardin and Taylor (2015) use it to describe a basketball coach, who was described as 'living in a glass closet', as she was instructed by her employer not to discuss her sexuality publicly. Their research investigated the perceptions and prevalence of open homosexuality in intercollegiate sports in the US, and found that the sector was not accepting of LGBTQ people, even though societal acceptance was increasing. Usher (2014) used celebrities Anderson Cooper (TV personality) and Jodie Foster (actor) as case studies to examine gay visibility within the media. In this instance, the glass closet is defined as someone hiding in 'the glass closet', who everyone already knows is gay, but who never acknowledges it or seeks to hide evidence that suggests they are leading an openly gay life (Usher 2014). This description affirms the notion that homosexuality can be a barrier to success and advancement in society, and that there is an obligation on gay people in the public eye to make a difference to the narrative.

Smith, Caputi and Crittenden (2012) reviewed the many metaphors used to highlight the glass ceiling and encapsulated a theory finding about gender differences in career advancement. They cite modifications relating to the sector, such as the 'Perspex ceiling', to illustrate manufacturing and the 'grass ceiling' to indicate the low number of women in agriculture. In corporate companies, women face the 'glass escalator', in which men receive more rapid promotions and the 'glass door', which refers to recruitment bias and processes favouring men. Research on the concept centres primarily around women as the victims of discrimination and bias, which suggests the pool is widening with an intersectional approach that includes barriers to factors such as sexuality. The 'glass closet' metaphor extends the notion to communicate a specific axis of the concept, in this case, as it relates to minority sexualities. The example from Kruse (2019) pertains to Buttigieg's sexuality and the media coverage of his campaign, with his debate performances being indicated as a potential hindrance to his progress.

Arguably, the way Buttigieg's gay identity has been portrayed as a facet of his political persona could be applied to male or female candidates in the same way. Much of the coverage is positive and draws on descriptive representation of a minority group to frame them. The texts examined in this research show the media use this intersectional approach to build a discourse for other minority groups in the political landscape, such as women or people of racial minorities. In terms of gender, Buttigieg enjoys an advantage by being a white male, a group traditionally associated with leadership stereotypes (Crenshaw 1991, Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013, Adams and Smrek 2018) and political dominance (Galea and Gaweda 2018). Robinson (2021) argues that the combination of his gay identity, his race and his masculinity created a pathway for Buttigieg to assert his privilege, in order to gain an advantage in the election. This mostly contrasts with the media coverage used in this study, which as shown here, was targeted towards his candidacy providing an opportunity for descriptive representation of LGBTQ+ equality and rights. Buttigieg was an example of white male privilege, as the media claimed he 'benefitted from wealthy gay supporters', and his Harvard and Oxford education, and military veteran status, all enhanced his masculinity in the media narrative.

### **5.2.3 Masculinity**

Masculinity emerged as a key macro theme, with the lack of diversity within the field of candidates being highlighted by some of the coverage. In early February, Balz (2020) wrote an opinion piece for *The Washington Post* (L) discussing the position of the Democratic candidates in terms of diversity. Lamenting the range of backgrounds, ages, genders, and experience within the field at the beginning of the election, Balz (2020) highlights:

"Despite having two women and an Asian American sharing the stage at Friday night's debate in New Hampshire, right now the Democratic race appears to be a contest among two white men in their late 70s, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and former vice president Joe Biden, and another in his late 30s, former South Bend, Ind., mayor Pete Buttigieg". (Balz 2020).

Whilst the comments are around racial diversity within the election, the point is made around the dominance of hegemonic masculinity and the dominance of white male politicians within the election. This was further emphasised after the final debate in March, which featured Biden and Sanders as the remaining candidates. *USA Today* (C) lamented the absence of Warren in the debate:

“Okay, this is a personal point, but I think it applies more broadly, too. It’s not just that Warren was my candidate, but I think she would have threaded the needle of this moment on this stage. Warren would have done what neither Biden nor Sanders did — explain with precise and devastating clarity exactly how Trump’s failed leadership exacerbated this pandemic”. (Kohn 2020, *USA Today*).

The article used the gendered metaphor of ‘threading the needle’, which relates to housework and sewing, something traditionally viewed as a woman’s skill, to illustrate Warren’s ability to articulate her views. The quote references her skilfulness and expertise in communicating her views and developing an argument, however her absence from the debate underlines the barriers she faced in remaining in the race and the power masculinity holds within US politics. The article continues to praise Warren and her debate skills:

“And bear in mind how elegantly she eviscerated Michael Bloomberg — not finger wagging or screaming at him but posing sharp, simple questions and points with painfully plain implications. I feel like Warren is the candidate we needed on this stage and the leader we need in this moment and we, as a party, blew it by not nominating her”. (Kohn 2020, *USA Today*).

The term ‘elegance’ is arguably more commonly applied to women and the article equated her performance with a particular style. This also pointed to the underlying thread that, for Warren to be successful in her debate (and generate favourable media coverage), she must display a controlled energy. The mention of Warren not ‘finger-wagging and screaming’ subverts the gendered stereotype of women who are judged as being ‘unfeminine’, and face wider ramifications in the media when they display forceful or aggressive behaviour (McKay 2020a).

By reducing the nomination race to white men, across ideological spectrums, masculinity, and therefore the lack of diversity within the party, became a focal point in the political landscape. After she finished her campaign, Warren stated that she believed her gender was a factor in her losing, but when asked by the media to expand on this, she labelled it a 'trap question' (Nilsen and Zhou 2020). This insinuated that she believed her gender was a factor, but that any discussion would be rendered pointless, or as the concept of a 'trap' implied, perhaps used against her or other women candidates. Warren's comments draw on the silence/shame double bind (Jamieson 1995), which suggests that by speaking her thoughts on the loss, she would be condemned or shamed by the media, but to remain silent, would leave her powerless in the election.

Within this section, masculinity is discussed further through the findings around different sub-themes: the connection between gender and the presidency, is explored; along with displays of toxic masculinity and white privilege, as they appear in coverage of Michael Bloomberg being challenged, again, by Elizabeth Warren over his alleged degrading treatment of women who worked for him. Parenthood was used to convey gendered stereotypes, which Amy Klobuchar attempted to benefit from, and Biden's status as a widower and single father was used to invoke empathy. The connection between masculinised military identity and politics was found in coverage of Pete Buttigieg, which enhanced his standing in the election.

#### **5.2.3.1 Gender and the presidency**

The challenge between Warren and Sanders enabled the left-leaning media to segue into a discussion of women in politics and the barriers they face. Frank Bruni, an opinion columnist for *The New York Times* (L) with a broad career covering the White House, turned chief restaurant critic (NYTimes.com 2022), questioned the gender barrier women candidates face and provided a more nuanced take:



“Would a female Democratic nominee have a harder time beating Donald Trump than a male one? I can’t tell you, because I don’t have a crystal ball and because it’s a stupid question, its answer is dependent on which female candidate you’re talking about, on how she runs her campaign, on the twists and turns of the national conversation between now and November”. (Bruni 2020, *The New York Times*)

The article highlighted that the women were not a monolithic group, and that female candidates vary in their approach to their campaigns. The mentioning of the ‘twists and turns of the national conversation between now and November’ alluded to the discourse surrounding the election and the power of media coverage in shaping the outcome. Bruni (2020) proposed the two women candidates were excellent prospects, and stated it was ‘absurd that this country hasn’t yet shattered the highest glass ceiling of all’, but drew the reader’s attention to a particular bias women candidates face:

“The idea that their party couldn’t risk nominating one of them at a juncture when getting rid of a Republican incumbent has seldom, if ever, been so important.” (Bruni 2020, *The New York Times*).

By suggesting a woman would be a risk, this statement invoked the discourse surrounding women candidates and their electability. Wolf, Brisbane and Junn (2020) argue that the concept of electability features often in political discourse and pertains to the ability of a candidate to mobilize voters. They suggest it is most often applied to women and people of colour: for example, the perception that a female candidate would lack support, in turn, creates an idea of electability through both ideological appeal and historical gender norms connected to the presidency. In their article, Bruni highlighted the type of risk the Democratic Party would be taking if it chose a woman candidate for the 2020 election, and simultaneously, implied that a male politician would be more likely to win. Demora et al., (2022) suggest that party elites and voters had concerns about a woman winning the nomination in 2020, particularly after Clinton’s loss in 2016, signalling low levels of comfort in this concept from the media and polls, which acted to decrease electability for women candidates.

After investigating the 2020 candidates through a survey of Democratic voters, they found this to be particularly true for Warren and Harris. Warren was the favourite, but Biden was perceived as the most likely to beat Trump.

Sanders' denial of his comments regarding a woman president opened an opportunity for the female candidates to address their viability in the race, something Bruni (2020) believed they did successfully.

"Warren drew a contrast between the two women and the four men who had made the cut for this debate. It was perfect, and brilliantly cast them not as trailblazers who had something extra to prove, not as outsiders who had finagled a way in, not as underdogs urging voters to take some extraordinary leap of faith, not as high-minded gambles. They turned the stubborn, sexist notion that their presence and presidential ambitions were exotic on its head, citing yardsticks by which they were demonstrably superior to their male rivals". (Bruni 2020, *The New York Times*).

Women are often portrayed as 'novelties and norm breakers' (Lucht and Davis 2021) within politics, and the media often focus on 'novelty' issues, such as gender, and emphasise their uniqueness in a political sphere that is dominated by masculinity (Meeks 2012). Bruni (2020) used overlexicalization to suggest the women candidates' debate performance would act as a mechanism for discrediting the gender biases they face. For example: 'trailblazers, outsiders and underdogs' invoke the common discourse of women candidates as 'others' in politics, however the final remarks praised their performances and emphasised a reversal in how audiences should perceive them.

In a separate article, *The New York Times* (L) used Warren's response to Sander's denial as a pivot to highlight another barrier for women. Quoting Amanda Hunter, research and communications director at the Barbara Lee Family Foundation, the article highlighted that the stakes can be high for a woman candidate who discusses sexism during a campaign:

“What Warren did on Tuesday night — pivoting from her signature “I’ve got a plan” messaging to answer a question that a man would have never been asked — was a big political risk. In our focus groups, participants consistently react negatively to anything from women that can even be perceived as whining or complaining”. (Gupta and Hunter 2020).

The phrase ‘I’ve got a plan’, refers to a response Warren gave to a Tweet about her policy-heavy approach to her presidential campaign, and which had become a slogan often featured in her stump speeches and was embraced by her supporters (Thompson 2019). The question the article refers to is ‘can a woman beat Trump?’, as mentioned previously, electability was one of the most significant factors in deciding who to vote for (Demora et al., 2022 and Corrington and Hebl 2018). The article also referred to the possibility that Warren’s actions may be perceived as ‘leveraging gender for political gain’ or, as Trump said during Clinton’s 2016 campaign: wielding the ‘woman card’. Falk (2012) notes that the metaphor of ‘using the gender card’ was previously levelled at Clinton by Tucker Carlson, a conservative political commentator for *Fox News*, after she made a speech in 2007, discussing discrimination she had faced during her career. They suggest that within a political campaign, the metaphor covers the practice of promoting arguments that would otherwise be socially unacceptable and can act to reinforce patriarchal power relations. This highlighted the risk in Warren’s strategy of initiating the challenge with Sanders.

Among the reporting about the exchange, *The Washington Post* (L) referenced the increased interest in the electability of female candidates, and repeated the discourse discussed by Demora et al., (2022) regarding the signalling of low levels of comfort about voting for a woman:

“Amplified a difficult conversation that has been underway at Democratic gatherings across the country ever since Trump's election. But for many voters, supporting a woman for president is not an easy decision. With Democrats so eager to defeat a president they see as a racist, sexist bully, many say they wonder whether the safest bet to defeat him is a man”. (Sullivan and Linskey 2020).

This type of commentary reinforces the prejudice and gendered bias women candidates must contend with from the media during elections and places them outside political norms. *Vox* and *The New York Times*, both left-leaning news outlets, used the exchange between Sanders and Warren to publish articles that took the debate one step further by challenging the discourse surrounding a woman president - an angle no other publication chose to investigate or promote. Partisanship may play a role in this editorial choice, as the Democrats had the possibility of choosing a woman for the party nomination, whereas only three Republicans, all men, challenged Trump for the nomination and all had dropped out of the race by March 2020 (Burns et al 2020).

#### **5.2.3.2 Michael Bloomberg and toxic masculinity**

Billionaire, and former New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg qualified for his first debate on February 19<sup>th</sup> after launching his self-funded campaign in November (Sandler 2019). Bloomberg had several lawsuits filed against him over the years alleging women were discriminated against at his company, and although he fought the allegations, his recent efforts to prevent disclosure clashed against demands that he release the women from non-disclosure agreements and undermined his criticism of Trump's alleged sexual misconduct (Kranish 2020). Future debate performances hinged on this assessment of Bloomberg, and contributed to the discourse around his character, his business operations, and his treatment of staff that shaped his campaign in this election. Overall, his character and motives were persistently questioned by the media.

Authenticity is a prominent narrative for politicians (Luebke 2020) and something an electorate expects and judges them on (Valgarasson et al 2020). Politicians are required to construct and present an authentic image, for different audiences, across multiple media outlets (Luebke 2020). Historically, Bloomberg has changed his allegiance to political parties, running in the Republican Mayoral primary in 2001, and then registering as an independent, midway through his time as Mayor of New York City, before finally returning to the Democratic Party in 2018 (Flegenheimer 2020).

*Politico* (L) suggested the debate offered a chance for Bloomberg's authenticity and political skills, which so far, had been shielded by his wealth and ability to finance his own campaign, to be scrutinised by the electorate:

"Primary attraction for the debate, was a chance for people to see Bloomberg naked—no longer on TV commercials, dressed in the heroic garb of tycoon-turned-Cincinnatus ready to lay down his financial data terminal and pick up his sword against President Donald Trump" (Harris 2020a, *Politico*).

Cincinnatus was a Roman statesman and military leader who gained fame for his selfless devotion to the Republic in a time of crisis, and for giving up the reins of power when the crisis was over (Leadershipnow.com 2020). He was also referenced by British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, in his departure speech in 2022, who insisted he would 'return to his plough', however, this was taken by the media to mean he would attempt to return, if his successor floundered (Grierson 2022). Cincinnatus is often held up as the paragon of civic virtue and outstanding leadership, and George Washington is known as the American Cincinnatus, after refusing to seize dictatorial power over the states and returning to his private life after the end of the war in 1783 (Varghese 2013).

*Politico's* audience may be aware of the comparison with Washington, a popular and respected president, who was overwhelmingly trusted by the populous (Chervinsky 2022), which suggests, after Bloomberg's authenticity had been debated, that the comment was to be taken as ironic, and his purpose in the election to be viewed with caution. On the surface, Bloomberg is framed as a hero for stepping aside from his business and into the battle of the election, where he had readied himself to 'pick up his sword and fight against his foe; Donald Trump'. However, this was Bloomberg's first public debate and provided a public test of his political credentials, as he had yet to prove himself in much of the political processes beyond his self-financing campaign. The comparison to Cincinnatus and the connection with George Washington, aligned Bloomberg with male leadership stereotypes that are often dominant in political discourse and viewed favourably by the electorate (Connell 1995).

A quote from Warren featured in much of the coverage of his performance and focused upon the past allegations of gender discrimination within Bloomberg's businesses:

"I'd like to talk about who we're running against. A billionaire who calls women fat broads and horse-faced lesbians, and no I'm not talking about Donald Trump, I'm talking about Mayor Bloomberg" (Warren 2020, *ABC News*).

Warren is referring to a book, compiled by colleagues in his company in 1990, entitled 'Wit and Wisdom' of Bloomberg's quotes, which were mostly misogynistic in nature and revealed a cruder side to him (Grynbaum 2020). Warren quoted a few of the comments from the book, and drew on the discourse from the 2016 election and Trump's derogatory comments about women. For example: in the 2016 Republican primary debate, Megan Kelly asked Trump about calling women 'slobs' and 'pigs' among other things (Stewart 2020b).

*The National Review* (R) covered the exchange by emphasising the force from Warren's delivery and framed Bloomberg as an ineffective debater who was stubbornly preventing the women from speaking about their experiences:

'Warren just tore Bloomberg apart on his former female employees who can't talk about their disputes with him because of nondisclosure agreements. Bloomberg looked like the proverbial deer in the headlights, utterly unprepared for this, other than to insist that he had many female employees over the years and most of them hadn't sued him or contended that he created a hostile working environment'.  
(Geraghty 2020b, *The National Review*).



**Image 9 – Warren and Bloomberg during the Las Vegas debate in February 2020 (Astor 2020 The New York Times).**

The metaphor of predator and prey was used with Warren cast as the wild cat/predator role. This presents the same issue when discussing diversity within the party and the absence of Warren in the final debate (P.355). Her elegance in debating was used to suggest she must show anger in a controlled way or risk the consequences of being portrayed as 'unfeminine' (McKay 2020a).

The 'deer in the headlights' suggested extreme surprise and helplessness, so much so, that thinking clearly was impossible for Bloomberg. Bloomberg's response that his other women employees hadn't complained or sued him, invoked sarcasm from the writer and implied that this does nothing to negate the women who did. The sarcastic tone continued with a comparison to Biden:

"Biden got in a good shot: "If people who signed NDAs want to come forward, just say 'yes they can.'" When Joe Biden is verbally body-slamming you over treatment of women, you've made a critical error." (Geraghty 2020b, *The National Review*).

This statement invoked the discourse, primarily sustained by the right-leaning media, around Biden and his own treatment of women. For example, Mahdawi (2020) wrote about the frustration of conservatives who ignored multiple sexual assault allegations against Trump, but had gleefully seized upon accusations against Biden, from former staffer Tara Reade from 1993. The comparison and sarcasm are indeed paralleled, as both men—powerful leaders within their respective fields—were accused of the same behaviour.

Maggie Astor wrote an article focusing on the challenge for *The New York Times* (L), noting: 'Ms. Warren made two things clear: She would not be ignored, and she would not hide her anger', so often a liability for women in politics. This is related to the media framing of women's anger, which is often forbidden or classed as irrational, while men's anger is viewed as just (Brooks 2011, McKay 2020a). The article focused on Warren's domination of the debate discussions, and was followed by offering views from other media outlets:

"Some commentators were criticizing Ms. Warren as "mean," "angry" and "nasty." But others saw it quite differently. "I've never seen anything like that on a presidential stage from a woman — it was mind-blowing. It's exhilarating and historic, but there's no question that it's a risk." (Astor 2020, *The New York Times*).



Mean, angry and nasty all draw on the intertextuality of Trump, labelling Hilary Clinton as a 'nasty woman', during the 2016 election (Plank 2016), a damaging mark against Warren's campaign. By countering this with a contrasting opinion, the coverage is arguably more balanced by emphasising the gamble Warren is taking on her behaviour. Bloomberg's response towards Warren regarding his behaviour towards women, drew her into a debate, in which she showed her frustration and anger towards him. The article reported this, but also invited the audience to challenge the double bind of femininity and competence (Jamieson 1995).

Assertiveness and conflict, or, as Warren's behaviour has been framed in the media, anger and nastiness, is an example of behaviour that carries a risk for women in the way they are perceived. As Harp, Loke and Bachmann (2016) found with their research of the media coverage of Hilary Clinton and the Benghazi hearing, anger has long been related to masculinity and associated with action. They found the coverage reverted to stereotypes of an emotional – thus - irrational, womb-holding – thus - brainless woman. For Clinton, this demonstrates the media discourse around women politicians who speak their mind and reinforces the double bind. For Warren, as mentioned in *The New York Times* (L) article, other media did indeed follow this pattern, which presented an opportunity to expose the bias and re-frame her debate performance.

*Politico* (L) noted Bloomberg's response to Warren's challenge, one which seemingly provoked her outrage:

'He was dismissive in ways that, rather than projecting confidence, underscored defensiveness. In a clip that has gone viral, he was captured rolling his eyes at Warren when she was railing against his treatment of women' (Harris 2020a, *Politico*).

The eye-rolling suggested frustration and irritation towards Warren, and may have also portrayed Bloomberg as paternalistic in the way that he refused to engage with Warren and respond or address the challenge.

This patronising form of sexism framed Bloomberg in an authoritative way, suggesting a degree of command over Warren that diminished her presence and her point and implied her behaviour was emotional or childish, rather than rational. A similar example came from the UK Prime Minister David Cameron who told shadow chief secretary, Angela Eagle, to 'calm down dear', when she questioned him over hospital waiting times (Wintour 2011).

Bloomberg went on to appear in the following debate, and once again, the media focused on Warren, who continued her momentum in challenging and holding him accountable for his past allegations of sexism. She began by telling a personal story she had recounted before, about how, in 1971, she was let go from a teaching job because she was pregnant (Stewart 2019b). However, this time, she used it as an opening opportunity to begin a fresh challenge against Bloomberg and his behaviour towards his female employees:

"But this time, she added something else: "At least I didn't have a boss who said to me, 'Kill it,' the way that Mayor Bloomberg is alleged to have said." (North 2020 *Vox*).

