#ToxicTwitter: The Symbolic Annihilation of Canadian Women Cabinet Ministers

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between online gender-based violence and symbolic annihilation. I ask the following questions: How extensively are Canadian cabinet ministers Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland subjected to online gender-based violence on Twitter? What forms of online gender-based violence do the two women experience? And how does online gender-based violence on Twitter function as a form of symbolic annihilation? To answer these questions, I conducted a content and discourse analysis of the top 200 liked tweets sent to the two women in the thirteen days immediately prior to the 2019 federal election and one day after. I then used an inductive approach to explore the larger data set using the themes I found within the most liked tweets. Ultimately, I argue that both women were symbolically annihilated through online messages that trivialized and condemned their capabilities, appearances, and agency. This research makes visible the far-reaching impact of online gender-based violence faced by prominent women, which is a growing problem around the world. It also offers a new conceptual approach through the lens of symbolic annihilation to construct a more holistic understanding of harassment faced by women online.

DEDICATION

To my children, Emily and Katherine, without whom this thesis would have been completed much earlier. I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

All Newfoundlanders should put a bounty on her head. She is a witch."[1]

"Dead meat. Sandra should stay in the kitchen where she belongs. Fly with the crows and get shot."[2]

"Go to hell you wrinkly bitch."[3]

OPENING THOUGHTS

Three days after the 2019 federal election, Canada's then Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Catherine McKenna, found the expletive "cunt" sprayed in deep red letters across the front window of her campaign office (Raney 2019). The incident is just one example of the recurring misogynistic attacks McKenna has encountered since assuming a political role. A month prior, the RCMP took the unusual measure of providing a security detail to McKenna following online harassment (BBC 2019; Rabson 2019). While these threats began online, McKenna also encountered abuse offline. The most notable incident occurred outside a movie theater "when a man pulled up his car beside her and her children, filmed her and yelled" an expletive the CBC refused to broadcast: "f--- you, climate Barbie" (CBC Radio 2019; Rabson 2019). The origin of the insulting moniker "climate Barbie" stems from The Rebel, a far-right wing news website. Since then, McKenna has been subjected to the insult, among many others, primarily on social media platforms. Conservative Member of Parliament (MP) Gerry Ritz joined in on the abuse by referring to McKenna as "climate Barbie" on Twitter in late 2017 before McKenna herself called him out for the tweet's sexist language (figure 1). While Ritz eventually apologized and deleted the tweet, the online harassment did not end there for McKenna. Ritz also suggested Chrystia Freeland, then Minister of International Trade, required "adult supervision" after showing "visible emotion" in the House of Commons (Wherry 2016).

[1] Twitter message directed to former finance minister for Newfoundland and Labrador Cathy Bennett.
[2] Twitter message directed to former Alberta MLA Sandra Jansen.
[3] Twitter message directed to MPP and former Premier of Ontario Kathleen Wynne.

Figure 1. Catherine McKenna's Reply to Gerry Ritz

McKenna is, of course, not the only woman politician to face online abuse. Conservative MP for Calgary Nose Hill, Michelle Rempel, revealed she too has received insults on Twitter (CBC News 2017). In provincial politics, former Calgary MLA Sandra Jansen received a standing ovation within the Alberta legislature in 2016 when she gave a strong speech criticizing the misogynistic and harassing comments she received on social media after crossing the floor to join the New Democratic Party (McConnell 2016). Beginning her speech with a hateful comment she received online— "what a traitorous bitch"—Jansen then appealed to members of all parties to stand up against the harassment levelled at women in politics (McConnell 2016). "Please oppose it. Don't ignore it. Don't look the other way. Don't excuse it. Because our daughters are watching us," Jansen said to her colleagues (McConnell 2016).

Evidence indicates that politicians and other public figures are at a greater risk of threatening and harassing behaviour, relative to the population at large (James et al. 2016; Pathe et al. 2014). There is also a highly gendered aspect to harassment. Former Alberta Premiers Alison Redford and Rachel Notley received more threats than any of their male predecessors (Gerein 2017). In response to the politicization of social media, Alberta Justice began tracking comments and posts in 2016 (Trynacity 2017). According to statistics obtained from Alberta Justice and the Solicitor General, there were 412 incidents of "inappropriate contact and communication" sent to Notley (Trynacity 2017). Moreover, three years into Notley's term, security documents revealed that the former Premier received 11 death threats (Trynacity 2018). In one such instance, after calls for Notley to be "taken out," someone filed a funeral application

under Notley's name to make it look as though she were arranging her own funeral (Trynacity 2018).

While some have belittled the harms committed through online platforms, the comments and implications are often severe and can quickly move offline. Jenny Kwan, a Hong Kong-born Canadian MP, had her car tires slashed and her office window broken (Burke 2019). In another instance, Kwan had a stranger walk up to her on the street and tell her to go back to her former country. In 2020, Leela Aheer, Minister for the Status of Women in Alberta, was told she "needed to be slapped in the face" and "dropped in a river wearing cement shoes" (von Scheel 2020). Incidents involving women in politics around the world illustrate that these threats are not always empty. In 2017, while campaigning in Paris, former French cabinet minister Nathalie Ksociusko-Morizet was attacked on the street and lost consciousness (France 24 2017). One of the most prominent examples of the real-life consequences women in politics face stems from the United Kingdom, where MP Jo Cox was shot and stabbed repeatedly by an extreme right-wing terrorist a week before the Brexit referendum. Following this tragic incident, abusers have used the image of Cox to threaten other women, including UK Conservative MP Caroline Ansell (BBC 2017).

The development of social media platforms gave rise to hopes for a level playing field where marginalized populations could have a voice. While social media platforms have become a valuable place to address social injustices, it is important to assess the "dynamics of power, domination and inequality" found within online spaces (Powell and Henry 2017, 49). Since the evolution of online communication, gendered harassment has found a new platform in the form of social media (Halder and Jaishanker 2011, 386). During her address at the 1996 *Virtue and Virtuality: Gender Law, and Cyberspace* conference, Ellen Spertus suggested that sexism and harassment online reflected the problems in offline society. Essentially, misogyny expressed online cannot be "divorced from [the] cultural and historical contexts" or threats women endure daily offline (Vickery and Everbach 2018, 11). As Powell and Henry (2017, 13) emphasize, online harassment "constitutes yet another form of social control and regulation that inhibits equality of digital citizenship and reinforces heterosexual and patriarchal norms." Online abuse against women is "part and parcel of a continuum of violence" which often starts offline and reverberates online and vice versa, eventually "pushing back women from public spaces to the private" (Van der Wilk 2018, 8).

These events and observations highlight the need to clearly identify and name the forms of violence women endure online and understand how the messages women receive produce gendered discourse. Moreover, there is growing evidence that gendered vitriol is proliferating online and drawing attention to these harms is an "essential step" towards ensuring women's full equality and participation both online and in politics (Mantilla 2015, 147).

GOALS OF THESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis addresses ongoing concerns about online harassment of women politicians in Canada and around the world. Despite the increasing attention paid to online discourse surrounding women in politics internationally, outside of news articles there is limited attention paid to the violence against women in politics in Canada and its overlap with online abuse. In an effort to remedy the gap, the aim of this project is twofold. The first is to understand the nature, extent, and scope of online harassment aimed at women in politics in Canada by asking: How extensively are Canadian cabinet ministers Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland subjected to online gender-based violence on Twitter? And what forms does this online gender-based violence take for the two women?

Secondly, this research seeks to identify the ways in which online gender-based violence (GBV) is a form of symbolic annihilation, a concept described by Gaye Tuchman (1978) to describe the absence, trivialization, and condemnation of women in and by the media. Specifically, I pose the following questions: How does online gender-based violence on Twitter function as a form of symbolic annihilation? What meanings are communicated about gendered power relations, especially perceptions of women's place in political institutions? The concept of symbolic annihilation enables an exploration of the dynamics of gender, power, and inequality that exist online and how this affects women politicians' participation across social media platforms in Canada. Moreover, the insights gained from symbolic annihilation literature open a space through which academics can gain insight into how women experience online harassment and its far-reaching implications.

For this thesis, I examined tweets sent to Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland over a 13-day period from October 4th to the end of October 22nd, 2019. More specifically, I analyzed the top 200 "liked" tweets sent to each woman in response to tweets the subjects themselves posted during the period. Selecting McKenna and Freeland as the subjects achieves a most

similar case comparison. The two women are similar in terms of position, status, identity characteristics and Twitter prominence. Using two cases with many similar characteristics enables an element of control over alternative explanations for different outcomes. In other words, by holding constant shared factors, it is possible to explain differences in outcomes. Essentially, any differences found in the amount and nature of GBV each subject received via Twitter would be due to other factors not linked to their similarities.

I employed content and discourse analysis techniques to examine the volume and nature of abusive messages received by McKenna and Freeland. Based on the results of this analysis, I argue that both women were symbolically annihilated through online GBV. In particular, abusers weaponized gender against the women in a manner that trivialized and condemned their positions and existence. Messages often employed slurs, calling the women "bitches," "cunts," and "idiots." Additionally, I found two key themes throughout the dataset that drew on the stigma of hysteria and depicted the women as reliant on men. The abusive tweets reflect the highly gendered discourse that reinforce men as the rightful gatekeepers of politics and situate women as outsiders. Misogyny materializes through the comments and acts as a mechanism to reinforce the patriarchal norms of society.

STRUCTURE OF THESIS

In the following chapter, I present the literature and theory guiding my analysis of online GBV against women in Canada. First, the chapter delves into the research on the broader topic of gender-based violence and the targeting of women. I then discuss the literature on violence against women in politics before producing a review of the research on abuse conducted on social media that illustrates the scope of the problem. The literature review chapter addresses the following questions: How has gender-based violence been conceptualized? How is violence against women in politics (VAWP) defined? To wrap up the chapter, I discuss how scholars have historically conceptualized symbolic annihilation. I then discuss how the concept enables an exploration of the dynamics of power and gender that exist on social media platforms and which facilitate the trivialization and condemnation of women.

