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'Can women have it all?' Transitions in media representations of Jacinda Ardern's leadership and identity by a global newsroom

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines changing media representations of Jacinda Ardern, former Aotearoa New Zealand Prime Minister, from the global broadcaster, BBC News Online, across three key milestones in the politician's career: her appointment, re-election and resignation. Our socio-semantic analysis of this representation demonstrates how the media intersect her professional identity with age, gender, social class, and later, her identity as a mother. Whilst earlier coverage of Ardern's career praises her successfully reconciling these aspects of her personal, social and professional identities, later coverage implies that 'having it all' was never really possible longer term. We argue that the visibility of this discourse, and the focus on intersectional aspects of Ardern's personal and social identities, leads to her resignation being positively evaluated as her 'finally' succumbing and committing to the 'natural' inevitabilities of heterosexual family life. The article considers what such representation means for Ardern and women politicians and leaders more broadly, and contextualises these findings in relation to existing research on media representations of women in politics and leadership. Finally, we also consider the value of a more longitudinal approach to tracking the cumulative effects of the representation of social actors and groups.

1. Introduction

Jacinda Ardern served as the Prime Minister (PM) of Aotearoa New Zealand between 2017-2023. While in office, she received high levels of global attention and popularity, initially labelled as 'Jacinda-mania' (Baird, 2023). She was internationally praised for her 'empathetic and strong' leadership and crisis communication in the context of a terrorist attack and a global health crisis, but witnessed a decline in support domestically during

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her tenure. On 19 January 2023, Ardern unexpectedly tendered her resignation, citing that she no longer had 'enough in the tank' to continue.

In response to the breaking news of her resignation, the global broadcaster, BBC News Online, ran the controversial headline: 'Jacinda Ardern resigns: Can women have it all?' There was near-instant resistance to the headline on social media from different areas of the world (Parker, 2023). As a globally respected news outlet that prides itself on impartiality, fairness and accuracy (BBC, n.d.), the BBC was accused of sexism and misogyny towards Ardern and, by implication, all other women leaders inside and outside of politics (see e.g. Ground News, 2023). Within hours, presumably in response to this criticism, the BBC changed its headline to 'Departure reveals unique pressures on PM', exchanging the previously gendered language for a non-gendered, more individual-orientated noun phrase 'unique pressures'. However, the revised title still implied that Ardern resigned because she was unable to balance motherhood and home life with leadership.

Many years of research in the field of language, gender and professional communication point to women being consistently pejoratively evaluated as interlopers when they occupy leadership positions. The 'think leader think male' stereotype continues to persist, despite numerous global initiatives to break through the glass ceiling and bring gender equality to workplaces (Mullany & Schnurr, 2023). In this article, we explore media representations of women in leadership through a focus on the way Jacinda Ardern is represented in an online publication that presents itself as committed to due impartiality, fairness and accuracy. Using a socio-semantic approach (van Leeuwen, 1996, 2008), we analyse ten articles published by the BBC across three key points in Ardern's tenure. We examine patterns of naming and evaluation, considering how these maintain and perpetuate ingrained stereotypes around gender, age, social class and parenthood; we also consider broader socio-cultural implications of the representations we observe and what this tells us about language, gender and political leadership in contemporary societies.

2. Background

Women continue to be significantly under-represented in leadership and politics. Globally, fewer than a third of senior leadership positions are filled by women (Grant Thornton, 2022), and women constitute only around a quarter of parliamentarians internationally (UN Women, 2023). Furthermore, there have never been more than 17 women leading countries in a single year, less than 10% of the number of men who have held these positions (Statista, 2023). Whilst Jacinda Ardern was the third woman to become New Zealand PM, a figure only surpassed by Finland and Switzerland, this represents just 7% of the total of New Zealand PMs.

In order to account for this gendered dynamic in leadership and politics, many scholars have turned to the study of language and the role it plays in either sustaining and/or challenging the glass ceiling – the metaphorical barrier that prevents women and other marginalised groups from accessing or progressing within the professional sphere (see Baxter, 2014). Such scholarship has established how identities are constructed by leaders and politicians themselves, and by the media, and the extent to which this is shaped by gendered discourses and ideologies (Lazar, 2006). Here, we take the view that identity, is something mobilised through language, either in a direct way – through specific

referential choices, or less directly – for example, through relying on specific styles of speaking or implicature (see Gee, 2012; Ochs, 1992).

Existing research suggests that language practices stereotypically linked to hegemonic masculinity, for example being confrontational, direct or autonomous (see Holmes & Stubbe, 2003), continue to be valorised in leadership and political contexts. Evidence of this was observed in the communicative behaviour of politicians such as Margaret Thatcher or Hillary Clinton, whose adoption of interactional styles normatively linked to masculinity was seen as means of gaining legitimacy in male-dominated and masculinised arenas because these gendered practices were seen as the 'right' way to be a politician (Jones, 2016; Teresa, 2020; Wilson & Irwin, 2015). The adoption of these norms to 'prove their worth and fitness to belong' was arguably the result of women being continuously framed as 'interlopers' in these spheres of public life (Cameron, 2006; Eckert, 1998; Formato, 2016). Nevertheless, recent research in this domain provides a source of optimism, pointing to a slow shift away from the 'masculine as norm' notions of leadership (e.g. Żukiewicz & Piel Martín, 2022). The popularity and evaluation of Ardern's more hybrid leadership style, which combines elements normatively linked to dominant hegemonic femininity and masculinity, may be a case in point (see e.g. Craig, 2021; Hafner & Sun, 2021).

