

Gendered Discussion of Politicians in News: How Can We Prepare Future Female
Politicians for Media Gender Bias?

by

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GENDERED DISCUSSION OF POLITICIANS IN NEWS

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Abstract

This research adds to the pre-existing knowledge of gender bias towards women in media. Through a focused review of political news media in British Columbia, this research found little evidence of gender bias towards women written in both municipal and provincial political news reporting. I conducted quantitative content analysis by reviewing 100 online articles during the calendar year 2014 from B.C. newspapers *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun*, including comments in response to these articles posted online by the public, to find the frequency of gender biased language used to describe female and male politicians in these mediums. I also conducted three interviews of female politicians from British Columbia and analyzed them using qualitative content analysis. Both the online content and interview data were used to create a document tool, Appendix B, of best practices for female politicians to refer to when preparing and relaying their messages to the media. This was done to create better understanding of female gender bias so a more gender equal political news reporting environment can be created. My findings indicated a perceived gender bias in political news media reporting by the three interview subjects, but very little indication of gender bias in the political news reporting of major provincial newspapers in British Columbia. The results suggest gender bias was created more by the community and fellow politicians of British Columbia than print news media.

Key words: gender, agenda setting, media, feminist media theory

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Gendered Discussion of Politicians: How Can We Prepare Future Female Politicians for Media Gender Bias?

Introduction

Much research has been conducted on gender bias in media. Studies found media addresses women with gendered, sexualized and sex stereotypical language that is not used to address men (Adcock, 2010). The presence of this language makes up a unique gender bias towards women. This gender bias is worth researching because, according to researcher Goodyear-Grant (2013), it leaves female politicians at a disadvantage to their male counterparts. Goodyear-Grant (2013) indicated the media provides audiences with gendered representations of female politicians and argued these gendered representations or descriptions of female politicians, using sex stereotypical language, become obstacles when women take on political leadership roles. This occurs because sex stereotypical language used for women often associates them with the home or private sphere of society, with their leadership roles in the public sphere contradicting this stereotype (Goodyear-Grant, 2013). News media was likely to focus on the personality and experience of female politicians versus the desired focus on policy positions (Ross, Evans, Harrison, Shears, & Wadia, 2013). Furthermore, according to Ross, media gender bias trivialized female ability to create

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parliamentary policy change by focusing discussion on appearance, clothing or age (2010).

Finally, gendered representations of women in political news media negatively affected women's desires to participate in politics and the public's desire for female politicians (Goodyear-Grant, 2013). My research purpose was to create a tool for female politicians to use so they can convey their messages to the media with less gender bias, thereby prompting media coverage that uses gender neutral language or language free of gender bias.

This study exclusively examined media gender bias towards female politicians in British Columbia. Although media gender bias towards men -- a little researched topic -- is a separate issue worthy of study, the main focus of this research is the gender bias towards women and the potential gender bias towards men was analyzed as a comparison tool to better understand female gender bias in media. A brief scan of the literature showed gender bias towards male politicians focuses on behaviour and perceptions of character, including associating men with less expressive actions and associating them with strength in military or economic issues of military or economy (Huddy & Terkildsen, (1993). Thus, it is qualitatively different than bias towards female politicians, which was more likely to focus on women's association with the home and private sphere of society.

Through this research, I sought to highlight and reduce gender biased language towards female politicians in British Columbia. The document tool, Appendix B, created from this research is a demonstration of practical ways local politicians can prepare for and respond to gender bias, with a goal of refocusing the political news media discourse.

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My research questions were: what can women in politics learn from a communication studies perspective about gendered discourse in the media? In what ways can women politicians better understand how gender discourse affects how they are perceived? Last, how can female politicians use this knowledge to convey their messages through news media and reduce gender bias? My objectives were: to discover how commenters on B.C. traditional news reporting of female politicians reacted to media usage, to learn from three political leaders about their experiences with media and their strategies for addressing gender bias in the media, and to create a document tool to prepare female politicians to refer to when preparing and relaying their messages to the media.

This mixed methods research study was conducted within the critical paradigm using quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Quantitative content analysis was carried out on online news articles from two largely circulated British Columbia newspapers, *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun*, and a review of comments made by online readers about those articles. Reader comments are not edited by these newspapers and, therefore, served as an accurate reflection of the participating audience responses to the news. The articles and comments were reviewed for themes related to gender bias. Subsequently, the frequency of these themes was calculated to discover if the audience or the article demonstrated, and therefore contributed to, gender bias in a corpus comprised of 12 months of B.C. print media political news. Finally, qualitative content analysis was conducted on data from three interviews of political leaders in B.C. to triangulate my findings.

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Feminist media theory and agenda setting theory guided my research methods and analysis. According to Fortner and Fackler (2014), feminist media theory applies feminist principles to researching media process and organizations. This application of feminist theory to my research addresses the media power and how it affects women in media by reinforcing gender bias. One of the major functions of feminist media theory is to review media output through discourse analysis for the purpose of discovering meanings in texts (Van Zoonen, 1994). The political news articles and corresponding comments were analyzed to reveal patterns in political media discourse that demonstrated gender bias from both the media and from the media audience who were compelled to respond to the media.

My second theoretical foundation, agenda setting theory, states that news media leads people to pay attention to or neglect certain topics based on the coverage those topics receive from the media (Shaw, 1979). Eugene Shaw, in *Agenda Setting and Mass Communication Theory*, demonstrated how issue salience is transferred from the media to audience agenda (1979). Agenda setting guided my review of online news articles and commenters' responses to discover qualities and effects of any gender bias.

The purpose of this study was to provide data to enable politicians to better understand audience and media gender bias. This understanding will help politicians to effectively convey their political messages through news media. Ultimately, this may contribute to a goal of a more equal presence for women and men of politics in news media.

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Literature Review

This literature review describes the well-researched gender bias towards female politicians in political news media and how this bias is constructed through the reinforcement of society's traditional gender roles in media, the media's power through agenda setting, and the differences in female and male leadership styles. Language is the primary means through which print media conveys a gender bias. The review of media power through agenda setting demonstrates how this gender bias is then used and its widespread effect on media audiences. This review of gender bias in media discourse was important to establish historical and theoretical foundations to gender bias towards women in media to better understand and compare a sample of media writing from two major British Columbia newspapers. A second area of review was the relationship between leadership and gender. It has been shown that women and men can demonstrate different leadership styles. As the subject of my study was bias towards female politicians it was important to review female leadership to understand their actions and how they may communicate with media differently from men, potentially resulting in gender-biased reporting from the media. This will help to show how gender can affect both actions in politics and the media as it discusses these politics. Recognizing that men and women have different leadership styles will assist with accurate data analysis because acknowledgment of a female politician having a more compassionate leadership style in news reporting may not be an example of gender bias, but actually a reflection of the politician's leadership and not

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gender bias contributed by media. Having an understanding of male and female leadership style prior to conducting the data analysis will help to avoid incorrect identification of possible media gender bias. Lastly, media agenda setting was used to better assess the consequences of gender bias introduced by the media or by the public via their responses to this media. By understanding the relationship between media output and audience understanding, I was able to explain the origins of gender bias by analyzing its frequency and how it potentially influenced audience discussion to include more gender biased language. This allowed me to create a current picture of the gender bias in political news reporting in British Columbia for the year 2014.

Gender Bias in Media

Gender bias -- discrimination or prejudice against a gender -- is prevalent in political news reporting. Themes identified in a literature review of gender bias in media were: the traits society attributes to women, how society views gender, women's awareness of gender bias, and a resulting distrust in media.

In order to understand gender bias in media we need to understand how society thinks of gender. Erturk (2004) defined gender as the social organization of presumed sexual differences between men and women that defines the roles of masculinity and femininity. Erturk (2004) indicated that gender is continually reinforced by language, institutions and social experiences. Through gender, society constructed socially acceptable female and male

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traits (Erturk, 2004). Western society is patriarchal, wherein sexes are given unequal access to power in favour of men (Erturk, 2004). Erturk (2004) also stated that femininities are continuously subordinate to masculinities. Walby (1989) described a modern patriarchy as social structures and practices in which men dominate and oppress women. Walby (1989) further stated two types of patriarchy, public and private, vary in terms of how and when women are excluded. Private patriarchy excludes women from parts of society other than the household and public patriarchy does not exclude women from any areas of society, but subordinates them in all areas (Walby, 1989). Public patriarchy, therefore, allows women into the public sphere, in roles such as leaders and politicians, but continues to subordinate them through culture and media. An example of this is a study by Burke and Mazzarella (2008) of online news stories from CNN, Fox News and the New York Times, which indicated a clear focus on males over females in news coverage, source references and gendered language.