In chapter three, I outline the methodological approach employed to analyze the messages sent to the two women chosen for my case studies. Specifically, I describe why I employed both content and discourse analysis and the limitations of each approach. Following

this, I outline my methodology for collecting the tweets, provide an overview of Twitter features relevant to the study, and present my coding system along with my hypotheses.

Chapter four describes the findings of my analysis beginning with a focus on the content analysis before diving deeper into the role of symbolic annihilation. Finally, in chapter five I offer a summary of my research findings and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

In this literature review, I aim to understand the nature and dynamics of online abuse directed towards women in politics. In the first section, I define the term gender-based violence (GBV) and draw attention to its disproportionate impact against women, especially racialized and "othered" women. I then examine the growth of social media and the accompanying harmful discourses taking place on social media platforms, arguing that those spaces have become the new abuse vehicle, replacing emails and faxes as the primary instruments of communication (James et al. 2016, 188). I contend that social media allows GBV to flourish against women in politics.

The second section identifies and conceptualizes the behaviours commonly known as "cyber harassment" or "online abuse." While there is a burgeoning field of scholarship focusing on harmful behaviours in online spaces, at present there is no consensus as to the appropriate definition or concept to describe these behaviours. The interchangeable use of terms such as "online abuse," "cyber harassment," and "cyber bullying" presents an obstacle to empirically investigating the phenomenon. Other common terms include "cyber stalking," "trolling," "cyber hate," "technology-facilitated violence," and "flaming." This list is not exhaustive, and the terms overlap in meaning. Each term implies destructive forms of abuse, yet all of them tend to overlook specifically gendered online hostility and the role of misogyny. However, people often use social media platforms and other forms of digital technologies to propagate and perpetuate misogyny. Appropriately naming and drawing attention to the forms of harm women face online is an "essential step in attempting to counter" the abuse (Mantilla 2015, 147). Simply put, we cannot separate misogyny or the historical and cultural contexts when discussing online behaviours (Vickery and Everbach 2018, 11). Therefore, I opt to use the terminology "online GBV" to emphasize the link between online forms of violence and offline modes of violence and abuse. As Azmina Dhrodia (2018, 381), a leading expert on gender, technology, and human rights, points out, the "widespread inequality and discrimination against women that remains embedded in society is increasingly being replicated online".

Research conducted globally regarding online harms against women covers both the general public and prominent figures, illustrating the large scope of the problem. A thorough

review of this literature reveals the need to draw a wider net than previously done so as to capture a more complete picture of harmful online behaviours, especially delegitimizing discourses. To enable a fuller understanding of these problematic behaviours, I draw heavily on feminist understandings of violence that illustrate how misogynistic and discriminatory language operates against women to delegitimize, censor, control, and oppress them. Furthermore, a review of the literature illustrates the lack of equivalent research pertaining to online harms in the Canadian context. Considering the scope of the problem worldwide, I seek to rectify this gap by mobilizing feminist understandings of violence through a discourse analysis in conjunction with a content analysis framework obtained from the incivility literature.

Following this, I consider the problem of online GBV within Canada and discuss its usage against women in politics. Online GBV is merely one form of violence against women in politics (VAWP). Generally, the literature breaks down VAWP into five categories: physical, sexual, economic, psychological, and symbolic (or semiotic)[4] violence. These categories do not exist in silos. Violence can, and often does, transcend multiple categories. Online GBV, for example, may occur in sexual, symbolical, and psychological forms. Perpetrators may also use online GBV in conjunction with physical violence to amplify the harm. Scholars highlight that women in politics' experiences of online GBV may prove discouraging or dangerous or both.

The closing section of this chapter deals with the concept of symbolic annihilation. Symbolic annihilation describes the absence, condemnation, and trivialization of women in the media. I argue that the concept is applicable to online GBV, as social media has become the new "cultural arm" (Gerbner 1976) of society and requires exploration. Through the marginalization of women in politics via silencing and condemnation, online GBV acts as a modern form of symbolic annihilation.

[4] A growing number of authors have expanded the VAWP typology to include "symbolic violence" (Krook and Restrepo 2016; Krook 2017; however, more recently some scholars have opted to use the term "semiotic violence" instead. This modification in partly due to scholar Gabrielle Bardall (2020) problematizing the terminology of "symbolic violence" which is rooted in the theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Bardall claims the inclusion of symbolic violence marks a clear break from the four other forms of VAWP. While the other forms of VAWP clearly violate "norms and laws of social relationships, symbolic violence imposes and legitimizes norms, laws and systems" (Bardall 2020, 382).

DEFINING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

While the terms "gender-based violence" (GBV) and "violence against women" (VAW) are often used interchangeably, there are important differences. Gender-based violence is a form of power-based violence, that involves the use and abuse of power over another and is directed against an individual based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender (SWC 2020). While definitions of violence have traditionally focused on physical offences, such as beating or using weapons, a feminist approach broadens the scope to include other forms of violence including psychological, sexual, and economic (Strid 2018, 60; Renzetti 2008, 272). As an umbrella term, GBV covers a range of behaviours including any actions, words, or "attempts to degrade, control, humiliate, intimidate, coerce, deprive, threaten, or harm another person" (SWC 2020). While cisgender men and boys experience GBV, the problem disproportionately affects women and girls, as well as other diverse populations such as Indigenous peoples, and sexual and gender minorities. According to the World Health Organization, more than one in every three women globally report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO 2013, 35). This alarming number does not include financial, emotional, or verbal abuse; nor are the violent behaviours that occur online included in the WHO framework.

In contrast, violence against women (VAW) is a form of GBV specific to women. A monumental moment for action against VAW arrived at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights held by the United Nations in Vienna. After decades of struggle by women's rights movements, VAW received recognition as a violation of human rights. This led to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA), adopted by the World Conference, to call for and appoint a Special Rapporteur on VAW. The historic step further contributed to the creation of the United Nation's 1993 *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (DEVAW), the first international instrument to explicitly address VAW and generate a framework for national and international action (Ballington et al. 2017, 13). According to the 1993 declaration, violence against women constitutes "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or in private life" (Article 1).

The UN definition is important for two reasons. Firstly, in line with feminist approaches to violence that critique the traditional narrow understanding of violence, the statement is

sufficiently broad as it includes acts that both "cause *or have the potential to cause harm* [emphasis mine]" (Watts and Zimmerman 2002, 1232). Secondly, framing GBV against women as a human rights violation led to an "important conceptual shift" (OHCHR n.d.) by acknowledging that women's exposure to violence is not accidental. Rather:

> ...violence is the result of structural, deep-rooted discrimination which the state has an obligation to address. Preventing and addressing gender-based violence against women is therefore not a charitable act. It is a legal and moral obligation requiring legislative, administrative and institutional measures and reforms and the eradication of gender stereotypes which condone or perpetuate gender-based violence against women and underpin the structural inequality of women with men. (OHCHR n.d.)

Today, GBV against women is considered one of the most prevalent human rights violations occurring globally (Sida 2019; UNFPA n.d). Twenty-four years after framing VAW as a human rights issue, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international body of independent experts, released General Recommendation No. 35. The Committee's adoption of the language "GBV" as opposed to "VAW" prompted human rights lawyer Vijeyarasa (2019) to describe the change as a "significant advance" from the previous 1992 Recommendation (no. 19), one with noteworthy implications (161). The Committee describes GBV against women as "one of the fundamental social, political and economic means by which the subordinate position of women with respect to men and their stereotyped roles are perpetuated" (CEDAW Committee 2017, para. 2). GBV, in all its forms, seriously inhibits women's ability to exercise their rights and freedoms. The Committee also expanded on the spaces where violence takes place today such as "technology-mediated environments" including social media platforms (para 20).

Gender-based violence against women therefore represents a "violation of human rights, affronting women's personal dignity and encumbering their rights as a group to participate in public life" (Krook 2020, 241). The significant shift in discourse that has occurred within the human rights literature importantly acknowledges that GBV is both a manifestation of the inequality inherent within a patriarchal society and a phenomenon that "serves to maintain this unequal balance of power" (Watts and Zimmerman 2002, 1232). In the wake of social media platforms becoming a popular tool for perpetrating violence, understanding GBV as both a human rights issue and a gendered structural problem provides an important foundation to conceptualizing online GBV.

SOCIAL MEDIA: THE NEW VEHICLE FOR GBV

As acknowledged in recommendation no. 35 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, while violence directed towards women is not a new phenomenon, what is new is the domain whereby violence takes place. During the formative years of the internet's widespread adoption, many had believed the new technology's connectivity would break down harmful attitudes and lead to greater opportunities for dispersed and diverse populations (Baer 2016, 24; Vickery and Everbach 2018, 10). With the rise of social media, now a ubiquitous feature of modern life, the same hopes emerged. Due to their heightened accessibility and usability, social media platforms have "provide[d] a voice to the voiceless" (Dhrodia 2018, 381). As a political tool, social media can additionally aid in networking "solidarity for otherwise alienated individuals" (Clark 2016, 800) and function as a site of empowerment (Baer 2016, 24).

Nevertheless, while many women have benefited from the possibilities that stem from open digital spaces in terms of power and visibility, those same spaces have become an arena for "unfiltered abuse" (Antunovic 2019, 431). From journalists (Baer 2016) to feminists (Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper 2019) to sports figures (Cohen 2014) to academics (Kavanagh and Brown 2019), women face harmful discourse online reflecting broader offline gender inequalities. As Emma Jane wrote in 2014, toxic internet-based interaction no longer exists "only in the darkest digestive folds of the cybersphere but circulates freely through the entire body of the Internet" (Jane 2014a, 532). We are in a period in which women face attacks in the private, public, online, and offline realms. No space is free of harassment or the risk of violence.