However, in the context of media representations of women leaders, it is not just their professional identity that becomes the object of evaluation and scrutiny. Personal aspects of their identities can be rendered salient and women leaders and politicians can be presented also as parents, spouses or carers, in a way that their men counterparts are not (see Devitt, 2002; Żukiewicz & Piel Martín, 2022), and in ways that are irrelevant to their job role. They are simultaneously expected to uphold ideals of femininity (such as being collaborative or conciliatory (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003)). Formato (2016, p. 393) argues that the 'language used by or to describe female politicians situates them … at a crossroads between bad performances in both their private role (e.g. as mothers) and their institutional public one'.

A number of studies have shown how women politicians are presented as professionally inefficient as a result of their motherhood. For example, Bengoechea (2011) shows that the Spanish Defence Minister Carme Chacón was negatively labelled as a 'mother minister' in the Spanish media when overseeing unpopular political decisions, whilst Bruce Kells (2021) shows that, in domestic coverage of Ardern's premiership, she was negatively evaluated as a 'part-time PM'. The narrative alternative to the 'part-time PM' is the 'Wonder Woman', which ascribes to Ardern the ability to successfully balance professional and family life: to 'have it all' (Bruce Kells, 2021). In cases like this, discourses of 'compulsory motherhood', 'child-centric motherhood' and 'mother-as-main-parent' (Mackenzie, 2018, 2019) require that a mother's life must completely revolve around her child(ren), sometimes at the cost of work. The 'women can have it all' discourse, in turn, both encapsulates and perpetuates the double bind for working women, demanding a balancing act that is rarely expected of working men (Hollinger, 2008, p. 225). The idea of 'having it all' has been widely critiqued and challenged, yet it persists across professional and domestic spheres.

Other dimensions of identity that can become salient in the representation of women leaders and politicians include race, age, sexuality and religion. Women leaders and politicians can be, among other things, presented as too young to be in office (see e.g. Bengoechea, 2011; Mullany & Lumala, 2023; Mullany & Yoong, 2016), sexualised or subject to negative evaluation on moral, religious or cultural grounds (Formato, 2016; Mullany & Yoong, 2016). It is important to acknowledge at this point that, whilst Ardern, as a young

woman from a working-class Mormon background, may face intersecting forms of discrimination in relation to some of these social categories, she is also a cisgender, white, heterosexual, able-bodied woman, and as such will not have experienced the same barriers and forms of discrimination as some of her political colleagues and counterparts.

Despite the evidence of different types of sexist, and sometimes misogynistic, treatment, women leaders and politicians *can* and often *do* challenge such forms of discrimination. Appleby's (2015) work, for example, focused on a now-classic speech made by the then Australian PM Julia Gillard in the Australian Senate. The speech, addressed to the leader of the opposition, Tony Abbott, became known globally as the 'misogyny speech'. Gillard successfully asserts her authority over Abbott in a series of challenges over his misogynistic language and actions, including criticism of Gillard for not being married and not having children, which Abbott, as well as the mass media, had used to question her legitimacy and authenticity as a political leader and as a 'real' woman (Appleby, 2015). Overall, there is a level of deeper scrutiny and constraint that is observably placed on women politicians and women leaders more generally (Mullany & Lumala, 2023). Existing research examines how this relates to various intersectional aspects of their identity but also how these politicians can resist and respond to such treatment. There is also clear evidence of the mass media perpetuating gender stereotypes and reifying identity positions for women which restrict their abilities to legitimately and authentically occupy high-profile leadership roles.

3. Methodology

We focus on reporting from one of the most globally successful news media outlets, BBC News Online. Among traditional news publishers, BBC News Online has one of the world's most visited pages (BBC, 2021). Attracting over 1 billion visits a month (PressGazette, 2024), BBC News Online has the power to shape international public opinion and inform how women in power are evaluated by its global audiences.

We trace media representations of Ardern across three key career milestones: her appointment as New Zealand PM (2017), re-election (2020) and resignation (2023). The online articles have been sourced from the search facility of the BBC News website. We accessed all articles published within a 2-week window before and after the relevant milestones. We excluded any articles that only marginally reference Ardern, but included both news reports and longer reports framed as analytical pieces. This gave us a dataset of 10 articles (see Table 1), 9 of which feature at least one video. These news reports and accompanying videos fulfil different communicative functions: while the articles prioritise informativeness, the videos primarily act as pointers to the information judged most relevant or newsworthy, and are sometimes not strictly related to the news report itself, primarily serving to attract the audience's attention. We focus predominantly on the text of the articles, analysing video data where relevant, to provide a qualitative, socio-semiotic analysis of naming and evaluation.