The concentration of bias in political news reporting often shows that women politicians are likely to be associated with traits that society typically attributes to women in general (Ross et al., 2013). These traits are traditionally warmth and compassion (Goodyear-Grant, 2013). Aspects of female politicians' personal lives are also frequently discussed by the media, including their marital status, maternal status and sexuality (Ross et al., 2013). I concluded this research by highlighting gender bias that described male versus female politicians in terms of different traits, their family status and sexuality. My research was

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conducted to discover how prevalent this language currently is and to find ways to reduce this language.

For my study, I felt it was also important to review female perspectives on the gender bias present in media. I accomplished this by interviewing three politicians regarding their awareness of and reaction to gender bias in media to help understand how gender bias could be reduced. Ross et al. (2013), in the review of press coverage for the 2010 British General Election, showed that female politicians are aware of gender bias in media. Case studies were used by Ross et al. (2013) to capture a key perspective of female politicians: distrust. For example, these researchers found that female politicians did not trust their national media. This distrust stemmed from a perceived lack of discussion regarding topics that are integral to politics and instead focused more on marital status, maternal status and sexuality (Ross et al., 2013).

While some female politicians feel betrayed by media which leads to their distrust, others are aware of media influence and may choose to manipulate it for their benefit in certain situations. Mohammadi and Ross (1996) researched the opinions of female British Members of Parliament on media effects as well as discussed the paradox between the value media offers the politician -- and therefore a politician's need to participate in it -- and his or her distrust of media from experience (Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). Their interviews indicated that female MPs were very concerned about the negative result on public opinion created by negative political coverage (Mohammadi & Ross, 1996). The women interviewed

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also discussed an additional paradox between their need for media and their critique of it.

This is referred to as the *provision-presentation distinction*, a theory that links behaviour to the gendered presentation of politicians in the media, suggesting that female politicians have some control over their media image (Goodyear-Grant, 2013). Research on this distrust and critique is an area for further investigation, and such was a focus of interview questions in my study. Research of this kind would be valuable in determining motivation or lack thereof for women to participate in political leadership roles and how media gender bias has affected this motivation. Furthermore, female politicians need to know about their ability to control their media coverage and how best to accomplish that goal, which were fundamental drivers for my development of a media tool for best practices.

Goodyear-Grant (2013) discussed the idea of Gendered Mediation, proposing that even gender-neutral news coverage can be a disadvantage to women. The disadvantage occurs because, throughout history, politics has been a male dominated field and we associate masculine attributes with success in politics (Goodyear-Grant, 2013). Historically, men have monopolized the areas of war, sport and politics, leading the language used to discuss these fields more masculine over time (Goodyear-Grant, 2013). Masculine-trait associations we hold with politics and the feminine-trait associations we ascribe to female politicians create a sense of incompatibility for the audience of news (Goodyear-Grant, 2013). These masculine trait associations could be considered examples of the gender bias towards women in political news reporting. Supporting evidence of this masculine language

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used to describe female politicians in shown in Adcock's (2010) study of the 1997 British General Election press coverage sought to contribute to feminist media analysis by conducting content analysis on the frequency with which women were reported on during the election in five major British newspapers. Adcock's (2010) results revealed that the masculine gender language used to describe female MP's categorized them as unfeminine, revealing them to be unfeminine or unnatural, atypical beings in masculine territory. The language we associate with women is not often used in masculine professional fields, meaning we currently use insufficient language to describe women in the traditionally masculine field of politics. Goodyear-Grant's (2013) book aided my study by revealing an incompatibility between traditional language and culture and modern women's roles in media language. My study of this language had a goal to find what language is currently used to help reduce this incompatibility.

To demonstrate the theme of media distrust by female politicians I reviewed Ross (2010). This book on gendered media describes how, when asked, female politicians are able to identify the gendered discourse surrounding them in the media. In addition, even though a woman may have many years of political office experience, the media may still write and question her capability for the role. Ross (2010) further stated that women are trivialized when the media discusses their clothing or appearance instead of their political capabilities. Ross (2010) reviewed the political campaigns of Sarah Palin and Hillary Clinton to demonstrate sexism in the media. When savvy female politicians understand the

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gender bias around them in the media, they sometimes use this knowledge to portray themselves in a certain way and, in so doing, transform the liability of inherent bias and their distrust of the media to a benefit in terms of their political image (Ross, 2010). Ross (2010) claimed both Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, knowing the media would portray them in terms of their social roles, used their images as mothers in their campaigns to their advantage to create a positive persona. The idea of using images as mothers to purposefully create gendered political news writing influenced me to question my own research participants about this strategy.

Origins to gender bias in news reporting can come from not only the gender of the politician who is the focus of the news, but also the sources of the story. Burke and Mazzarella (2008) conducted quantitative content analysis on the lead story of daily online news stories from CNN, Fox News and the New York Times. The research results indicated not only gender biased language, but that 85% of all sources in these lead stories were male (Burke & Mazzarella, 2008). Burke and Mazzarella (2008) reported that they expected a large source discrepancy between males and females, but not as large as 85%. The unexpected findings of this study reinforced the need to determine if the audience of these news stories is aware of and influenced by this large gender bias. My research studying the responding online comments to news stories attempted to identify the extent of this public awareness.

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Leadership Politics and Gender

Research, Walinga and McKendry (2014), shows women often demonstrate a compassionate, collaborative leadership style that is contrary to the traditionally masculine dominated field of leadership. Thus, understanding a female leadership style is important to this study of media coverage and public response to female politicians to further examine potential origins of media gender bias in reporting. Women leaders who adopt a female leadership style may not meet society's traditional expectations of a leader, which may continue to reinforce gender bias in politics reflected in political news reporting (Holden & Raffo, 2014). Themes identified in a review of literature on leadership and gender include: female leadership being more collaborative and democratic than male, differences between society's expectation of leaders and leader actions, the negative effects of media gender bias on female leaders and theory of prejudice towards female leaders.

Research by Eagly and Johnson (1990) and Walinga and McKendry (2014) were reviewed to provide an understanding of female leadership style. Both studies demonstrated that women often present a more collaborative, democratic leadership style. Walinga and McKendry (2014) further showed that, as individuals, we value a female leadership style, but organizations are often constructed with a male leadership style. This male leadership style is also present within politics, as indicated by Goodyear-Grant (2013).

A study completed by Holden and Raffo (2014) found a theme of differences between society's expectation of leaders and leader actions by measuring different opinions

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of varying generations on female leadership. Research participants were asked to use ten common words to describe male, female or gender neutral leadership (Holden & Raffo, 2014). Their results suggested that people admire similar traits in both male and female leadership (Holden & Raffo, 2014). Holden and Raffo's (2014) hypothesis was confirmed, that different generations valued different attributes in their leaders. The results of this study, that people value similar traits in both female and male leaders, are contrary to the differences in leadership styles that men and women often exhibit. This finding guided me to believe that the expectations of society for male and female leaders to exhibit similar traits may contribute to gender bias towards both men and women because our leaders possibly exhibit only one leadership style or the other. This would leave either sex seen as inadequate if they were not able to demonstrate all valued leadership traits.

Understanding how public and political perceptions of women's political leadership are affected by a gendered media bias is important to the current study. Hoyt and Simon (2013) conducted a study to determine if gender-biased media about female leadership would affect women as consumers of gender-biased communication or as leaders themselves. Two studies were conducted: in the first, participants were randomly assigned to view either gender-stereotypical advertisements of women or gender-counter-stereotypical advertisements of women (Hoyt & Simon, 2013). Participants then responded to a questionnaire on attitudes towards women in the first study. In the second study, the female participants were asked to complete a leadership task (Hoyt & Simon, 2013). The

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results of Study 1 showed that women who viewed images of gender-counter-stereotypical roles had more egalitarian beliefs about female leaders (Hoyt & Simon, 2013). The results of Study 2 showed that women who viewed gender-counter-stereotypical advertisements had greater leadership aspirations (Hoyt & Simon, 2013).

A meta-analysis by Eagly, A. and Karau, S. (2002), argues that female leaders are perceived and evaluated differently from male leaders. Eagly and Karau identify two forms of prejudice towards female leaders, a lack of awarding leadership credibility and a less favorable evaluation of female leader's skills (2002). Through reviews of this researched topic, Eagly and Karau show that women are devalued more than male leaders, especially when they perform leadership in a masculine style making the prejudice towards them stronger in these situations (2002).