Many features of social media foster uncivil, abusive, and hostile communication. The ability for abusers to remain anonymous means that many attacks conducted within the cyber sphere cannot be easily traced back to the perpetrator. Anonymity may in fact encourage individuals to engage in abusive behaviour as it eases a perpetrators ability to "overcome personal inhibitions" that may have acted as a deterrent from victimizing another face-to-face (Schwartz 2009, 414). Additionally, social platforms allow the abuser to remain constantly connected to their victim by switching accounts and following their target across sites. Social media algorithms have also been linked to the spread of extremist content (Tokmetzis 2019), leading YouTube to "dramatically" clean up its platform (Tuters 2020).

Considering the new space for violence and its reported growth, academics have sought to analyze internet platforms and their usage as a vehicle for harmful behaviours. However, a problem facing the literature is the lack of clear and separate definitions to describe online harms. Cyber abuse, online harassment, cyber violence, technology-facilitated violence, trolling, online misogyny, and cyberbullying are just a few of the terms adopted. To add to the challenge of locating a consistent definition, with the ever-evolving technology-facilitated communication services, the production of new forms of violence, harassment, and bullying arises (Van der Wilk 2018, 10). How researchers operationalize the concepts differ, too, with some collapsing interactions into one category of "psychological violence" (IPU 2016). Other scholars opt to define online harms broadly using the concept of "incivility" (Rheault, Rayment and Musulan 2019; Tenove and Tworek 2020) and evaluate content on a continuum from dismissive messages to insulting discourse to hate speech (Tenove and Tworek 2020). Nevertheless, it is important to develop common terminology to enable researchers to collect and compare data on the prevalence and nature of the behaviour in question, and thereby identify its implications (Van der Wilk 2018, 11).

ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

My research adopts the term "online gender-based violence" (online GBV), which I define as a form of power-based violence, that involves the use and abuse of power over another that utilizes digital technologies to cause harms directed against an individual based on their gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender. Online GBV exists on the continuum of gender-based violence and manifests itself in many different forms. These forms include actions of a criminal, civil, or otherwise harmful aggressive and harassing nature (Powell and Henry 2017, 5). Importantly, the concept of GBV is inclusive of "violence that is directed towards women *because* they are women" [emphasis mine] (Strid and Verloo 2019, 87) and is thus inclusive of behaviours which are considered forms of violence against women (Rodriguez-Darias and Aguilera-Avila 2018, 64). This focus on gender rather than sex enables the inclusion of GBV "against cis women, transwomen, and transpersons and partly also violence targeting people outside of the heteronormative scheme" (Strid and Verloo 2019, 87). Using an inclusive definition is important as it acknowledges the stigma and discrimination endured by those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. Moreover, the inclusivity further

entrenches the recognition that GBV is an issue "rooted in the unequal power relations between men and women and [acts] as a central mechanism for maintaining inequality" (Strid and Verloo 2018, 90). People weaponize GBV against women and others based on their gender identity to police their actions and ensure their continued subordination (Manne 2018). Taking a broad approach to understanding GBV enables future researchers to use the concept for other types of investigations, including those that employ a more inclusive intersectional lens.

Notably, online GBV refers to a range of behaviours that harm targets beyond those of a criminal nature (e.g., criminal harassment, uttering threats, or intimidation). Many of the actions that fall within the category of online GBV "are legal and considered normative" (Cook, Wilson, and Thomas 2018, 154), such as inflicting psychological violence, stalking online, and those that attempt to intimidate or otherwise silence people. As an umbrella term, online GBV includes behaviours typically found within definitions of the more common terms such as "online abuse" and "cyber harassment." These terms' shared behaviours include: harassment through social media platforms and other telecommunication tools; sharing abusive content including sexualized images or videos; sexual aggression and threats; using technology to inflict mental suffering; damaging a victim's reputation or credibility; infringement of privacy using technological data; and stalking (APC 2017, 4-6; Rodriguez-Darias and Aguilera-Avila 2018, 64; Suzor et al. 2019, 86). In my framework, I take online GBV further to include discourse that seeks to denigrate, delegitimize, threaten, or deeply insult people based on their identity characteristics.

It is important to note that the aggressive and harmful online behaviours often function in tandem with other modes of GBV, such as stalking, sexual harassment, and physical violence. However, online GBV is also unique as there is a heightened ease for perpetrators to hide behind anonymity while perpetually using digital platforms to conduct attacks from around the world. Furthermore, the internet opens the space for abusers to coordinate attacks. For example, the "Gamergate" controversy of 2014 involved a highly coordinated online harassment campaign targeting several prominent women in the video game industry. Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist media critic, received particular attention for drawing attention to the misogyny in video games. The volume of rape and death threats drove Sarkeesian and others out of their homes in fear of their safety (Crecente 2014).

Violence does not fall upon women accidentally and the concept of GBV captures this truth by underlining "the gendered relationship between victims and perpetrators" (Strid and Verloo 2019, 87). Simply put, GBV is an expression of the entrenched misogyny and discrimination women endure both online and offline. The concept of GBV reflects the power inequalities based on gender roles and functions to maintain this unequal status quo. Online GBV is simply a modern manifestation of more traditional forms of gender-based violence.

The definition of online GBV is thus broad and was deliberately chosen, as to use a narrower definition, with a focus on physical harms and actions covered by the criminal code, would risk "ignoring certain behaviours" which may "operate in ways analogous to physical violence in excluding women from political life" (Krook 2017, 79). While some have raised concerns that utilizing an umbrella term will blur the lines between behaviours (Simister 2012, 10), I believe, in line with other feminist writers, that to draw lines is a misguided approach (Cook, Wilson, and Thomas 2018, 154; Krook 2017). Taking a comprehensive approach to analyzing harmful behaviours recognizes both the expression and effects of online abuse that extend beyond violence, such as the silencing and self-censorship of women and the efforts to delegitimize others (Ging and Siapera 2018, 516; Jane 2014).

Despite a recent increase in usage of the term "online GBV," there is still a lack of consensus in academia regarding the most appropriate term for describing harmful online behaviours. The research community have made efforts to define the various online harms with considerable debates arising due to subjective and cultural factors (Ward and McLoughlin 2020, 55). Popular terms that are similar but not synonymous include cyberbullying, cyber harassment, trolling (Phillips 2015), networked-misogyny (Banet-Weister and Miltner 2016) and gender-trolling (Mantilla 2015). To better understand online GBV, it is necessary to explore the common terminology used to describe similar behaviours.

Cyberbullying generally denotes acts perpetrated amongst the youth population. Smith et al. (2008) describe cyberbullying, as an "aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend himself or herself" (376). Definitions of bullying rely upon three criteria: intent to harm, existence of a specific target, and an imbalance of power (Smith, Del Barrio and Tokunaga 2013, 36).

Cyber or online harassment, similar to cyberbullying, typically represents negative and unwanted messaging targeted towards a specific person (Citron 2015, 2; Lenhart and Zickuhr 2016, 8). While some define the term as involving repeated and prolonged contact (Citron 2015, 2), others argue that the concept of cyber harassment is more appropriate when referring to isolated instances of online aggression (Rodriguez-Darias and Aguilera-Avila 2018, 64). The term further encompasses messages that threaten, insult, or incite fear and emotional distress in the victim (Citron 2015, 2). Despite the broad definition of the term, it fails to capture the gendered nature of abuse aimed towards women.

Trolling is a word incorrectly used as a synonym for online abuse, as it is in fact considerably different (Golf-Papez and Veer 2017, 1336). Lack of consensus and understanding about what constitutes trolling is largely due to the media's "misappropriation of the term" (Fichman and Sanfilippo 2016, 6). Trolling has become a "catch-all term for any number of negatively marked online behaviours" (Hardaker 2010, 224), a classification which presents a problem for the effective tackling of online misbehaviour (Golf-Papez and Veer 2017, 1337). Understanding the need for a working definition of trolling, Golf-Papez and Veer (2017, 1339) describe the concept as the "deliberate, deceptive and mischievous attempts that are engineered to elicit a reaction from the target(s), are performed for the benefit of the troll(s) and their followers and may have negative consequences" for those involved. A "troll" in this context is a person who acts to inflame or upset another (Lumsden and Morgan 2018, 121; Phillips 2015, 2). Key elements of trolling include the attention-seeking nature of the troll and their intention to convince the targets of a false belief, which is "always exploitative" in favour of the troll or their followers (Golf-Papez and Veer 2017, 1339).

While both online abuse and trolling are intentional, in addition to its deceptiveness, trolling tends to be mischievous and sometimes-playful (Golf-Papez and Veer 2017, 1341). As such, describing an online attack as "trolling" risks downplaying the seriousness of the issue at hand. As media scholar Adrienne Shaw (2014, 275) warns, we "should be careful not to equate rape threats with less vicious forms of Internet disruptions (i.e., 'trolling')." Incorrectly equating trolling with more harmful online behaviours may have the effect of amplifying the view that such online acts are not "real," and neither are the impacts. An inability to see online acts as "real" often leads to placing the onus on victims to "not feed the troll" rather than attempt to question the structures and inequalities that lead to abusive environments. Similarly, women in

politics are often told the abuse is the "cost of doing politics," as something that comes with the territory, which is extremely problematic and has the effect of silencing and blaming the victims. Therefore, the delineation between online GBV and trolling is required.