In examining the representation of Ardern and its broader implications, we take the view that language use is rarely 'neutral' and so it often encodes biases or 'angles of representation' (Fowler, 1991). This means that the way the media represents people or events can both inform and be informed by 'ways of seeing the world, often with reference to relations of power and domination' (Sunderland, 2004, p. 6). In relation to gender, language

Table 1. BBC News Online dataset of key milestones in Ardern's career as PM.

Career Milestone	Analytical Label	Title	Article type	Date posted	Word count
Appointment	**Article 1**	'Jacinda Ardern becomes New Zealand's youngest woman leader'	News article	19 October 2017	603
Re-election	**Article 2**	'NZ election: The people left behind in Ardern's 'kind' New Zealand'	Analysis piece	13 October 2020	1502
	Article 3	'Jacinda Ardern: New Zealand's prime minister'[2]	Analysis piece	16 October 2020	1266
	Article 4	'Jacinda Ardern's majority may prove to be her biggest challenge'	News article	17 October 2020	676
	Article 5	'New Zealand election: Jacinda Ardern's Labour Party scores landslide win'	News article	17 October 2020	805
Resignation	**Article 6**	'Jacinda Ardern resigns: Departure reveals unique pressures on PM'	News article	19 January 2023	842
	Article 7	'Jacinda Ardern: New Zealand PM quits citing burnout'	News article	19 January 2023	782
	Article 8	'Why Jacinda Ardern's star waned in New Zealand'	Analysis piece	19 January 2023	1002
	Article 9	'Jacinda Ardern: New Zealand PM says no regrets over decision to step down'	News article	20 January 2023	542
	Article 10	'Jacinda Ardern's burnout highlights the pressure world leaders face'	Analysis piece	21 January 2023	1271

use can reflect or sustain broadly held beliefs about how people are 'expected to behave *in particular gendered ways*' (Sunderland, 2004, p. 21, original emphasis). However, language use also has the power to augment or challenge these ideas. In considering how social actors such as Jacinda Ardern are represented by text-producers, we examine the extent to which such representation further sustains or challenges unequal relations with regards to social categories including, but not limited to, gender, age and class.

Our analysis draws on van Leeuwen's (1996, 2008) socio-semantic approach, focusing on representations of Jacinda Ardern as a social actor. We consider which dimensions of Ardern's identity are foregrounded, how they are evaluated, and the extent to which such representations are informed by relevant identity-based stereotypes. We view this representation and evaluation to be encoded in various referential choices, starting from naming strategies. We consider here the extent to which she is nominated, so represented in terms her unique identity (e.g. as 'Jacinda Ardern') or categorised, so represented in terms of identities and functions she shares with others (including professional identities such as 'prime minister' or 'working mum') (van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 52). We also examine the social actions ascribed to Ardern as a social actor, as the evaluation of such social action will inevitably have effects for the appraisal of the social actor who carries it out (Vilar-Lluch, 2022). We then trace relevant patterns across the different milestones in her political career and consider the cumulative forces of the representation that we uncover.

4. Analysis

4.1. Appointment

When Ardern is appointed PM, one BBC article covers this event. This article includes the repeated announcement of Ardern's appointment and the section 'Who is Jacinda

Ardern?', suggesting that BBC News' international audience knows relatively little about Ardern at the point when the article is released:

> (1) Jacinda Ardern becomes New Zealand's youngest woman leader
>
> (Article 1, 19 October 2017)
>
> (2) Ms Ardern has been opposition leader for the last three months. At 37, she is set to be the country's youngest prime minister since 1856.
>
> (Article 1, 19 October 2017)

The instances of functionalisation that name Ardern as the new PM are qualified with directly indexicalised references to her age and gender through the noun phrases '*youngest woman* leader' and 'the country's *youngest* prime minister'. On the one hand, this leads to positive evaluation. In the case of the references to her age this can arguably be positively associated with her talent and ability to reach the highest office at a young age. However, at the same time, this linguistic choice immediately renders Ardern's youth and gender as salient and relevant to her professional role as PM and can also bring connotations of inexperience and immaturity as a leader (see Mullany & Yoong, 2016). In Extract 2, the formal honorific 'Ms' is used. Following BBC News Style Guide, choice between 'Miss', 'Mrs' and 'Ms' should be based on the person's preferences, and journalists should use it consistently (BBC, 2020). 'Ms' was originally introduced so that women did not have to reveal marital status in choosing between 'Mrs' or 'Miss' (Baker, 2010). However, speakers may perceive the choice of 'Ms' as marked, and the honorific has been identified as a marker of age, being divorced, being a feminist or being lesbian (Schwarz, 2003). Thus, while this choice can be interpreted as giving status and deference to Ardern, at the same time its selection as an address term brings an ambiguity to Ardern's marital status. Such ambiguity, in turn, has been shown in previous research (see Appleby, 2015) to lead to othering of women PMs who are not in heterosexual marriages.