The coverage featured much of the exchange between the candidates, however *Fox News* (R) was the only outlet to follow the story further, and noted that the woman's claim had been corroborated by another Bloomberg employee who said he witnessed the exchange, for which the woman sued Bloomberg in federal court (Olson 2020). *The National Review* (R) used the exchange to invoke discourse surrounding abortion:

"Kill it." That's what Warren accuses Bloomberg of saying to a pregnant employee of his. "Kill"? "It"? What's "it"? A baby? Something living to kill? This could have been the springboard for an interesting discussion of abortion . . . "(Nordlinger 2020c *The National Review*).

Nordlinger (2020c) proposed the statement could have sparked a discussion about abortion, particularly around the definitions and terms, from within the pro-life discourse.

For example, the discourse associated with the article would be around foetal personhood, which confers legal rights from conception and aims to go beyond abortion bans in some states, to classify the procedure as murder (Zernike 2022). The use of the words 'kill' and 'living' have connotations of this particular discourse, whilst being featured in a right-leaning media outlet, the commentary from Nordlinger aligns with one of the most prolific conservative values regarding the issue of abortion: one that places foetal personhood above a woman, and denies a woman's right for choice and autonomy over their bodies (Roberti 2021). The Pew Research Centre (2021) found that the issue has long been divided along political lines, with the gap recently widening. They found that 80% of Democrats vs 35% of Republicans believe all abortion should be legal in the US, which suggests *The National Review* promoted this argument within an echo chamber of right-leaning voters and used the comments from the candidates to emphasise the Democratic party's opposite stance on the issue.

*Politico* (L) published an opinion piece written by Harris (2020b), in which the abortion exchange between Warren and Bloomberg was used to examine the sexism within US politics. Beginning by analysing Bloomberg's response to Warren, Harris highlights his manner in a sarcastic tone:

"C'mon, Mike Bloomberg is not sexist. He told us he isn't. And yet there was Elizabeth Warren claiming he is, even though he just said— did she not hear him the first time? — that he is not. Geez, no wonder the camera caught him rolling his eyes with impatient disdain". (Harris 2020b, *Politico*).

The behaviour displayed denial, exasperation and dismissal of Warren, which the text challenged through a sarcastic tone. For example: Bloomberg 'told her he isn't' and 'did she not hear him the first time?' Both comments use sarcasm to expose the contradiction in Bloomberg's behaviour and frame his response as petulant, whilst implying that in truth, he was sexist. His denial, his attempt to diminish the accusations and his body language (eye-rolling) embody the response of men who are held to account for misogynistic behaviour.

The University of Houston conducted a survey investigating support for the “me too” movement, which was quoted in the Harvard Business Review, and found this to be a classic response by males who often claim that they did not understand how their actions were perceived, claiming that women are oversensitive (Bower 2019).

The challenges between Warren and Bloomberg were often framed this way within the media coverage: Warren’s anger and outrage became the focus of her debate performance, and Bloomberg’s indifference and failed attempts at rebuffing her challenge, became the focus of his appearance in the debates. Further, the article highlights the positions of the two remaining women candidates, who were set within a cycle of gender bias and barriers within US politics:

“They are clinging to viability in the race and have converged in ways that made me realize how often, over how many years, my own reporting career has involved covering that same rut” (Harris 2020b, *Politico*).

This signals the importance of the role of media in public discourse, and suggests an awareness of bias and sexism in political coverage, along with a weariness and desire for change. The article concludes by stating that:

“American politics, especially at the presidential level, remains shaped by sexist double standards. These are amplified by the prism through which much of journalism covers politics, with our emphasis on personality, style and impressionistic perceptions of amorphous factors like strength and charisma”. (Harris 2020b, *Politico*).

The emphasis on impressions, perceptions, and illusive factors in political media coverage of women has been well-documented as perpetuating damaging stereotypes and steering discourse within politics (Ross 2017, Haraldsson and Wängnerud 2018 and Campus 2013).

By commenting on this issue, there was a form of awareness from the journalist and a challenging of this discourse, through publishing something so explicit in its assessment of the Democratic Party and the presidential election.

#### **5.2.3.3 A portrayal of parenthood**

As politics becomes more diverse, the role of parenthood may intersect with gender, to influence a candidate's campaign, policies and how they are presented in the media. Generally, motherhood is of greater interest to the media, however attention towards fatherhood has risen, with the rise of the modern man (Smith 2017). *The Washington Post* (L) published an article focusing on Biden's role as a single father. He became a single parent to his two sons in 1972, after his wife and daughter were killed in a car crash (Entous 2022).

Essentially a fact-checking article from the November debate, childcare policy was discussed by Biden, who used his experience about being a widower and single parent, to demonstrate his understanding and show empathy with other people in similar situations:

"You know, I was a single parent, too. When my wife and daughter were killed, my two boys I had to raise. ... I was making \$42,000 a year. I commuted every single solitary day to Wilmington, Delaware — over 500 miles a day, excuse me, 250 miles a day — because I could not afford ... childcare. It was beyond my reach." (Kessler, Rizzo and Kelly 2019, *The Washington Post*).

This framing of Biden represents a positive inversion of the stereotypical gendering of women in the role of motherhood, in which diligent parenting is often portrayed as aspirational and virtuous. Indeed, part of the discourse around Biden and his political career frames him as a resilient single dad, who has overcome multiple personal tragedies that have shaped his political career.

Elliott (2021) notes that, in times of national trauma, Biden is America's grief counsellor: calm, but not cold, comforting, but not weak, and for nearly half a century, Americans have watched him publicly wrestle with sorrow, whilst nursing his own, barely concealed, wounds. This pivotal time in Biden's life has shaped him into an empathetic leader - particularly in the way this story was framed by *The Washington Post* (L). The article looked at Biden's salary as a senator in 1972, noting that the '\$42,500 adjusted for inflation would be almost \$260,000 in today's dollars'. They used this to suggest that the expense of childcare would have been within his reach and cast doubt on his story, however this was followed by an insight from 2015:

"It's worth noting that in an emotional speech at Yale University in 2015, Biden said "the real reason I went home every night was that I needed my children more than they needed me." (Kessler, Rizzo and Kelly 2019, *The Washington Post*).

This final comment invoked sympathy for Biden, highlighting his resilience and strength of character. It also presented him as honest and authentic. All of which are key leadership characteristics (Luebke 2020) that form part of his public identity and help him appear 'presidential' in the debates. However, the traditional role of a father has changed in a way that mirrors the arc of the article. Turchi and Bernarbo (2020) suggest that in the early twenty-first century, the media portrayal of the role of fatherhood expanded, from the expectation to provide financially and be a disciplinarian, to include some traditionally feminine roles. They conducted a thematic analysis of modern single father representation on television in the US from 2008-2018, concluding that representations, such as the 'bumbling idiot' and that of a 'deadbeat' single parent, combined with the power of the media to influence and reinforce the status quo, can challenge the legitimacy of parents. They found that race, class, sexuality, and socioeconomic status played into negative stereotypes, whilst more affluent fathers were characterised as competent and engaged - neatly confirming the narrative on Biden.

Smith (2017) found when investigating UK politics that men can opt in and out of the politicisation of family in a way women cannot - citing Tony Blair as an example of the media framing as a 'modern man', in which his status as a working father made him a novelty, and he was thus applauded for helping his wife work. Further, it is suggested that partisanship may have played a role in the 'opting out' tactic, when in 2016, Conservative men shied away from the 'modern man' image and conservative women presented a more traditional role of motherhood. Biden enjoys a key position within the Democratic Party, which aligns with Blair, and the political ideology of his party in the UK, suggesting that partisanship could be a factor in the discourse of Biden and fatherhood.

Politicians' private lives are of increasing interest, regardless of gender and are used by them to mould their political identity (Langer 2009, Corner 2000, and Street 2004), although historical research has shown men's fatherhood is often viewed as an asset, whereas women's motherhood is complex, and may be viewed as both an asset and a constraint (Jamieson 1995, Smith 2017). *The Washington Post* (L) created doubt around Biden's claim, however the context was used to gain sympathy for his situation and generate admiration for him as a parent, whilst embedding his honesty and authentic political persona within the discourse of the election.

Parenthood was represented again, in an article from *Politico* (L), which looked at the body language of the candidates during the January debate, emphasising how Warren had shown her 'true authenticity' when discussing healthcare policy:

"Then, most remarkably, her voice broke. We felt not just her pain, but also, because of the anger and indignation that preceded, her strong powerful maternal energy. That crack in her strong delivery was a rare moment when we see the power that a woman candidate can have. This is something a male candidate would have had a hard time trying to copy because of our old stereotypes that alpha men can't show pain and tenderness." (Wood 2020, *Politico*).

Noting that 'her voice broke' through a 'crack in her strong delivery' conveys authenticity and implies Warren's emotional response was genuine, and that her gender served as an asset. The article contrasted this with typical assumptions of masculinity, which they believed would have rendered the point much less effective, had it been delivered by a male candidate. McKay (2020a) notes women leaders can present an identity in which feminine qualities are highlighted and therefore meet societal norms, whilst navigating a masculine political sphere. The emphasis placed on motherhood, or 'maternal energy', enabled Warren to allude to constraints of the womb/brain double bind (Jamieson 1995), a practice that Campus (2013) likens to a bilingualism of the masculine and feminine leadership traits that contribute to effective leadership.

For some women politicians, motherhood has historically been a key feature of their political campaigns and political identities. In 2008, Sarah Palin used her role as a mother to convey her devoted and caring nature (Stalsburg and Kleinberg 2015), and often referred to herself as a 'hockey mom' whilst bringing her children on stage for events (Schreiber 2016). Hilary Clinton was a 'mom first and a candidate second' in her 2008 presidential bid, with images of her arm-in-arm with her daughter being featured in media coverage of her campaign (Stalsburg and Kleinberg 2015). These women have drawn on traditional gender stereotypes and accepted societal norms to shape and advance their campaigns. Ironically, this practice could activate the bias and prejudice women in politics face for domestic motherhood or contrastingly, present a deliberate attempt to harness the discourses around motherhood and politicians, for more progressive political ends. As shown with the commentary around Warren, there are elements of feminine traits that work in favour of a candidate, if shown in a specific light.

After the December debate, Rodriguez (2019) published an article on *ABC News* (C) focusing on Klobuchar's campaign progress and her role in the impeachment trial of President Trump in early 2020.



The article quoted Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, who suggested Klobuchar's absence in early primary states, like Iowa, could work to the candidate's advantage, and that voters would place her duty to attend the trial above the candidate's campaign tour. Emphasising this position, Klobuchar is quoted:

"It is my constitutional duty," Klobuchar said. "I will find a way because I am really good at doing two things at once -- I'm a mom. And that means doing my duty for the country by being at that trial but also going back and forth, especially to the early states." (Rodriguez 2019, *ABC News*).

Her quote draws on the stereotype of mothers being organised and multi-tasking, a view traditionally positioned as incompatible with political office (Deason, Greenlee and Langer 2014). Klobuchar uses this stereotype to her advantage and draws on an anti-patriarchal discourse, to show how the role of domestic motherhood can benefit her in political office. Smith (2017) suggests this new politicised motherhood has a wider cultural emphasis on mothers being 'special, different and powerful'.

The example used by Klobuchar speaks to the assumption that mothers are naturally better at multitasking, diplomacy, budgeting, and other such skills. Politicised motherhood, as a concept, contrasts with the traditional double bind of competency and femininity (Jamieson 1995). The traditional view of motherhood increased the likelihood of adopting stereotypical feminine traits and roles, such as warm, child-focused, and consensus-oriented, which according to Jamieson (1995) can legitimise negative perceptions of women who deviate from these. However, the concept of motherhood, when used as a positive trait, can sometimes work in reverse for the politician. In essence, motherhood can be a double-edged sword for women, not only within politics. The stereotype that Klobuchar uses of the mother who thrives on chaos and excels at handling multiple demanding duties, can filter down to 'ordinary' mothers who may not be able to live up to such high standards, and invokes the notion of 'having it all' - motherhood, career, relationships, etc.

Her use of this was intended to communicate her ability to carry out her role in an impeachment trial, whilst campaigning for the party nomination and attending to her family. However, it is doubtful that a male politician would need to draw on such a narrative, in order to prove their abilities and political worth. In the UK in 2016, Andrea Leadsom left the Conservative Party leadership race after an article was published by *The Times*, which suggested that she had commented that motherhood gave her an edge over her rival, Theresa May, who did not have children, and gave her more of a stake in the future of the country (Rigby 2016). In this scenario, Leadsom maintained that her comments had been misrepresented by the journalist, and while she had apologised, the article had led to further negative media coverage of the comparison, and therefore Leadsom left the race, leaving May as the remaining candidate (Elgot 2016).

#### **5.4.4 The military**

McDermott and Panagopoulos (2015) advocate that military service has long been regarded as an advantage on the political resume of a candidate, as voters may rely on this information as a shortcut to make inferences about the candidates, and thereby vote accordingly. Media coverage of two of the candidates, featured references to past military service and reflected positive associations ascribed to candidates.

Tulsi Gabbard's background in the military lay at the foundation of her campaign, and she maintained that her 16 years of service and two tours of Iraq, had shaped her life and political philosophy (DiStaso 2019). This element of her political identity was represented by much of the media in describing her debate performances. Writing for *Newsmax* (R), Gingrich (2019) lamented that the debates were boring, and proposed Gabbard as the most interesting feature among them:

"She has a great smile, she looks totally self-contained. Harris looks like she is struggling and attacking...I think that as a veteran in the military, she has a sense of the real world that Harris does not have." (Gingrich 2019, *Newsmax*).

Smiles, facial expressions and an emphasis on physical appearance are all features of non-verbal communication that are attributed to feminine communication, and can soften speech (Grebelsky-Lichtman and Bdolach 2017). Whilst commenting on her appearance, particularly her smile, Gingrich used gender to contrast Gabbard against Harris, whom he used more masculine language to describe. Gabbard is portrayed as composed when under attack (from Harris), which invoked her military experience, and there is the assumption that this role has given her a particular perspective of the world that is unique to veterans.

Buttigieg's military veteran status was also incorporated into his campaign and political identity. Beaumont (2019) notes he had served as an intelligence officer, tracking money to terrorist cells in Afghanistan for seven months, but is careful not to call himself a combat veteran, despite the danger he faced. *The Washington Post* (L) recounted how Buttigieg used his own experience as a military veteran when discussing the United States military commitments: 'he believed he was one of the last troops, turning out the lights when he left, years ago'. He used the experience to speak about how the government would handle wars in future and aligned himself with the role of president. The *BBC* (C) wrote that 'he served in the Navy' and 'he's an openly gay veteran of the Afghanistan War and a Rhode Scholar', and *the Washington Post* (L) reported that 'Buttigieg, who served in Afghanistan, mentioned his time in the Naval Reserve, as evidence of his commitment to defending the First Amendment and the Constitution'. The First Amendment protects freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances (Justice.gov 2021). Buttigieg used his military service to emphasise his commitment to defending the constitution, a strategy unique to him, as no other candidate on the stage had served, as Gabbard, also a military veteran, had not qualified for the debate.

During the January debate, *The Washington Post* (L) reported Buttigieg's response when answering a question about US foreign policy and Trump's decision to send more troops to the Middle East:

"Whenever I see that happen, I think about the day we shipped out and the time that was set aside for saying goodbye to family members. I remember walking with a friend of mine, another lieutenant I trained with, as we walked away, and his one-and-a-half-year-old boy was toddling after him, not understanding why his father wasn't turning back to scoop him up. And it took all the strength he had not to turn around and look at his boy one more time." (Alemany 2020, *The Washington Post*).

His comments stemmed from a personal perspective and evoked empathy, highlighting how the actions of a president and the military affect everyone around them. Whilst this displayed the sacrifice people make in these circumstances, it also depicted an image associated with masculinity. Male soldiers are typically portrayed as a manifestation of masculinity, however this story portrayed a different angle on the surface; a softer one with emotions. Holyfield (2016) suggests male veterans who return from war zones with post-traumatic stress disorder, largely suffer because of the constraints traditional masculinity places on the expression of emotions, leaving them to suffer in silence, so as not to appear less masculine.

News outlets referenced Buttigieg's sexual identity and his veteran status multiple times across the debates: *Newsmax* (R) characterised Buttigieg as 'a virtual unknown a year ago, who is trying to carve his own path as a 37-year-old openly gay military veteran from the Midwest'. Buttigieg's sexuality placed him outside of the typical stereotype of a soldier, who MacKenzie (2021), when investigating the discourse of 'the good American soldier', suggests is one of a small-town, humble, heterosexual, able-bodied heartthrob. Their research found that these narratives are reinforced and sustained by the media, even when experiences and evidence are presented that counter this. Outside of the debates, Buttigieg was also subjected to claims that he overstated his service, after *The Wall Street Journal* published an opinion piece, written by former US Marines, painting him as a careerist whose connections enabled him to gain an analyst position, which was significantly safer and more comfortable than that of a soldier (Graziosi 2020).

This narrative was mirrored in some of the debate coverage as *The Washington Times* (R) reported:

“He has laid claim to being a war hero, but now it has been revealed that he got in and got out of the service by using a fast-track shortcut, only served in a war zone for a matter of months, and his only heroics were serving as a chauffeur for officers and dignitaries”. (Tyrrell.Jr 2020, *The Washington Times*).

This suggested that Buttigieg’s status as a veteran would have limited political capital in his campaign, as his experiences, as a homosexual, are different to that of a soldier. His sexuality was juxtaposed with his military experience and was implicitly leveraged to raise questions about his masculinity. This is key, as his masculinity is viewed as intrinsically important to military service. Americans have distinct ideas about what members of the military are like, with masculinity and strong leadership being key traits, and Buttigieg’s narrative of an intelligence officer lacks the shortcuts voters make inferences from (McDermott and Panagopoulos 2015). However, there were some positive associations ascribed to Buttigieg. *The New York Times* (L) noted he ‘continued to emphasize his veteran cred’, and commented on his debate performance and his ability ‘to do those “as a war veteran ...” moments, which would be terrific in a debate with Trump’. *ABC News* (C) made a similar point, in more depth:

“Perhaps his strongest moment came when he described how, as a military veteran who is vocal about his faith, he could stand up to Trump in a general election. “I’m ready to take on Donald Trump because when he gets to the tough talk and the chest thumping, he’ll have to stand next to an American war veteran and explain how he pretended bone spurs made him ineligible to serve”. (Jaffe, Peoples and Superville 2020, *ABC News*).

Buttigieg’s quote described Trump’s debate style in masculine terms of ‘tough talk’ and ‘chest thumping’, both actions that convey a sense of hypermasculinity in his performance.

He also mentions the exemption Trump was granted from the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. He received a timely diagnosis of bone spurs that led to a medical exemption in 1968, something shrouded in mystery, as Trump claims not to recall who signed off on the condition (Eder 2018). Both are used to diminish his stature and reinforce the masculinity associated with Buttigieg's military service. The implication that the medical exemption was false, implies Trump lacked the courage to enlist and therefore lacks the standing and spirit required to be president. Ultimately, this coverage drew the connection between masculinity and the presidency, suggesting a candidate must embody a 'militarised' idea of masculinity, in order to be able to carry out the job.

#### **5.2.4 Politics and pop culture**

The use of popular culture to attract support, evoke an image or communicate a message, has become a familiar phenomenon in politics (Street 2000 and 2004). Examples of this were found within the data, where media outlets used references to film and TV shows to discuss the candidates and their debate performances. This section looks at how the candidate's gender is key to communicating the desired message or invoking the intended imagery to audiences and how this draws the discourses around toxic masculinity, femininity, virtue and leadership stereotypes.

In an opinion piece published by *Fox News* (R), Greg Gutfeld, a political satirist and news presenter (IMDB.com 2023), provided his opinions on the Democratic debate, which took place in November 2019. Among them, he referenced the horror film 'Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>', which is part of a horror franchise and was produced in 1980 (IMDB.com 2023a):

"But you know what the debate stage really was? It was that cabin at Camp Crystal Lake from "Friday the 13th." All those candidates are the stupid teenagers making idiotic decisions. Let's check out the basement! Let's go skinny-dipping alone! Above all, don't hop in that car and escape. And President Trump is the ever-present Jason, waiting to pick each and every one of them off. He's there, on that stage, even when he isn't. It's sad to think that someday Trump will not be president, and the whole world will look like a Democratic debate. Like Jason, maybe we'll just keep bringing him back." (Gutfeld 2019, *Fox News*).