In an attempt to distinguish between "regular" trolling and the more serious gendered abuses that occur online, Karla Mantilla (2015) coined the term "gendertrolling." As Mantilla (2015, 11) explains, "gendertrolling" is "exponentially more vicious, virulent, aggressive, threatening, pervasive, and enduring than generic trolling". Another distinctive feature is the use of "graphic sexualized and gender-based insults to demean women as sexual objects and to insult them for being women" (Mantilla 2015, 11). Mantilla aptly distinguishes gendertrolling from generic forms of trolling, however the definition fails to distinguish itself from other terms centering on gender-based harassment. Moreover, using the term gendertrolling once again risks downplaying the seriousness of the problem through the usage of the word "troll."

Some feminist accounts that consider the gendered nature of harmful online behaviours directed toward women prefer to use the term "cyber misogyny," "cyber sexism," or "gendered-harassment" (Women's Media Center n.d.). While the purpose behind the harassment varies with every incidence, gender-based harassment intends to "denigrate the target on the basis of sex" (Women's Media Center n.d.). Characterized by sexist and misogynistic vitriol, gender-based harassment aims to embarrass or shame women.

The list of terms described above is neither exhaustive nor are the terms mutually exclusive. As I have shown, overlaps exist among the terms used to denote harms perpetuated online. Each type of behaviour is interrelated through their dependence on a technological source; most prominently today, that source is social media (Duggan 2017). There is also conceptual overlap due to the manner in which victims may respond to the harms. Given the varied terminology, my research paper uses the term online GBV as it acts as an umbrella concept inclusive of harassment, abuse, intimidation, coercion, and other harmful behaviours. When discussing previous research, I use the term(s) utilized by the author(s).

WOMEN ONLINE: THE RISING COST

Although a relatively new phenomenon, online GBV research indicates that the problem is widespread, with its effects against the victim in line with other forms of violence (e.g., psychological, emotional, and sometimes economic). One of the largest organizations to

investigate online GBV to date is Amnesty International. Over a period of 16 months from December 2016 to March 2018, Amnesty conducted extensive qualitative and quantitative research concerning women's experiences on social media platforms in an effort to understand the scale, nature, and impact of online GBV. From interviews with 86 women and non-binary individuals, including politicians, journalists, activists, and games developers, and a survey of 162 women based in the United Kingdom and the United States without a large public following, Amnesty found that 62.35% of the respondents experienced abuse on Twitter (Amnesty International 2018a).

In order to understand the extent of harassment towards women on social media on a larger international scale, Amnesty led an online poll of around women in each of the following countries: the UK, USA, Spain, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Poland, and New Zealand (Magill 2017). The online poll surveyed around 500 women in each county. Averaged across all eight countries, 23% of women revealed they had experienced abuse or harassment online (Dhrodia 2018, 382). Participants from the United States recorded the highest number of women who reported online abuse, at 33%, while Italy recorded the lowest, at 16% (Dhrodia 2018, 382).

Other studies have highlighted the gendered nature of online abuse. A 2017 Pew Research Center (4) study broke down the definition of "online harassment" into six categories: offensive name-calling, efforts to deliberately embarrass someone, physical threats, stalking, harassment over a sustained period, and sexual harassment. From a national representative survey of 4,248 U.S adults, Pew Research found men are "somewhat more likely" than women to experience online harassment (44% versus 37%), however, the types of harassing behaviour they were subjected to differed (Duggan 2017, 14). While men were more likely to experience offensive name-calling and threats of physical violence, women were particularly vulnerable to experiencing sexual harassment and stalking (Duggan 2017, 7). Women were also more likely than men to find their experience with online harassment "extremely or very upsetting" with 35% feeling this way compared with 16% of harassed men (Duggan 2017, 7). Additionally, the report highlighted the link between someone's identity and the prevalence of harassment (Duggan 2017, 17). From those who experienced online harassment, 14% believed it resulted from expressing their political views while 8% emphasized the role of their gender (Duggan 2017, 17). Of particular concern is the impact of online harassment. Over one-quarter of respondents (27%) said they decided not to post online after witnessing the harassment of others,

and more than one in ten (13%) revealed they stopped using an online service altogether due to witnessing harassing behaviour (Duggan 2017, 4).

Compared with a similar survey conducted in 2014, the results show an increase in the share of Americans who have experienced online harassment (Duggan 2017, 4). Notably, nearly half (49%) of the 30 to 49-year-old demographic experienced a form of online harassment, representing an increase of 10 percentage points since 2014 (Duggan 2017, 5). In both the 2014 and 2017 studies, the venue in which the majority of online harassment took place remained the same: social media platforms (Duggan 2014, 23; Duggan 2017, 23). Despite evidence indicating online GBV is on the rise and the role one's identity, such as gender, plays in relation to the types of online abuse they face, scant attention has focused on the relation to violence against women in politics (VAWP).

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

Building on the definition of violence against women, campaigns such as #NotTheCost by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) have defined violence against women in politics (VAWP) as based on three characteristics: the harmful acts target women because of their gender; the very form of the attacks can be gendered "as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence" (NDI 2017, 12); and the goal of the attacks is to discourage women's participation in politics, silence them, and "preserve traditional gender roles and undermine democratic institutions" (Krook 2017, 78). At its core, VAWP is a form of GBV "that manifests physically, psychologically and sexually, both online and offline" (UN Women 2018, 10). Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016, 136) distinguish VAWP from violence against women in elections as "the latter includes acts during electoral periods directed at women as candidates, voters and activists," whereas VAWP occurs both during electoral periods and after the candidates assume political positions.

Traditional approaches to political violence focus on physical harms and the perpetrator's motives (Bardall, Bjarnegard, and Piscopo 2020, 5). Feminist scholars have sought to rectify the traditionally narrow approach by acknowledging that political violence acts differently on different genders (Bardall 2020, 380) by broadening the scope of what violence entails. Following the work of scholar Liz Kelly (1988), feminist approaches recognize VAWP as existing on a continuum from explicit violations of women's rights and physical violence to

discriminatory attitudes and subtle forms of control over women's bodies. Importantly, the idea of a continuum does not imply a hierarchy of severity; instead, the term reflects the common characteristics underlying the various forms of violence, including intimidation, threat, control, coercion, and unequal power dynamics (Kelly 1988). These understandings have led activists and scholars to broaden VAWP into five forms: physical, sexual, economic, psychological, and symbolic (Krook 2017; Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2019). These broad categories are not mutually exclusive. Physical violence involves any bodily harm inflicted on female political actors or their relatives, which may include abductions, assault, assassinations, and domestic abuse (Krook 2017, 79). Sexual violence includes sexual acts, attempts to coerce sexual acts, rape, and sexual harassment (Krook 2017, 79). Economic violence refers to "degradation and coercion through control over access to economic resources" (Krook 2017, 80). The fourth form of VAWP is psychological violence, which involves any "hostile behaviour or act likely to cause psychological harm, suffering and or/fear" (IPU 2016, 3). Psychological violence includes online GBV due to its focus on the emotionally and mentally harmful impacts on targeted women (IPU 2016).

Finally, symbolic violence comprises acts that "delegitimize female politicians through gendered tropes denying them competence in the political sphere" (Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2016, 144) and is recognized by an increasing number of authors, although not all agree to its inclusion in the VAWP typology (Bardall 2020). Symbolic violence "operates at the level of portrayal and representation, seeking to erase or nullify women's presence in political office" (Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2016, 144). Canadian women politicians from different political parties have reported that an increase in the targeted misogynistic and hateful attacks occurring on social media has led them to fear for their safety along with their staff members (Burke 2019). As a result, some women have opted to install security features including panic buttons and cameras at their constituency offices (Burke 2019).

Research from Amnesty International (2018) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016; 2018) reveal the increased mobilization of psychological and symbolic violence through the tool of social media. In light of the proliferation of harassing rhetoric on social media platforms, attention has shifted to its ability to act as an assembly of hate and incivility towards political actors.

Initially, some argued that the internet's ability to provide a direct form of communication between the public and politicians could "humanize politics," bolster democratic discourse, and provide useful as a political marketing tool—a presupposition that led to its quick uptake by public figures (Ward and McLoughlin 2020, 49). Nevertheless, it has become apparent the prevalence of abusive and intrusive attention politicians historically received offline (James et al. 2016) continues in the online sphere.

In an effort to further understand the circulation of harassing discourses on social media, academic literature has explored the degree to which socioeconomic factors are related to incivility on social media (Vargo and Hopp 2017) and the relationship between political candidates' engagement on Twitter and their exposure to harassment (Theocharis et al. 2016). While some academics concentrate on pre-determinants of incivility online, those exploring the experience of online abuse faced by politicians tend to focus on the UK context (Akhtar and Morrison 2019; James et al. 2016; Gorrell et al. 2018; Greenwood et al. 2019), New Zealand (Every-Palmer et al. 2015) and European parliamentarians (IPU 2016). There is also a propensity by researchers to rely on surveys.

Studies in a variety of democracies highlight the widespread level of abuse aimed at political actors. Utilizing the same survey instrument, researchers examined members of four different parliaments: the UK (James et. al, 2016), Queensland (Pathe et al., 2014), Norway (Bjelland & Bjørgo, 2014) and New Zealand (Every-Palmer et al. 2015). Carried out in 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014 respectively, the survey provided a cross-national comparison of members' experience with "inappropriate, intrusive or aggressive behaviour" (James et al. 2016, 181). The proportion of politicians who experienced harassing and intrusive behaviour were similar across the four surveys. Importantly, however, the researchers found that social media played a greater role with each successive survey (James et al. 2016, 191). While inappropriate social media contact constituted 10.1% of the responses in the 2010 UK survey, this rose to 60% in the 2014 New Zealand survey (188). The results suggest that the harassing behaviours parliamentarians received through social media may have risen in line with the increased use of social media by both the public and politicians alike.