Eagly and Karau (2002) provide research that further demonstrates the prejudice towards female leaders. Portraying a woman as pregnant lowers her evaluations of performance as well as physical attractiveness (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Whereas, the attractiveness of male leaders serves as an advantage and increase their positive evaluations (Eagly and Karau, 2002).

The accumulated meta-analysis research of Eagly and Karau (2002) demonstrates three conclusions on prejudice towards female leaders: there are less favorable attitudes towards female leaders than male, women have greater difficulty attaining leadership roles, and it is harder for women to be evaluated as effective in leadership roles than men. I

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believe this meta-analysis supports the qualitative research of my study, helping to demonstrate the ways in which female leaders experience prejudice and biased treatment. this is reflected in the qualitative data.

A similar study by Eagly and Carli (2003), suggests that women are required to display extra competency to meet a standard for recognition comparatively to male leaders. This forces female leaders to often seek leadership roles with less resistance and avoid roles that challenge their authority or norms indicating women should be egalitarian.

Eagly and Carli (2003) argue that transformational leadership may be an advantage to women because it is associated with supportive, considerate behavior which is aligned with the female leadership style.

Eagly and Carli (2003) provide a more positive outlook on the future of leadership than Eagly and Karau (2002) and shows that organizational leadership roles have changed in favor of female leaders as well as female characteristics have changed to fit these roles. Early and Carli (2003) suggest that an appointment of a female leader is a symbol of change itself. This research provides motivation for my study to discover was to create change within political news reporting and politics in a practical format that female leaders can use in their roles.

Media Power and Agenda Setting

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Agenda setting is commonly defined as the media's ability to affect public attention or agenda to the salience of issues or objects (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014). Agenda setting helps to provide the theoretical rationale for my study for the comments by public audiences to online news stories. Key themes identified in my review of literature on agenda setting include: attribute agenda setting, the power of agenda setting, and sensationalism driving media reporting.

Contributing to the research and analysis in my study is attribute agenda setting, defined by McCombs et al. (2014) as agenda setting that impacts attributes an audience finds salient to an object. Attribute agenda setting in my study helped to explain the media and public focus on certain traits of female politicians, such as appearance, while not discussing traits such as leadership or decision making capabilities of female politicians in the media. McCombs et al. (2014) further stated that agenda setting can be passive or casual and may impact an audience even with lower exposure to media. They attribute these agenda setting effects on the public interest by the media's use of a high degree of redundancy (McCombs et al., 2014). Johnson (2014) supported this idea and stated that media functions to create audience agreement on important issues. Johnson (2014) also suggested that agenda setting can be powerful enough to create an agreed upon opinion by people of all sexes, races, religions and cultures. Agenda setting was important to my research on a gendered discussion of politics because it was used to assess the transfer of salience from media to audience on the particular subject of gendered political news media.

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Furthermore, my use of online discussion forums allowed for a continuous monitoring of civic conversation to measure the frequency of gender bias discourse contributed by a B.C. print media audience and how this discourse was affected by the media studied (McCoombs et al., 2014).

To demonstrate media's large influence through agenda setting I reviewed Spiro Kiouisis's study on agenda setting and attitudes, which explored the impact of media salience on presidential candidates in the United States (2011). This study compared the media agenda of presidential figures with the public opinion of the candidates (Kiouisis, 2011). This study empirically verified that increased media attention positively increased the public opinion of the presidential candidates studied. However, this media attention may be difficult to garner for female politicians who may be marginalized and seen as less powerful. For example, Dobek-Ostrowska, who discussed Gadi Wolfsfeld's theory of cumulative inequality, suggested that those who need media voice the most have the least because media is dominated by a small selection of powerful people (2013). Dobek-Ostrowska stated that issues covered by news media adhere to journalism standards and are not an accurate representation of social groups and their objectives (2013). Dobek-Ostrowska (2013) discussed the prospect for online media to make up for this inequality by providing a platform for marginalized members of society to have access to media discussion. Expanding on Dobek-Ostrowska's work and, in consideration of the role of online platforms to represent others in our society, my study of the comments relating to online news articles

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resulted in further data to supplement this research. Agenda setting theory was instrumental in my analysis of the similarities between the topics discussed in the media and the comments discussed by its audience to see if this online platform could provide a forum free of agenda setting.

Sensationalism often drives media reporting (Castells, 2013). Consequently, exposing the wrongdoing of the powerful gave solace to the public (Castells, 2013). Castells (2013) argued that understanding complex issues of policy in politics is too difficult for the average newsreader, so the media focuses on character and how it manifests through appearance, words and information. My study reviewed the focuses on character aspects to see if they differ from male to female politicians. Castells (2013) also highlighted a need for politicians to make themselves interesting to the public. This idea relates to my earlier discussion of the provision-presentation distinction by Goodyear-Grant (2013) and helped me to understand why female politicians are portrayed using certain language.

Literature Limitations

The literature reviewed above provides merit and guidance for my own study; however, it also has limitations that reinforce a need for my research. There is very little research on political news reporting on a provincial level. Many of these studies, such as Ross et al. (2013), were conducted at a national level in Britain and not in British Columbia or even Canada. A study specific to this province would be very valuable to Canadian academic literature. Furthermore, some of these studies reviewed did not include mixed

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methods research, for example, Adcock (2010) only contained content analysis.

Mohammadi and Ross (1996) conducted solely interviews in their study, but I feel much value was added by using both qualitative and quantitative content analysis in my research because they provided a more accurate picture of cause and effect of media gender bias.

Also, Burke and Mazarella (2008) acknowledged a flaw in their study was only reviewing the lead story each day of these news outlets. My study of a comprehensive sampling of all news stories from the chosen news outlets for the year of 2014 created a more accurate picture of gender bias than if I had studied just the headline articles. While the study by Hoyt and Simon clearly showed the impact of media on female leadership (2013), there was a limitation in that only an audience of female college students was asked to participate in the study. Similarly, the research by Holden and Raffo (2014) only had female participants in their study. I feel my research has improved upon this by gathering both male and female perspectives and comparing the identified gender bias towards female politicians to male politicians to find any differences. As well, the study by Hoyt and Simon (2013) asked participants to review data in an experimental setting, which could reveal varying results from the general public. I feel my study looking at voluntary online news article responses provides a wider audience with a greater range in cultures and age groups more representative of the general public. A flaw of the research by Eagly and Karau(2002), is it's lack of comparison to studies that may find other reasons for the disadvantage to female

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leaders. This study only examines their disadvantage, lower success rate than male leaders, through a gender bias and does not acknowledge any other contributing factors.

This literature review revealed the specifics of gender bias in media and how it is created, the strength of the media to enforce this gender bias and the potential effect it may have on future female leaders. All of this information highlights the need for further research into a method to reduce gender bias in political news reporting and the need for it to exist in British Columbia, Canada.

Methods

The purpose of this study is to provide accurate data to enable politicians to better understand and navigate media and audience gender bias. Increased understanding will allow politicians to more effectively and impactfully convey their political messages through news media. This research, conducted within a critical paradigm, used qualitative content analysis of interviews and quantitative analysis of political news articles and corresponding online responses to those articles. The purpose of this research was to highlight the relationship between media, gender and politicians and to work towards changing it to a more unbiased view. I conducted quantitative content analysis on 100 B.C. political news articles in published online 2014 to create a picture of the current discourse of gendered news in politics and to discover the frequency in which political news reporting used a gender bias towards female politicians. Then I used qualitative content analysis on

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personal experiences of female politician's reactions to this discourse shared through interviews. The goal of collecting the interview data was to use politician's reactions and experiences with media gendered language to contribute to understanding and thereby create a more equal environment for female politicians in the media. I believe mixed methods research was the most valuable way to conduct this research because it provides a more holistic perspective of this subject. Supporting this research design are researchers like Ross et al. (2013), who augmented their content analysis with case studies. Similar to their study, my qualitative and quantitative research results may be compared for a better understanding of how specific media gender bias affects female politicians in British Columbia.

My research and methods were guided by two theories: feminist media theory and agenda setting theory. Feminist media theory provided a framework for the content analysis of my research. Theorists Parry and Karam (2001) indicated feminism seeks to promote the rights of women. Feminist criticism has shown the importance of allowing space for women to express themselves freely and accurately (Parry & Karam, 2001). When explaining feminism, Jackson and Jones (1998) stated that to think from a feminist perspective we must challenge what knowledge we already have because it has been used within a male dominated culture. Conducting research on the gender bias in media is a way to challenge this traditional masculine perspective. One of the main functions of feminist media research is to examine the media output with the aspects of reality via content analysis, quantifying and analyzing words or phrases in text to discover meaning, and semiotics, the study of

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signs and symbols and the analysis of communication systems (Van Zoonen, 1994). Van Zoonen (1994) described quantitative content analysis as having a focus on objectivity and its process of accepting frequency and repetition of phrases or words in text as indicators of meaning. This process of identifying repetitive texts and grouping them into themes to provide insight is the reason I used content analysis in my study. Quantitative content analysis provided me with a clear picture of the current gender biased language used in political news reporting in B.C. for the year 2014, and the actual language being used to enforce gender bias. A flaw in content analysis is that a natural reading of the analyzed text would not produce a similar impression on the reader (Van Zoonen, 1994). Examples of texts have been provided to support decisions made in identifying themes. Future researchers will then be able to agree or disagree with these findings and can see in the literature reviewed and methods of thesis research the foundation of other research that guided what themes and language I looked for in the text.