The debate stage was replaced by a 'cabin at Camp Crystal Lake', setting the vision for his further commentary, and invoking nostalgia and the safety of a summer camp. The film falls in the genre of 'slasher films', which follows the formula that the killer is typically male and the victims are teenage, usually female, and almost always white (Kvaran 2016). Gutfeld's narrative follows this formula, with the candidates being portrayed as 'stupid teenagers making idiotic decisions', and where, 'President Trump is the ever-present Jason, waiting to pick each and every one of them off'. The candidates, although male and female, were all depicted as having low intelligence and being doomed to a brutal death – ideas often connected to women in this film genre (Wellman, Meitl and Kinkade 2021 and Hernández-Santaolalla and Raya 2021). Trump was cast as the killer, with associations to toxic masculinity and enhanced strength (Hernández-Santaolalla and Raya 2021). This scenario invoked the gendered discourse around slasher films, in which a teen, usually a woman, is brutally murdered by a man. As Wellman, Meitl and Kinkade (2021) found, slasher films disseminate messages that equate femininity with purity, punishing characters who display sexuality, with a violent death, and perpetuating stereotypical gender roles in society.

Masculine stereotypes and discourses were invoked by *The National Review* (R) which used the film *Jaws 2* to describe the apparent danger Sanders posed as the leading candidate in the election. The article describes the desperation the Police Chief experiences in trying to convince leaders of the danger:

"In *Jaws 2*, Roy Scheider reprises his role as Police Chief Brody, the landlubber lawman forced to battle a great white shark. He's convinced there's another beast out there, but he can't persuade anyone who matters. "Look at this. That's a shark," says Brody, waving a grainy underwater photo at the town's political leaders. "I'm telling you and I'm telling everyone at this table, that's a shark. And I know what a shark looks like because I've seen one up close. And you better do something about this one, because I don't intend to go through that hell again." (Nordlinger 2020b, *The National Review*)

Sanders was portrayed as Jaws, the main antagonist in the film franchise, which terrorises the swimmers of Amity Island (IMDB. Com 2023b). In the film, the great white shark is bigger and more predatory than usual, which adds to the sense of danger that a nomination for Sanders posed. Although the gender of Jaws is not discussed in the film, the 1974 source novel by Peter Benchley, presents the shark as male, and it was given the name 'Bruce' during the production of the film (Teague 2020). The plot is driven by male-centred conflict; the director, Steven Spielberg, referred to it as 'Moby Dick meets An Enemy of the People'. This draws on themes, such as power, clashing interests and public opinion, and examines the consequences of living with them (Rees and Holt 2022). The comparison presents him as a version of brute, primal masculinity, untouched by the constraints of society; and sits within the context of male political power, with Sanders cast as an imminent and grave danger to society.

Popular culture was again used to draw a comparison between Sanders and the American comedian, Larry David, who is known as the co-creator of the television shows *Seinfeld* and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (HBO.com 2023). David is described as America's most famous misanthrope, and is the greatest proof that "you are what you are," given the fact that he remained a curmudgeon even once he got rich and popular (Dowd 2020b).



*Fox News* (R) used this comparison to provide analysis of Sander's campaign: 'Bernie has been covered more as an entertaining ideologue, an eccentric uncle, a Larry David character, than a potential president', and in a more negative tone, *Newsmax* (R) labelled Sanders 'the Larry David of campaigning, snide and dismissive'. The comparison invoked humour from the show, and the language diminished him and drew focus away from his political career.

Finally, *The New York Times* (L) compared Elizabeth Warren to Arya Stark, a central character who trains to become a deadly assassin (Fandom.com 2021), from the television show *Game of Thrones*:

"The Arya Stark of the debate. Recently ignored, Warren came to dominate all, especially Bloomberg, and save her candidacy. The strongest, most forceful presence on that stage". (Dowd 2020b, *The New York Times*).

Tufekci (2019) notes the character is small and unthreatening, however she is resilient, develops a killer instinct and despite a tedious story arc, accomplishes the improbable task of killing the Night King in the finale episode. They suggest that the Night King represents an 'otherised' external threat throughout the eight seasons, potentially invoking the US political landscape and the high stakes, 2020 election. The comparison speaks to the unexpected nature of Warren's performance (she was 'recently ignored'), and how her arc within the election had been slower than those of her male rivals, and limited by gender bias within media coverage. She was the 'strongest and most forceful presence', which are typically characteristics associated with male leaders, showing that she resorted to these to rescue her campaign. Incidentally, Arya Stark also did not conform to gender ideals, as she hid her identity and posed as a boy, in order to follow her desire to become a warrior (Trejo Morales 2020).

The research now looks to discuss these findings in the following chapter, and draw conclusions from them to answer the research aims and questions from Chapter 1.

## **6.0      Discussion**

This research centres around the way the US media portrayed gender in media coverage of the 2020 US Democratic Party debates, and, through CDA, revealed the most prominent and consequential discourses. Gender is a key building block in the construction of these, and evidence of stereotypes, tropes, and narratives, used by the media to position candidates according to traditional and generalised gendered ideals, were uncovered. The analysis revealed that positive and negative coverage fell along the binary of masculine and feminine ideals, and how these sit within the discourse around politics and leadership. The findings suggest white heteronormative males dominate US politics, upholding historic and enduring privilege and societal power structures. This research shows that women and minority candidates faced gendered discrimination, which portrayed them as exceptional to the norms of US politics, and as a risk for the Democratic Party nomination. Further to this, discrimination was revealed through the intersection of gender and sexual identity for Pete Buttigieg, and through ageist discourse around Biden, Sanders and Warren. This section mirrors the structure of Chapter 5, with three macro themes of Feminine Identity, Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and Masculinity. Under Feminine Identity, there are sections discussing women in media, the challenges between Klobuchar and Buttigieg, and Warren and Bloomberg are discussed in the context of emotions. The challenge between Warren and Sanders around a women president is discussed in the context of truthfulness. A women's work, a public voice, choices of attire and appearance are discussed. Under the theme of Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), a section on the media framing of Buttigieg is drawn from the findings on LGBTQ+ identity, and the way it intersected with gender in politics. Following this, a section on political firsts is included, which draws from the findings on Buttigieg and his campaign as a gay politician, and Warren and the way her gender intersected with age, when asked about her chances of becoming the first woman president. Within the theme of Masculinity, there is a discussion on veterans and the military, and then on white male privilege.

There is also a section on the political ideology of media outlets and a potential correlation to gendered discourses. This part of the research found evidence of gendered tropes and stereotypes from both left-leaning and right-leaning media coverage, whilst centre media were found to be the most subjective.

## **6.1 Feminine identity**

This section discusses the discursive constructions of women politicians and women in media roles, within the media coverage of the Democratic Party nomination debates for the US 2020 presidential election.

### **6.1.1 Women debate moderators**

Coverage around a female-only moderator panel in the November debate, received very gendered coverage that framed the women as unique, history-making, and implied that the agenda leaned more towards gendered issues during debate discussions. *The Washington Post* (Alemany 2019) noted the women were 'centre stage' and emphasised they 'discussed issues that affect women and families'. *Vox* (Zhou 2019a) also reported a 'marked contrast from previous debates', alluding to the historical marginalisation of women and gender issues, which were brought up during November's debate. *USA Today* (Berhmann 2019) suggested issues, such as abortion rights, childcare and housing, had been 'largely ignored' in previous debates. The discourse reflected the fact that men had historically dominated the platform, agenda, or discussion, with women being denied sufficient opportunity to participate and lead the debates.

This is telling of the lack of representation of women as a group within media, and the resulting media coverage relates to the concept of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978), not by demonstrating such annihilation itself, but by suggesting the issue exists historically for these women.

Tuchman's research investigated the way women were portrayed by the mass media, and found that working women were condemned, and others trivialised, and should remain protected within the confines of the home (Tuchman 1978). Although the research precedes Jamieson's double bind theory (1995), the concept is similar to that of the double bind of femininity and competence, where a woman is expected to remain within societal expectations of femininity, not within media or politics.

The discourse around the moderators was largely positive in tone - documenting their assent to what was framed as an esteemed role in election coverage, noting the action towards gender equality within the industry, and praising the shift in agenda towards issues that affect women. Arguably, the coverage highlighted the uniqueness of the women, portraying the event, and them, as outliers, as previous debates lacked an agenda featuring gendered issues. This suggests the event was tokenistic, rather than reflective of true change in all-round diversity of future debate moderator panels.

### **6.1.2 Emotions**

The mediated discourse of emotion was revealed through analysis of coverage around Amy Klobuchar, who repeatedly challenged Pete Buttigieg, in an effort to highlight the perceived privilege gender affords male political candidates. Across multiple debates, Klobuchar repeatedly attempted to highlight the gender bias she believed lay between herself and Buttigieg, by using the debate stage as a platform to voice her frustration.

The media framed Klobuchar as angry and emotional in her approach to victimising Buttigieg. *The Washington Post* (Alemany 2019) reported a quote from her explicitly addressing the matter: 'I am honoured to be standing next to him, but women are held to a higher standard'. In the surrounding media coverage, while a small portion of commentators supported her efforts, many framed her as antagonistic in her assertions, portraying her as over-sensitive, touchy and belligerent. She persistently highlighted and evidenced the differences in political experience, funding opportunities and media coverage that she felt gave Buttigieg an advantage as a man.

However, she was rewarded with unflattering and damaging descriptions that framed her behaviour as whinging and nit-picking - a trope that is particularly gendered towards women, and positioned Buttigieg as a victim of her confrontations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the coverage used language that suggested aggression on her part, including a reference to hazing (Harris, *Politico* 2019), in order to halt Buttigieg's success. This framing is suggestive of a degree of force and violence in her challenges, drawing the focus to her emotions, and diminishing her attempts at highlighting the gender bias she believed she faced. The media were punishing Klobuchar for her actions, resulting in a dichotomy of rational vs. emotional discourse. There was validation in her claims, and she tried to produce evidence, however it was her emotional response that was the focus of the coverage.

The media focused on an attribute more likely to be ascribed to a woman than a man – hair - as a metaphor, which served to exaggerate her message and emphasise her emotions. *The New York Times* (Dowd 2020a) referenced her hair to portray her emotions, 'Her bangs weren't shaking, but she was, spending much of the night on the ropes', and *Politico* (Neffinger 2020) also, 'Mayor Pete coolly got Klobuchar's hair vibrating over forgetting the Mexican president's name'. The portrayal implies she was over-emotional and perhaps, irrational, 'vibrating' suggests shaking, anguish, fear or strong emotions, and could be considered infantilising, through the suggestion of such uncontrollable anger that her hair was shaking. This expresses an assumption about Klobuchar's emotions in a distinctly gendered way, as men's appearance, particularly hair, is not commented on to the same extent. These descriptions underline the focus on her actions and appearance, rather than her words, which depoliticised her and diminished the focus of her arguments.

Through these exchanges, both candidates were portrayed as 'squabbling siblings', which undermined their authority, weakening their political identities, and consequently, their campaigns. Interestingly, the framing of these exchanges resulted in both candidates' portrayals depoliticising them, something which arguably happens more when there are two women involved.

For example, Hilary Clinton, and GOP candidate of 2016, Carly Fiorina, whose exchanges during campaigns were labelled 'cat fights' by the left-leaning publication *The Nation* (Savan 2015), also suggested the characterisation was promoted by men (primarily across social media), for their gratification as 'men love a cat fight, it's a male dream'. In this instance, the male privilege that Klobuchar is speaking about may have influenced the media's portrayal of Buttigieg, as his reactions were never the focus of reporting, which reflected his mild temperament. However, the result, as described by *Vox*, was 'good television, but electorally, mutually assured destruction'.

Elizabeth Warren was subjected to similar coverage, which emphasised her displays of emotions, while she questioned and challenged Bloomberg's character and motives for his presence in the election. As shown in the previous chapter, she was painted as angry and outraged that a candidate with such a background filled with accusations of misogynistic and discriminatory behaviour, should be able to participate in the debates or the election itself. *The National Review* (Geraghty 2020b) suggested she 'tore Bloomberg apart', drawing on the metaphor of predator/prey, and *Politico* (Nelson et al 2020) described her 'railing against his treatment of women'. The research uncovered evidence of an emphasis towards her emotional confrontation, with negative connotations for Warren. However, *The New York Times* (Gupta and hunter 2020) framed the discourse differently. They used gender to provide a contrast against women's emotions being levelled against them disparagingly, by connecting her anger with righteousness and justice, as described: 'she could not hide her anger' and 'it was exhilarating and historic – but no doubt a risk'.

Whilst not the primary narrative of the coverage (Bloomberg's accusations of discrimination were), the coverage across the media highlighted her behaviour as unfeminine, and invoked the discourse around women and emotion, which drew the focus away from her argument and undermined her attempts for Bloomberg to take some accountability for his actions.

Ultimately, the emphasis was on Bloomberg, and his debate performance damaged his political credibility, but coupled with the discourse around Warren, it weakened the attempt at correcting the socialised attitudes towards toxic masculinity and failed to dampen hyper-masculinised ideas regarding power.

Emotions were also a key theme in the discourse around a woman's voice and how they sound. The media followed a pattern of emphasising characteristics and emotions, using this strategy to pitch two women candidates against each other, whilst drawing a contrast of each of their femininity. *The National Review* described Warren's voice as 'quavery and oddly beseeching', comparing it to another candidate, Marianne Williamson, whose voice they deemed 'beautiful and a gift'. Specifically, Warren's pitch and timbre are represented in an unflattering light, suggesting an overly emotional and irrational response in the way she spoke. This draws on the gendered discourse around women in politics that focuses on how a woman sounds, diminishing their position, power, and their point. The implications are a gendered imbalance of the portrayal of political candidates, centred around societal expectations of what femininity sounds like.

These examples imply these women politicians do not conform to normalised notions that align with a socially idealised gender performance of femininity, but rather, one that presented them as appropriating masculine characteristics, such as assertiveness, outspokenness and leading opinionated challenges. Klobuchar was framed as aggressive towards Buttigieg, and was infantilised for highlighting the bias she believed women politicians faced in the election. Warren was given similar treatment, as her anger was the overriding feature in the discourse, when challenging Bloomberg on the debate stage. Such behaviour motivated negative coverage that focused on their actions and minimised their arguments - penalising them for appearing 'unfeminine'. Women politicians have, historically, faced a backlash for emphasising masculinity in their political messaging and identity (Bauer and Santia 2021).

Throughout Hillary Clinton's long career, her language grew increasingly masculine - provoking speculation that it was a deliberate strategy to evade the gendered discrimination women face in politics, but leading to a campaign and candidate in crisis, and lacking a clear presentation strategy (Jones 2016). This exemplifies the societal gendered expectations around women and femininity, as Clinton was criticised despite adopting a more 'acceptable' style of leadership, which evidently only applies to men and not women in leadership positions. This research shows how this applies to Klobuchar and Warren, who were also criticised for showing traits that, when attributed to men, are positive leadership characteristics, but deemed 'unfeminine' and ineffective for women. Margaret Thatcher can be seen as a further example of a politician who also adopted many masculine traits. As Conservative Prime Minister, she created a profoundly contradictory persona that neither represented women (as a woman, nor group), and was not a typical woman politician, addressing women as subordinates and appearing to reserve the right to achieve political power for herself (Campbell 2015).

Thatcher and Clinton provide examples of differing gender performances, as Clinton was analysed and regarded as disingenuous or betraying her gender, disadvantaging her political career. Thatcher was able to remain in power, in the highest political office, for three consecutive terms, and has often had masculine elements of her character acknowledged. As Crines, Heppell and Dorey (2015) noted, her persona, rhetoric and oratory were integral to the policy agenda of Thatcherism, and she took great care to maintain her credibility and political capital. Undoubtedly, women politicians are faced with steep judgement about leadership styles, and this research suggests that there may be other factors at play (environmental, historical, political parties, social appetites towards gender, and many others) when charting the political rise and fall of female candidates, and their gender performances in the media. However, Clinton's historical campaigns, and this research, show the media portrayal of Warren and Klobuchar discussed in this section, support the gendered penalties that remain in place and sustain the gendered discourse around women politicians.



The dichotomy of a woman politician challenging her opponent in a 'masculine' way frames her as unfeminine, invoking the competency/femininity double bind, disadvantaging her to the audience.

This remains a barrier for women candidates who confront or challenge, no matter how righteous or powerful, but there is a persistent burden for them to display their anger and emotions in a controlled, feminine way, keeping them suppressed within politics. As Jamieson (1995) notes, the double bind draws energy from the ideal that masculine or feminine dichotomies are set in a hierarchy, with masculine ideals considered superior, and women defective, if they deviate from the feminine norm, but fall short of the masculine norm of competence. Coverage of both women politicians presents evidence of the same double bind of femininity and competence, as the discussions were framed as heated conflicts, with the women as the instigators, unable to control their outrage. The rhetorical frame presents a problem for women who display 'unfeminine' qualities, such as assertiveness - which is traditionally connected to male leadership stereotypes. When men get angry, they are perceived to be bold and show decisive leadership. However, women are angry and over-emotional.

With these challenges, the media coverage provides an example of an additional double bind, which Jamieson (1995) refers to as the silence or shame double bind. The media determined that Klobuchar was discredited for speaking out and highlighting the bias between herself and Buttigieg within the election, however, if she had remained silent, arguably, and due to the double bind, she would have been powerless within the election. The media's response to her challenge only succeeded in positioning herself further within damaging gendered stereotypes and tropes used against women in politics. *Fox News* acknowledged she 'took a risk' by challenging Buttigieg and *Politico* reported that she 'lost respect for losing her composure'. This pattern also applied to Warren and her confrontations with Bloomberg: if she spoke out, then she could move her campaign along, whilst damaging her opponents. She succeeded somewhat with Bloomberg, by revealing the cracks in his campaign and his weak political viability.

Further, the criticism around Warren's voice added a layer to the discourse around her debate performances, which detracted from what she was saying and positioned her as unfeminine. As Jamieson (1995) describes, the bind women face for expressing themselves is persistent and offers a spectrum of literary descriptors: bossy, nags, shrews, fishwives, harridans and many more. The media coverage of these women signals they should be silent and submissive, as they were subjected to a negative portrayal of their debate performances for speaking out. The effort to gain a hearing or respect for their thoughts and ideas, is bound by the idea that media scrutiny will perpetuate gendered stereotypes and norms, which work to sustain barriers in politics.

Tuchman's research on symbolic annihilation was conducted decades ago, and the results expressed concern about the function of the media in shaping gendered opinions, and the consistent repetition of themes that marginalise women and could encourage the maintenance of their subordinate position in society. Whilst the women were afforded a presence in the news, this research shows the annihilation of them within media coverage, where their gender was used to deny the aspects and arguments that they were attempting to draw attention to. This provides a measure of how entrenched societal norms around femininity, and expectations of women politicians to conform to them, are within society, and how far the media permeate power structures and seep into daily lives.

The women faced damaging media coverage, triggering negatively gendered discursive frames, and perpetuating the barriers and destructive stereotypes that enable gendered power structures to remain in place. This study illustrates the symbolic annihilation of women politicians within the media, and shows that the representation in the fictional world (mass media) assigns them, acts as a barrier to progress, and reinforces dominant power structures that keep women subordinate within society.

### **6.1.3 Truthfulness**

The notion of truthfulness arose in coverage around a dispute between Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, on alleged comments that he believed a woman could never be president. The findings in Chapter 5, showed *The National Review* (Geraghty 2020a) typified the challenge as the 'great progressive candidate duel', in which Sanders denied the accusation and was supported by much of the media coverage. This stance implied Warren was a liar, a narrative carried through the resulting media discourse. She was framed as the antagonist and her integrity was questioned, as the media drew on previous discourse around Warren's claims of Native American Heritage, which she was accused of using to advance her law career. *The New York Times* (Stephens 2020) lectured that she was 'lucky not to be pressed further as surely, not many would believe her'. *The National Review* (Harsanyi 2020) used the challenge not only to reinforce her potential dishonesty, but to suggest all women were likely to be untruthful. Headlined 'Women Lie Too', the article conflates the dilemma of who to believe, with the wider discourse around the "me too" movement, and the suggestion that society may have a 'moral obligation to believe women in these male-female disagreements'. This is followed with a scientific study (albeit selectively and inaccurately) to connect Warren with Hilary Clinton, framing them as representatives of their gender, and as proof that all women are naturally more prone to lying. The article proposed Warren had 'already been caught pushing a "self-oriented" lie that was used to bolster her career for decades, so she is clearly not above being dishonest'. The conclusion is damaging to Warren's allegations, as assuming truthfulness 'over another man's word would be denigrating to men and completely irrational'. This history, compounded with Sanders' denial and the framing of her emotions, subjected Warren to a negative portrayal of her debate performance, and framed her as aggressive in her confrontation and disingenuous in her motives to bring the issue up in the debate.

This exemplifies the double bind of silence and shame (Jamieson 1995), as Warren was discredited and blamed for attempting to damage Sander's reputation and campaign, and was accused of trying to manipulate the party nomination and the media narrative. If she remained silent, she would be (further) disadvantaged in her pursuit of the party nomination.