Alongside the focus on Ardern's young age, she is also presented as a relative newcomer to political leadership. Extract 2 references 'the last three months' before her appointment as PM when Ardern was opposition leader. The article states later that Ardern has been involved in politics 'since her teens'. The identity of a newcomer is constructed also through relational means, specifically the juxtaposition of Ardern with her political opponent, Bill English, evidenced in Extracts 3 and 4:

> (3) The campaign ahead of the September general election had seen a tightly contested race between incumbent Bill English, from the National Party, and rising political star Jacinda Ardern.
>
> (Article 1, 19 October 2017)
>
> (4) Bill English became prime minister in 2016 when his predecessor John Key unexpectedly resigned. He had promised voters experience and reliable economic management.
>
> (Article 1, 19 October 2017)

Whilst Ardern is represented as a 'rising political star', English is described as an 'incumbent' who 'had promised […] experience'. The presentation of the two politicians serves

to distance them from one another, both in terms of their projected image (potential celebrity versus predictable doldrum) and the length of time spent in political leadership roles (new versus old; see also Extract 2). Whilst it can imply inexperience, the label 'rising political star' carries positive evaluation, the appraisement relying on metaphorical language that presents Ardern as outstanding and full of promise.

The presentation of Ardern's professional identity, intersecting with her gendered and religious identity, is expanded in the 'Who is Jacinda Ardern?' section:

(5) **Who is Jacinda Ardern?**

Involved in left-wing politics since her teens - including spending time in the UK as policy adviser to Tony Blair

First entered parliament in 2008, at the age of 28

Took over the Labour leadership on 31 July

Made tackling inequality, affordable housing and student debt a key part of her election campaign

Has been outspoken on feminism and mental health

Brought up a Mormon - but left the faith over its opposition to same-sex marriage

(Article 1, 19 October 2017)

The reference to her political identity through the labels 'left-wing' and reference to her previous professional role as 'policy advisor' to Tony Blair, show strategic positioning of Ardern's Labour Party affiliation. This is also expressed in other examples of qualification, including those describing Ardern as somebody 'outspoken on feminism and mental health'. The strategic choice of 'feminism' is notable here, positioning Ardern as a political activist on gender-based equality issues. Reference to her religious background ('[b]rought up a Mormon') is integrated with the continued presentation of her political identity, as it is later noted that she 'left the faith over its opposition to same sex-marriage'. It is later suggested that Ardern's progressive political leanings are particularly relevant to younger voters:

(6) Ms Ardern had targeted young New Zealanders with policies on education subsidies, housing and the environment.

(Article 1, 19 October 2017)

Overall, across article 1, the BBC represents Ardern's professional identity as a political leader intersecting with her young age, gender, her gender-based politics and her religious background. The latter are deemed not only relevant to her professional role but also salient and newsworthy in terms of her perceived relatability.

4.2. Re-election

At the time of Ardern's re-election, media attention had already been magnified, fuelled by the popularity of her public appearances in the context of a terrorist attack and the Covid-19 pandemic (Żukiewicz & Piel Martín, 2022). BBC News published 4 articles around this event. At this point, the BBC represents more about Ardern's politics, family

life and background. The articles adopt different angles, with some focusing on Ardern's political victory, whilst others offer a more comprehensive analysis of New Zealand's socioeconomic situation at the time. Altogether, the articles convey an ambivalent presentation of Ardern's persona, both as a victorious and capable leader, and as someone who failed to accomplish part of the original political agenda, neglecting the most disadvantaged electorate.

It is noteworthy that 3 of the 4 articles published around this milestone acknowledge the central role Ardern played in her party's political success:

> (7) New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has led the centre-left Labour Party to a historic victory and is in a position to form the first single-party majority government since 1993.

> (Article 4, 17 October 2020)

> (8) New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has won a landslide victory in the country's general election.

> (Article 5, 17 October 2020)

In Extracts 7 and 8, positively valenced social actions ('has won' and 'has led the centre-left Labour Party') are attributed to Ardern in an individualised and functionalised role ('New Zealand Prime Minister'), resulting in a linguistically boosted positive outcome, a 'historic' or 'landslide' victory in the general elections. These representations contribute to highly positive evaluations of Ardern and her political skills.

Other instances of positive evaluation are realised less directly, through possessive attributes referring to her skills, accomplishments and leadership. This is visible across 3 of the 4 articles covering the re-election, as illustrated in extracts 9-11:

> (9) Ms Ardern's ability to make New Zealanders feel safe during a pandemic has been the main factor in her decisive victory.

> (Article 4, 17 October 2020)

> (10) Ms Ardern's success in uniting 'the team of five million' - a reference to the population of the country - is a testament to her extraordinary abilities.

> (Article 4, 17 October 2020)

> (11) Jacinda Ardern been widely praised for her strong and compassionate leadership

> (Article 2, 13 October 2020)

Extracts 9–11 inscribe positive judgements about Ardern's political competence through possessive attribution ('Ms Ardern's ability', 'Ms Ardern's success' and 'her strong and compassionate leadership') and positively valenced social action concerned with fulfilling the duties of her professional role, e.g. 'to make New Zealanders feel safe' (though see above point about the use of Ms). At this point in time, we also see glimpses of her more hybrid leadership style ('strong and compassionate') rendered worthy of praise, highlighting the movement away from valorising only masculinised leadership styles.