Similarly, Akhtar and Morrison (2018) surveyed 181 UK parliamentarians, representing 28% of the House of Commons, about their experiences of being "trolled" online. Their findings

revealed that every MP experienced online abuse and many of them faced it multiple times a day, consistent with previous survey data (Amnesty International 2018; IPU 2016, Wall and Hayes 2019). Moreover, compared to the 2010 survey of UK MPs (James et al. 2016), the research revealed the proportion of parliamentarians affected by online abuse had undergone a substantial increase (Akhtar and Morrison 2018, 324). Remarkably, the findings revealed that while the earlier study reported 10.1% of all respondents had dealt with inappropriateness online, by 2018 *every* respondent reported online abuse at least once (Akhtar and Morrison 2018, 324).

While survey-oriented research provides valuable insights, there are limitations due to the heavy reliance on self-reporting which poses validity constraints. Further, survey respondents may not read every message directed at them and thus the results may fail to present the true extent of online harms. Nevertheless, it is a valuable tool to understand the scope of online GBV and the volume of abuse the victims notice. However, as the Pew Research Center study (2017) revealed, internet and social media users do not react *only* to messages directed specifically at them. Indeed, witnesses to abuse sometimes adjust their behaviour, for example through the form of self-censorship or departing from the social platform altogether. To address the gap of survey data, researchers have directly analyzed messages politicians receive to provide quantifiable evidence regarding the extent and nature of online GBV.

Gorrell et al. (2018) utilized Twitter's streaming application programming interface (API) to create their corpus for analyzing abuse directed towards sitting UK MPs and all known election candidates. Using a dictionary-based approach combined with semantic analysis to detect abusive language in tweets posted leading up to the 2015 and 2017 UK general elections, the authors found that the quantity and proportion of abuse increased between the elections (Gorrell et al. 2018, 601).

Building on this research, Greenwood et al. (2019) included two new periods, one in late 2018 and the other in early 2019, for further exploration on abuse of UK MPs. The periods chosen covered a planned "meaningful vote" on the Brexit withdrawal agreement, which was delayed, and the subsequent vote on January 15, 2019, when the sitting government suffered the largest ever defeat on the floor of the House of Commons (Greenwood et al. 2019; Stewart 2019). Regarding methodology, the authors did not include all tweets an MP would see on their timeline because they excluded those in which users randomly mention the MP. Instead, the researchers focused on data from "tweets sent by each MP, any replies to those tweets, and any

retweets either made by the MP or of the MPs own tweets" (Greenwood et al 2019, 4). Such an approach increases the likelihood that any abusive language used intentionally targeted the MP (Greenwood et al 2019, 4). Results demonstrated an increase in the volume of abuse aimed towards women MPs after 2015 (Greenwood et al 2019, 7). Surprisingly, men and Conservative party members were the most prominent targets across all four periods (Greenwood et al 2019, 7), a finding supported by other recent research (Akhtar and Morrison 2018; Ward and McLoughlin 2020). However, a partial explanation may arise from the number of men in high profile positions. Men accounted for over 70% of cabinet members in 2015 (Gov UK 2015). Then, after the snap election of 2017, male representation in the Cabinet increased to over 77% (Gov UK 2017). In addition, the Conservative Party constituted the majority of parliament during the timeframe investigated. As Greenwood et al (2019, 6) state, "in pre-election periods people are focussed on expressing their opinion about the future leadership of the country" (Greenwood et al 2019, 6). Furthermore, studies have shown as visibility increases, women receive more uncivil messages than their male counterparts (Rheault et al. 2019, 5). Therefore, it is likely that men were targets because of their high-profile positions as cabinet ministers.

Recently, Ward and McLoughlin (2020, 62) found evidence that some politicians are specifically targeted. After finding that "most [UK] MPs encounter Twitter abuse to some degree," the authors tested the levels of abuse across three attributes of an MP: recognition, gender, and political party (Ward and McLoughlin 2020, 63). Measuring recognition by the number of tweets an MP received, the research revealed that "increased name recognition has a positive relationship with levels of abuse" indicating that the more frequently an MP is mentioned online, the more abuse they receive (Ward and McLoughlin 2020, 63). As with previous UK-centric research, Ward and McLoughlin (2020) found male MPs attracted more abuse than their women counterparts. Yet, women received a "significantly higher proportion of hate speech" compared to their counterparts (Ward and McLoughlin 2020, 63). Of all the tweets that contained hate speech, women MPs received 86%. This finding brings up a crucial element concerning the type of abuse women face. While political women may not receive more "unwanted contact," the abuse they do receive is deeply gendered and "potentially more threatening" (Ward and McLoughlin 2020, 63).

Other studies examining women's participation online reveal the deeply gendered nature of online interactions. In line with studies conducted on the general public (Duggan 2017),

research reveals women politicians suffer more from online GBV than do men (Akhtar and Morrison 2018). Amnesty International addressed the subject of online GBV against women politicians by commissioning a study which used machine-learning tools to detect and analyze online abuse against women UK MPs. Looking only at women candidates in the run-up to the June 2017 UK election, the analysis found that between January 1st and June 8th, 2017, 25,688 out of 900,223 (2.85%) tweets directed at the women were abusive (Dhrodia 2018, 382). Again, this figure is in line with similar studies that have found overall online abuse levels aimed at UK politicians to be between 2 to 4% (Gorrell et al 2018; Ward and McLoughlin 2020, 58).

Notably, evidence from the Amnesty report found a striking difference between abusive messages sent to members of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and their white colleagues. Diane Abbott, the first Black women MP elected to the UK parliament in 1987, received 45.14% of all abusive tweets. Even excluding Diane Abbott, Black and Asian women MPs still received 35% more abusive tweets than their white women colleagues (Dhrodia 2017). Amnesty's findings demonstrate the intersectional nature of online GBV. For individuals with multiple or intersecting identities, the online violence will often target those different identities. In the case of Diane Abbott, the abuse she faced was not limited to sexist and misogynistic comments; they were also "incredibly racist" (Dhrodria 2018, 384). Using four time-periods between 2015 and 2019, Greenwood et al. (2019, 7) found no statistically significant differences in levels of abuse between MPs based on their ethnicity. However, as the authors themselves acknowledge, this lack of difference could arise from the small representation of MPs falling within the BAME classification.

Research focused on understanding how a political figure *perceives* acts of harassment reveals important findings often missed when focussing only on the message content and normative understandings of violence. Collignon and Rudig (2020, 3) surveyed candidates standing in the 2017 UK general election regarding their personal experience of any form of "inappropriate behaviour, harassment, or threats to security". By purposely refusing to provide a narrow and stringent definition of violence to the respondents, the researchers were better able to understand how candidates react to perceived threats. This is significant as it provides insights into the effects of harassing behaviour. The authors find 45% of women candidates suffered harassment and intimidation in comparison with 35% of males (Collignon and Rudig 2020, 3). Further, the results show that young, female, and leading candidates are "significantly more

likely" to have suffered from harassment than their counterparts and to be more fearful (4). Once again, women respondents pointed out the most frequent abuse occurred online through social media platforms (29%). Following communications on Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms, the next most frequent mechanism used to send harassment was through emails at 23% (Collignon and Rudig 2020, 4). Unsurprisingly, only female candidates reported facing sexual harassment (Collignon and Rudig 2020, 5).

In 2016, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conducted a study on the experiences of women members of national parliaments pertaining to sexism, harassment, and violence (1). Based on in-depth interviews with 55 women parliamentarians from 39 countries, the IPU's study revealed the widespread prevalence of GBV against women parliamentarians (11). The study showed that 81.8% of interviewed participants had experienced some form of psychological violence (3). As mentioned above, psychological violence encompasses any "hostile behaviour or act likely to cause psychological harm, suffering and or/fear" (IPU 2016, 3). Psychological violence against women parliamentarians most commonly appeared in the form of "humiliating sexual or sexist remarks" (IPU 2016, 3). Respondents pointed out how they constantly face comments and attacks about their appearance, the "role they should play," and the level of femininity they present (IPU 2016, 3). Technology-based interaction, in particular social media, is the main channel for perpetrating psychological violence, although traditional media continues to play a role in reproducing sexist and misogynistic remarks. Out of the IPU study respondents, 27.3% believed the traditional news media had circulated images or comments about them that were derisive or sexually charged (IPU 2016, 4). This number rose to 41.8% in the case of social media (IPU 2016, 4).

Then, in 2018, the IPU turned its focus on European parliamentarians. Surveying 81 women from 40 European countries, the study found 85.2% suffered from psychological violence while in office and 58.2% were the target of "abusive, sexual or violent content and behaviour on social networks" (IPU 2018, 5). Anonymous users were the perpetrators in the majority of cases (66.7%) of online GBV against women MPs (IPU 2018, 6). Confirming the findings from the previous literature discussed, both Amnesty International and the cross-national IPU studies revealed that acts of harassing and psychological violent behaviour especially "in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing,

intimidation and threats" is particularly profuse online and through social media platforms (IPU 2016, 6).

A Guardian backed research project compared the treatment of politicians in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia on Twitter (Hunt, Evershed, and Liu 2016). Focusing on leadership contests involving both female and male politicians, the project sought to discover if abuse, as defined by tweets containing swear words and abusive language, differed between politicians at similar levels in their parties. Comparing tweets received by 2016 US Democratic Presidential nominees Hilary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, the research found Clinton received abusive tweets at a rate almost twice that of her counterpart (Hunt, Evershed, and Liu 2016). "Bitch," "cunt," and "whore" were in the topmost common abusive words in tweets directed toward Clinton; on the other hand, the most used abusive words against Sanders were "idiot" and "fuck" (Hunt, Evershed and Liu 2016). Of the three US Republican presidential candidates, Carly Fiorina (the only female candidate in the party), Chris Christie, and Ben Carson, Christie received the most abusive tweets at 2.4% compared to 1.53% for Fiorina and 1.28% for Carson. Yet, once again, the language directed towards the candidates differed based on gender with Fiorina receiving "extremely sexually charged" abuse (Hunt, Evershed, and Liu 2016). Perhaps the most dramatic revelation stemmed from the Australian comparison. Despite Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd receiving almost an equal number of mentions in Twitter conversations, Gillard received approximately twice as many abusive tweets.