The exchange invoked masculine associations with leadership, and specifically, the presidency. The media coverage follows a familiar line, presenting the notion that a male candidate was balanced, and not discriminatory or sexist in his assertions that a woman couldn't be president. This is supported by Conroy (2015), who states that women are at a disadvantage, due to their associations with femininity, and there exists a positive bias towards masculine candidates, particularly within the United States, where notions of leadership largely embrace masculinity and reject femininity. Furthermore, this is emphasised in American politics, where the meanings associated with femininity are synonymous with weakness and antithetical to leadership, particularly within the context of The White House. In addition to this, Sanders is well-established in his politics, with an accepted public reputation for authenticity being a key part of his political identity. Together with gendered leadership assumptions and norms, the media demonstrated this inherent advantage when upholding his denials over Warren. Ultimately, Warren's gender was used against her within this challenge, to invoke the assumption that women are 'natural' liars, unsuited to leadership and the presidency, whereas his masculinity and power were his shield. This speaks to the power of this connection, the homogenisation of these ideals within public discourse, and the omnipresence of masculinity within the mediated political portrayal of election politics.

#### **6.1.4      Appearances**

Following the November debate, *The New York Times* (Friedman 2019) published an article critiquing Tulsi Gabbard's clothing choice of a white trouser suit, and how this communicated specific ideas and messages about her to the audience. The tone was mocking and accused Gabbard of being insincere towards the meaning and symbolism behind the choice of attire.

This message centred around its colour (white), symbolising purity, which is most often associated with the suffragettes and, in recent times, has been used by women politicians to demonstrate their commitment to fighting for policy change and equality for all (Lang 2021). However, for Gabbard, the article casts suspicion on her motives towards women's rights, and believes she should not benefit from the support, attention and connotations the fashion statement brings. Instead, the article characterises Gabbard in a distinctly hyper-masculine way, as the 'white knight attempting to save us all from, yet another regime change war'. In the field of psychology, a 'white knight' is often framed as an idealised hero, who is compelled to rescue and seek out the needy and vulnerable, most commonly women (Lamia and Kreiger 2015). This evokes the discourse of heroes and leadership with a clear masculine tone, and a degree of suspicion relating to the hero's motives and agenda.

In view of this article, Gabbard does not conform to, and is not worthy of, feminine ideals and codes. The article uses a masculine trope to act as a cue for the reader to frame her as a 'saviour', but the mocking tone renders her disingenuous, inauthentic, and to be viewed with suspicion as a political candidate. The article does two things. The perspective around her fashion choice and associated 'failings', depoliticises her and detracts from her debate performance. It provides an example of how fashion can be weaponised through gendered discourse, something male politicians are rarely subjected to in the media. However, this is not simply a reductionist strategy focusing on her fashion choices, rather than her politics. The explicit framing of her as a 'white knight' and the intentional thread of suspicion throughout the article, draws focus towards her politics and undermines her intentions within the election. This steers the discourse towards unfavourable opinions of Gabbard, tapping into existing dominant discourse around her problematic policies and beliefs, which align closer to the opposition, making the framing of her more powerful to the reader.

### **6.1.5 Careers**

Kamala Harris, a former attorney general, was described by *Fox News*, as giving a 'prosecutorial dissection' of her debate opponent, Tulsi Gabbard, and *The New York Times* (Vivion Brooks 2019) mentioned they 'lost count the amount of times she had said criminal', which was 'not a good look for her'. The messaging around the term 'look' is a non-verbal form of communication, although applied to men and women, the gendered implications in its application to women arguably go further, due to the media's propensity to comment on women's appearances. Overall, the comment references disapproval in the way in which Harris carries and projects herself. Further to this, her career is used to frame her behaviour as threatening towards the other candidate, aligning her with negative masculine connotations.

This serves to depoliticise her, by drawing attention to her past rather than her debate point, and highlights what the media portray to be 'unfeminine' behaviour from her. Similarly, Warren's past as a teacher was invoked by *Newsmax* (Fitzgerald 2019), in order to mock her intellect and deride her knowledge and skill in policy-making. She is described as 'best student in class with plans galore', whilst *Fox News* (Gingrich 2019) also reference her past career by reporting that she is the smartest candidate, but 'she knows it'. Arguably, teaching and law are conventional careers, with law being traditionally, and remaining, male-dominated (Bell 2022), and teaching deemed an inherently female profession, but with men dominating the prestigious positions of principal and professor (Wong 2019). This places both candidates within masculine territory - something the media used as a tool to remind audiences of the ideological feminised expectations of women and work, and embedded societal gendered ideals of leadership.

### **6.1.6 Motherhood**

The discourse around motherhood and women candidates was primarily positive in the representation of leadership. Often, the discourse of incompatibility and motherhood is found in the mediated construction of political candidates (Carlin and Winfrey 2009, Harp, Ioke and Bachman 2010 and McKay 2020b), and exemplifies the double bind of womb and brain (Jamieson 1995), which is typically faced by the working mother, whom society deems is governed by her body and not her brain. This discourse connects a woman's identity to their role as a mother, rendering them incapable of successfully combining a career and parenting - ideals to which men are not subjected. Within this research, media coverage around both Klobuchar and Warren referenced motherhood, with the resulting discursive constructions from the media being positive.

When discussing healthcare policy, Warren's status as a mother and her 'maternal energy', were used by *Politico* (Wood 2020) to *authenticate* her emotion and demonstrate the power of her empathy – both feminine traits, often used to depoliticise candidates. The media drew on the discourse of the power of motherhood and its ability to transcend boundaries, noting that 'this is something a male candidate would have had a hard time trying to copy because of our old stereotypes that alpha men can't show pain and tenderness.' Warren was also discussing healthcare policy, an area of politics often viewed as more feminine and assigned to women politicians, due to the assumption that women have better 'softer' skills, such as empathy, to make a success out of policy within these parts of government (Folke and Rickne 2016). In this scenario, for Warren, the gendered media representation of motherhood was used in a positive way to endorse her politics in a uniquely feminine way.

The findings revealed another example of the discourse of motherhood, with Klobuchar choosing to conspicuously play on the stereotype of the busy, juggling mother, to advantage herself and conflate her role as a politician with her role as a parent.

*ABC News* (Rodriguez 2019) reported that Klobuchar was required to attend the impeachment trial of President Trump in January 2020, which took precedence over her election campaign. When discussing her absence, Klobuchar insisted she was able to carry out both duties, as she 'was really good at doing two things at once – I'm a mom'. Jamieson (1995) notes that devotion to a career can seem unmaternal for women and that the double task of raising children while pursuing a career has earned its own tag: 'juggling'. This is the principle that Klobuchar alludes to, when explaining that being a busy mother enables her to balance paid and unpaid work demands. Some contemporary discourse portrays a positive side to this, as an idealised version of productivity (Watson 2020), but it can be seen as something of an ironic stereotype as the idea assumes that women are doing the majority of the childcare and home life tasks (Jamieson 1995). This research illustrates that Klobuchar has pinned her desire for political visibility to a feminised lifestyle that demands flexibility. Arguably, she is portraying a version of a working mother, which the media often paints in a favourable light - drawing the audience towards a picture of parenthood, unique to a mother, which would act as an asset for her. Conversely, working mothers are often vilified by the media (implicitly or explicitly) for 'neglecting' their perceived duties by having a career or working. Coverage of both women exists within an established discourse of women, motherhood, and politics which arguably, is a recognisable trope audiences would already be familiar with. Joshi and Goehrung (2020) found that the electorate, when considering limited time and resources, would often expect a female politician to choose between family and voters, while male politicians often benefit from emphasising parenthood, as it is assumed their familial obligations are outsourced, as social expectations often fall along gendered lines and towards women.

Klobuchar actively exploited the discourse of motherhood to show her suitability for political office, by taking the stereotype of the multi-tasker mother and reversing it to highlight skills traditionally associated with women, such as diplomacy, multitasking, and budgeting.



Something that women politicians have done historically, as Campbell (2015) cites Margaret Thatcher, who, despite her performance as a woman, not who represented other women, but who 'outwitted men', by referring to the role of wife and mother as a privilege, and idealising the role by generalising economic theory as a housewife knew all about balancing budgets. In the US in 2008, Sarah Palin used motherhood to build a feminist rhetoric around her campaign, describing the conservative movement as a 'mom awakening' and declaring 'mama grizzlies embody authentic feminism' (Gibson and Heyse 2013).

These patterns, whether represented through the women politicians themselves, or through the media, work to sustain gendered expectations around women politicians. Klobuchar's self-framing in this way was used to suggest that these qualities, often correlated with women, would be virtues in the presidency, using the established stereotypes to her advantage. The findings suggest that these examples from Warren and Klobuchar exist in a type of accepted/safe zone of feminine leadership ideals, and would not provoke fresh thinking or revolutionise gendered ideals around the presidency. However, this study shows more examples from women candidates, and a single reference to Biden's status as a single father, indicating that media portrayals remain highly feminised in their connotations, as it is motherhood, not parenthood or fatherhood, being drawn upon.

## **6.2. Intersectionality**

The following sections discuss the findings, which demonstrated discourses around sexuality as being part of a candidate's identity, which in the context of this research, specifically refers to Pete Buttigieg. There follows a section that discusses the notion of political 'firsts', a label bestowed by the media that highlights inclusion, but also differences in identities.

### **6.2.1      LGBTQ+ identity and media framing of a gay politician**

Much of the media coverage around Buttigieg included references to his sexuality, as it intersected with his lifestyle, marriage, children, political viability, and his military background, as mentioned previously. *Politico* published a lengthy opinion piece by Kruse (2019), analysing his candidacy, how his sexuality was perceived by voters, and questioning the potential impact this part of his identity would have on his chances of winning the election.

Beginning with a focus on Buttigieg's lifestyle, something to which heterosexual men are typically not exposed in media coverage, the *Politico* article (Kruse 2019) featured commentary about his spouse, as 'a man who teaches Montessori middle school and with whom he hopes to parent children', which asks voters if they can accept the totality of who he is, lifestyle and sexuality included. This was used to frame Buttigieg's relationship in a more typically feminine way, using associations of family and school, something often levelled towards women candidates to suggest their responsibilities lie within a home life and work as a barrier to participation in politics. This reiterates the findings of this study that heteronormative men are treated in a more focused and prominent way by the media, than other men and other minority candidates.

A further parallel was drawn, focusing on how his sexuality would translate into popularity and votes. The headline for the *Politico* article posed the question 'Are your neighbours ready for Mayor Pete?' (Kruse 2019). The headline is in reference to research conducted by Ipsos (2019), which investigated voter attitudes towards candidates, including a candidate's gender. They found that, when asked about a female president, 74% agreed they were comfortable with the prospect, while also believing their neighbours would be less accepting (33%). This refers to the polling phenomena, in which a citizen may publicly affirm support for a candidate, but privately hold a different view.

The Bradley effect loosely posits that, although voters supported a candidate of colour, they privately held racist views and voted alternatively (Payne 2010), and 'shy Tory' voters did not admit to supporting a party that had a social stigma attached to it (Strurgis et al 2017). In essence, the concept explains how people can use 'neighbours' as proxies for their own true opinions, and offers a cover for discrimination of any kind, including race, gender, and sexuality. The headline suggests Buttigieg's sexuality poses a similar barrier, like that of a candidate's gender or race, when running for president.

Further to this, in the same article, Buttigieg's campaign was characterised by a metaphor of 'shattering the glass closet' referring to the pioneering nature of his political success. This language is often employed when discussing women and the invisible barriers they face, which hinder promotion within society and connects the discourse surrounding Buttigieg to the discourse of women in politics.

This framing contrasts with the discussion around Buttigieg's masculinity, and how it intersects with the discourse of his military career and the questioning of his privilege and progress in the election from Klobuchar. There lies an implication that he has benefitted from male privilege within the election, something that still carries penalties according to different masculinities, including homosexuality (Connell 1995), but still serves to carry him beyond some of the barriers women would face. As Connell (1995) notes, patriarchal culture interprets gay men as lacking in masculinity, and suggests that queer theory and feminist theory share a perception that more conventional forms of hegemonic masculinity are connected to conceptions of power, organised for domination and resistant to change.

This research demonstrates that Buttigieg benefited in some respects from having characteristics of white male privilege and hegemonic masculinity, as shown in Chapter 5, around the challenge from Klobuchar who mentioned that he received more favourable media profiles and coverage than the women candidates and fundraising opportunities involving large donors.

This was covered by *Vox* (North 2019), who reported that Klobuchar was referring to the media profiles of past candidate Beto O'Rourke and Buttigieg, stating 'both generated breathless media coverage despite limited political résumés'. The women candidates had no such press to compare. It was also noted by *Politico* (Kruse 2019), *The Washington Post* (Zhou 2019) and *Fox News* (Marsh 2019) that Buttigieg campaigned with his husband and attracted wealthy donors, who connected with his identity as a gay politician. This points to political access, who has it, and how. It also exemplifies the benefit Buttigieg's masculinity afforded him in the election.

However, he was simultaneously disadvantaged by another discourse, operating in tandem, which portrayed his homosexual masculinity as a barrier in a similar way to how women's female gender is used against them: to exclude, diminish and differentiate them as political players, and preserve the biased systems and structures that hold the traditional, hegemonic male power. He was framed by the media as a pioneering leader, specifically due to his sexuality and often displayed a calm approach to debating challenges, as demonstrated by his reactions to Klobuchar, who repeatedly challenged him on her belief of a gendered double standard in the election. This mirrors the discourse and expectations around women politicians, who are often classified as 'firsts', and that a calm or composed reaction to a challenge could present as less masculine in terms of leadership traits, such as assertiveness and confidence. As Connell (1995) notes, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity and is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity.

Buttigieg represents a form of tension between queerness and hegemonic masculinity, in that the media were able to draw elements from both, sending conflicting messages about his status accordingly. Often, Buttigieg's gender performance contrasted with stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity and male leadership, which Butler (1990) maintains, can act as a barrier to overcoming the gender binaries within systems of patriarchy, and upholds the 'othering' of women and minority groups.

The media coverage represented a political identity for him that reinforced the established masculine ideals of leadership, and simultaneously positioned him outside of it, next to women and other minority groups who represent a different kind of leadership. This leadership and politics is associated with equality, but for Buttigieg to win the Party nomination, would also represent a significant change in the balance of power within the Party, which is ultimately a narrow reflection of society.

In summary, the discourse around Buttigieg's media coverage shows similarities to that of women in politics, and shows that he faced many barriers that discriminate in comparable ways. However, at times, it invites the audience to consider his candidacy as a male leader first, and a gay man second, granting him the positive associations that come with male leadership stereotypes.

### **6.2.2 Political firsts**

The findings revealed that Buttigieg's sexuality as a gay man intersected with his gender within the coverage, and acted as a discursive device to keep a minority group on the margins of politics. The media consistently referred to Buttigieg as 'openly gay', and over-lexicalisation was used by the media as a discursive strategy to emphasise his sexuality, as much was made of the fact that he would be the 'first openly gay president', if he won. The device is identified by the over-use of a particular lexis, a strategy often used to characterise minority groups (Fowler 2013). He was also referred to as the 'standard bearer' for diversity within his party by *The Washington Post* (Zhou 2019b). This frames him in terms of descriptive representation, implying that the rights and policies relating to that group could be improved within society through Buttigieg's presence in the election. Indeed, the media coverage offers his ability to win a mayoral election in the state of Indiana, where the Governor, Mike Pence, was promoting policies discriminating against LGBTQ+ people, as 'proof of his political mettle' (Marsh 2019, *Fox News*).

The coverage noted that Buttigieg won with '80% of the vote shortly after coming out in public for the first time' (Zhou 2019b, *The Washington Post*), and that this political win was 'easier said than done, after coming out as gay' (Kruse 2019, *Politico*). Buttigieg's political success is framed around his sexuality, and the discourse bears parallels to how descriptive representation plays into the political coverage of women, often framing them as novelty and 'othered' within politics (Ross 2017, Meeks 2013 and Verge and Pastor 2017). They are frequently framed as 'firsts' in election campaigns – for example, through Elizabeth Warren's response to being asked how she felt about being the 'oldest person ever inaugurated', in stating she 'would also be the youngest woman'. This statement offers a complex message, as she is being portrayed primarily based on her age, however by using her gender, she is announcing the importance of this criterion, as there has never been a woman president. The coverage of the all-female moderator panel was also framed as unique and pioneering ('took centre stage') (Behrmann 2019), 'marked contrast' and 'starring role' (Alemany 2019), and was credited with steering the agenda and questions of the debate towards areas and issues that affected women as a whole group.

As a concept, being a 'first' offers a unique appeal to voters to represent a certain point of view and representation of a group. This research offers insight into the Democratic Party nomination process of the US 2020 presidential election, of how the media used descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967) to characterise the candidates and moderators as symbolic, in order to create a sense of inclusion among readers and within minority groups in US politics.

### **6.3 Masculinity**

The sub-themes in this section have been identified as the military and veteran status, and its ability to act as a cue for voters to form inferences around a candidate's character. White male privilege was also identified, which highlights the inherent advantage awarded to men in politics, by the media, and when intersecting with ageism acts to minimise the damaging discourse around older candidates.

### **6.3.1 Veterans and the military**

The military has historically been associated with the presidency, with masculinity at the centre of it. Military service is often regarded in a positive light on a political candidate's resume, and can provide an influential source cue for voters to make inferences about candidates and vote accordingly (McDermott and Panagopoulos 2015 and McLaughlin, Geras and Rhinehart 2022). The strength of this advantage to a candidate's political identity may be declining, as in 2022, 18% of members of the House of Representatives had military experience, representing a steady decline from the 1970s in which 70% of members were veterans (DeSilver 2022). The higher number of veterans was possibly influenced by the *Selective Service Act*, which was in place from World War I, until it expired in 1973, and compelled every man who was drafted, to serve between 2- and 8-years military service (PBS.com 2001). However, McLaughlin, Geras and Rhinehart (2022) suggest candidates can still benefit from veteran status, as a cue to characteristics and competence around political issues, such as crime and foreign policy. Within this research, the media used the status to construct part of the political identity of both Gabbard and Buttigieg. Gabbard's composure whilst being challenged by other candidates was attributed to her status as a veteran, and framed her as having a unique and distinct sense of the real world, which was deemed lacking in other candidates. This was used, by the right-leaning media, to associate masculine and leadership traits, which contrasts her with the way the other women candidates were portrayed.

Buttigieg's military service was also portrayed as an asset across the media's political spectrum, by the *BBC*, *ABC News*, *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and *Newsmax*. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *The Washington Post* (Alemany 2020) quoted Buttigieg talking about a fellow soldier leaving his young child behind to go to war, and used his veteran status to invoke masculine stereotypes, but contrast them with empathy for the sacrifices these people make for their country. He also used it to mock Trump, whose macho persona he belittled, as *ABC News* (Jaffe, Peoples and Superville 2020) reported on the contrast between them as a candidate who had served in the military, to Trump, who allegedly was ineligible due to health reasons.

This draws upon the hypermasculine discourse around the military and political candidates, framing Buttigieg as a patriot due to his service. Furthermore, Buttigieg's veteran status was also often added as a descriptor to his political identity, which as McLaughlin, Geras and Rhinehart (2022) suggest, can act as a cue to associate patriotism and courage with him, which could give him an edge over his fellow candidates.

The representation of masculinity shown in the media coverage of Buttigieg, who was constructed as 'a 37-year-old openly gay military veteran from the Midwest' (ABC News, Jaffe, Peoples and Superville 2020), included much of the established traditional ideas around hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1995) regards the military as a masculine institution, built and sustained by a gender configuring of the internal division of labour, policies, power and recruitment and promotion. The preservation of this masculinity can be evidenced by the struggle and slow-paced change to LGBTQ+ people serving, as Godvin (2023) acknowledges, in 2010 it was against Department of Defence policy to openly identify as gay or lesbian, and transgender people weren't allowed to serve until 2016, and were disallowed again under the Trump administration until 2021. The media construction of Buttigieg's veteran life, was as complex as these policies, and played into his political campaign through his personal narrative, and also in media discourse. His masculinity presented an opportunity to challenge impressions around gender as heteronormative, which lies at the core of Butler's gender performative theory (1990), and is tied to established stereotypes and power structures in society. In essence, Buttigieg's gender performance of masculinity successfully *subverted* the traditional stereotypes associated with the concept, explicitly contrasting itself with examples of hegemonic masculinity and deriding them.

The media coverage acts to convey a gendered performance and an identity around a different kind of masculinity that places emphasis on other characteristics (intelligence and integrity), rather than strength or "manliness".