Agenda setting theory also provided a theoretical framework for my research. Basic agenda setting describes the impact of media salience on the topics considered important to the public, also known as the public agenda (McCoombs et al., 2014). Media salience refers to topics not discussed in the media and, as a result, not discussed or acknowledged by the public. Secondly, attribute agenda setting applied to my research because it affects the focus on the attributes of objects created by media (McCoombs et al., 2014). Within this study, the objects of study are female politicians and the attributes are topics such as

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personality or qualifications. Second level agenda setting theory guided my study of gender bias in news media through research that showed that female politicians are attributed with characteristics of either a masculine leadership style, a traditional gender role, family status or physical appearance. Thus, the news media exhibits salience on specific attributes of female politicians differing from salience on attributes of male politicians. Agenda setting theory also applied to my review of the comments made by the public audience of the news media articles. One of the main functions of agenda setting is to determine salience and how the media directs public attention to an issue (Neuman, Guggenheim, Mo Jang, & Young Bae, 2014). Neuman, et al. (2014) researched the effect of agenda setting on large amounts of data. They identified 29 key newsworthy issues held by the American population and searched multiple forms of media to analyze the effects of agenda setting on these media's and how they relate to each other (Neuman, et al., 2014). The results of Neuman, et al. (2014) indicated that agenda setting influence between traditional forms of media and social media is not a one-way pattern, but a dynamic of both forms of media leading the agenda setting influence.

Correlating audience responses to articles helped to determine the effects of agenda setting within the gender bias studied. Topics and themes revealed by conducting quantitative analysis on the 100 political news reporting articles were often identified in the audience responses of online articles, and some new themes present only in the online comments. This process demonstrated agenda setting and media salience of the topics

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reflected within the 100 articles studied. Agenda setting was important to this study because political news articles were reviewed in conjunction with their corresponding online comments as submitted by readers. Agenda setting theory connects the information discussed in the articles to the comments provided in response. As this research goal was to create a tool for future political female leaders to assist them to navigate political news media, agenda setting serves as a clear explanation of media influence to these users.

Data Gathering

The data in this study was comprised of online news articles from two largely circulated British Columbia newspapers, *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun*. The corresponding comments made by readers online about relevant articles from these newspapers were also analyzed. The quantitative research centered on the measurement of topic frequency and themes indicative of gender bias in B.C. political news media (Kumar, 2010). Based on previous studies such as Ross et al. (2013), some example topics including gender bias are: female politician's marital or maternal status or sexuality. Other topics searched for in the data were male and female leadership styles, discussion of physical appearance and gender stereotypes. All topics were reviewed to see if they were applied to both female and male politicians. The articles reviewed were of B.C. politics throughout the 2014 calendar year. The quantitative research included 100 political news reporting articles containing following criteria: discussion of a female political leader in the article (leader

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being someone with a position in political office or officially elected volunteer position within a political party in British Columbia), written and published within the 2014 calendar year. Along with the articles, the comments section below these online articles were reviewed for their topics and language used to create knowledge around audience response to gendered language in the media, and to analyze any gendered language presented by the audience in their responses.

The qualitative portion of the research contained three semi-structured interviews which were conducted with two women and one man at varying stages and leadership roles in their political careers. These interviewees consisted of two municipal politicians and one federal liberal riding president. The interview subjects remain anonymous. The three participant interviews were semi-structured, with guiding questions asked of all participants and room for follow up questions (Merriam, 2014). This allowed the respondents to provide data pertinent to the study in a way unique to their own experiences (Merriam, 2014). The interviews were designed to collect data to showcase participant experiences and strategies in dealing with B.C. political news media. These interviews were conducted in less than 90 minutes each. They were recorded, with consent, and followed up on with the interview subject for further questions needed. The interview subjects were shown their transcripts prior to analysis of the data and allowed time to clarify their statements or edit comments. As recommended by Merriam (2014), my interview guide for the semi-structured interviews consisted of questions posed to all participants and highlighted topics for discussion. These

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topics included: politics in British Columbia, gender, media, perceived relationships with the media, past dealings with political news media, desires for women's relationship with media, and the personal effect media relations has had on them anything about strategies.¹ I prepared for the natural expression of narratives within the interview data. A narrative is a possible consequence of a semi-structured interview. Although a narrative inquiry could have provided further useful information, I chose to limit my study to answering specific questions (Cortazzi, Lixian, Wall, Cavendish, 2001). Elements of narration may present in the interview data as it arises organically during semi-structured interviews. There can also be added risk for the narrative interview subject when they reveal blame or harmful information in their stories (Cortazzi et al., 2001). I avoided this by ensuring the identities of my interview subjects were anonymous and by using semi structured interviews.

A limitation of my data research is that I was not able to provide inter rater reliability testing. This was not possible due to time constraints and financial restrictions of this study. I have mitigated this by providing examples of each quantitative and qualitative data theme so others can review for validity. A future study could benefit from having more than one researcher to conduct inter reliability testing on the data.

¹ See Appendix A for list of interview questions.

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Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative content analyses were conducted on the data within this research. My quantitative research data was coded by categorizing the themes identified in gendered news reporting from my literature review. These suggested themes were: elements of female and male leadership styles, comments on the marital or family status of politicians, discussion of appearance, use of stereotypical male or female traits to describe politicians, and identifying the ratio of male to female participation in politics. Many sub-themes were identified under these categories and then grouped into the following major headings: negativity towards politicians, leadership, discussion of gender, appearance, marital and family status, non-physical descriptions of politicians. I used the Nvivo software to help code the data. This process facilitated the consistency of my analysis by allowing me to review articles and highlight themes throughout. I was able to identify low-inference categories (common traits or facts) in the research that I then coded in order to link the categories and data I collected (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

For the purpose of this research I define a theme as topics or phrases that recur in the analyzed data to create a category for analysis. If a topic was referenced only one time in the data it was still labeled as a sub-theme, possibly contributing to a larger collaboration of sub-themes to form a larger theme. Even one reference to a topic was valuable to note in my research because I studied the frequency of themes and the absence of a theme or very small presence is noteworthy when trying to determine if and how themes are gender bias are

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present in data. Each of the 100 articles and all online comments were read to find the themes present. I began by reading all the articles and identifying themes based on the knowledge that gender bias in media often took the form of gender stereotypical language, discussion of traditional gender roles, appearance or family status. The articles were reviewed 3 times in total. First to identify themes, second to ensure all themes identified later in the research were looked for in previous articles, and a third time after identifying any new themes in the comments data. Similar process was conducted in review of the online comment data. New themes were identified when the topic carried any possible variance from a previous similar theme. For example the themes, *male politician aggressive trait* is different from *male politician stereotypical traits* because a male politician being described as aggressive may be stereotypical, but not all stereotypical male traits are aggression. Identifying themes in the quantitative data provided me with suggested themes that I could review in the qualitative data as well.

Qualitative analysis in interviews for the purpose of my study captured the personal experience of the interview subjects and their strategies for working with news media to avoid gender biased reporting. The interviewed subjects viewed gender biased reporting as discriminatory and potentially detrimental to their electoral careers. The interview questions were designed to determine experience with media and to determine if the interview subjects had experienced any of the predicted forms of gender bias in media. Themes were identified in the data by reading the interview transcripts and highlighting phrases, words or

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paragraphs that discussed a topic. Unlike the quantitative data the qualitative data often contained entire paragraphs expressing an experience that was then labeled as a theme. Examples of these paragraphs are shown in the results section. Each interview transcript was reviewed twice to ensure themes found in a later transcript were searched for in the first. This coding process enabled me to draw connections between the varying experiences of the interview participants and themes present in both the interview data and quantitative data studied. Examples of how these themes appeared in the qualitative and quantitative data is explained by chart in the results section.