In one of the articles, the presentation of Ardern's political identity takes a more relational form (Extract 12), similar to earlier comparisons with Bill English (Extracts 3 and 4). Ardern is compared with an international head of state, rather than a direct opponent,

demonstrating a transition in her status to one with her occupying a prominent role in world-stage politics:

> (12) Jacindamania quickly spread across the globe, where she was feted as the anti-Trump - a liberal beacon in a world which seemed dominated by right-wingers like the US president.

> (Article 3, 16 October 2020)

In Extract 12, Ardern's identity is constructed in direct opposition with that of former US president Donald Trump, through the inclusion of the definite article and prefix, creating 'the anti-Trump' as a new address term for Ardern. She is positioned in opposition to Trump as 'liberal', as opposed to a 'right-winger', and metaphorically framed as a 'beacon', giving people hope, encouragement, and lighting the way for an optimistic future. It is noteworthy that such comparisons also imply she provides a counterbalance to what is otherwise a masculinised and male-dominated context of political leadership (see also Background).

Similar metaphorical references to Ardern are visible through reference to her 'star power', showing a change to a more advanced version of the earlier label 'rising star':

> (13) A big win driven by star power

> (Article 5, 17 October 2020)

In Extract 13, the electoral victory of Ardern's party, lexicalised here through the positively valenced expression 'big win', is attributed individually to Ardern. Although reference to Ardern as a 'star' is made more indirectly, inferred from possessive attribution ('star power'), this contributes further to the portrayal of her as the driving force behind the party's victory.

There are negative judgements of Ardern's political skills in this set of articles, but these are mainly associated with references to the economy, with articles either alluding to continuing rates of poverty (Extract 14) or the absence of a clear economic recovery plan after the Covid-19 pandemic (Extract 15):

> (14) But critics say her government has failed to tackle child poverty - one of her key promises when she came to power in 2017.

> (Article 2, 13 October 2020)

> (15) New Zealand is in recession for the first time in 11 years and Labour has been criticised for not having a clear Covid-19 recovery plan.

> (Article 5, 17 October 2020)

These negative evaluations are more specific than the positive evaluations, referencing particular political issues and plans rather than general states of safety or compassion. They are also attributed to Ardern less directly than more positive evaluations, with specific political actions being attributed to the institution or party Ardern belongs to ('her government', 'Labour'), and raised by anonymous critics (see Extracts 14 and 15). Overall, in the coverage of Ardern's re-election, the BBC individualises Ardern through positive commentary and uses depersonalisation strategies, including assimilation, when critiquing her.

Aside from presenting Ardern as a political leader, we also see instances of her being explicitly described in terms of her family relations and motherhood. It is noteworthy that motherhood is prominently featured in one video which is included in 3 out of the 4 articles covering her re-election – the video is captioned 'Jacinda Ardern's key leadership moments':

> (16) Ms Ardern went on to give birth in office, proving women can indeed do both (although, as she herself has been quick to point out, not without a supportive partner).
>
> (Article 3, 16 October 2020)
>
> (17) Jacinda Ardern spent her childhood living in small, rural towns in her close-knit Mormon family. She was born in 1980 in the city of Hamilton, two hours south of Auckland. Her father, Ross, was a police officer, while her mother, Laurell, worked as a school cook.
>
> (Article 3, 16 October 2020)

References to Ardern's family relations provide means of portraying her as a tenacious leader, keying into stereotypes about motherhood, social class and professional/political life to present her as somebody who can overcome adversity. Positive judgements of Ardern's tenacity are specifically invoked through juxtapositions of her family background with academic and professional accomplishments that might not normally be expected (Extract 17), and lexical triggers ('proving women can indeed do both', Extract 16) involving debates around whether women can be mothers *and* high-flying professionals. The latter also keys into the 'Wonder Woman' narrative which has been identified in the domestic media coverage of Ardern (Bruce Kells, 2021). Extract 16 sees a shift in focus, from individual experience ('Ms Ardern went on to give birth in office') to a generalised assertion of seemingly universal gender roles ('proving women can indeed do both'). Here, Ardern becomes a reference point for *every* woman, the assumption being that if she can 'do both', balancing her professional and domestic life, then so can all 'women'. Underlying this assertion, nevertheless, is the articulation of an inherent tension between the two, as women have to 'prove' that they can 'do both'.

The 'can women have it all?' debate which has seeped into the BBC's media discourse here is directly resisted by Ardern, evidenced in the direct quotation featured in the same article (Extract 18).