The findings show a distinction between the media portrayals of careers that are framed using masculinity to present a positive representation of the candidates (Buttigieg and Gabbard in the military), versus the way masculinity is used to construct negative representations of careers that are connected to femininity (Warren as a teacher and Harris as a lawyer). When women intrude on what is considered to be 'masculine' terrain, for example Harris and Warren (both of whom have had successful careers in law) they are framed in a way that devalues their knowledge, intelligence and qualified opinions. The exception is around the right-leaning media, who positively portrayed Gabbard and her experience in the military, possibly due to her aligning closer with their politics or adopting masculine characteristics (composure under attack); and the framing provided an opportunity for them to pitch her against other female candidates of greater prospects in the election.

The media emphasis on Buttigieg's veteran status resulted in a positive representation of his masculinity and leadership skills, as the *BBC* (Zurcher 2020a) noted 'he's an openly gay veteran of the Afghanistan War and a Rhode Scholar', creating a unique component to his campaign messaging. Although some coverage from right-leaning media questioned his alignment with normative portrayals of military masculinity, as *The Washington Times* (Tyrrell.Jr 2020) reported 'he got in and got out of the service by using a fast-track shortcut'. This diminishes his experience as a veteran and questions the association with his political identity, suggesting he was able to manipulate his military service to avoid danger. It implies cowardice and attempts to separate him from his status.

Despite this questioning, Buttigieg's representation, and the framing of Gabbard by the media, would indicate that the line in positive or negative coverage around careers and their subsequent wisdom is gendered, with positive associations belonging to heteronormative masculinity, and excluding feminine and other masculinities from these.

### **6.3.2 White male privilege**

The 2020 Democratic primary elections involved a diverse field of politicians, including an unprecedented six women (Perry and Yates 2021), but the discourse found within this study reflects the sustained double bind of problematic 'sameness versus difference', which emphasises the differences between genders, and questions if men and women should be treated the same (Jamieson 1995). Within politics, Jamieson (1995) argues that it is possible for the framing to work both ways, and that it may be used to the advantage of female candidates. As Ross (2017) notes when considering that women are different, the double bind frames women in ways connected to traditional roles, such as housewife or mother, and argues that women do politics differently and therefore complement men's approaches, and bring something qualitatively different to the political sphere. For example, as discussed previously in this chapter, the media invoked the discourse of motherhood and its unique power, something that is the opposite of submissive and weak, to describe Warren speaking about healthcare policy. This is further emphasised by *USA Today*, which offered a summary of Warren's departure from the election, after conceding to Sanders and Biden in March 2020. A gendered metaphor was used to describe her supposedly unique skill of 'threading the needle' (Kohn 2020), in explaining and clarifying, what Warren believed to be, the Trump administration's chaotic handling of the beginning of the pandemic. Sewing is often regarded as 'women's work', and may be considered condescending in association to Warren. It can be seen as a 'domestic duty' for women and was a key act in creating feminine virtues, such as thrift, practical creativity, and attention to appearance (McLean 2019 and Thompson 2022). However, in the context of Warren's ability to articulate her point, threading a needle requires considerable skill. This frames Warren in a distinctively feminine way - highlighting her absence in the election, and conflating it with the absence of women and the distinctive skills they can offer in politics. It also implies the remaining male candidates were less effective in articulating and communicating - an important skill when considering the purpose of the debate is to sway voter's opinions on the issue.

Conversely, advocating for equality and invoking the sameness/difference double bind, the discourse of women in politics intersected with age, when Warren was asked about comments from President Barack Obama, regarding his thoughts that women make better leaders, and 'old men' should make way for them. She would be the oldest president ever inaugurated and she replied that she would also be 'the youngest woman' (Stevens 2019). On the surface, this references the advanced ages of the candidates, while singling out Warren for her gender and invoking the double bind. However, it also draws attention to the lack of diversity in top levels of political power. Her comments demonstrate the differences in gendered ageism, which emphasises the dominance of patriarchal norms, and when combined with society's preoccupation with youth, results in a faster deterioration of status for women, rather than men (Ayalon 2018). Men dominate leadership positions, older men dominate politics and Warren was drawing attention to the barriers women face, including a double standard around aging. Jamieson (1995) also discusses the double bind of ageing and invisibility, in which women become less valued and present in society as they get older, and men are afforded the ability to age with dignity, wisdom, and gravitas. Warren's comment doubled as an indication of the dominance of men within politics, despite their age, *and* a reference to the lack of gender equality within the political sphere.

The coverage around the lack of diversity within the Democratic Party, revealed the discourse of white male privilege and its inherent connections to leadership and politics. *The New York Times* and *Politico* both described Joe Biden as looking 'presidential', despite months of verbal miscues and noted that these had done nothing to diminish his status as 'frontrunner', a narrative which perpetuated implicit disadvantages for other candidates and embeds white male privilege further. The title was used again to describe him by *The National Review* and by *Vox*, and as a 'constitutionalist' by *ABC News* (Karson 2020) for telling the moderators 'integrity needed to be restored to the presidency and he believes he is the best candidate for the job'.

As mentioned previously, the women candidates' past careers were used against them by the media, however Biden's political career was used to characterise his candidacy favourably and frame him as a winning choice for voters: 'No drama, a good statesman, a great first lady, a strong player on the world stage, Obama's wingman' (Korecki 2020, *Politico*), whilst *The National Review* (Nordlinger 2020b) also drew on his past as Vice President, by suggesting 'voters' opinions about Biden were written in cement that dried sometime in Obama's first term'. The reference to Biden's wife, Dr. Jill Biden as a 'great first lady' as a positive appeal is ironic, as no other partner was framed similarly in this study, and Buttigieg's husband and his career as a Montessori teacher was used by *Politico* (Kruse 2019) to subordinate Buttigieg's masculinity and appeal to voters. The praise and positioning of Biden within this discourse may be warranted, as he is a popular politician within party circles, however his emotional responses were portrayed differently to that of Warren's and Klobuchar's. *The New York Times* (Bruni 2020) reported 'Biden roared, unleashing his cranky side and producing comedy gold'. They noted he 'resurrected Angry Joe to save his candidacy', whilst acknowledging that it 'doesn't work all that well for his brand'. They followed by portraying him as simply wanting to be 'heard above the fray' and, to justify his aggression further, 'he was not wrong that the moderation was a mess'.

*The National Review* (Nordlinger 2020b) also noted the change in temperament, noting he 'decided he could get the strong finish that he wants (and really needs) by shouting as much as possible' and that he 'flashed some anger and more or less commanded everyone else to stop interrupting him'. This was viewed as creating some 'genuinely surprising and somewhat entertaining moments' and viewers would have seen him as 'fired up, feisty, and passionate'. This evidence is a direct comparison with the way the women candidates were portrayed for similar behaviour, and reactions to arguably more serious issues (as Warren challenged Sanders on his alleged comments of a woman never being able to become president, and her challenge to Bloomberg over misogynistic accusations to Klobuchar, highlighting the double standards she felt existed between Buttigieg and herself).

The discourse around Biden disadvantages other candidates from minority groups, and reinforces leadership stereotypes of white men who present a safer (Biden was also framed as the best candidate positioned to beat Trump) and better choice for voters.

There were also some examples found within the data, however, that attempted to subvert the hegemonic and toxic elements of masculinity, and exhibit an alternative dimension of the ideologies within the political sphere. For example, ageist discourse diminished the standing and implied presidential viability of Biden and Sanders in the media coverage of the debates (Bruni 2019, Nordlinger 2020b and Zurcher 2020b). Hegemonic masculinity is rooted in strong, virile young men, and Connell (1995) looks at other intersections of masculinity, such as race, class, and sexuality, but neglects to address age as a factor in masculine identity. Hegemonic masculinity stalls around middle age, and the masculinity of older men is often characterised by invisibility (Springer and Mouzon 2018) - and frequently seen as dependent and static in life (Spector-Mersel 2006). The discourse portrayed Biden as incompetent, due to his age - 'There is his advanced age, propensity for verbal stumbles' from the *BBC* (Zurcher 2020b), and Biden was portrayed as 'rambling and incoherent, giving rise to questions about his age' by *Vox* (Prokop et al 2019). Sanders was portrayed as ill-tempered and eccentric due to his age too, 'For an old coot, Bernie is amazingly crisp and disciplined' by *The National Review* (Hurt 2020). Both descriptions weakened their masculinity and therefore their capability to carry out the role of president. Ultimately, the discourse did not impact their campaigns, as they were the final two candidates for the Party nomination, with Biden successfully winning the Party nomination and presidency.

While the ageist discourse could be damaging, the influence of masculinity and its associations with leadership, particularly a role as important as the presidency, overruled this. Both Biden and Sanders may have benefitted from their familiarity with voters and established media personae, with references from his time as Vice President for Obama for Biden (Korecki 2020, *Politico*).

For Sanders, *Fox News* (Shapiro 2020) suggests he offers 'an anti-Constitution, anti-free market, intersectionality-based perspective, why water it down with insincerity? Sanders brags about the fact that his ideology has never changed. He's right'. With reputations as politicians with authenticity at the centre, they have sincere convictions underpinning their politics. This could also be viewed as evidence of the entrenched attitudes towards gender and leadership, as all candidates from minority groups had been unsuccessful, which suggests age, when considered in the context of white men, is not as much of a barrier as gender, sexuality, or race.

#### **6.4 The impact of political ideology on media representations of gender**

The research explored the possible link between a media outlet's political leaning and the way gender was portrayed within the coverage of the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election. This part of the study reflected the intention to investigate the researchers' assumptions that the evidence would reflect political attitudes from along the spectrum. For example, right-leaning media would support and display gendered ideals in line with conservative attitudes, and the left-leaning media would present a more supportive narrative for advancing gender equality and women's rights. The results did not reflect expectations, as there were many discourses constructed around gendered stereotypes across all media: tropes and narratives that negatively portrayed candidates and their supposed political feasibility.

Conventional Left - Centre - Right political leanings or ideologies, appeared to have little, or no, substantial influence in determining the construction of discourses and messages. One side did not seem to counteract, challenge, or question the other: instead, all media outlets generally participated in creating and contributing to existing problematic gendered discourses. This implies that the existing discourses (and bias) around gender are so deeply entrenched in the US media – and, by extension, US society – with a scope that reaches deep into the production and consumption of media messaging, and that is widespread, regardless of individual outlets' partisan position on politics.

This suggests they are likely to continue to be generated and disseminated, and to function as barriers to minority groups within electoral politics. This is problematic, as the media fall along expected lines of political ideologies, but the left-leaning media were found to use language, stereotypes and narratives, which operate against gender equality. This makes the discourses less contested and more hegemonic in character, which reinforces the political landscape as dominated by men. As Fairclough (2010 p.8) states, discourse focuses on the function of ideologies, which are operationalised in ways of interacting, acting or of 'being' through identities, that contribute to establishing or sustaining unequal relations of power. This is not to say that one side of the media is more prone to this than the other, simply more instances of gendered discourse were found within the left-leaning articles than was expected. This could be due to the corpus of texts containing more articles from the left-leaning media, due to the increased interest around reporting from the debates, as they would be more aligned with Democratic Party politics and the election. It could also be that the left-leaning media have more interest in providing more in-depth commentary and opinion around gendered issues, and therefore more material was generated naturally.

For all these commonalities, the researcher observed some finer points of difference between the right-leaning and left-leaning media, in the ways these discourses were constructed. One distinction was that the former tended to use more humour and satire to construct their discourses. Although political comedy has evolved to become an integral part of political communication across the world and across different parties (Jennings, Bramlett and Warner 2018), in the US, the conservative movement also uses humour as part of its complex array of rhetoric and strategies to engage their audience and belittle their rivals/enemies (Bauer 2023). Within this research, some of the articles found in right-leaning publications showed elements of comedy in their structure and writing - for example, headlines such as 'if you didn't watch the debate last night, you were the winner.' from the *National Review* (Geraghty 2019b); 'Dems working hard to be the boring party' from *Newsmax* (Fitzgerald 2019), and 'Joe Biden is 'kind of Mr. Magoo-ing' his way through 2020 debates' from *Fox News* (Axelrod 2019).

One article also deployed comparisons between Bernie Sanders and the US comedian Larry David (Dowd 2020b) to associate him with a character known for his cantankerous, sardonic humour. Political comedy focuses on catching and sustaining the attention spans of the audience, familiarising them with policy and encouraging their support for elites (Webber et al 2020). In this research, the media's use of humour places the messages within a cultural context and creates an element of community with their audiences.

Further nuance was observed by the researcher in that, despite all media outlets within this research reporting facts from the debates and both sides publishing opinion pieces, the length of these differed markedly, and were generally much longer and more in-depth in Left outlets. The left-leaning media were found to present a more detailed analysis of the candidates, their campaigns, political identities and policies, than those on the Right - offering views and discussions towards their political viability within the election. Again, this could be attributed towards the alignment of the politics and perspective around the nomination of a candidate for the election. For example, the discourse of ageism and Biden was found within several articles, across the media. Dougherty (2020b) wrote for *The National Review* suggesting his 'diminished capacity needed to be discussed' in 556 words. Bruni (2019) wrote an article generally in defence of Biden's age, for *The New York Times* which was 1096 words. A further example can be seen in the coverage around Warren challenging Sanders over the alleged comments of the possibility of a woman president. Harasanyi (2020a) wrote a particularly damaging take on Warren, and the notion of lying/truthfulness for *The National Review*, which was presented in 408 words. The same issue was covered by Gupta and Hunter (2020), for *The New York Times* and produced 827 words around the risk Warren took in drawing herself into the challenge with Sanders and highlighting the issue. These examples, all opinion pieces, suggest that length is not necessarily indicative of the impact of discourse, and may be down to other factors, such as readership preferences, editorial decisions, and the types of publications. This is simply reflective of the observations made, by the researcher when carrying out the study.



Ultimately, these discursive practices, the use of comedy/satire, and the length of articles, acted to enhance connectedness with individual outlets' specific audiences, responding to filter bubbles and filling echo-chambers for readers, who selected political coverage reflecting their beliefs and opinions. Fairclough (2010) argues that media texts specialise in creating meanings between texts, and more abstractly, between different social practices and domains. Ultimately, media content is not the only place bias lives, as the nature of discourse existing within society suggests that some onus must be placed on the eye of the beholder, and how the audience receives, processes, and internalises messages around gender (Iyengar and Hahn 2009, Edgerly 2015).

Also, the business model of the US media must be considered to play a role in agendas and editorial decisions, as sensationalist news performs best within the metrics most outlets are measured on – subscriber numbers, page views and ratings, rather than actual content (Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig 2003, Bednarek and Caple 2017). Headlines and articles that feature gender, gendered stereotypes, or tropes, front and centre - or indirectly woven within - may have been designed to perform to these, rather than adopting the more balanced and unbiased stance, which advances gender equality. This research shows how extensive and widespread gendered discourses are within the structure of the media; how deep the echo chambers are; and that there is an argument for consumers to be more discerning and aware of bias within their media consumption.

The findings of this thesis may not necessarily map entirely to expectations or to what many may have expected regarding the 2020 US election. The right-leaning media were predictable in their discourses around both age (albeit, conveniently targeting what for them, was the political 'opposition' - principally Biden and Sanders) and gender, with misogynistic commentary used to depoliticise the women politicians and diminish their presence in the election in ways that are well-established (e.g. by focusing on their appearances, voices, emotions and implied electability).

However, there was also evidence of a more gracious and supportive approach to the women politicians at times, such as highlighting their achievements and connecting the barriers they face to their gender. Unison across the media appeared in the form of Bloomberg's debate performances and the allegations of a hostile workplace for women, coupled with a political identity that placed wealth above integrity.

As expected, it was more the liberal media that highlighted the barriers women faced in politics, offering fuller explanations to widen the discussion and normalise minority groups within the political system. However, they also offered many examples of narratives that contributed towards doubling down on more damaging discourses - specifically in terms of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991).

Ageism surfaced in metaphors used by the left-leaning press to describe Biden, both from *The New York Times*, that first describes him as an old car in need of repair, but continuing despite the aged problems:

"He still can't speak in a straight line, instead zigging and zagging: If he were a car, his tires would constantly scrape the curb and his hubcaps would probably pop off. But they stayed on this time around". (Bruni 2019, *The New York Times*).

The second, draws a parallel to a school play, suggesting the (debate) performance was amateur, undermining a politician with decades of experience and a former Vice President:

"You're rooting for the players, you're grading on a curve, and you're grateful they remember their lines. But you also know it isn't Broadway". (Stephens 2020, *The New York Times Opinion* 2020).

At best, these are endearing, and end with a positive note, however they draw attention to the negative aspects of aging, by implying Biden must make extra effort to remain relevant and competent in the role of President.

Following the intersectional media representation of the candidates, an overarching finding related to the gendered way the media portrayed Pete Buttigieg. A pioneering presidential campaigner, as the first gay man to run for this office, his masculinity, presence, position in the election, and electability, were consistently questioned and debated. The most significant article around Buttigieg and his sexuality was produced by *Politico* (Kruse 2019), with the headline posing the question 'Are your neighbours ready for Mayor Pete?' as previously discussed. The pioneering nature of his candidacy was centred in much of the discourse around him, and served to align him to the discourse around women in politics and the barriers they face. For example, as the article reported a voter's concern around the issue: 'Like, are we really ready for a gay president? Like, were we ready for a woman? I thought we were, but clearly, we weren't, you know?' (Kruse 2019). Within this research, the discourse of his sexuality was more prevalent throughout coverage produced by the left-leaning media. There is a duality in doing so, which raises awareness of him, of barriers minority candidates face, but also plays a role in reinforcing ideals, and highlighting the questions and concerns around these candidates.

In terms of the media outlets in the centre of the political ideology spectrum, there was an absence of evidence of bias in how they portrayed gender, which itself implies impartiality. When discussing the debates and candidates, they did not demonstrate the same volume of gendered language, focusing on more factual, neutral reporting with some smaller instances, which were revealed through CDA: noticeably regarding Biden's age, and how Warren and Klobuchar showed their frustrations and anger on the debate stage.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter contains a discussion on the key themes identified in this study. The first key theme of Feminine Identity included an examination of the way the women politicians were subjected to damaging narratives and stereotypes around the way emotion and the notion of truthfulness were portrayed. Their past careers, appearance, and the way they sound were also used to undermine their presence in the debates and detract from their politics.

The theme of motherhood was portrayed as an asset unique to women, but the construction of this representation contained assumptions that implied women, not fathers, were accountable for most domestic responsibilities, and highlighted their position outside of the masculine norms around leadership and politics. The theme of Intersectionality is covered through a discussion around the way the media portrayed Buttigieg, his campaign and his sexuality. A further section looked at the way political 'firsts' was used as a label by the media to denote and emphasise gendered and intersectional differences in candidates. It can create a sense of inclusion for minority groups, but can also highlight uniqueness, which can seem a risk for voters and does little to normalise diversity within politics. The woman-only moderator panel was a further example of this concept.

Under the theme of Masculinity, military experience was represented as an asset for both female and male candidates, and was used to highlight different masculine traits, which can be beneficial, regardless of the candidate's gender, when associated with leadership norms. For example, the dominance of hegemonic masculinity in politics was noted by the media, suggesting Gabbard's veteran status meant she was emotionally composed when 'under attack' from the other women candidates during the debates, aligning her with masculine leadership norms. Buttigieg's military service was also portrayed as an asset, which worked to minimise his homosexual masculinity, which typically, would have subordinated and marginalised him. Further discussion on masculinity highlighted white male privilege, and the inherent advantage it awards men in politics, specifically Bloomberg, Sanders and Biden, who benefitted from gendered associations with the concept to advance in the election, despite negative media coverage. Positive media coverage, which countered damaging narratives such as ageism, truthfulness for Sanders and framed Biden as 'presidential', was found in this study. Bloomberg's mere presence and ability to join the race and launch a costly campaign in the later stages, also highlighted the notion that these men have an advantage over minority candidates.

The final section of this chapter looked at how the political ideological spectrum plays into the production of damaging gendered stereotypes, tropes and narratives, which were found within this research. This indicates that the political leaning has no real direct influence on the construction and dissemination of these within reporting.

The next chapter concludes the research and summarises the key findings. It also demonstrates the contribution to knowledge, and outlines research limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

This thesis has demonstrated how mainstream US media coverage of the TV debates for the 2020 Democratic Party nomination routinely promoted discourses that acted to diminish women's participation in politics – while also questioning the masculinity and fitness for office, of one of the male presidential candidates based on his homosexuality. The framing of women as emotional and angry, the focus on their appearance and the way they sounded, along with the implications that they are more prone to being untruthful, contributed to positioning them as inferior and divergent from prescribed hegemonic norms. This research strongly supports previous studies that have demonstrated the existence of an embedded norm in US presidential politics that gives preference to white heterosexual men, with the media producing discourses that uphold and nurture patriarchal and heteronormative structures of power that entrench the status quo. The key findings from this research are as follows:

- Women politicians are subjected to gendered discourses, which diminish their presence, campaigns and viability within US politics.
- This research also revealed intersectional barriers for candidates, in terms of age and sexuality (Crenshaw 1991).
- This research confirms that the norms in US presidential politics are centred around masculinity, particularly, white heteronormative men, and highlights the bias and discrimination minority groups face when engaging in the political sphere.