Ethics

I ensured my research was ethically sound through obtaining informed consent from each of the three interview participants via a signed document. This document described the study and the possible outcomes of the research, such as potential publication and the document tool to aid politicians in media use that I plan to create using my research findings. Participants were offered the ability to withdraw comments or participation from the research at any time. It was understood that they are public figures asked to relay information on their involvement with media and their political careers. Interview subjects remained anonymous in order to create no harm to their reputation or relationships. My research did not be involved any vulnerable participants.

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Some of the research data for my study was obtained by analyzing publicly available information, news articles and online comments from the public, which does not require an ethical review.

Results

One hundred political news media articles from 2014 were analyzed in this study. Fifty articles were included from *The Vancouver Sun* and 50 articles from *The Province*. Out of these 100 articles selected, 75% were written by male journalists. The articles were selected by reviewing all articles published from these two newspapers with content on politics or politicians. As the study was meant to research gender bias in political news reporting on politicians, articles that included no description or information on people were excluded. Potential articles were searched within the online archives using the following search categories: *politics, legislature, government, MLA, MP, mayoral, election*. All overarching themes identified in the study, describing each theme's sub-themes and the frequency with which these sub-themes were identified in the articles and comments made by the public are identified in Table 1.

Quantitative Results of Articles and Online Comments

Tables 1-8 include all themes and sub-themes identified in the quantitative content analysis of the online articles studied and the respective comments relating to these articles. Tables 1-8 also includes the frequency with which these sub-themes appeared in the articles

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and the comments studied. Tables 1-8 are divided into smaller charts that demonstrate each major theme identified in the study and reveals the sub-themes for the articles studied and the comment studied. These sub-themes are placed next to each other with their frequency for easy comparison between the sub-themes that were presented in the articles versus the online comments.

Table 1 THEME: Negativity towards female politicians

Sub-Themes in Articles	# Of Articles Containing Theme	Sub-Themes in Comments	# Of Comments Containing Theme
Awkward female politician	2	Making fun of female pols	11
Female pols. not handle pressure	5	Negative female pol. traits	5
Female pol spends public money	3	Female pols. as criminals	13
Negative/Shady actions by female pols.	12	Female pols. as embarrassment	11
		Female pol. spends public money	6
		Female pols. untrustworthy	3
		Lack of honesty by female pols.	5

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Table 2 THEME: Negativity towards male politicians

Sub-Themes in Articles	# Of Articles Containing Theme	Sub-Themes in Comments	# Of Comments Containing Theme
Male pols. are criminals	1	Mocking of male pols.	11
Male pols. failures	2	Male pols failures	10
Negative/Shady actions male pols.	8	Bad traits of male pols.	1
Mocking male pols.	2	Male pols. are untrustworthy	9
		Male pols. are criminals	4

Table 3 THEME: Leadership

Sub-Themes in Articles	# OF Articles Containing Theme	Sub-Themes in Comments	# OF Comments Containing Theme
Female pols. show female leadership style	4	Positive leadership shown by male pols.	1
Female pols. show male leadership style.	6		
Male pols. show male leadership style.	6		

** no instances of male politicians exhibiting a female leadership style were found in the 100 articles studied.*

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Table 4 THEME: Gender

Sub-Themes in Articles	# Of Articles Containing Theme	Sub-Themes in Comments	# Of Comments Containing Theme
Female pols. described with gender stereotypes	2	Gender is not a factor	4
Female pols dismissed because of gender	1	Discussion of media reporting on gender bias	1
Male pol. aggressive trait	10	Indicates media uses gender bias	2
Male pol. exhibits female traits	7	Men think politics and political reporting is not gender equal	2
Male pol. described with gender stereotypes	3	Sexist comments towards female politicians	1
Sexism in political news reporting	2	Women think politics and political reporting are gender equal	3
Discussion of unequal female to male political participation	4	Women think politics and political reporting is not equal	1
		Men think politics and political reporting is gender equal	6

Table 5 THEME: Appearance

Sub-Themes in Articles	# Of Articles Containing Theme	Sub-Themes in Comments	# Of Comments Containing Theme
Description of male pols. physical traits	2	Discussion of male pol. physical trait	1
		Discussion of female pol. physical trait	1

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Table 6 THEME: Marital and Family Status

Sub-Themes in Articles	# Of Articles Containing Theme	Sub-Themes in Comments	# Of Comments Containing Theme
Male pols. paternal status	1	Female pols marital status.	1
Male pols. marital status	3		
Female pols. maternal status	1		
Female pols. marital status	2		

Table 7 THEME: Positive Remarks Politicians

Sub-Themes in Articles	# Of Articles Containing Theme	Sub-Themes in Comments	# Of Comments Containing Theme
Admiration of female pols.	3	Admiration for female pols.	5
Male pols. as righteous	8	Admiration for male pols.	5
Positive remarks on female pols.	2		

**These themes presented themselves in the study, however, as they do not provide influential data regarding the gender bias in media, they have been kept but not expanded upon.*

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Table 8 THEME: Descriptions of Politicians

Sub-Themes in Articles	# Of Articles Containing Theme	Sub-Themes in Comments	# Of Comments Containing Theme
Female pols. qualifications	9	Comments on male pols. character	1
Female pols. non-physical traits.	5	Pols. are after public money	9
Male pols. qualifications	21	Politicians are childish	1
Male pols. non-physical traits	8	Politicians are criminals	9

Not all sub-themes were congruent between the male and female politicians described in the articles and comments of the study. Often sub-themes arose, as shown above, for only female or male, and were not present in the comments made by readers online. In the instances where these sub-themes were non-existent, they were removed from the tables above. For example, under the larger theme of Marital and Family status, within the comments made by online readers, only one instance of discussing a female politician's marital status occurred. Other sub-themes, such as a male politician's marital status, were present in the articles studied but not the comments. To show this discrepancy, no similar sub-theme was highlighted under the comment heading. This was to promote the tables of themes accurately reflecting what was present in the data.

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Table 9 contains the quantitative content analysis data for the 100 online articles reviewed for gender bias in this study. All major themes are listed with their corresponding sub-themes. A discussion of the results is included that highlights important inferences from the data and quotations from articles that support the qualitative findings. This table has been constructed to show data supporting the themes and sub-themes found in the articles studied.

Table 9 Quantitative Data Analysis of Articles: The Vancouver Sun and The Province

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	# OF ARTICLES	QUOTATION
Negativity towards politicians	<p>TO FEMALES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -a awkward female politicians -f female politicians cannot handle pressure -female pols. spend public money -negative/shady actions of female pols. <p>TO MALES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -male politicians as criminals -male pols. as failures -negative/shady actions by male pols. -mocking male pols. 	<p>While themes vary between male and female results, the sub-theme 'negativity toward female politicians' was created from 22 collected articles. The similar male sub-theme, 13 articles, a 9% increase in the negative discussion of female politicians. The categories with the highest number of articles being: 8 articles mocked male politicians and 12 articles described neg/shady actions by female pols.</p>	<p>"Horgan denied the accusations, saying Clark provided no evidence of any sexism and that he's simply doing his job as Opposition leader by criticizing her government's policies and questioning her decisions." – <i>Rob Shaw, The Vancouver Sun, Dec 2 2014</i></p> <p>"In other words," Eby told the legislature Thursday, "there were no side deals. But that was not the case. There was a side deal. The minister knew it and he signed anyway." – <i>Lindsay Kinds, The Province, April 4 2014</i></p>

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Leadership	-female politician female leadership style -male politician male leadership style -female politician male leadership style	Of 16 articles discussing leadership style, 12 articles demonstrate politicians acting with a typically male leadership style. This was distributed evenly. 6 articles described women using a male leadership style and 6 for men.	Female pol. Showing male leadership style: "Another Tory MLA has left the Progressive Conservative caucus, saying the government's problems are bigger than just Premier Alison Redford's embattled leadership." -Wood, Braid, Varco, <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> , March 17 2014
Discussion of Gender	-female pol. described using gender stereotypes -female pol. dismissed because of gender -male pol. Exhibits feminine traits -male pol. described using gender stereotypes -sexism in political news -unequal male to female participation in politics.	Of the 19 articles discussing gender only 2 showed gender stereotypes of women. A similarly low number, 3, used gender stereotypes when describing males. Only 2 articles demonstrated sexism. And unexpectedly large number of articles, 7, described male politicians using typically female traits. 4 articles highlighted the unequal representation of females to males in politics. The distribution of the 19 articles discussing gender is: 6- <i>The Province</i> , 13- <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> .	MALE POL DESCRIBED WITH FEMALE TRAITS: "But those who know the outspoken, sometimes-combative, NDP MLA from Juan de Fuca paint a different picture, one of a man who wears his heart on his sleeve, who can be overcome with emotion behind the scenes..." - <i>Rob Shaw, The Vancouver Sun, May 1 2014</i> . UNEQUAL REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE TO MALE POLS: "No one has yet provided a decent justification for the continuing dearth of female leaders in the public and private sectors." - <i>Editorial, The Vancouver Sun, Dec 4 2014</i> .
Appearance	-description of male pol. physical trait	Unexpectedly, only 1 article described a politician's physical appearance. It is a discussion of a male politician's weight loss	"Doug McCallum has spent much of the past decade tightening his belt, dropping 30 pounds to become a fitter, leaner