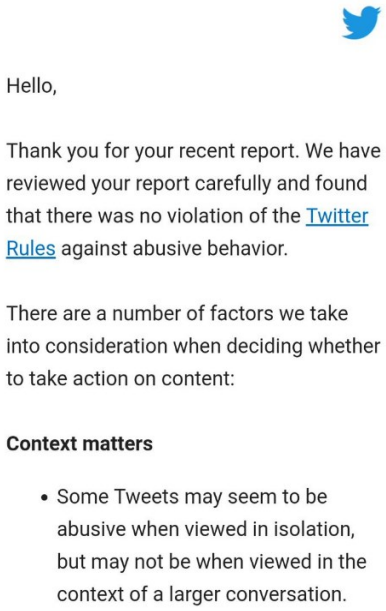
Where possible, the researchers assigned a gender to the sender of a tweet. In line with the literature (Akhtar and Morrison 2018), most of the abuse was sent from male perpetrators. Male users made up almost three-quarters of the abuse mentioning Gillard, Fiorina, and Clinton (Hunt, Evershed and Liu 2016). Eighty-three per cent of those who called Fiorina a "cunt" were men (Hunt, Evershed and Liu 2016).

Collectively, this scholarship demonstrates that although there were early expectations of social media breaking down gender divisions, the experience of using social media is not gender neutral. The data highlight the clear gender-divide in terms of who is receiving the abuse, the types of abuse endured, and who is sending the abuse. Altogether, the research also indicates that backlash against women in politics is not limited to only a handful of women or to those situated in a particular country or political party. Rather, the evidence shows that violence against political women is ubiquitous online. As Emma Jane (2017, 3) states, "while the internet did not

invent sexism, it is amplifying it in unprecedented ways". Indeed, the use of expletives, "recreational nastiness" (Jane 2014b, 559), and sexualized threats of violence women face online draws attention to the "(new) articulation of (old) sexualising misogyny" (Jane 2014a, 532).

Krook (2017, 82) points out that political women who speak from a feminist perspective are more likely to receive forms of online GBV "given that they challenge male dominance in multiple ways". Krook draws attention to the vitriol "self-proclaimed feminist" UK MP Jess Phillips received online, primarily through Twitter (83). During a single evening in May 2016, Phillips received over 600 messages threatening to rape her (BBC 2018). One user commented that Phillips "looks like she needs a good fuckin (sic), just to settle them new teeth in" (Barisic 2019). After Phillips reported the Tweet, Twitter responded in a surprising fashion, stating they found no violation of the Twitter Rules and "context matters" (figure 2).

Figure 2: Twitter Response to UK MP Jess Phillips



Hello,

Thank you for your recent report. We have reviewed your report carefully and found that there was no violation of the Twitter Rules against abusive behavior.

There are a number of factors we take into consideration when deciding whether to take action on content:

Context matters

- Some Tweets may seem to be abusive when viewed in isolation, but may not be when viewed in the context of a larger conversation.

Carl Benjamin, a former UKIP candidate for the 2019 European elections, joined in on the vitriol by tweeting "I wouldn't even rape you" to Phillips. The abuse directed at Phillips has not ended. In 2019, Phillips said the police were called to her house three times over a single weekend due to an increase in online abuse, underscoring that the divide between online and offline violence is not always clear (BBC 2019b).

Media reports from Canada indicate similar patterns of online GBV aimed towards politicians (Rabson 2019; Trynacity 2018), yet there remains limited empirical research

examining the phenomenon. One exception to this is a study by Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan (2019, 3) who used machine-learning models to predict "incivility" of over 2 million messages sent between April and July 2017 addressed to Canadian politicians and US senators on Twitter. Defining a text as uncivil if it contained profanity, vulgarity, insults, "personal attacks on someone's private life," or hate speech, the authors found the 10.69% of the tweets addressed to politicians in Canada were uncivil (Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019, 4).

Much has happened since 2017—including a cabinet minister receiving an RMCP detail due to both online and offline abuse—and more recent research highlights that overall online hate has risen (Ofcom 2019, 10). According to evidence submitted to the House of Commons for their report *Taking Action to End Online Hate*, between 2015 and 2016 a "600% rise in intolerant hate speech in social media postings by Canadians" transpired (Housefather 2019, 21). In the most recent federal election, a journalist used the words "nasty, divisive and messy" to describe the political campaigns (Desai 2019).

The campaign period leading up to the 2019 Canadian federal election offers a promising context for investigation for two reasons. First, campaign periods increase the spotlight on political parties and their members. This is also a time during which "parties and candidates are more active than ever" in order to receive media attention and reach the public (van Aelst and De Swert 2009, 152). As high-profile members of the party, it is likely the heightened media attention expands to cabinet ministers. Media coverage is important for the purposes of this study as it inevitably influences public discourse and therefore online communications. In fact, scholars have found a positive correlation between offline newspaper attention and the extent to which politicians receive attention on social media (Kruikemeier, Gattermann, and Vliegenthart 2018, 222). After finding a high volume of abusive attention aimed at UK party leaders during the campaign period, Greenwood et al (2019) theorized this is because of the public's increased focus on expressing their opinions before an election. However, it is important to acknowledge some studies which note a gender gap in media coverage visibility, with women lagging their male counterparts (Van der Pas and Aaldering 2020, 124).

The second reason supporting a focus on the 2019 campaign period as a site of online GBV is that the role of digital media has grown in importance with each successive election. On Twitter, mentions of the federal election in 2019 increased by 86% compared to the 2015 election (Austin 2019). For these reasons and considering the events that have unfolded since the

2015 election, there is a need to re-examine messages directed towards politicians in the current context. As women are more likely than men to report facing online GBV and are targeted on account of their gender (O'Connell and Ramshaw 2018, 13), the focus of this research is social media's users' messages sent to two prominent Canadian women members of Parliament during the run-up to the 2019 federal election. My research further attempts to quantify the extent and nature of the abuse, as well as to explore its effects.

SO WHAT? THE "COST OF DOING POLITICS"

Despite the substantial harms of online GBV, "many view it as a benign part of online life that should be tolerated" (Citron 2009, 392). Society's reaction to discounting "harms that disproportionately affect women" is nothing new (Citron 2009, 392). From old laws where men could not face prosecution for raping their wives to today's lack of regulations surrounding online GBV, women's suffering often finds itself ignored (Citron 2009, 392; Hensley 2019). In response to the pervasive and persistent nature alongside the normalization of abuse against female public figures, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a non-profit, nonpartisan organization, launched the #NotTheCost Campaign to stop violence against women in politics. A major problem facing victims of online GBV is the view that the online world is not "real" and therefore neither are its harms. Yet, this view does not reflect reality.

For many elected representatives, using social media is now the dominant way of engaging with their constituents. A survey of 181 UK MPs found 165 respondents (92%) used Twitter, 123 (68%) used Facebook and 103 (57%) used Instagram (Akhtar and Morrison 2019, 324). In an increasingly digitalized age, online GBV or even the potential for its occurrence can have the negative effect of pushing politicians engaged in online platforms back offline. Faced with the potential of online attacks, not only are women politicians unable to express themselves, but their ability to work is impaired. In 2018, Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps deleted her Facebook account in response to the vitriol and anger she witnessed online, ending her years of active engagement with constituents online (Smart 2018).

The purpose of the gendered violence and online attacks is "to shut women up and shut them down" (Jane 2016) and there exists evidence to support its effectiveness in pressuring victims to self-censor or silence themselves. A poll commissioned by Amnesty International asked women aged 18-55 about their experiences on social media. Of those who had experienced

online abuse (23%), around two-thirds revealed "a feeling of apprehension when thinking about using the internet or social media" (Dhrodia 2017). Furthermore, of those women polled in the USA and UK who experienced online abuse, 81% and 78% respectively made changes to the ways in which they engage with social media platforms as a result (Amnesty International 2018b). A study from the Data & Society Research Institute found that 27% of all American internet users self-censor their social media usage due to fear of online harassment, with the number rising to 41% for women aged 15 to 29 (Lenhart and Zickuhr 2016, 4).

Essentially, both the presence online abuse in its many forms and its risk of occurrence encourage a silencing effect. Moreover, online harassment may deter others from running for political office, thereby keeping women in the margins of political society. In her work on gender-specific election violence, Gabrielle Bardall (2013, 4) notes that, "the speed and scope of social media attacks have a chilling effect on political aspirants," with women often raising the threat of widespread and public attacks as a factor dissuading their entry into politics. For example, in Australia, 8 out of 10 women over the age of 31 said they were less likely to pursue their political aspirations after witnessing the negative and misogynistic attacks against the country's first female Prime Minister Julia Gillard (Shepherd 2014). Likewise, a UK study of participants engaged in a "program for aspiring women leaders" found over 75% of those who had witnessed sexist abuse online of women politicians "said that it weighed on their decision about whether to seek a role in public life" (Krook 2017, 84).

To date, studies of the implications of online GBV of women have primarily focused on its ability to act as a barrier to women's equal participation in politics (Krook and Sanín 2019) and its silencing effect (Amnesty International 2018; Powell and Henry 2017). Instead, I apply conceptual understandings of symbolic annihilation to better understand both the nature and content of harassment. This specific lens will be helpful in showing that online GBV directed at political women constitutes a form of symbolic annihilation that requires recognition.

SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION

"Symbolic annihilation," first conceptualized by George Gerbner (1972), helps to capture the nature and effects of online GBV aimed at women politicians. In his writings about representations on television, Gerbner wrote: "Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation" (44). Through a feminist analysis on

women's representation in the mass media, Gaye Tuchman (1978) expanded the term to include the categories of "trivialization" and "condemnation" alongside "omission." Using the example of women's representation in the media, Tuchman drew attention to women's literal absence, despite making up half of the population. Tuchman argued that through women's absence, trivialization, and condemnation in the media, women were devalued. Although women's marginalized status permeates a wide variety of organizations and institutions, scholars have traditionally focused on the mass media, including television (Tuchman 1978; Tuchman 2000), newspapers (Verge and Pastor 2018), and advertising (Gurrieri 2020).

Scholars have further extended symbolic annihilation to critically examine the treatment of other social groups and mediums. For example, Debra Merskin (1998) explored the portrayal of Native Americans on television shows and films as a monolithic group of "Indians." By primarily including Native Americans only in historical pieces, Merskin (1998, 342) argues the media perpetuates "the notion that Natives exist only in the past." Glennie (2018, 108) showed how popular music videos symbolically annihilated Inuit women and therefore "captured their real-world position" as a group lacking socio-political power. An analysis of cartoons by Klein and Shiffman (2009) revealed the ongoing symbolic annihilation of four specific social groups – women, older adults, non-heterosexual individuals, and racial minority group members - over a sixty-year period. While Gutsche et al. (2020) recently applied the concept of symbolic annihilation to racism in hashtags pertaining to racially charged incidents involving the social policing of Black individuals.

Tuchman's conceptual expansion of symbolic annihilation is also an apt lens through which to view and analyze the online social world and how political women fit within it. While political women are provided space on social media platforms due to its open accessibility, the trivialization of their abilities, and focus on their appearance, sex appeal, or lack thereof, as well as condemnation though abusive messages, reflects is an ongoing attempt to maintain the marginalization of women in politics. As Gerbner (1972) alluded to in his original conceptualization of symbolic annihilation, the language used to define people signals their perceived worth in society. While the abusers direct the online GBV towards specific political women, it sends a clear message to women as a group that they do not deserve a place in politics. The message broadcast from the act of symbolic annihilation is an important feature of the concept. As discussed within the online GBV literature, witnesses to the violence, harassment,

and delegitimization rhetoric often react by self-censoring and removing themselves from the online sphere (Duggan 2017). This chilling effect further impacts women with political aspirations (Bardall 2013; Krook 2017; Shepherd 2014). The literature makes clear that one does not have to personally experience online GBV and the resulting symbolic annihilation for it to leave an impact (Duggan 2017).

Analyzing the online GBV aimed at women in politics provides a valuable opportunity to explore how online users symbolically annihilate women. From the VAWP literature and media outlets, we know women encounter resistance and demonization for simply existing in the political sphere. Perpetrators of online GBV continuously delegitimize and devalue women's political roles and legitimacy. These perpetrators essentially weaponize social media platforms through the reproduction of stereotypes and glorification of gender-based violence. The concept of symbolic annihilation is powerful in its ability to reveal the harmful consequences that arise from the trivialization and condemnation taking place within online messages. Yet, to date no scholars have closely examined the relationship between social media platforms and women in politics through the lens of symbolic annihilation. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of literature drawing attention to the discourse and themes of traditional media representations that omit the role of political women or delegitimize and trivialize their positions. This literature is an important foundation to understanding the ways in which society belittles and condemns women in politics online.

Using quantitative analysis, studies have shown that women are still largely absent in the Canadian media (Cukier, Jackson, and Gagnon 2019). Yet, there is evidence that suggests the usual relative infrequency of women in the political realm can lead to enhanced visibility of female candidates due to their newsworthiness (Trimble 2007, 974). Nevertheless, research confirms Tuchman's assertion that when women *are* represented, they are represented as incompetent or inferior compared to men (2000, 156). A content and discourse analysis of articles published by the *Globe and Mail* newspaper on the candidates vying for leadership of Canadian political parties since 1975 revealed women received more negative and gendered evaluations of their communication skills, political experience, and intellectual abilities than the men candidates (Wagner, Trimble and Sampert 2019, 155). Strinati (2004, 167) points out when the media do make women visible, their "concern with women is often devoted entirely to their representation," their sexual attractiveness, and their linkage to domestic labour. Through the

discussions of women politicians' bodies, they are situated as "outsiders to elite-level politics, potentially undercutting their perceived legitimacy" as political actors (Trimble et al. 2013, 477). Moreover, the media's role in reproducing the tropes of women in the role of the mother, wife, and in traditional home settings, or as the sex object for men's viewing pleasure, reaffirms "the fate of women in a patriarchal society" (Strinati 2004, 167). Essentially, what occurs is the trivialization of women's roles and importance, as they are "dismissed to the protective confines" of the private sphere (Tuchman 2000, 154).

Media representations work to entrench stereotypes and shape society's expectations of women (Cukier et al. 2016). Writing in 1976, Gerbner noted that the media, in particular television, "is the central cultural arm [of society]...it is an agency of the established order and as such serves primarily to extend and maintain rather than to alter, threaten, or weaken conventional conceptions, beliefs, and behaviors" (175). The media sell cultural values, concepts, and perceptions of what it means to be successful that have implications beyond the screen and paper. We learn from the media who can and who should exist in the public sphere. Who should take the role as leader, expert, politician and who should not, is gleaned from the media and then transposed into other cultural divisions, including online platforms.

The role of condemnation is an area underexplored within the literature focusing on the concept of symbolic annihilation. Condemnation refers to criticism, and sometimes vilification, of groups who do not comply with expected norms of sexuality, marriage, image, aspirations, and so on. Despite the passing of over 100 years since white women won the right to vote in federal elections, those who decide to run for office today continue to run the risk of vilification for stepping outside the norm. Condemnation typically follows closely behind any apparent norm breaking. Today, condemnation and rebuke primarily occur through social media, which provide a platform for users to abuse women in politics through name-calling, expletives, sexualized imagery, and other forms of online GBV.

Tuchman revisited the concept of symbolic annihilation in 2013, explaining that it limits the possibilities of women's lives by discouraging their presence in spaces typically catered to men, for example politics (xii). Further impacts include emboldening other women and men to "adopt stereotypical views of women's individual and collective potential" (xiii). When people label women in politics with stereotypes, render them incompetent, and chastise their every move, the perpetrators reinforce women's inequalities. The abuse women in politics face acts as

both a manifestation of inequality and a "mechanism for subordination" that serves to maintain the unequal balance of power in society (Watts and Zimmerman 2002, 1232). While the subordination of women might not always be the explicit motivation of the perpetrator, it is nevertheless a consequence of their actions (Watts and Zimmerman 2002, 1232).

In a world where political women continue to face physical violence and even death for simply doing their job, some may believe interrogating symbolic annihilation risks undermining "the urgency of actual annihilation," yet, in reality "symbolic annihilation is often a central premise of actual annihilation; they intertwine, overlap, and reinforce one another" (Solis 2018, 2). The vitriol, inequality, and discrimination women face online acts an extension of behaviours embedded in society (Dhrodia 2018, 381). These forms of violence do not exist in separate silos. The hostile and discriminatory practices against women online are modern examples of actions that lead to women's symbolic annihilation in the cyber sphere and deserve exploration. In the next chapter I detail the methodology employed to identify and analyze the GBV and subsequent symbolic annihilation of women cabinet ministers on the social media platform Twitter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Online GBV is a growing form of violence used to marginalize and censor women in the public sphere, particularly in politics. While international studies have investigated and reported on the phenomenon for a number of years (Dhrodia 2018; Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016; Ward and McLoughlin 2020), there is limited research examining online GBV targeted towards political women in the Canadian context. As mentioned, I use the term "online GBV" as an umbrella term to refer to a range of violent behaviours occurring online and directed against people based on their gender identity, gender expression, or perceived gender. Using an inclusive definition of violence enables online GBV to include a broad range of behaviours including: promoting violence against an individual based on their identity; harassment via online platforms; sharing abusive and sexualized content; using technology to inflict psychological suffering; and harming a victim's reputation or credibility (APC 2017; Rodriguez-Darias and Aguilera-Avila 2018; Suzor et al. 2019).

This study seeks to understand the nature, extent, and scope of online GBV aimed toward women in politics in Canada by asking: how extensively are Canadian cabinet ministers Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland subjected to online gender-based violence on Twitter? And what forms does this online gender-based violence take for the two women? I also seek to identify the ways in which online GBV is a form of symbolic annihilation by posing the following questions: How does online gender-based violence on Twitter function as a form of symbolic annihilation? What meanings are communicated about gendered power relations, especially perceptions of women's place in political institutions? To answer these research questions, I performed a content and discourse analysis of a corpus of tweets gathered in the final two weeks of the 2019 Canadian federal election campaign. My analysis focussed on the tweets addressed directly to cabinet ministers Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland. Below, I detail the way I selected which tweets to analyze and the reasons for their selection. I also provide an account of my content and discourse analysis techniques while identifying each method's strengths and weaknesses for analyzing online messages.

SELECTION OF TEXTS

When Tuchman (1978, 167) originally wrote that "mass media [is] the cement of… social life", television and newspapers were the dominant form of cultural communication. Today the internet, and specifically social media platforms, have caught up to these other forms of communication, if not overtaken them in this domain. Canada contains one of the most connected populations in the world (Gruzd 2018, 4). Of online adults, 94% have an account on at least one social media service (Gruzd 2018, 4). Statistics on daily usage among social media platforms paint a picture of a society deeply entrenched in the online world. The highest percentage of daily users among the top nine platforms show 79% of Facebook users visit the platform daily, and almost half visit several times a day (Gruzd 2018, 6). Canadians increasingly rely on social media as their news source, surpassing print newspapers and television, with 77% of Canadians now going online for the news and 44% citing social media as their primary news source (Watson 2019). Social media has thus firmly established itself in people's daily routines. From marketers to politicians to government agencies to activists, there is an understanding of social media's reach and power to influence the masses.