- The discursive approaches used by the media in covering the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election were not driven by partisanship, and evidence was found from across the political spectrum of gendered tropes, narratives and stereotypes that perpetuated discourse harmful to candidates.

The research was designed around the aim of highlighting gender equality within media and politics in the 2020 US election, and three objectives were formulated, in order to fully investigate the bias and discrimination faced by women and minority candidates. For the research methodology, CDA was chosen and used as a framework for analysing the media coverage collected, which addressed the first objective:

***To identify and evaluate critically, the construction of gender discourses in the media coverage of the Democratic debates during the 2020 US election (Fairclough 2010).***

Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach to CDA (2010) was very effective in identifying how the media construct discourses that contain gendered stereotypes, narratives and tropes. It follows four stages, as covered in the methodology in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.1). In doing so, the researcher selected a broad range of media outlets that produced ample coverage of the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for data collection. These were then coded, and themes relating to gender emerged, which were collated and informed the remaining steps. This process enabled the researcher to meet the objective, and produced substantial, and encouraging, findings for further analysis, in order to meet the second objective:

***To analyse critically, how gendered the media coverage arising from the Democratic debates was and identify key themes relating to theories selected for this research. double bind (Jamieson 1995), symbolic annihilation (Tuchman 1978) and gendered performance (Butler 2002) and masculinities (Connell 1995)***

The following sections offer conclusions drawn from the key research findings, which are summarised earlier in this section, as: women in politics, intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), masculinity and US presidential politics, and how the theories selected for this study apply to them. Following these sections, is the conclusion around the media's political ideology, and the bearing this had on the portrayal of gender, which meets the third objective:

***To investigate critically, the media landscape in the US, their political ideologies and how they correlate with aspects of gender in US politics.***

Finally, the contributions to knowledge and research limitations are laid out, suggestions for future research are made, and the potential impact of the study is discussed.

## **7.1 Women in politics**

The research demonstrates that the US media's representations of gender reinforce gendered stereotypes and tropes, which aid systems and structures of power within US politics, thus hindering the advancement of women candidates - and gender equality itself. This, in itself, may not be revelatory, as similar findings from past research have also produced strong evidence of gendered discrimination in mediated politics. Most recently, the immediately preceding (2016) US presidential election provided a compelling example. The impact of Hillary Clinton's gender on her campaign and media coverage has been extensively investigated, with Harp (2019), Sanghvi (2019), and Conroy, Martin and Nadler (2020) finding evidence of discrimination and bias that diminished her political viability. In a similar vein, this research found evidence of gendered discrimination through media discourses portraying women candidates as overly emotional; placing disproportionate focus on their appearance; utilising their past careers to mock and minimise their debating skills; and ridiculing their voices and oratory.

The media used these characterisations, opinions and projected bias, through the production of journalism, to construct discourses that diminished and devalued their presence within the election, while reinforcing gendered ideals around (male) political leadership. They play a powerful role in perpetuating influential discourses that may shape a society's values and behaviours. Such portrayals of women work to sustain patriarchal power structures, entrench inequality in society and are reflected in the ways policies are shaped, and governments led. Although it is difficult to measure the impact of such media coverage on women's political campaigns, the approach to reporting the salient points of the primary Democratic Party nomination debates was undoubtedly gender-biased, and relied on older, but very familiar, beliefs and ideals. This research shows the portrayal of women candidates in a largely negative light, simply on account of their gender.

A further layer to this finding was found in the form of some gendered stereotypes being subverted by the media, and by the candidates, in order to present a positive impression of gender that was unique to the women. Motherhood and Warren's defeat in the final stages were defined by the media by portraying gendered stereotypes in an unexpected way - changing the message usually associated with them. From *Politico* (Wood 2020) framing Warren's response about healthcare policy, to her status as a mother, using her "maternal energy" to authenticate her emotion and demonstrate the power of her empathy. Klobuchar utilised the stereotype of a busy mother to her advantage claiming she "was really good at doing two things at once – I'm a mom" (Rodriguez 2019, *ABC News*).

The comment was reported to suggest she could manage both her role in Trump's impeachment trial and her campaign for the party nomination. This shows how stereotypes perform ideological work when portrayed in a positive or negative light; and as Czopp, Kay and Cheryan (2015) suggest, their complimentary nature contributes to their persistence, and can be disruptive to interpersonal group relations, which can serve to justify inequality. They also suggest that for members of stereotyped groups, emphasising dimensions of that which their group typically excels at, can be attributed to a compensatory coping strategy, in response to stigmatisation in society.



This could be possible when considering the cultural context of this research, because, as shown, women are subjected to discrimination due to gendered assumptions and the opportunity to challenge these is rare. The examples in this research were used by the media to convey empathy, emphasise a response (Warren) and efficiency in a demanding political role (Klobuchar). All typically female traits. As Margaret Thatcher knew, "if you want something said, ask a man, if you want something done, ask a woman", from her 1965 speech to the National Union of Townswomen's Guilds conference (Hutchings 2013). Femininity is used to depoliticise women, but in the context of this study, these can be viewed as small, but significant, steps towards contesting, if not dismantling, gender discrimination in media coverage, as there were far more examples of damaging narratives. The topic of motherhood and its influence on the electorate, positively or negatively, would benefit from further research around media tropes as debatably, matriarchal societies are rare, so the notion that motherhood would advance women in politics could be something of a double-edged sword.

Certainly, the women candidates had visibility and equity in media coverage, yet, in terms of gender, it was biased, discriminatory and the framing and messaging was actively obstructive to their campaigns. Women were denied a fair and equal chance at participating in the nomination process, with the media making a key effort to maintain the political status quo.

## **7.2 Intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991)**

The scope of intersectionality reaches across many dimensions of identity that overlap and interact with gender to include race, sexuality, class, nation, and other axes of power (Crenshaw 1998 and Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013). This research builds on evidence from previous studies within the nexus of gender, politics, and media, by further demonstrating how gendered representations can prove to be even more stigmatising and disempowering for politicians whose gender identities intersect with aspects of age, race and sexuality, thereby compounding the access and advancement inequalities they experience in politics (Marron 2020; Soto-Vásquez & Gonzalez 2022 and Nee 2022).

Examples of ageism were found, which were used to question Biden's and Sanders' abilities to carry out the role of president. These intersected with homogenous masculinity, a characteristic that acted to counter negative discourse around their ages enough to ensure the final two candidates were both white heteronormative men in their 70s. Although the field of candidates was diverse, their race did not feature in the corpus of texts, due to many minority candidates ending their campaigns early in the data collection. Kamala Harris ended her campaign in December, citing financial reasons, and Andrew Yang and Cory Booker ended their campaigns in January, after failing to qualify for the December debate (Aljazeera 2020). For Harris, her campaign began with promise: it had finance, national organisation and a candidate whose background reflected the Party, however the common refrain that she was a "cop", was unpopular with the left-wing of the party, and she failed to capitalise on momentum built during the earlier debates (Zurcher 2019). Her letter to supporters cited finances: "I'm not a billionaire, I can't fund my own campaign" and the path to the nomination became too narrow (Merica 2019). Without doubt, the monied environment of American politics plays a role in the stagnated candidate norms that promote white male politicians, as 44 out of 45 presidents have shown, with Barack Obama being the single exception (Tan 2020). The qualifying rules and structure of primaries may play a role too, albeit ultimately connected to campaign finances. To qualify for a debate, candidates must either break 1% in three nationally-recognised polls or have 65,000 unique campaign donors, with at least 200 donors in 20 states (Montellaro 2019). Both paths require campaigning, and therefore financing, in order to qualify, as even the best messaging can't be heard without money to fund adverts, events and staff. Donations, large or small, can be subjected to bias and discrimination factors when choosing among candidates, suggesting the overriding preference for a winning candidate is a white male, not a black man or a woman. This would be an interesting area for future research to investigate if campaign donations are reflective of demographics or influenced by intersectional factors such as gender, race or sexuality.

However, despite the lack of diversity within the field of candidates remaining from November 2019, the importance of race within the framework of intersectionality must be recognised, and the narrowing of the field early in data collection is reflective of barriers these candidates faced in running and sustaining their political campaigns. Indeed, Crenshaw's (1991) influential work on the issue focused on exploring the race and gender dimensions of violence against women of colour, which emphasises the importance of race as an identity category that intersects with gender to shape experiences within the political sphere.

The findings highlight the insight and progress an intersectional lens can offer when researching politics, gender, and the media. This becomes particularly apparent when looking at Buttigieg's campaign as a gay politician and the media coverage around him. The analysis found he was subjected to gendered stereotypes, projected onto both male and female politicians, with some media coverage conflating his sexuality with his progress in the race – while simultaneously questioning his appeal and viability as a presidential candidate. This provided some insight into the challenges LGBTQ+ candidates face within US politics, and the actual disparity between supporting a gay candidate through narratives and discourse, and the true appeal to voters, who hold the power to advance their campaigns to the next stage.

As a candidate, Buttigieg represents a unique finding within this research, a "hybrid masculinity" (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). His political identity had the implicit advantages of hegemonic masculinity, and the subordinate masculinity of gay men. Bridges and Pascoe (2014) suggest that dominant masculinities may appropriate elements from subordinate masculinities, in order to maintain and conceal their power, thus creating a hybrid. Media representations of Buttigieg commented on the pioneering nature of his campaign – ascribed solely to his sexuality – and also simultaneously portrayed him as a naval veteran and the breadwinner in his marriage to a Montessori teacher, with his hegemonic masculinity being foregrounded by Klobuchar, in her efforts to highlight the bias women faced within politics.

When considering Buttigieg through an intersectional lens, this research revealed that his sexuality was used by the media to invoke discourses that positioned him within stereotypes and damaging narratives - something akin to the women candidates' experiences of media coverage and Jamieson's double binds (1995). However, Buttigieg's "hybrid masculinity" suggests political candidates may be able to shape their campaigns and public personas in ways that minimise discrimination and bias towards intersectional factors, such as sexuality. The risk that this strategy carries is a possible compromise in the ability to connect with minority groups, if these groups detect a deliberate effort to underplay intersectional factors that matter to them, in terms of representation and their motivation to vote.

These findings illustrate the pervasive barriers to participation that apply to women, and that also take the form of some less explicit and measurable hurdles for other minority groups. This indicates gender discrimination and bias does not apply to women or men, as single homogenous groups, in that individuals' sexuality and age were also shown to impact their political viability - suggesting that a greater level of discrimination is experienced by (for example) older and/or LGBTQ+ candidates, racial minorities, and others exposed to intersectional inequalities.

### **7.3 Masculinity and the US presidency**

This research confirms that the norms in US presidential politics are centred around masculinity, particularly white heteronormative men, and highlights the bias and discrimination that minority groups face when engaging in the political sphere. This was evident through the military discourse found in the media coverage, which used veteran status to act as a cue for masculine leadership norms with both Buttigieg and Gabbard. In the example of Gabbard, it was drawn upon to suggest she was able to remain composed when coming "under attack" from other women candidates during the debate (Gingrich 2019, *Newsmax*).

For Buttigieg, it formed a key element of his political identity for the media, which enabled them to use it to both question his homosexual masculinity (Tyrrell.Jr. 2020, *The Washington Times*) and emphasise his white male privilege (Alemany 2020, *The Washington Post* and Jaffe, Peoples and Superville 2020, *ABC News*). This research demonstrates that the connection between the military and masculinity is a discursive tactic the media can use to portray political candidates in a positive nature, due to its associations with masculinity and leadership, which in turn, perpetuates discourses that diminish minority groups.

Whilst the connection between the military and masculinity was a significant finding, the dominant pattern of masculinity that was revealed within this study was white, heteronormative masculinity. This was in some part achieved through the media coverage of the TV debates, which afforded white male politicians preferential narratives drawing on established discourses and social norms that favour them in US politics. This arguably enhanced Buttigieg's "hybrid masculinity", along with his veteran status, but was also evident throughout coverage of Sanders and Biden, which intersected with their age. Both politicians were subjected to ageist discourse from the media, however they were able to remain in the race, forming the final two candidates. They benefitted from coverage that suggested Biden was "presidential" (Bruni 2019, *The New York Times*) and a "frontrunner" (Lizza 2020b, *Politico*), whilst Sanders was described as "amazingly crisp and disciplined for an old coot" (Hurt 2020, *The National Review*). Ageist discourse, which ordinarily could have been damaging, was countered with language aligning these candidates with leadership norms associated with white heteronormative masculinity. Further to this, Bloomberg's ability to enter the nomination race, and qualify for debates during the later stages, could be attributed to his white male privilege. Media coverage around his debate performances, particularly the challenges from Warren, highlighted his unsuitability as a political candidate. His campaign stalled at this point, however his mere presence in the race after minority candidates, such as Kamala Harris and Cory Booker, had to end their campaigns, due to such factors as finances, suggests he benefitted from his wealth and masculinity, and the privilege these bought him.

The discourses around masculinity found in this study highlight discrimination against women in politics and intersectional barriers, which hinder diversity and slow the advancement for gender equality in US politics. These show a preference towards white heteronormative male politicians in US politics exists within the media. This suggests, as Fairclough (2010) states, that discourse is ideological, and contributes to sustaining these relations of power and domination. No media outlets made significant challenges to the hegemonic norms around gender, which resulted in preserving, advancing, and reinforcing harmful stereotypes, tropes, and attitudes. Through the media discourse of masculinity, the hegemonic nature of these were strengthened, and women and other minority candidates were subjected to the well-documented bias and discrimination, derived from their gender and identities.

#### **7.4 Gender inequality in the media coverage of the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election**

Fairclough (2010) notes that one thing that makes gender equality difficult to tackle is different representations. This is true of the issue between the two primary political parties in the US, and has contributed to a polarisation of opinions and beliefs in society. Dimock and Wike (2020) found 90% of supporters, from each side, worried that a victory by the other side would lead to “lasting harm” to the United States, and that their concerns were about more than politics: they were about core American values. Gendered attitudes and beliefs run deep in society, as demonstrated through the numerous intertextual media allusions to Hillary Clinton’s unsuccessful 2016 campaign, referring to the alleged discrimination and bias she faced as a woman. While this highlights the discrimination she faced as a woman candidate (her politics aside), the flow of gendered media representations, combined with her loss for the Democratic Party, undoubtedly enabled comparisons, and continued to be drawn by the media. This type of media representation invites voters to consider her loss, and may influence perceptions of women candidates and the possibility of supporting one in the 2020 election. This also lends a historical depth to the framing of the candidates in relation to the past and provides a process of linking the past to the present.

In terms of modality of the media coverage, there is much speculation regarding a potential "first" woman or gay president that projected into the future, with modal expressions from the left- and centre-leaning media directing the reader towards an election scenario in which women were represented more equally. For example: the group of women moderators were able to "set the agenda", as "the priorities are different" when men were absent from the role, and the journalist used the pronoun "we", to describe the collective benefit for women of the debate being steered towards politics focused primarily on them (Plank, cited by Alemany 2019, *Washington Post*). After Warren's defeat, the left-leaning media described the loss in terms of representation, and again, directed the reader to consider the ramifications: "I feel like Warren is the candidate we needed on this stage and the leader we need in this moment and we, as a Party, blew it by not nominating her" (Kohn 2020, *USA Today* (C)). Again, the use of "we" was employed as a modal expression to project the journalist's sense of loss, and by extension, the readers and the Democratic Party voters. Connected to the notion of "firsts", and the reporting around Buttigieg and his candidacy, the article by Kruse (2019, *Politico*) contains the placement of modal expressions firstly, in the headline "Are your neighbours ready for Mayor Pete?", by asking the reader to consider the possibility of a gay president. Although the phrase alludes to reservations voters may have had around such a candidate becoming president, the modality within the article remains pointed towards the future and one of a more diverse political sphere. The journalist writes about "wealthy gay supporters, who were eager to back a figure who could, they believe, crack or outright shatter the glass closet" (Kruse 2019, *Politico*). Shattering the glass closet is to break a barrier around part of his identity that invites bias and discrimination' the modality of pushing through to win the nomination (or even to simply advance within politics) moves the reader towards a changed political landscape, with more diversity and equality for minorities. Modality within the media texts in this research represents the ideology of the left-leaning press, one which generally advocates for gender equality, and by extension, the readers who subscribe to similar politics, beliefs and social ideals.

As Fairclough (2010) suggests, the use of modality by the media helps the social wrong (gender inequality) go from "is", to "could be" (gender equality) - indicating an openness to change initiated by social agents, such as politicians (in their representation and actions) and the media (in their reporting and discourse).

## **7.5 Media, gender, and the impact of political ideology**

The political leaning of the media outlets selected for this study were investigated, in order to ascertain if there were any patterns or connections between gendered discourses and political ideology. This section seeks to address the second research objective: To investigate, critically, the media landscape in the US, their political ideologies and how they correlate with aspects of gender in US politics. To answer this, the third research question asks: How does the political ideology of a media outlet play a role in the way gender is portrayed in the coverage of an election?

This research examined how a sample of media outlets, balanced across the US political spectrum, portrayed gender through coverage of the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 presidential election. It was determined that conventional Left-Centre-Right political leanings or ideologies appeared to have little, or no, substantial influence in the construction of gendered discourses and media messages. One side did not seem to oppose, counteract, challenge, or question the other: instead, all media outlets generally participated in creating and contributing to existing gendered discourses.

These findings did not fully align with the researchers' pre-assumptions regarding media agendas, or what others may think about their media diet. The left-leaning media were assumed, by the researcher, to support and advocate for gender equality within politics, which would align with broad liberal political views, and this was found to be true in most of the texts used for this study. However, bias towards gender did filter through and was revealed through CDA analysis.



Ultimately, this was more than anticipated by the researcher, but was small, in comparison to findings of this ilk from the right-leaning media, which largely fell within expectations of aligning with conservative political views. There remains a distinct binary between the right and left ideologies within media and this was a significant finding of this study.

Considering the historical treatment of women and other minority groups, along with the research and interest around representation and the portrayal of gender within politics, the media continues to use gender as a tool to disadvantage minority groups and fortify male dominance within the US political system, specifically, white, heterosexual males. However, this area was not central to this research and forms a question, rather than answering one. A fuller study could look at actual frequencies and variations within the media and the different stereotypes to further breakdown these details.

## **7.6 Contribution to knowledge**

This research sits at the intersection of gender studies, media studies and political communication, and aims to advance existing literature and theories that highlight gender and intersectional inequalities as issues in US and wider western societies. Miles (2017) advocates that one of the most important elements in research is to structure a study around the development of a research gap that forms the primary basis of the investigation of any problem, phenomena, or scientific question. The originality of this research comes from the gaps identified within the existing literature, and as such, the key contributions are:

- A gap identified for this study was around the concept of diversity within a group of candidates as a case study. The key contribution from this is around women politicians who varied their approach to campaigning and men who represented a variety of masculinities.

- Following the first point, a population gap was recognised, such that female and male politicians have been well-researched, however, drawing again on the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013), this research found that LGBTQ+ people were not adequately represented in the literature.
- The context of this research was identified as a further empirical gap. The context of the Democratic Party debates for the nomination for the US presidential election 2020, provided a group, rather than a singular candidate, for analysis of their genders, their media portrayals, and the way these intersect with other aspects of identity.
- A gap in knowledge was identified around the examination of a media outlet's political ideology and its potential impact on the portrayal of gender in electoral politics. This study contributes to the field by drawing a wide sample from across the left-centre-right spectrum, and finding evidence of harmful gendered discourses within both right-leaning and left-leaning media.

As shown in the review of literature in Chapter 3, much research exists on gender in politics (Byerly and Ross 2006, Ross 2013, Campus 2013, Smith 2020), and research exists that investigates gender within the 2016 US election (Harp 2019, Paxton, Heughs and Barnes 2018). Many contemporary studies analysed the media coverage of Hillary Clinton, in terms of her gender and the impact this had on her campaigns (Harp 2019, Sanghvi 2019, and Conroy, Martin and Nadler 2020), and the media coverage of Donald Trump was investigated in regards to the portrayal of his masculinity (Johnson 2017, Smironova 2018 and Zucher, Weis and Richman 2019). These themes shaped the underpinning design of this research and influenced its structure. This study adds to the current corpus of literature by exploring the debates held for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election and the resulting media coverage, from a gender perspective.

Historically, within the field of political science, the gendered portrayal of women politicians in the media has been investigated, highlighting UK politics (Mavin, Bryans and Cunningham 2010, Ross 2016, McKay 2020) and in the US, the 2008 election, which featured candidacies from Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin (Carlin and Winfrey 2009). The media representation of women as heads-of-state and government across the globe has also been researched (Verge and Pastor 2017 and Thomas et al 2020).