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		written by a female journalist in <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> .	version of his former self when he was mayor of Surrey.” – <i>Kelly Sinoksi, The Vancouver Sun, Oct 31 2014</i>
Martial and Family Status	-male pol. paternal status -male pol. marital status -female pol. maternal status -female pol. marital status	Only 7 articles in total discussed family status of politicians. Male politician marital status was discussed slightly more 3-2. 2 articles from <i>The Province</i> and 5 from <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> .	FEMALE POL MARITAL STATUS: “The Speaker had posted holiday snaps of herself and her husband during a trip to South Africa in late August and early September.” – <i>Vaughn Palmer, The Vancouver Sun, March 26 2014</i>
Non-physical Descriptions of politicians	-female pol. qualifications -female pol. traits -male pol. qualifications -male pol. traits	43 articles included non-physical descriptions of politicians. 9 articles described female pols. qualifications and 21 articles described male pols. qualifications (12% difference). 25 of these articles were written by <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> and 18 by <i>The Province</i> . It is noteworthy that of all 13 articles written on both male and female traits, <i>The Province</i> wrote only 2.	QUALIFICATIONS: “The 61-year-old has represented the riding of Vancouver East since 1997, winning six consecutive federal elections.” – <i>Staff reporter, The Province, Dec 13 2014</i> . “The 35-year-old Cote, who recently completed a master’s degree in urban studies at Simon Fraser University...” – <i>Dan Fumano, The Province, Nov 16 2014</i>

Analysis of quantitative article data

From the qualitative data studied in the 100 articles from *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun*, a 9% greater negativity towards female politicians over males was noted.

Contrary to prior research, gender stereotypes were used infrequently within the articles studied. This indicates that while the journalists often show female politicians in a

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negative light more than males, they did not use specific gender biased language to do so, demonstrating differences in the way male and female politicians are reported on . Further reinforcing this, the study revealed only one article describing the physical appearance of a female politician. This was unexpected as prior literature studied indicated this was to be common. The data revealed favoritism to male politicians in news media. Female politicians received more negative attention than their male counterparts. Male politicians were discussed in ways that promoted them as political leaders, such as their qualifications. The gender bias presented itself in the data through unexpected channels. I hypothesized that the gender bias would be prevalent in discussions of female versus male leadership styles, and physical appearance of female politicians and their family status. The results showed a more general, positive light and media reporting given to male politicians and that marital and family stat was evenly discussed of male and female politicians. However, supporting my hypothesis, I found a majority of politicians, male and female, use a male leadership style.

Table 10 contains the quantitative content analysis data of comments in response to the 100 online articles reviewed for gender bias in this study. All major themes are listed with their corresponding sub-themes. A discussion of the results is included, highlighting important inferences from the data and quotations from articles studied supporting the qualitative findings. This table was constructed to show data supporting the themes and sub-themes found in the comments studied. The direct quotations listed in this table include the

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name of commenter, date the comment was made, and an indication of which news article the comment was responding to for reference.

Table 10 Quantitative Data Analysis from online comments: The Vancouver Sun and The Province²

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	COMPARISON	QUOTATION
Negativity towards politicians	<p>TO FEMALES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -making fun of female pols. -negative female pols. traits -female pols. are criminals -female pols. as an embarrassment -female pols. spend public money -female pol. as untrustworthy -lack of honesty by female pols. <p>TO MALES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -mocking of male pols. -male pol's failures -bad traits of male pols. -male pols. are untrustworthy -male pols are criminals 	<p>Female politicians were called criminals in the online comments 13 times while male pols. were called criminals only 4. Male politicians were referred to as untrustworthy more often than female 9-3. Both male and female politicians were mocked equally throughout online comments. 11 instances for each sex were recorded. There were 54 comments in total showing negativity towards female politicians and 35 comments containing negativity towards male politicians. The distribution of negative comments for males and female on <i>The Province</i> website was even at 24-23, however, on <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> website comments females received 30 negative comments and males 12.</p>	<p>FEMALE POLS EMBARRASSMENT: "She barely graduated from High school and dropped out of three universities..enough said." –<i>Ken Elmer. VS Website, Dec 1 2014 Resp. to V. Palmer, The Vancouver Sun, Dec 1 2014</i></p> <p>MALE POLS UNTRUSTWORTHY AND MALE POLS CRIMINALS: "I suspect he's (MLA De Jong) mainly disappointed that this has come to light and that his B.C. Liberal government, yet again, comes off looking both incompetent and crooked." –<i>Mark Eddy, The Prov. Website, July 18 2014. Resp. to M. Smyth, July 18 2014.</i></p>

² The sub-themes identified in the comments under the category of non-physical descriptions of politicians were: politicians are after public money, politicians are childish, and politicians are criminals. Each of these themes presented themselves as gender neutral and equally distributed throughout male and female politicians.

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Leadership	-Positive leadership male pols.	One article by Jeff Lee on Nov. 8 2014 in <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> profiled many positive aspects to the leader Kirk Lapointe, resulting in 4 positive comments on Lapointe's good leadership skills.	"I voted for Kirk LaPointe. He is honest, principled, and cares about the residents and communities of Vancouver. He will make a fine Mayor." - <i>Sheryl Spencer, The Vancouver Sun website, Nov 8 2014</i>
Discussion of Gender	-Gender is not a factor -Discussion of media reporting on gender bias -Indicates media uses gender bias -Men think pols and pol. reporting is not gender equal -Men think pols and pol. reporting is gender equal -Sexist comments towards female pols. -Women think pols and pol. reporting is gender equal - Women think pols and pol. reporting is not gender equal	Gender was discussed in the online comments a total of 19 times. 18 times this theme was discussed on <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> website. 6 me indicated they think politics and political news reporting is not equal and 2 men indicated they think it is gender equal. While 3 women indicated they think politics and political news reporting is gender equal and only one woman stated she thought it is unequal. 4 commenters indicated they think gender is not a factor in politics/political news reporting.	"I kinda wanted to see how this played out in the media a little before commenting. But what I couldn't help notice is the shock and outrage that some of my female friends and associates have over this Premier's comments. These women are furious that such a powerful person would ever need to play "the gender card". Here's a little tip: criticizing policy isn't sexism - its politics. Most people I know could care less of the Premier's gender - it's a non-factor. They can't stand her because of her policies and her party. What I get from the women in and around my little world is this: "Christy Clark doesn't speak for me, at all." – <i>Peter Kelly, The Vancouver Sun website, Dec 3 2014, Resp. to Rob Shaw, The Vancouver Sun, Dec 2 2014.</i>
Appearance	- description of male pol. physical trait	Only 2 times were politicians described by their physical	"They told (said) he's a very good looking guy ...

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	· description of female pol. physical trait	appearance in the online comments. 1 description of a male in <i>The Province</i> and 1 description of a woman in <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> .	they were laying it on thick. That's when I had enough.” – <i>Laurie Thi The Province website, Nov 14 2014, Resp. to S. Cooper, Nov 14 2014.</i>
Marital and Family Status	· female pol. marital status	The quote to the right is the only time marital status was mentioned of any politician in the online comments. This is from <i>The Province</i> , responding to an article about MLA Jenny Kwan’s spending.	“Hey, it was her husband who misappropriated the money, she divorced his ass. Go list the liberal MLA'a who have misappropriated thous....no millions of tax payer dollars.” – <i>Dave King, the Province website, Dec 23 2014, Resp. C. Oliver, Dec 22 2014.</i>

Analysis of quantitative online comments data

Similar to the quantitative data from the 100 articles studied, the online comments following political news reporting articles in *The Province* and *The Vancouver Sun* reflected a theme of more negativity towards female politicians than male (54-35). The majority of this disparity occurred in articles on *The Vancouver Sun* webpage.

With only one comment from the study reflecting on a male leadership style, it is appropriate to state that audience members are not aware of politics being affected by a male or female leadership style. A large majority of the gender discussion in comments reviewed in this study took place on *The Province* webpage. This revealed unexpectedly that male commenters were more likely to believe that gender bias is an issue in politics and political

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news reporting than females. Four commenters even stated that gender is a not a factor in politics. This is contrary to the data collected in the interviews suggesting gender bias is a large factor.