> (18) But she was quick to put to bed any thoughts she was doing anything out of the ordinary. 'The only reason I can do what I'm doing is because my partner has the ability to be a pretty much full-time carer,' she told the Financial Times in 2018. 'So I don't want to appear to be superwoman because we should not expect women to be superwomen.'
>
> (Article 3, 16 October 2020)

Ardern's statement that 'we should not expect women to be superwoman' is a direct acknowledgment of gendered expectations around 'having it all' that have been placed on her specifically, and women in general, with regard to their professional and family lives. Here, the level of scrutiny placed on women results in them needing to become 'superwomen', and meeting the expectation to 'have it all' as something beyond 'the ordinary'. By describing her partner as a 'full-time carer', a functionalisation strategy that highlights her (male) partner's key role in the domestic sphere, Ardern

challenges stereotypical notions of sex roles and the ascription of heterosexual domestic responsibilities to her in the direct quote that is chosen. The recurrent attention to Ardern's supportive partner as the main reason for her professional and personal success, either through direct (Extract 18) or indirect (Extract 16) quotations, foregrounds the gendered nature of the coverage, for equivalent credit is not usually attributed to partners of male politicians, even when similar support is to be expected. Extract 18 further illustrates the generalised practice, across re-election and resignation articles, of repeatedly reporting direct quotes where Ardern makes explicit reference to her gender, motherhood or family life, foregrounding these personal attributes over her professional role. Although Ardern herself resists this 'can women have it all?' discourse, the text-producers nevertheless foreground Ardern's roles as a mother and partner (and her balancing of these roles), thereby positioning them as salient to her professional identity.

4.3. Resignation

BBC News published five articles reporting Ardern's unexpected resignation in 2023. Across these articles, representations of Ardern highlight her achievements in office, whilst also framing her as someone who is vulnerable, affected by the pressures of work, and balancing work and family life. Whilst two of the articles offer an outline of Ardern's life and time in leadership, three use Ardern's resignation as a way to explore wider socio-cultural issues for politics and world leaders. In the case of the latter, this includes the strains faced by world leaders and issues associated with (working) motherhood.

Each article begins with a report of the resignation announcement, and the affective response this evoked:

(19) For millions around the world, Jacinda Ardern's resignation comes as a shock.

(Article 6, 19 January 2023)

(20) New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern surprised the world this week, announcing that she was quitting because she no longer had 'enough in the tank' to do the job.

(Article 10, 21 January 2023)

Extracts 19 and 20 illustrate how Ardern's decision to step down is framed hyperbolically as a 'shock' or 'surprise' for 'the world' (Extract 20) or 'millions around the world' (Extract 19). In these extracts, the resignation is framed as something particularly frightening or upsetting[1], and this extreme emotional state is hyperbolically attributed to all of (or high numbers of) the population worldwide. The social action of 'resigning' or 'quitting' carries a much more negative valence than the social actions reported in the election and re-election articles.

All 5 articles covering Ardern's resignation evaluate Ardern's time in office. As we saw in the re-election articles, the evaluation of Ardern's political actions can be positive or negative, but negative evaluations tend to be more specific and policy-related, as well as being more indirect. However, there is a further change in the resignation articles, with a more direct critique of Ardern's political action, or *in*action, as in the following:

(21) She leaves office with the bulk of her reform agenda either still waiting to be passed or in the very early stages of implementation.

(Article 8, 19 January 2023)

In Extract 21, the negatively valenced action of 'leaving office' is attributed to Ardern, and the amount of work she hasn't completed during her term ('the bulk of her reform') is quantified. While references to work left behind may be recurrent regardless of gender, the negative judgement evoked by the attribution of uncompleted work is explicitly emphasised here ('the bulk of') and contributes to the negative prosody conveyed throughout article 8 (see Extract 22, 'waned'). The referential (pronominal and adjectival) choices made in Extract 21 ('she' and 'her reform') further individualise Ardern, holding her personally responsible for a lack of sufficient progress on the party's reform agenda. This is in contrast with the earlier critique of 'Labour' or 'her government' rather than Ardern directly (see Extracts 14 and 15).

Moreover, whilst possessive attributions in the re-election articles referenced Ardern's positively evaluated skills and accomplishments, in the resignation coverage, this is no longer the case. This pattern is evident in Extracts 22-24, which now rearticulate the metaphor to show a negative transition in Ardern's popularity and a change to her 'star power'.

(22) Why Jacinda Ardern's star waned in New Zealand

(Article 8, 19 January 2023)

(23) Jacinda Ardern's personal popularity has taken a hit recently, with latest polls suggesting it's at its lowest since she came to power in 2017.

(Article 9, 20 January 2023)

(24) She has had a meteoric rise to power fuelled by 'Jacinda-mania', but New Zealand's love affair with her has since soured as her government struggles to navigate post-pandemic economic challenges such as the rising cost of living and deepening social inequality. Just weeks ago, her approval rating hit its lowest level since August 2017 - just before she became PM - as her Labour party also saw sliding popularity.

(Article 6, 19 January 2023)

The possessive attributes referenced in Extracts 22-24 are now coupled with negatively valenced processes ('waned', 'taken a hit' and 'hit its lowest level'). In Extracts 23 and 24, these processes are qualified with the superlative forms of the adjective 'low' ('lowest'). In Extract 24, Ardern's popularity in New Zealand is also likened to a 'love affair' that has 'soured', evoking vivid imagery around the demise of Ardern's former brilliance, positioning Ardern as a romantic idol (as opposed to a professional politician) who has fallen from grace. Further, the metaphor of the 'love affair' implies a highly personal relationship between Ardern and the people of New Zealand, characterised by a degree of temporality. This is consistent with the BBC's focus on her personal life and personality, but now takes over as a distinctly negative presence.