Investigations of masculinity and politics by Murray (2021) looked at the context of Brexit and Smith (2021) looked at UK male politicians. In the US, masculinity has been studied from the presidency of George W. Bush, by Coe et al., (2007) to that of Barack Obama (Cannen 2013), whilst Trump and his 2016 campaign provided much interest in the area from Smirnova (2018) and Dignam (2019). The 2016 US election was a key catalyst for this research, as the candidates and their campaigns illustrated a contemporary case study of unprecedented politics. Gender and media proved to be fruitful subjects, producing literature centred around the media portrayal of both candidates (Dittmar 2016, Sangvhi 2018 and Paxton and Hugues 2018), as Trump's masculinity provided an excellent case study for investigation (Kray, Carroll and Mandel 2018, Harp 2019, Harmer, Savigny and Siow 2020). This literature was influential in the design of this study and gaps were identified, which are discussed further in this section. There are, of course, correlations between past research and this study, which were considered when developing the structure.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the gap identified for this study was around a group of diverse candidates as a case study, rather than a singular candidate. This increased the complexity of the study, as women and men are not a homogenous group, but the diversity of candidates enhanced the scope of the research and maximised the application of the theory. This research included women candidates who varied their campaigns and their approach to the debates, and men who represented a varied example of masculinities. Gender bias was found throughout the media coverage, with the differences in candidates enhancing the analysis, and enriching the findings and impact of this study.

A further gap, mentioned as the second point, was identified during the initial stages of this study, around the notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) within the context of a larger group of candidates at the primary stages. As the election progressed and the media coverage developed, the importance of age, race and sexuality became more explicit within the discourse and shaped the research accordingly. The most prominent example of this concept was Pete Buttigieg, who has inspired some very recent examinations into his 2020 campaign, mostly about his sexuality and how it intersected with his religion as a Christian (Magni and Reynolds 2023, Hester 2023). This research has helped to reveal intersectional barriers constructed within media discourses and thus provides insight into how these sustain existing power structures. There is an empirical gap, in that no research exists that studies a group of 2020 electoral candidates, focusing on their gender and media portrayals, and the way these intersect with other aspects of identity, despite certain candidates continuing to be marginalised and remaining minorities within US elections, with versions of masculinity dominating. Much of the gender theory selected for this research is well-utilised within the area of gender, media, and politics. However, there is scope for intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) to be applied in tandem with these, in order for the key theories to look further outside of the binary genders of male vs. female. This research contributes to knowledge through applying the framework to the coverage of Pete Buttigieg, who was subjected to media representation that focused on his sexuality, rather than his politics. Consequently, this revealed a population gap, as female and male politicians are well-researched, and drawing again on the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), this research has found that LGBTQ+ people are not adequately represented in the literature. They represent a growing interest, which arguably, correlates with their increased representation within politics, and the recent changes and debates around policies and legislation that affects them.

Considering the third point mentioned at the beginning of this section, around the selection of the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the US presidential election in 2020, which provided a group, rather than a singular candidate for analysis and is a key contribution to the originality knowledge within the field.

Much of the existing literature focused on the latter stages in elections, such as presidential debates, rather than those from earlier in the selection processes. The Democratic Party nomination stage of the 2020 US presidential election was considered a logical stage, as it offered the highest chances for diversity, which was essential, as gender is the central theme for this research.

The final point made at the beginning of this section, is that the breadth of media outlets used, spanned the spectrum of political ideologies, painting a picture of how gender is portrayed on both sides of the US political landscape. This component adds to the originality of the study, and resulted in a key contribution to knowledge of gendered discourses, to the extent that narratives that diminished women were produced across the media, regardless of their political ideology. This would be an interesting finding to investigate with further research, through an intersectional lens, with new primary candidates or with presidential candidates.

Considering the methodology, CDA (Fairclough 2010) is a popular methodology for studies around the nexus of gender, media, and politics. A methodological gap was identified around the analysis of multiple, diverse, candidates at the political party nomination stage of the 2020 US election. The case study generated a rich corpus of texts, which was enhanced by the range of candidates, and the media's political ideology offered a further lens for analysis. The framework of CDA was considered the optimal method for investigating the research subject, due to its association with workings of power within society, social wrongs, and the aim of revealing hidden meanings within language.

This body of work creates a possible resource for addressing the problems facing the drive towards gender equality in society, as Fairclough (2010) suggests resistance arises when new forms of discourse are assimilated, and often combined with older, more established ones.

Flood, Deresiewicz and Pease (2020) argue that opposition is inevitable against social change, and that, reflecting this, gender equality has persistently been met with denial, disavowal of the responsibility, inaction, appeasement, and repression, and often comes from privileged groups, which, in this context, would be older, white men and the media.

## **7.7 Limitations**

This research began before the COVID-19 pandemic, and was inspired by the unconventional and divisive 2016 US election. Thorough planning began in January 2019, which enabled data collection to begin in November 2019, in line with the schedule for the 2020 election and the Democratic Party nomination debates.

The researcher felt it was important to capture the data (news reports and articles) in real time – hours after the debates finished, to ensure a true picture of events, opinions, and agendas. This went smoothly, and during a five-month period, 810 articles were collected from 12 online media outlets that featured coverage of seven Democratic Party nomination debates. As shown in Table 5 – P.112, the debates from February 7<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> yielded a slightly lower number of articles (78 and 89) than the other debates (all 100+). This could be related to events in the news cycle impacting interest, such as the early signs of COVID-19, Trump's impeachment trial from mid-January, and the fact that there was a cluster of three debates in February, as dictated by the primary voting schedule, in contrast to the usual one per month. The stage of the race may also be a factor, as the field had narrowed to five candidates at this stage, and according to the media, a clear winner had been anointed – Joe Biden. As the race progressed, the nature of the media meant news was still delivered, despite a global pandemic, meaning there were no barriers or limitations, to accessing and collecting data for this research. Whilst other countries delayed or cancelled elections, primaries in the US were delayed or switched to mail ballots, the date for the final vote of November 3<sup>rd</sup> remained in place (Wallace and Palder 2020).

The virus shifted the narrative and shaped political campaigning, with recent research suggesting that COVID-19 cases negatively affected voting for Trump (Mendoza Aviña & Sevi 2021 and Algara et al 2022), and one study suggesting that if cases had been 5% lower, he would have won re-election (Baccini, Brodeur and Weymouth 2021).

The volume of data collected took many rounds of reading and analysis, in order to determine discourses. Beginning with the pilot study and 150 articles, a full read through was conducted, in order to establish the initial set of codes, and further reading was carried out, coding the articles as thoroughly as possible. This process was conducted with each set of texts from each debate, with a minimum of three full read-throughs to code, add new codes, and narrow down to a corpus of texts suitable for CDA analysis (Table 8, P.117). 87 articles formed the final corpus of texts for this research, and were read through multiple times, highlighting instances of gender that the codes previously identified, and collating these within the key themes. Literary devices, such as metaphors and rhetoric, intertextuality and context, along with notes of examples of theories were noted. The political ideology of the media outlet was also mapped against the analysis. This was challenging for the researcher, but proved successful in revealing many themes and discourses around gender. Alongside these, other themes emerged, such as the use of pop culture as cues for political identities, ageism around candidates and policy issues, such as women's rights, climate change and immigration. These were explored, however were determined of lesser relevance within this study, as evidence gathered was minor and did not correlate strongly with the gender theory used in this study. Issues like women's rights, whilst inherently about gender, were found to be more of a peripheral issue, when considering the candidate's media coverage. For example, abortion was addressed by Warren, when she challenged Bloomberg on his alleged treatment of women, citing his firing of an employee for being pregnant. The media discourse centred around the candidates, rather than the issues. This research followed the framework laid out by the aims and objectives, and these additional themes were considered too wide of the remit to be included.

Policy issues, such as women's rights are much-studied from a political and feminist perspective, however research around the impact of how climate change and immigration intersect with gender are interesting areas, which are becoming more prevalent in public discourse and in political policies. Whilst these areas can be considered modest findings within this research, a limitation exists around exploring them more fully, such that, to do so would require a different research topic and a change in methodology. They can provide inspiration for future research topics, but would present a considerable change in structure within this study.

Reflecting on the choice to use CDA as a tool for analysis, the researcher has experience with other theory that can be used to interpret meaning through media, particularly semiotics (Barthes 2012). Chandler (2007) defines semiotics as the study of 'signs', which take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects in everyday speech, and how these form a system of meaning. Signs and meaning are prevalent through media texts, however CDA was considered a more appropriate approach, due to its focus on relationships between language and other social elements. Fairclough (2010 p59) considers discourse to be a complex of three elements: social practice, discursive practice and text, which all extend the analysis of language beyond semiotics, to look at the relationship between the three elements. Despite previous knowledge of semiotics, CDA was considered more appropriate for the context and design of this research.

## **7.8 Looking to the future**

In terms of future research relating to this study, some paths emerged that would contribute to the growing prominence around the issue of gender. The intersectionality framework lends itself to deeper analysis of candidates from minority groups, and Pete Buttigieg would be an excellent study of this.

His campaign for 2020 established roots for his political career, and he currently holds the position of Secretary of Transportation within the Biden administration, meaning that he retains a visible profile within US politics, and in media.



Kamala Harris, whilst she did not feature significantly within this study, as she ended her campaign in December 2019, went on to become Vice President, under Joe Biden, and, would also provide an interesting topic of investigation around women in politics, through the intersectional lens of race, or through the notion of glass ceilings and double binds candidates face. Whilst this research focused on Democratic Party candidates, Republican candidates would offer a fascinating contrast in studying the primary process from the opposite end of the political ideology spectrum. The political slant of media outlets, and the correlation of how they portray gender, may also be explored further. Current research exists that examines right-leaning media and aspects of truthfulness, or their audiences, but there is a gap for research that enquires about the gendered discourses produced by media, and where these sit within political beliefs and societal structures.

This research critically examined media coverage, from outlets positioned across the political ideological spectrum, of the Democratic Party debates for the nomination for the 2020 US presidential election. Beginning in November 2019, media texts were collected after the debate, which was held on November 20<sup>th</sup>. Further media texts were collected after each subsequent debate and formed a set of 810 articles in total. Texts from the November debate were read once for initial coding, and were then re-read, in order to code thoroughly. A pilot study was conducted on a sample of these texts to confirm the coding was correct, and that all mentions of gender, as relevant to this study were captured. Once confirmed, the process was repeated on further debates and new codes were added when necessary. From this, key macro themes were identified, and a corpus of 87 texts formed the basis for investigating how gender was portrayed by the media, from which CDA was used to gather key findings and patterns of gendered language and discourses. The findings fell within the larger macro themes and the gender theories selected for this research were applied to each sub-theme. This formed the discussion chapter and included sub-themes around feminine identity that showed an analysis of how women in politics were penalised, when not found to conform or present themselves within societal ideals.

Hegemonic masculinity was identified as a dominant power structure within US politics, through the media favouring white heteronormative men over women and other masculinities. It was at this stage that the research was enhanced by the inclusion of the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991), as gendered discourses that intersected with age and sexuality, were found when coding, and were thus further developed when conducting CDA (Fairclough 2010). This was included, as it was a significant narrative within the texts, related well to the research aims and objectives, added an extra dimension to the discussion, and is considered to be an important perspective for future research of similar topics. In summary, the findings of this study demonstrate women, and other minority groups of society remain discriminated against through gendered discourses, which are constructed, disseminated, sustained, and supported by the US media. This assists in upholding the dominance of white heteronormative men in US politics and hinders the progress of gender equality.

It is the intention to disseminate the results of this research to the academic community through journals, and two articles could be produced from this research. The first would investigate how sexual orientation affects the way a candidate's masculinity is portrayed by the media during the 2020 Democratic Party nominations for presidency. Pete Buttigieg would be an excellent study and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) and masculinities (Connell 1995) would be used to draw together his portrayal within the media, with the concept of a hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014), and its effects within politics and media further developing his case. CDA (Fairclough 2010) provided rich evidence of tensions between Buttigieg's sexuality and masculinity, and no current research exists within this context, using these theories. The second proposed article would investigate further, the media ideology element of this research, and would explore correlations, or lack thereof, between gendered discourses of politicians and the political leaning of media outlets. Again, CDA (Fairclough 2010) revealed findings, which were contrary to the researcher's thoughts and expectations on the issues, and would make an interesting subject matter for further analysis.

Current research exists that examines right-leaning media and truthfulness or their readership, however there is a gap for research that enquires towards the gendered discourses produced and where these fit within political beliefs and societal structures.

The impact of this research lies in how it highlights, explicitly, further instances of gender inequality in the media, framing of political candidates during electoral politics, and contributes to addressing the cause for a balanced portrayal of gender. Presently, after the 2020 election, the Biden administration formed the first-ever US government strategy for gender equality (whitehouse.gov 2021). It acknowledges a need for reform within the country and throughout defence, diplomacy, foreign aid, and trade deals, to advance the issue. It also acknowledges that the appointment of Kamala Harris as Vice President, broke a barrier to women's participation in politics that was more than 200 years old, as she joined the most diverse and gender-balanced cabinet in history. This shows, for at least one political party, that the appetite for change and evolution around gender is present and progressing. This research could be of interest to the US Gender Policy Council, which Biden created to work across all federal agencies towards gender parity and provide guidance on policy. That is assuming there is no change in administration, due to the upcoming presidential election in 2024, where a change in party would invite a change in staffing, policies and approaches to issues. Outside of the White House, there are many organisations that advocate for gender equality within elections. The Centre for American Women and Politics (CAWP) has multiple smaller, state-based, organisations that advocate for women's political empowerment. Emily's List is an organisation that aims to increase Democratic pro-choice women representation within US politics, the head of which, Laphonza Butler, was recently selected for the US Senate (replacing senator Diane Feinstein, who died, aged 90), making her the only black female in the Senate and the only LGBTQ+ person to represent California in the chamber (Binley 2023). Opportunities for this research to be seen, considered, and possibly incorporated within the US political sphere exist, and can be approached as part of the next steps for the researcher and their study.

This study also has potential for impact regarding the media portrayal of politicians. By analysing the media coverage and defining discourses that portray a candidate in a damaging and discriminatory way, politicians and political strategists can have more accurate insights, as to how media coverage and discourse affects campaigns and candidate viability within elections. This offers a chance to form counter narratives and anticipate voter's attitudes towards campaign messaging. The media can also gain insight into discourses created or sustained by their output, that may be perceived as contrary to their audience's political leaning or beliefs. This research has the potential to contribute to political campaigns and communications during elections, which can create opportunities to advance gender equality and increase substantive representation of candidates from minority groups.

The potential impact of this research also addresses the fourth stage of Fairclough's (2010) CDA methodology, by suggesting possible ways past gender discrimination. Evidence was revealed of discourses, which offered an imaginary sense of what progress would look like. Within the discourses, there were mentions of women's achievements in policies and partisanship, their military service, motherhood, and their frustration at misogyny and discrimination, all highlighting the existing damaging stereotypes around gender. Fairclough (2010) acknowledges that although different imaginaries exist, feasibility and strategy must be considered. This is true of gender equality, and this research shows the widening of the debate, the increasing complexity of intersectional perspectives, and ways of advancing the issue of gender inequality.

This research assembled a significant body of data, which helped to cast further light on the challenges women, and minority groups face in politics in the US. Examining coverage of a group of diverse candidates from the TV debates for the Democratic Party nomination for the 2020 US presidential election, revealed gendered discourses within the media texts. Harmful narratives, stereotypes and tropes were found, and intersectional barriers were also uncovered.

This research demonstrates how these were constructed, through discursive devices such as rhetoric, metaphors and intertextuality, and demonstrates that a media's political ideology does not always shape the nature of their coverage of gender. In conclusion, for the Democratic Party, the path to nomination, and beyond, remains complex and challenging for minority candidates. Up until very recently, it was reserved for those who fit within the norms of leadership: white heteronormative male politicians. The Democratic Party nominated Vice President Kamala Harris, to represent the Party in the 2024 US presidential election, on August 5<sup>th</sup> 2024 (Fung and Moore 2024). At present, she is the only woman of colour to lead a major party ticket in a presidential election, a situation stemming from President Biden stepping down as the incumbent, meaning Harris will face the Republican Party opposition candidate, Donald Trump, in November 2024 (Olorunnipa and Pager 2024). When reflecting on the context of this research, Harris' nomination means representation for minority candidates has improved, she has succeeded in overcoming many of the barriers that were found in this study, and at least one glass ceiling has been broken so far. Regardless of the outcome of the 2024 US presidential election, challenges remain, and more analysis, research and ideas are required to move gender equality forwards. To finish with Crenshaw's view on the historic candidacy:

"We cannot defend democracy, we cannot defend Kamala Harris, without taking on directly the intersection of racism and sexism that we see across her campaign" (Crenshaw 2024).

It may be one perspective, but this suggests the future in US politics is intersectional. It is hoped this research can add to the area of politics, gender and media studies, and highlight awareness around the barriers minority candidates face in electoral politics.

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(Accessed: 05 March 2022).

## **Appendix 1**

### **Candidate Biographies**

#### **Joe Biden**

Joe Biden represented Delaware, Pennsylvania for 36 years as a Senator, an area he is from and has raised his family in (White House 2023). Baio (2020) notes he lost his first wife and 13-month-old daughter in a car accident in 1972, losses which shaped his political career and cultivated his public reputation as an empathetic leader. He married his second wife in 1977, Dr Jill Biden and family life is central to his political persona. When formally entering the race, he declared his candidacy represented two things – the workers who built America and the values that can bridge divisions (BBC 2021). Biden would go on to win the Democratic Party nomination in April 2020 and proceed to win the 2020 US presidential election against incumbent Republican President Donald Trump (White House 2023)

#### **Bernie Sanders**

Sanders is a democratic socialist from Vermont, Massachusetts with a long career in politics beginning with the role of Mayor of Burlington, MA, in 1981 (a win by 10 votes!) and becoming a Senator in 2006, a role he was re-elected for a third term in 2018 (Berniesanders.com 2023). The Sanders campaign focused on socialist politics with policies around Medicare-for-all and welfare state expansions aimed at uniting the working class and galvanising young people to vote (Beauchamp 2020). Strongest in the role of underdog, the issues he popularised were healthcare initiatives and climate change and, for a time from December 2019 to February 2020 was the front-runner for the nomination (Gambino 2020a). He ended his campaign officially in April 2020, leaving Biden as the remaining candidate (Beauchamp 2020).

#### **Pete Buttigieg**

Launching his campaign in April 2019, the former naval intelligence officer worked as a management consultant before entering politics by becoming mayor of South Bend, Indiana in 2012 (Pak, Scanlan and Thomas 2020).



Buttigieg positioned himself as a moderate and called for generational change in political leadership and focused his proposed policies on greener energy and infrastructure to help the climate crisis, reduce gun violence and boost funding for law enforcement (CNN 2020). Schneider (2020) summarised his campaign as a 'breakout' for a gay, veteran, millennial, mid-west mayor who finished fourth behind Warren, Sanders and Biden before ending his campaign in March 2020.

### **Elizabeth Warren**

Warren entered the election as a liberal Senator from Massachusetts, a position she has held since 2012 and as an academic, she shaped her campaign around scholarship and technical expertise in financial and economic policies (Yglesias 2019). Despite the early momentum behind her campaign, she failed to win any primary in 2020 and, as the last major female Democratic candidate, she ended her campaign in March 2020 (Gambino 2020b).

### **Kamala Harris**

Kim and Stanton (2020) note Kamala Harris spent the past 20 years defining her career in law and politics with a series of 'firsts'. She was the first black woman to be elected District Attorney in California, the first Indian American senator and now the first black woman and the first Asian American Vice President after Biden chose her as a running mate in 2020. Despite running her 2020 campaign around left-leaning views on the death penalty and LGBTQ+ rights, she was criticised for not being progressive enough and the common refrain from the media and campaign trail was 'she's a cop' (Honderich and Dissanayake 2020). She ended her campaign in December 2019 citing financial difficulties but delayed her endorsement for Biden until March 8<sup>th</sup> when there were no more women left in the race and his nomination was inevitable (Kim and Stanton 2020).

### **Amy Klobuchar**

Klobuchar became Minnesota's first female senator in 2007 and where she has remained and launched her campaign for the presidency in 2019 (Chapman 2020). Merica et al (2020) state her campaign pledged to focus on the

'nation's heartland', alluding to her status as a Mid-Westerner and targeting disaffected voters in places like Michigan and Wisconsin.

However, she trailed her fellow candidates in fundraising which ended her campaign on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 and endorsed Joe Biden for the nomination.

### **Cory Booker**

Former Mayor of Newark, NJ, and now a Senator, Cory Booker announced his candidacy in February 2019 with a campaign focused on tighter gun control and tackling the opioid crisis and antitrust laws around pharmaceutical companies (Haslett, Kelsey and Gehlen 2020). He ended his campaign in January 2020 after failing to qualify for the debate in Iowa and his attention moved to his role in the upcoming impeachment trial of Donald Trump (Buck 2020). His departure from the race was the second high-profile black candidate in a month, after Harris, and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (2020) noted his discourse raised awareness of racial issues faced by communities of colour in the US.