Comments studied in this research revealed commenters rejected the notion that gender bias exists in political news reporting and did not add discussion containing typically gendered language themselves, such as discussing physical appearance of politicians and family status. Comments did, however, reflect a negative bias towards female politicians similar to that presented in the articles studied. This demonstrated the principle of agenda setting in media affecting audience comments on politicians.

Table 11 contains the qualitative content analysis of interviews conducted in this study. All major themes are listed with their corresponding sub-themes. Examples of qualitative data from the interviews is shown supporting the theme and sub-themes found in the study. The direct quotations listed in this table include the assigned pseudonym of the interview subject. This table was designed to demonstrate how the qualitative data in the study has been summarized into themes and findings.

Table 11 Qualitative Interview Data Results

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	QUOTATION
Media focus	-media focus on physical appearance	"I have not had this happen to me personally but I will anecdotally say that I know and have

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - media focus on male politicians -media focus on family status -media focus on traditional gender roles 	<p>been involved in the aftermath of a line of questioning that included questions about a woman’s appearance – most specifically her dress. It was a very disheartening experience, that a media person/outlet would consider it appropriate to question the style choices of an individual that was devoting their life to public service.” – <i>Riding President</i>.</p> <p>“Once that particular reporter left the organization, then things seemed to even out a bit more, but inevitably the quotes and articles where focused more on the male councillors rather than the female (even though there was an equal number of each gender). – <i>Municipal Politician #2</i></p>
Fear of media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -media influence -media causes negative effects -fear of media negative reporting -favoritism to male pols in media 	<p>“I didn’t like being painted like that. As someone who is impractical. Making it sound cheap and weird. You can’t do this if that kind of thing is going to bother you. There are far worse things going on in politics between politicians and between staff and politicians. If that’s going to bug me I need a thicker skin. I don’t take it seriously. There have been a few articles that have been very critical of me...” - <i>Municipal Politician #1</i></p>
Community Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -community comments on age -community comments on gender - sexist comments from male politicians 	<p>Gender bias is not only in media, but also society. We get messages from media which are very powerful, but they were present in society to begin with. They reinforce each other. Why would people that probably don’t even read <i>local paper</i> approach me and say to me ‘oh you’re young and a woman, it must be so hard.’ That really knocked me off my feet. But it is hard! I get written off by staff, I get weird sexual comments from other random politicians. I remember walking into a conference with another young woman my age and we were laughing, and she happens to be a very beautiful young woman and we were</p>

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		laughing our heads off about something, and every eye in the room turned and stared at us. It was all older men. That's what politics is. Retired men. If two guys had walked in and laughed would every single person have turned and stared at us like they did?" – <i>Municipal Politician #1</i>
Change is needed in politics	-advice for future female politicians -ideas for change	<p>“NEVER fudge an answer, as whether you are male or female, they will hang you out to dry on that! If you make yourself available to the media then they will tend to come to you more for a sound bite as they can depend on you being there – and of course the more you talk to the media, the more comfortable you will feel answering their questions.” –<i>Municipal Politician #2</i></p> <p>“We have to change so much more than just the media. First of all the hours that things are operating downtown (referring to legislature). You are expected to be on all the time. That leaves no room for parenting. That also leaves no room for men to be parents. It would be very rare for a man to be a stay at home parent. I don't think you should have to sacrifice parenting for a job as politician and it seems like that is the trade of that is expected. “ –<i>Municipal Politician #1</i></p>

Analysis of qualitative interview data

As the names of the interview subjects will remain confidential to ensure no harm or risk comes to the participants, I will refer to them as Municipal Politician #1, Municipal Politician #2, and Riding President. Riding President is male and both Municipal Politicians are female. Four main themes were found within the interview data: media focus, fear of

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media, unexpected community comments, change is needed in politics The themes of media focus and fear of media are derived from agenda setting theory in media. This fear was present for both female Municipal Politicians but not for the male Riding President. This fear , was indicated by the interview subjects, to have stemmed from examples of unfairness towards the female politicians from the media. The following is a quotation from Municipal Politician #2: *“Unfortunately what I have found is that often reporters allow their own personal political preferences to guide how their stories are written, or who they interview for a story. For a number of years our local community newspaper had a reporter who was more inclined towards the political leanings of three members of council and not the other three. Consequently the articles that appeared in the paper tended to focus on those councillors and the rest of us were quoted or featured very sporadically by comparison.”*

While this discussion did not indicate gender bias exhibited by the reporter, Municipal Politician #2 went on to reveal her perceived experience while participating in a Mayoral election against a male politician. Municipal Politician #2 revealed that the effort made by the media to write about her candidacy and platform was minimal and the male candidate was discussed at great length in the local newspaper. *“The paper did an article on the male candidate and barely mentioned me, almost as an afterthought in the article. A couple of weeks later, it then went on to print the platform of the male candidate (correctly), but used an old platform of mine from a previous election. This, of course, made me look as if I was behind the times on what was needed for our community. Needless to say I was not pleased*

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and when I approached the reporter with my concerns, I was told that that was what they had on file. They had not bothered to look at my new website, or contact me to get current information (but obviously had done so with the male candidate).” This experience demonstrated the major theme of media focus and how the interview subjects felt media focus was on their male political counterparts. Municipal Politician #1 expressed a similar experience with media being unwilling to cover her because she did not meet gender stereotypical expectations. Municipal Politician #1 was asked to participate in a magazine article demonstrating her cooking at home with her children, however, when Municipal Politician #1 indicated that this was not common practice in her household due to the fact that both she and her husband worked full time and she held a position as a municipal councillor. Municipal Politician #1 thought it would be misleading to demonstrate cooking with her children as it was not practice in their busy household, but would be happy to discuss another aspect of their lives. *“[The reporter] dropped the article. Never contacted me again. Sometimes it’s not what they write, but what they won’t write.”* This experience of Municipal Politician #1 demonstrated the sub-theme of media focus on traditional gender roles identified within the study.

When asked about the media reporting on their appearance, interview subjects had varying responses. Riding President confirmed that he has witnessed media questioning female politicians about their dress that made him uncomfortable: *“I know and have been involved in the aftermath of a line of questioning that included questions about a woman’s*

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appearance, most specifically her dress. It was a very disheartening experience, that a media person would consider it appropriate to question the style choices of an individual that was devoting their life to public service.”

Municipal Politician #1 did not experience media reporting or questioning her based on appearance, however, she did express that many community members questioned her about her age, appearance and gender. *“When people meet me in person for the first time, they know my name from the newspaper and they know my name from the election campaigns, they are often surprised. They say ‘Oh, it must be so hard, you’re young and a woman’. And I think, bet you didn’t say that to my male colleague [XXXXXXXXXX], because he’s a man first of all and he’s got a bit of grey so he doesn’t look young.”* While Municipal Politician #2 indicated she had not experienced questioning or description based on her appearance she indicated it is something she has witnessed at the provincial political level. *“It would never be acceptable to report on how a male politician is dressed or if he had an emotional response to something, so why should it be ok to point that out about a female politician?”* These experiences were categorized within the theme of community responses.

Each of the interview subjects was asked if he/she could provide advice for future female politicians when navigating media in order to create a more equal portrayal of female politicians and avoid the gender bias in media. Much of these responses were a request for change within politics and were categorized within the study under the theme: change is needed in politics. For example, Municipal Politician #2 indicated best practice would

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include asking the media to email questions for a response or having journalists leave voicemails so as the politician you could craft a response without being caught off guard.

In response to this question Municipal Politician #1 indicated a much greater need for change in politics. *“We have to change so much more than just the media. First of all the hours that things are operating downtown (referring to legislature), you are expected to be on all the time. That leaves no room for parenting. That also leaves no room for men to be parents. It would be very rare for a man to be a stay at home parent. I don’t think you should have to sacrifice parenting for a job as a politician and it seems like that is expected.”* Municipal Politician #1 indicated she felt the requirement of politicians to be away from their families to attend legislature reinforces the gender bias. Municipal Politician #1 felt that with technology there should be ways for MPs and MLAs to attend legislature without leaving their city or their families on such a regular basis. *“You sacrifice everything to be there and that’s unappealing if you have strong relationships. So what kind of people do we end up sending? Are they people that are willing to sacrifice everything? Or are they people that are doing it for the wrong reasons?”* Municipal Politician #1 said that the gender bias in media is a reflection of society’s restrictions and workplace expectations. *“Unless we change the way we do government or politics it’s going to remain a barrier for women who have strong ties to their children. Or they don’t have children or those types of partners and are expected to live a restricted life.”*

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Discussion

Supporting Erturk (2004), my research revealed a patriarchal society and institution of politics revealed by many instances of masculine language used to describe both male and female politicians. The study also revealed negative language used more frequently to describe female politicians. This continues to demonstrate the patriarchal hegemony of political leadership and political institution in British Columbia, however not all my findings show a gender bias in political news reporting.