Where positive evaluation of Ardern's political identity is presented in the resignation articles, this is tied to her gender identity and motherhood, specifically, giving birth whilst in office:

(25) And a year later she became the second elected world leader to ever give birth while in office, after Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto in 1990.

(Article 7, 19 January 2023)

(26) She was the first female world leader to bring an infant to the UN meeting in New York as she and her partner Clarke Gayford sat through the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit with Neve.

(Article 8, 19 January 2023)

In extracts 25 and 26, ordinal numbers are used while naming Ardern as the agent of actions associated with motherhood and childcare ('to ever give birth' and 'to bring an infant to the UN meeting') in direct proximity of references to her professional role ('world leader'). These categorisations frame her personal actions as work-related achievements. As with the re-election articles, many of these references invoke positive evaluations of Ardern as a leader who was able to 'have it all' against the odds – to be a successful political leader as well as, for example, a loving partner and nurturing mother. Here, Ardern's identity as a political leader is, again, defined and marked out in part by aspects of her personal identity.

In this set of articles, naming strategies that define Ardern primarily in relation to her personal life and her role as a mother are now used:

(27) Many of her fans are women, who have avidly followed her journey from newbie PM to working mother and have looked up to her as a role model.

(Article 6, 19 January 2023)

(28) But Ardern also holds that very rare position of being a working mother while leading a country.

(Article 6, 19 January 2023)

Extracts 27 and 28 are taken from the controversial BBC article where we started our paper, 'Can women have it all?'. In this article, Ardern is named through gendered and relational forms of identification on several occasions: as a 'mother' (1 instance), 'working mother' (3 instances) and 'woman' (2 instances), one of these including a pre-modification that references 'work'. Ardern's position as a mother is juxtaposed here with her role as a world leader in a way that is represented as unusual, exceptional and worthy of attention, through boosted evaluations ('very rare', Extract 27) and appraisements ('role model', Extract 28).

4 out of 5 resignation articles also make reference to Ardern's statement that she was looking forward to spending more time with her family, and getting married to her (male) partner:

(29) Ms Ardern said she was looking forward to spending more time with her family - being there when her daughter starts school and 'finally' marrying her fiancé, Clarke Gayford.

(Article 10, 21 January 2023)

An unequivocally positive and hopeful impression is created in these instances, through the attribution of social actions such as 'looking forward to spending more time with her family' and 'marrying her fiancé'. The latter is also pre-modified by the adverb ''finally'' (repeated in 3 out 5 of the resignation articles), implying that the marriage is long overdue because of Ardern's professional commitments taking over. Whilst Ardern is lauded for being a successful woman in politics, and for being both a mother and a

leader, these articles now imply that it is ultimately unnatural and unsustainable to combine the role of PM with being a wife and mother. Ardern's resignation is thus represented as an act that restores a 'natural' balance in favour of aligning with the heterosexual matrix and motherhood over choosing a political leadership career.

5. Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have highlighted linguistic changes in how Jacinda Ardern has been represented to global audiences over time by one of the most successful international media publishers, BBC News Online. This focus was deemed important due to broader evidence of the way women are often marginalised in leadership positions in politics and other professional contexts, and the influential role played by news media discourse in sustaining or challenging this situation. The focus on Ardern's representation as a social actor was premised on her prominent status in global politics during her tenure, rendering her representation consequential not only for Ardern but also other people with similar social identity categories.

Our analysis has considered the coverage of Ardern's political career across the three career milestones, observing progression from her presentation as a rising political star, to a victorious and tenacious leader, and finally to a more vulnerable politician and a working mother about to become a wife in a heterosexual relationship. Personal and social aspects of her identity, as a young woman from a working-class background who then became a mother, are made salient to her professional role and standing as a popular leader. The visibility of these personal dimensions are partly premised on their apparent unexpectedness, and consequently newsworthiness, due to gender, age and class-based stereotypes about who typically works in such professional roles (see Background).

In early coverage, positive evaluations of Ardern are often premised on the idea that her youth, gender and newcomer status constitute obstacles that she has overcome on her route to political leadership. Similar representations are also visible in the re-election reporting, where Ardern is praised, both directly and indirectly, for her tenacity. This reporting relies on the principle of exceptionalism, implying that it isn't normal for these different aspects of a woman's identity to be successfully reconciled, and Ardern, as a 'rising star', is an exception to the rule. Representing Ardern as tenacious by virtue of her ability to 'balance' these dimensions of her identity, however, may serve to entrench, rather than dismantle, the gendered divides and stereotypes reported in research on media representations of female politicians around the world (see Bengoechea's (2011) work in Spain, 2011; Formato's (2016) work in Italy; Mullany and Yoong's (2016) work in Malaysia and Teresa's, (2020) work in the US). These findings point to a ripple effect in the gendered, classed and aged dimensions of global politics, and the influential role of the language used by the media when representing political figures.