### **Tulsi Gabbard**

Archie (2022) notes Gabbard was elected to her state of Hawaii in 2002, she then went on to become the first Hindu and one of two combat veterans elected to Congress in 2012. They note her 2020 campaign cantered the issue of 'war and peace' and despite not qualifying for debates since December 2019, remained in the race until March 2020 when she dropped out to endorse Biden as the party nominee. During her candidacy, she angered fellow Democrats by appearing frequently on Fox News and voted 'present' on articles of impeachment against Donald Trump (Associated Press 2020).

### **Tom Steyer**

A billionaire hedge fund investor and climate change activist, Steyer focused his campaign on racial and economic justice issues but despite extensive spending - \$24 million on political adverts, he failed to qualify for debates past November 2019 and ended his campaign officially in February 2020 (Summers and Sprunt 2020).

### **Andrew Yang**

Strauss (2020) notes the Democrat, an Asian American billionaire entrepreneur, rose from obscurity in 2020 with no political profile, to build a following based on modernising American industry, aligning it with the fast-changing economy and a signature policy of a universal basic income of \$1000. Further to this, towards the end of 2019, Yang was the only non-white person left on the debate stage however, his unconventional campaign failed to generate the donations and votes he needed to stay in the election and he ended his campaign in February 2020.

## **Appendix 2 - Summary of news outlets**

A summary of each news outlets follows which shows the history, ownership, and a brief background of each.

### **Fox News**

In March 1996 Rupert Murdoch introduced *Fox News*, a 24-hour cable news channel to America which ideologically, is to the right of other main media sources (DellaVigna and Caplan 2007). AdFontes Media (2019), used in this research to assess and position media outlets ideologically, places *Fox News* to the right/strong right of the centre and notes it has a wide variation in terms of reliability of facts. Gramlich (2020) writing for the Pew Research Center believes *Fox News* holds a unique place in the US media landscape as Democrats access a variety of news sources for political coverage, *Fox News* dominates the ideological right by a wide margin with 43% of all Americans trusting it for election coverage in 2020 and 65% of Republicans. However, 40% of all Americans distrust it. Furthermore, those who trust *Fox News* have specific views on key issues and people. For example: 63% believed Trump's response to the Covid 19 pandemic was 'excellent' versus 24% who listed CBS as their news source.

A BBC news profile of Rupert Murdoch suggests he has helped shape much of the media landscape in the UK, US, and Australia with his ownership of powerful newspapers such as *The Sun* and *The Times* and broadcast channels such as *Fox News* and *Sky* (BBC News 2023). Moreover, politically, his publications were supportive of the Conservative government in the UK during the 1980s and 1990s but switched to support Tony Blair before his win in 1997 creating a noticeable trend for selecting winners and inserting himself in British politics. In the US, *Fox News* has a uniquely partisan power, and after his 2020 election win, President Biden described Rupert Murdoch as 'the most dangerous man in the world' after the presenters framed Biden as 'one of the most destructive forces in the United States' (Bump 2022). These statements reflect the days after the 2020 election in which Trump blamed fraud for his loss and *Fox News* broadcast allegations against the voting machine company Dominion, upholding Trump's narrative.

Dominion sued after it became the subject of the 2020 election conspiracy theories often promoted on the channel however, although the case was settled privately it posed questions over the credibility of the news network (Bauder and Ricardi 2023). Although this took place post-time frame for this research, it is connected to the 2020 election and provides a measure of influence *Fox News* has within American society.

The channel remains primarily owned by the Murdoch family, with Rupert's son, Lachlan appointed Chairman of Fox News and News Corporation after his father's retirement in September 2023 (Darcy 2023).

### **The National Review**

*The National Review* is a biweekly magazine and website publishing Conservative news and opinions, Adfontes Media (2019) positions the outlet as a 'strong right' political ideology and notes the reliability of its reporting as 'mixed'. Nadler, Bauer and Greene (2019) maintain that the publication which was founded in 1955 by William F. Buckley, along with other conservative intellectuals shaped, and reshaped, how Americans remember and view the civil rights movement of the 1960s. They maintain that shortly after Martin Luther King Jr's assassination, conservatives were deeply opposed to King and his radical left however, as time went by, conservatives writing for *The National Review* used King and other civil rights leaders for their political gains, in turn weakening the political left. Arguably, this was the beginning of narratives which helped situate a conservative agenda within the social and political sphere and exemplify the connectivity between mass media and politics. Contemporary *National Review* coverage has courted controversy with politics.

In 2009 journalist Jim Geraghty published an article asking Barack Obama to release his birth certificate bringing citizenship conspiracy theories to the mainstream media and one which Trump used to diminish Clinton's time in his administration (Geraghty 2009 and Rothman 2016). I

n 2001, *The National Review* journalist Ann Coulter published an article two days after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in New York where she suggested all Muslims were guilty and America should invade their countries conflating the act to Hitler and World War 2 (Thrush 2019).

In its current capacity as a website and print magazine, *The National Review* remains popular among conservatives and political news - despite a relatively small circulation of 75,000, some argue that it's enduring appeal since its inception in the 1950s and it's apparent approach of supporting and attacking strategically whilst providing a conservative opinion on the news.

### **News Max**

*Newsmax* is a conservative news and opinion website founded in 1998 and is regarded by Adfontes Media (2019) as 'strong right' in terms of bias and is classed as 'generally reliable' in terms of reporting accuracy. Goss (2023) acknowledges the outlet's status among conservatives and is critical in the assessment of coverage which they characterise as 'sham-journalism' which appropriates the trappings of reporting tactics but practices a form of weaponised political discourse.

Citing the coverage of the failed prosecution of Michael Sussman, Hillary Clinton's campaign lawyer accused of a single count of making a false statement to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 2016, *Newsmax* demonstrated a high degree of partisan one-sidedness to attempt to delegitimise the political opposition and relies primarily on Republican sources including Trump allied felons.

### **The Washington Times**

*The Washington Times* skews right as a category of bias according to AdFontes Media (2019) and is classed as 'generally reliable' in terms of accuracy in reporting. They note that it is a daily newspaper published in Washington DC, established in 1982 by Unification leader Sun Myung Moon and is now owned by Operation Holdings Inc. a subsidiary of Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity.

It gained popularity when President Regan declared he read it every day (Clarkson 1987) and in 1992 North Korean leader Kim Jong Un gave his only interview in Western news media to *The Washington Times* (Merrill 1993). Currently existing as a website and print publication, in 2003 it was the only national newspaper which still featured a weekly Civil War page and had become a reliable source for extremist views on race, religion, immigration and the American concept of 'Dixie' – a nickname for the Southern States (Moser and Belrich 2003).

### **BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation)**

Founded in January 1927 as a public broadcasting channel and funded by a licence fee, the corporation is essentially self-regulated and free from government controls (Harris and Wegg-Prosser 2007). AdFontes Media (2019) classify the *BBC* in the 'middle' category of bias and as 'reliable' in terms of factual reporting and analysis. Gaber (2018) recognises that in recent years the *BBC* remains the most trusted source of news in the UK however, there have been some journalistic missteps in the coverage of UK elections. For example, during the 2016 election discussions of a hung parliament dominated coverage at the expense of wider discussions around policy issues which may have influenced voting. In addition to this example, coverage of the then labour party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, was criticised for a lack of fairness and a failure to detect support from ordinary Labour members as opposed to the focus on opinions of Labour MPs. When considering impartiality at the corporation, an Ofcom report from 2022 suggests the polarised political landscape presents a challenge and that the *BBC* faces a higher level of scrutiny than other broadcasters due to its unique position in the media landscape. It concluded that viewers believed alternative views or a range of views and, challenging different viewpoints were key to the concept.

In terms of global reach, a report from Reuters Institute and Oxford University (Newman 2022) found that globally, trust in the media was lowest in America at 26% but that the *BBC* was rated second most trustworthy news source at 46% with local news services at 54%.

### **USA Today**

Founded in 1982, *USA Today* is an online news platform which reaches 6 million people per day and whose mission is to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to make the USA truly one nation (Roper Centre 2020). This implies a central approach to political ideology and AdFontes Media classifies *USA Today* as 'neutral and balanced' in terms of impartiality and mostly 'reliable' in terms of reporting accuracy and analysis.

The report from Reuters Institute and Oxford University (Newman 2022) found that 38% of Americans found it a trustworthy news source and that it reaches more people through its website than through broadcasting, radio, and print (6% vs 8%).

### **ABC News**

Fabrikant (1995) reported the Walt Disney Company acquired the parent company of *ABC News*, a division for the American Broadcast Company, for \$19 billion in 1995, making it the second largest merger in US history. In terms of political ideology, AdFontes Media (2019) the outlet is in the 'Middle' category for bias and is deemed 'reliable' in terms of reporting accuracy and analysis. This is supported by research conducted by the Pew Research Center (Mitchell et al 2014) which measured the ideological differences in news sources that Americans access for political coverage and found that across the entire group, *ABC News* was trusted by the greatest percentage of respondents overall, 50% of those asked.

### **CBS News**

*CBS* (Columbia Broadcasting System) began as a radio station in 1928 and diversified into television and other media fields over the decades with media personalities Lucille Ball, Ed Sullivan and Walter Cronkite who anchored the flagship news program, establishing it as the dominant network by the 1970s (Bauer 2020). In terms of political ideology, AdFontes Media (2019) the outlet is in the 'Middle' category for bias and is deemed 'reliable' in terms of reporting accuracy and analysis.



The broadcasts and news production of contemporary years have benefitted from a reputation of integrity and neutrality which Groeling (2008), attributes this perception of lack of media bias to *CBS News* anchor Walter Cronkite who remarked:

“Our job is only to hold up the mirror, to tell and show the public what has happened and then it is the job of the people to decide whether they have faith in their government and leaders “(Alan and Lane 2003 p139, Groeling 2008).

Furthermore, establishing the presence or absence of partisan bias in media content is difficult but, in the report, published by Reuters Institute and Oxford University (Newman et al 2022) the corporation was trusted by 43% of respondents for political and news coverage, positioned joint third with *ABC News*.

### **The New York Times (NYT)**

Established in 1851 by Henry Jarvis Raymond and George Jones, *The New York Times (NYT)* is a news organisation with print and digital outlets and is currently owned by shareholders, the majority belonging to the Sulzberger family who have owned passed ownership down through several generations (Forbes 2022). According to AdFontes Media (2019) the outlet ‘skews left’ for bias and is deemed ‘reliable’ in terms of reporting accuracy and analysis. Since 1860, the *NYT* has endorsed a total of 27 Democratic candidates and 13 Republicans, with Hilary Clinton in 2016 (Adams, Louttit and Taylor 2016) and breaking with convention in 2020 to endorse two women, Amy Klobuchar and Elizabeth Warren (Editorial Board, *The New York Times* 2020). Indeed, Puglisi (2011) found that news coverage during an election gave more emphasis to policy topics on which the Democratic party are perceived to be more competent (civil rights, healthcare, labour, and social welfare) when the incumbent president is Republican. In 2023, the *NYT* had more than 10 million subscribers, 670,000 of them to the print edition (Robertson 2023).

### **The Washington Post**

The Graham family-owned control and editorial leadership for 80 years but in 2013, *The Washington Post* announced it was selling ownership of the paper to the Amazon founder Jeff Bezos (Stolberg 2013). Within 3 years of Bezos' ownership, it had doubled its web traffic, and, crucially for a newspaper, became profitable (Giuliani-Hoffman 2019). In 2023, *The Washington Post* had recorded 2.5 million subscribers which, although falls short of the 10 million *The New York Times* has, it still has a significant readership in the US (Watson 2023). AdFontes Media (2019) the outlet 'skews left' for bias and is deemed 'generally reliable' in terms of reporting accuracy and analysis.

### **Vox**

AdFontes Media (2019) states *Vox* is a news website founded in 2014 with a mission to 'explain the news' by Ezra Klein, Melissa Bell and Matthew Yglesias. They found it skews 'left' and is 'reliable' in terms of analysis and reporting. *Vox* remains a free-access website for news, unusual in the US media landscape but in keeping with its ethos and their business model blends grants, financial gifts, and advertising to exist (Woods 2022). Their company website states its goal is:

'To ensure everyone, regardless of income or status, can access accurate information that empowers them' (*Vox* 2017).

Kersley (2022) documents *Vox's* growth to become one of the most successful English language news publishers on YouTube with 10.7 million subscribers with an average of 2 million views per video, the closest next publisher, the Economist has 500,000 views. They note that the channel launched in tandem with the news website in 2014 and reflects the company's aim to spread 'explanatory' journalism through graphics and visuals. The website remains significant with 36.5 million visits per month (Semrush 2023b).

## **Politico**

*Politico* is a news website, founded in 2007 in North America and launched a European website in 2017, which bills itself as the intersection between politics, power, and policy (*Politico* 2022). AdFontes Media (2019) assesses the outlet as 'centrist/left' for bias and is deemed 'reliable' in terms of reporting accuracy and analysis. In 2021, *Politico* was acquired by German media group Axel Springer with the aim of becoming truly nonpartisan, as Mathias Döpfner, the CEO, believed American media was becoming too polarised with legacy brands like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* drifting to the left while conservative media had become too far under the influence of Trump's 'alternative facts' (Ellison 2022). In 2018, the platform drew 26 million unique viewers per month to the US website (*Politico* 2018) growing to 92 million in December 2023 (Semrush 2023a).

## **Appendix 3 – Debate Summary**

### **November Debate**

10 candidates participated in the 5<sup>th</sup> debate which was held in Atlanta, Georgia and was hosted by MSNBC and *The Washington Post* (Vox.com 2019). The debate was staged at Atlanta's Tyler Perry studios, America's most prolific production venue for entertainment for black audiences, which was once a Confederate military stronghold (Berg 2020).

The decision to stage the debate there refers to the political and economic power of Georgia's growing film industry and signalled an implicit acknowledgement of the space that black voters occupied in the electorate and the state's potential battleground status in 2020 (Taylor 2019). MSNBC host Rachel Maddow, veteran NBC News correspondent Andrea Mitchell, NBC reporter Kristen Welker and Washington Post reporter Ashley Parker were tasked with moderating the debate making them only the second all-female panel to moderate a major political debate (Fahri 2019). The candidates who participated were former Vice President Joe Biden; New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker; South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg; Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard; California Sen. Kamala Harris; Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar; Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders; billionaire businessman and activist Tom Steyer; Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren; and entrepreneur Andrew Yang (Taylor 2019).

### **December Debate**

The 6th Democratic debate took place on December 19<sup>th</sup> at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles with *PBS Newshour* and *Politico* hosting (Carlisle 2019). Historically, California is considered safe territory for the Democrats, however, it holds outsize importance in the race due to a change in the primary schedule, a group of important primary candidates and maintained its status as a fundraising area (Oprysko 2019). Seven candidates qualified: former Vice President Joe Biden, South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg, Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, billionaire executive Tom Steyer, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and entrepreneur Andrew Yang (Carlisle 2019).

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December, Donald Trump was impeached on two articles: abuse of power and obstruction of Congress and while voting for the articles fell largely along partisan lines, Tulsi Gabbard voted 'Present' on both and criticised the process as politically motivated (Fandos and Shear 2019). She did not qualify for this debate, along with New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker and Kamala Harris and Julián Castro had ended their campaigns earlier in the month (Carlisle 2019). Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced he was officially running as a Democrat on Nov. 24. but failed to qualify for the debate due to fundraising requirements as his campaign was self-funded (Oprysko 2019). Judy Woodruff, Amna Nawaz and Yamiche Alcindor of PBS NewsHour as well as *Politico's* Tim Alberta moderated the debate (Carlisle 2019).

### **January Debate**

The first Democratic presidential debate of 2020 was held in Des Moines, Iowa on January 14<sup>th</sup>, less than three weeks before the Iowa caucuses and will be hosted by CNN and the Des Moines Register (Desmoinesregister.com 2020). For decades, Iowa played an important role in America's presidential primaries; Barack Obama said that winning Iowa during the 2008 primary season was the best night of his political career, and the state serves either as a campaign's launchpad or as its crash site (The Economist 2020).

Carlisle (2020a) notes much happened around the world in the few weeks since the last debate, tensions between the United States and Iran spiked on Jan. 3 when the U.S. assassinated Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said that the House plans to vote to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate, opening the door for a Senate trial on President Donald Trump's removal from office. 6 candidates qualified for this debate; former Vice President Joe Biden, Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, and Amy Klobuchar; former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg; and billionaire Tom Steyer (Vox.com 2019).

### **February 7<sup>th</sup> Debate**

After the Iowa caucuses and President Donald Trump's acquittal by the Senate on two articles of impeachment, the week ended with seven Democratic presidential candidates in a debate in New Hampshire (Carlisle, Gajahan and Aguilera 2020). The Iowa results have historically winnowed the field and the failure to declare a winner have muddled the contest (Lizza 2020a). This was attributed to a malfunction of an app meant for reporting results due to a "coding issue," meaning after days of waiting as results trickled in, a winner had not been declared yet (Carlisle, Gajahan and Aguilera 2020). Of the 11 candidates still running for president, only seven participated in the debate, which was moderated by *ABC* chief anchor George Stephanopoulos, *ABC World News Tonight* anchor David Muir and *ABC News* correspondent Linsey Davis, WMUR's Political Director Adam Sexton and anchor Monica Hernandez (Moore 2020). The seven candidates who qualified were: former Vice President Joe Biden, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar, Sen. Bernie Sanders, billionaire executive Tom Steyer, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, and entrepreneur Andrew Yang (Carlisle, Gajahan and Aguilera 2020).

### **February 19<sup>th</sup> Debate**

The Las Vegas debate was hosted by NBC, MSNBC and the Nevada Independent with six Democratic candidates: Joe Biden, Michael Bloomberg, Pete Buttigieg, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar (Quinn 2020). It brought the contenders in front of a different audience that reflected the makeup of the Democratic Party and the country as a whole, as Nevada is nearly 30% Latino, over 10% Black and encompasses one of the nation's fastest-growing Asian-American and Pacific Islander populations (Karson, Cunningham and Cathey 2020). Dzhanova et al (2020) noted it was the ninth overall debate, and the most pugnacious but, it was the first that featured Bloomberg, who didn't take campaign contributions and did not qualify for previous ones due to donor thresholds.

### **February 25<sup>th</sup> Debate**

The 10<sup>th</sup> democratic debate took place in Charleston, South Carolina and featured seven candidates; former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg, former South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders, former Vice President Joe Biden, Sen. Amy Klobuchar and businessman Tom Steyer (Cillizza 2020). Mastio and Lawrence (2020) suggested the previous debate in Nevada was classed as a 'fight club', this debate was likened to a 'food fight'. They noted the Democrats interrupted, cross-talked and attacked each other with such intensity that it seemed like 2016 again with the level of desperation palpable, regrettable but, understandable. Zurcher (2020b) writing for the BBC also offered a comparison between the two latest debates likening the Nevada debate to a dinner theatre murder mystery in which Michael Bloomberg was the victim and switching to Bernie Sanders as the victim in the South Carolina debate.

### **March 15<sup>th</sup> Debate**

Former Vice President Joe Biden, who recently emerged as the party's presidential front-runner, met Senator Bernie Sanders for the first 'one-on-one' debate of 2020 on March 15<sup>th</sup> (Carlisle 2020b). However, as Karson (2020) writes, the debate, which was hosted by CNN and Univision, also came as the election was upended by a global pandemic. They suggested the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, had thrust the 2020 campaign into uncharted virtual terrain, in which the candidates were campaigning without campaigning, shifting to online events, instructing all employees to work from home or telework, and grounding field operations to a halt.

The debate took place in Washington D.C., with no audience, instead, it featured just two men, each making the case for their ideological wing of the Democratic primary (Carlisle 2020b). USA Today reported the debate was like 'one of those unplugged concerts without amplifiers and electric guitar; no audience, no line-up of 10 or 6 or 11 candidates interrupting each other like it was "Lord of the Flies" time. Just two guys at lecterns situated a polite six feet apart, in compliance with coronavirus-era social distancing rules. Two septuagenarian guys with a combined 72 years of experience in Washington'.

*The National Review* likened the lack of audience to the presidential debate between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960 and suggested the pandemic had reorientated daily American life and noted at that point in time, the US had 3,244 confirmed cases of Coronavirus and 62 deaths from the disease according to Coronavirus Resource Center at the Johns Hopkins University of Medicine. *The New York Times* noted the debate was, if nothing else, 'a live event to be shared with a large audience. Gone was the viewership competition from N.B.A. games, baseball spring training, a college basketball tournament selection show. Why not watch two septuagenarians talk for two hours?'.