In support of previous findings by Ross et al. (2013), the interview subjects, both male and female, questioned in my research demonstrated their own knowledge of gender bias in media from experience and showed a fear of participation in news media because of this perceived bias. To expand upon Ross et al. (2013), my research explored why female politicians feared media involvement. Their fears come from personally experiencing unfair treatment in the past, often stemming from favoritism granted to male politicians in the form of passed over opportunities for advancement and underappreciated commitment to public service and accomplishments. My quantitative data was not designed to assess the personal consequences to female politicians from media gender bias, but any fear stemming from this form of bias was captured qualitatively.

Media agenda appears to have directly influenced the political issues that were available for discussion online to the B.C. community. Within the calendar year 2014, a few key issues stood out: the Vancouver mayoral election, Ministry of Health firing scandal,

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LNG pipeline and the Kwantlen University salary scandal. As well, the results of the study showed negative reporting on female politicians resulted in similar negative comments made by the online audience. Contrary to my hypothesis, little data was found indicating journalists were focusing on the family status, appearance of female politicians, leadership style or traditional gender roles and, as a result, the online comments made by citizens of British Columbia also did not contain this focus. The presence of such agenda setting in news media was not unexpected however, the topics influenced by agenda setting found in this study were. I hypothesized that discussion of family status, appearance and a greater number of gender stereotypes would be present. These topics were not present within political news reporting in British Columbia.

The data collected in this study indicated that gender bias in media does not present itself in the manner hypothesized by myself based on my literature review. Instead, the bias towards the female politicians in the data studied revealed negativity towards female politicians, but not using gendered language. Some examples of these negative comments found are the suggestion that female politicians cannot handle the pressure of their chosen field or that they are untrustworthy. This is congruent with the research of Eagly and Karau (2002), demonstrating that female politicians are not evaluated fairly compared to male politicians. The political news reporting in British Columbia did not contain the hypothesized gender bias that prompted this study however, the interview subjects all indicated they experienced gender bias in the hypothesized manner of being asked about

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their family status, their appearance and being portrayed in typical gender roles by the media and community. I suggest that the perceived gender bias by the interview subjects has been exaggerated by culture and media influences outside news print reporting as my findings indicated little gender biased reporting in the political news media of British Columbia during a one year period. This finding could be unique to British Columbia, which could indicate a more gender equal culture in the province if so. In order to discern if the lack of gendered news reporting is specific to British Columbia or to the two chosen newspapers studied, further research could be done, changing these variables. It is also important to further examine the perceived gender bias in media reporting by the interview subjects to determine if this perception could be influenced by culture, community or other forms of media. A study examining television news media or political social media would be a worthwhile comparison.

A secondary goal of this research was to determine ways in which female politicians could better interact with news media to eliminate gender bias and create more equal news reporting and more equal representations of female political leaders in society. When asked about suggested ways to interact with media for the creation of this equal reporting, Municipal Politician #1 indicated she thought the change should not focus on media relationships, but on the culture of politics. Municipal Politician #1 suggested that the hours in which politics as a career are run are impractical for families. Municipal Politician #1 suggested that much attendance in the legislature could be done via video-conference and

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that working hours could be changed to centre on children's school schedules. The idea of leaving a family for much of the year to attend legislature outside of the city you reside in is not attractive to most parents. Changing a politician's access to family time would encourage more women to participate, which would likely have a positive effect on media reporting of female politicians. Further research should be done in this area to determine if politics is capable of operating under a female leadership style and to determine opportunities for more family support of politicians. Analysis of how to change a field previously masculine dominated field to support both genders in the 21st century would provide useful for female leaders in creating a gender neutral workplace. The answer given by one female politician participant indicated that she saw the source of her perceived gender bias in media as being cultural and work environment related. As results of this study showed an unexpected lack of gender bias in news reporting, and all the interview subjects all indicated at some point community and cultural gender bias experiences, I suggest that the change to eradicate a perceived gender news reporting bias should actually take place in the community of politics in British Columbia. This change could be conducted by changing the culture of politics to support families more, as Municipal Politician #1 suggested, or by educating female politicians about gender bias and its cultural presence.

Limitations

This research was completed by one researcher, and this leaves room for others to recreate this study and possibly find varying results, based on location, experience and

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interview subjects. This study was conducted using a convenience sample, a group of interview subjects and data that are accessible to the researcher due to financial and geographical limitations. Although having contacted many women involved in politics throughout the province of British Columbia, only two municipal politicians were able to participate in this study. Their contributions are no less valuable than those of a Member of Parliament or a Member of Legislative Assembly however, should politicians in different roles be interviewed, different results may occur. Choosing interview subjects with varying ages and career roles in British Columbia politics added value to my research. Due to time constraints and completion of research by myself, I only reviewed articles within the calendar year 2014. Considering geographical and time constraints, this study, if reproduced elsewhere, could have varying results, especially if it were to be conducted during a different calendar year or different culture with varying gender values and political participation by women. Due to the limited number of human subjects available within monetary and time constraints to this study, this research cannot be generalized to others without similar experience (Creswell, 2014).

Recommendations

I recommend for future researchers that they possibly complete a focus group format for study of this subject. It is difficult to have politicians agree to participate in this study. I also recommend that future research be done on how to change the culture of politics in order to create a more family oriented environment that may help to remove gender bias.

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Should more time or resources have been allotted for this study, a greater number of articles could be studied to show change in gender bias over time and articles directly written about the interview subjects could be reviewed. I will also recommend to other researchers the benefit of having research participants be anonymous. This would not be possible in the focus group setting but would be in many other interview formats. The interview subjects for this study were more willing to share personal experience with media and fellow politicians knowing their identities would be protected. Finally, I recommend that a similar study be conducted to research the gender bias in B.C. political news reporting towards male politicians. We could identify more closely what gender neutral language could be used in media reporting if we had a clear of understanding of male political news gender biased language. Following the data collected qualitatively from the interview subjects, I also recommend research into the culture of politics and ways to change the traditionally masculine field to support families more and to recognize female leadership styles.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions**GROUP 1: Designed to determine media involvement.**

1. Please describe your current and past involvement in politics in British Columbia.
2. In your past and current political positions, please describe your interactions with news media. Can you provide examples?
3. How has the media affected your political career?
4. Has the media affected your desire to participate in politics? How so?

GROUP 2: Designed to determine media experience.

5. Can you describe for me some positive and some negative experiences you have had with news media? What made these experiences either positive or negative?
6. How do you respond to the media when you are asked questions regarding or are written about in terms of your appearance, marital status or maternal status?
7. Do you feel there are any advantages to being a female politician in terms of how you are described by media?
8. Have you ever experienced gender bias in the media? Please provide examples.

GROUP 3: Designed to establish best practice for future politicians.

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9. Are there any ways in which you would hope to change media reporting on female politicians in British Columbia? Why would you make these changes?

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Appendix B: Avoiding Media Gender Bias media Navigation for Female Politicians

Questions to ask when trying to control media messaging.

Try to respond with gender neutral comments about the lives of all politicians, reminding your questioner that both male and female leaders struggle to meet work and family demands.

Be consistent when discussing marital and family status. Do not introduce as a conversation topic if you will not be comfortable discussing it later.

Be prepared for gender bias from politicians and community members.

When feeling a gender bias is held towards you, try to determine where it stems from. Is it from a specific local paper? A reporter? Could it be from news or social media? Is it the public? Or a member of council?

The results of my research indicate very little gender bias in written news reporting and audience opinion reflecting this. Do not assume all areas of news reporting are gender bias because one is. Try to pinpoint the biased area and address it or avoid that reporter if possible.

Have I made my messaging readily available to the media?

What should I do when asked a question by media or the public that contains gender bias?

When preparing to publicly discuss gender bias you have felt provide conclusive evidence of this bias. Much of the B.C. public will not have the same understanding of bias as a female leader and could disagree that bias is present. Media will likely provide a large amount of coverage to a female politician indicating she feels a gender bias.

How do we move forward and reduce politics and political news reporting of gender bias?

This document was created by Hannah Lawrie using the results of her master's thesis study at Royal Roads University to research How to prepare future female politicians for media gender bias
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