In the coverage of Ardern's resignation, the personal aspects of the politician's identity, particularly being a mother, and a desire to be in a heterosexual marriage, are presented as 'natural' identity characteristics that ultimately prevent her from continuing her leadership career. The reformulated headline of 'unique pressures' are attributed to Ardern's decision to resign, despite Ardern citing 'burnout' as the cause of her resignation. Across the resignation coverage, a positive representation emerges of Ardern 'finally'

committing more time to family life and childcare responsibilities. This frames her departure from the highly public role of PM, and increased presence in the domestic sphere as a wife and mother, as a positive step that reinstates the 'natural' order of things and keys into a dominant discourse of the 'good mother', a woman whose life completely revolves around her child (see Mackenzie, 2018, 2019). The overall trajectory of the representation of Ardern and her career can be interpreted as a narrative warning, the resolution of which serves as a cautionary tale of one woman leader's failed attempts at 'having it all'. These findings also point to the self-contradictory nature of the 'can women have it all?' debate that is encoded across multiple articles, and which occupies such a prominent part of popular cultural discourses around the role of women in the workplace. Specifically, these articles value, praise and encourage the ability to balance professional and domestic aspects of life, yet rely on the presumption of an inherent tension between the two. Later articles show a change over time and suggest that this tension is resolved through Ardern's ultimate resignation and subsequent return to the natural, biological order of things that she had been suppressing.

Overall, the representation that we observe across our data set chimes with many years of research into the representation of women leaders and politicians, suggesting that that they continue to be portrayed as interlopers in the professional sphere (see Cameron, 2006; Eckert, 1998; Formato, 2016; Mullany & Schnurr, 2023). Such findings are highlighted in relation to various media around the world (see e.g. Bengoechea, 2011; Bruce Kells, 2021; Mullany & Lumala, 2023; Mullany & Yoong, 2016). However, such representation may be particularly consequential for media outlets such as BBC News Online, given their global reach. While the representation of women politicians and leaders is bound to be scarcer in comparison to their men counterparts (given the statistics about who works in politics and leadership), the visibility of such forms of portrayal does nothing to reverse this trend.

BBC News Online's reporting across the three key milestones of Ardern's political career represents a missed opportunity for nuanced engagement with the expectations of women in leadership and politics. Such engagement is glimpsed in some of the earlier articles that challenge stereotypes around women in leadership. For example, in contrast to findings around women leaders having to adopt masculinised styles of speaking to gain legitimacy in the professional sphere (see Jones, 2016; Teresa, 2020; Wilson & Irwin, 2015), we see Ardern's hybrid ('strong and compassionate') leadership style being valorised (see e.g. Extract 11). This may represent a growing acknowledgement and celebration of leadership styles that de-centralise, or move beyond, traditionally 'masculine' concepts of leadership as dominance, assertiveness and directness (see Craig, 2021; Hafner & Sun, 2021; Żukiewicz & Piel Martín, 2022). There are also some attempts at engaging with Ardern's own voice as a woman who challenges dominant discourses of gender, leadership and motherhood but this engagement does not go far enough and is ultimately undermined by the overall trajectory of Ardern's representation.

The implications of the forms of representation that we observe in the paper arguably have two-fold effects. On the one hand, they have the power to reinforce ideologies around the relationships between gender, social class, age, and political life. On the other hand, and potentially as a consequence of the former, these forms of representation may have the power to influence women's (and other minoritised groups') participation in the political sphere and leadership, where they are already less likely to be represented.

We advocate for careful consideration of linguistic choices mobilised in media representation of politics and political figures, particularly with regards to various marginalised aspects of their identity, to encourage a more diverse and non-exclusionary participation in the workforce (see also Sun & Chałupnik, 2022). We acknowledge at this point some of the structural challenges facing those working in a global newsroom, for example having to produce news quickly and managing the public interest in politicians' and leaders' personal lives. However, we call for the non-professional aspects of politicians' and leaders' social and personal lives to be detangled as far as possible in the reporting and, when this is not possible, to ensure that the discussion of women leaders' life beyond the professional sphere does not take such a decidedly different form from that of their men counterparts. This may offer a significant challenge to the 'double bind' that women leaders and politicians often face in their careers.

Finally, from a methodological perspective, we wish to point to the value of considering media representations of social actors over time in context and co-text, rather than in isolation, adopting a longitudinal perspective to track the combined effects of representation of social actors/groups at different moments in career development. Our analysis and discussion considered the representation of Ardern across three different points in her political career and such a longitudinal approach has enabled us to map out important transitions and the broader socio-cultural consequences of how this social actor's time at the pinnacle of her leadership career has been portrayed by BBC News Online.

Notes

1. See, for example, Collins Dictionary's definition of 'shock' (countable noun) as 'something [that] suddenly happens which is unpleasant, upsetting or very surprising' or (uncountable noun) 'a person's emotional and physical condition when something very frightening or upsetting has happened to them' (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/)
2. The original version of the article was updated on 19/01/23. We retrieved an archived version at: https://web.archive.org/web/20201024093232/https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54565381 [Accessed 19 April 2023].

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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