Social media now play a key role in shaping users' norms, values, and behaviours. Everyday culture intertwines with the online world. Just as television during Gerbner's era maintained and extended the "conceptions, beliefs, and behaviors" of society, so too does social media today (Gerbner and Gross 1976, 75). The online world amplifies the practices that exist within traditional media and the offline sphere. There are arguments that social media can promote women's interests through activism and the spread of information. However, evidence also supports the claim that "gendered vitriol is proliferating in the cybersphere…particularly when internet users wish to register their disagreement with and/or disapproval of women" (Jane 2014b, 558).

Twitter is the site of analysis for my study because it is the predominant form of social media communication used by politicians (Akhtar and Morrison 2019, 326) and is commonly known as a key platform for political discussion. Twitter is a social networking platform created in 2006 which is accessible in a web browser or through external applications (for example, via smartphones). Twitter is one of the world's largest online social media platforms with over 330 million monthly active users. Canada has approximately 7.6 million Twitter users, representing 42% of online Canadian adults (Gruzd et al. 2018).

The platform allows users to post messages consisting of 280-characters or less, which are known as "tweets." Besides words, users can share images, videos, and links to external sites within their tweets. These messages then appear on a user's profile and on the timelines of "followers" they may have. An "at sign" ("@") appears at the beginning of each username, allowing other users to easily search for each other and direct their messages. When someone includes the "@-username" in a tweet (e.g., @cafreeland), the mentioned user is notified. A hashtag (symbolized with the "#" sign) is often included within tweets. Hashtags are quite versatile and are primarily used to index keywords or phrases. They also perform the function of aggregating conversations and creating thematic communities (e.g. #metoo). Categorizing tweets with a hashtag enables people to find, follow, and contribute to the conversation easily and can raise awareness to specific themes and issues (see Clark 2016; Williams 2015).

SUBJECTS AND HYPOTHESES

I analyzed the messages sent to the Twitter handles belonging to current federal cabinet ministers Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland in the two weeks leading up to the election and one day after the 2019 federal election, which was held on October 21. This time period spanned October 4, 2019 until the end of the day on October 22, 2019. At the time of analysis, McKenna held the role of Minister of Environment and Climate Change for the Liberal Party. She is now the current Minister of Infrastructure and Communities. Freeland held the position of Foreign Affairs Minister and is now Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. I chose the two ministers as the subjects of analysis for several interrelated reasons.

First, to achieve a most similar case comparison, I chose the two highest profile women in the federal cabinet at the time. McKenna and Freeland are similar in terms of their position, status, identity characteristics and Twitter prominence. Employing a most-similar approach enables researchers to explain any disparity that may arise between subjects (Gaal 2015, 147). Hence any differences in the amount and nature of GBV they receive via Twitter would be due to other factors. Secondly, research indicates that as visibility increases, women receive more uncivil messages than do their male counterparts (Rheault et al. 2019, 5). McKenna and Freeland, with their high-profile portfolios, are highly visible; therefore, it is likely they would receive a high volume of abusive and harassing messages, enabling a more fruitful analysis. Additionally, both women were among the top ten sitting politicians with the most Twitter

mentions in 2018 (Austin 2018). At the time of analysis, the data for total Twitter mentions in 2019 was not available and I therefore relied on the 2018 statistics (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Sitting Politicians with the most Twitter mentions in 2018:

1. Justin Trudeau (@JustinTrudeau)
2. Doug Ford (@fordnation)
3. Andrew Scheer (@AndrewScheer)
4. Catherine McKenna (@cathmckenna)*
5. Jason Kenney (@jkenney)
6. Maxime Bernier (@MaximeBernier)
7. Kathleen Wynne (@Kathleen_Wynne)*
8. Michelle Rempel (@MichelleRempel)*
9. Chrystia Freeland (@cafreeland)*
10. Andrea Horwath (@AndreaHorwath)*

*denotes women politicians.

Thirdly, during the analysis period both women had amassed over 100,000 followers on Twitter (146.7k for Freeland and 129.4k for McKenna as of October 27, 2019) thereby enhancing the likelihood of Twitter user engagement. Importantly, Theocharis et al. (2016) found that the extent of harassment and abuse a politician receives correlates with their engagement on Twitter. Although Freeland has more followers, McKenna engages with the platform more frequently. For example, during the time-period under analysis, Freeland posted seven times in English while McKenna posted 28 times. This stark difference in Twitter engagement is not unusual either. Looking at the week from the election itself onwards (October 21 – 27, 2019), Freeland tweeted a total of three times while McKenna posted 44 times. This led to the first hypothesis:

H_1: Catherine McKenna will receive more harassing tweets than will Chrystia Freeland.

As mentioned, due to their cabinet positions both women attract a high level of media and public attention. Regarding their identities, McKenna and Freeman are both white, cisgender, in heterosexual relationships, and have children, and thereby "enjoy the socio-economic privileges accorded these identities" (Trimble 2017, 23). Importantly, the two women's similar identities remove variables that have shown to impact harassment online and negatively influence media

attention such as race/ethnicity (Dhrodia 2018), sexuality (Crawley 2017), and childlessness (Trimble 2017).

Scholars have found certain topics discussed online as less likely to "invite an abusive tone," including the environment and the economy (Greenwood et al. 2018, 11). In contrast, topics such as defence and national security, or borders and immigration, consistently attracted abuse (Greenwood et al. 2018, 11). Due to the portfolios McKenna and Freeland managed at the time, the environment and foreign affair portfolios respectively, the initial expectation was that they would fail to attract much abuse or, alternatively, Freeland would receive the brunt of it. Yet, the media attention and offline events directly specifically at McKenna prior to the 2019 election called this assumption into question. Moreover, media reports have highlighted the prominence and targeting of those involved in climate change issues, particularly women (Turner 2020).

As discussed further under the "Coding Content Analysis" section below, to operationalize online GBV I divided abusive discourses into four separate categories: 1) offensive language; 2) threats (including those of a sexual nature); 3) personal attacks on someone's private life; and 4) gendered attacks. With this context in mind and the extensive literature indicating that prominent women often face abuse both online and offline that is misogynistic and sexually charged (IPU 2016; Duggan 2014), the second hypothesis is as follows:

> **H_2**: Both women will receive more harassing tweets invoking gendered language (type 4: gendered attacks) than tweets in the other harassment categories.

While it is important to determine the frequency and type of harassing texts each woman received, to understand the "underlying or implied meanings" of the texts I went beyond exploring the manifest content and undertook a feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 235). Employing a feminist CDA enables one to conceptualize and position online GBV within a broader understanding of symbolic annihilation.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

In this study, I first employed content analysis to provide an account of the prevalence and patterns of online abuse and violent rhetoric against two women politicians in Canada. Content analysis is a systematic, objective, and quantitative research method used for analyzing

verbal, written, or visual data (Riffe 2014, 19; Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 228). Content analysis reduces the content of a text to a set of categories. It further involves assigning numerical values to words, images, phrases, themes and other "symbols of communication" (Riffe 2014, 19). In other words, this approach emphasizes the systematic coding and counting of content thereby providing a quantitative data set for analysis. As such, a key step for the researcher conducting content analysis is to look for categories to quantify, either deductively or inductively. The pre-determined classification system used by Rheault et al. (2019) to predict the incivility of online messages, described further in the "Coding Content Analysis" section below, provided the foundation for my quantitative analysis. Specifically, I used content analysis to quantify the number of tweets sent to each woman containing offensive language, threats, personal attacks on their private life, and gendered attacks. By employing this framework, I am measuring the concept of online GBV in a valid manner and ensuring reliability. In effect, it is feasible for future researchers to code the dataset in a consistent manner, thereby ensuring stability, reproducibility, and accuracy.

Content analysis is a research technique used for producing "replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (Krippendorff 1989, 403) enabling researchers a methodical and rigorous account of the manifest content in texts (Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 228). Manifest content is the most readily apparent or literal meaning of a message and can be distinguished from the latent content, or the underlying and implied content of a text (Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 229). The manifest content includes the easily observable and countable elements of a text. Actual examples from the corpus of tweets help to illustrate the importance of content analysis for classifying meanings within a text. For the purposes of my research, the following example's manifest content is the direct insult and offensive language. Each element is easily detected and countable.

> "@cathmckenna It amazes me what a total fucktard you are, it literally shocking, you virtue signal constantly and accomplish. Lots of people feel there was no reason to change the anthem. No one but the unhinged where offended by it. #TrudeauMustGo #MckennaMustGo" (@tirednonsense, October 16, 2019)[5]

By employing content analysis, I can then quantify and analyze the presence of abusive markers (i.e., offensive language, threats, personal attacks, and gendered attacks). The tracking

[5] All tweets referenced are copied exactly as they were written despite grammatical and spelling errors.

of these categories enables the identification of patterns or relationships within the texts (Lasswell 1968, 60; Riffe 2014, 3; Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 228). Another strength of content analysis is its unobtrusive and non-reactive nature (Halperin and Heath 2017, 345; Riffe et al 2014, 30). In other words, the texts have already been produced and circulated, hence there is no risk of reactivity, or ethical issues. A drawback of content analysis is its inability to account for a text's latent content (Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 229). For example, the following tweet contains offensive language that would result in its categorization as an abusive text.

> "@cathmckenna What fucking science? All you do is screech "climate plan" and ram a useless tax down our throats. Use this so called science to save the plant. Three more days of liberal movement hypocrisy and you are done. Oil and gas built this country. Accept the #truth #climatebarbie" (@OutwestK9, October 18, 2019)

However, it fails to consider the messages and meanings conveyed between the lines. It thus becomes necessary to explore beneath the surface to understand clearly what is happening, what forms of trivialization and condemnation are communicated in the tweets, and what the tweets say about gendered power relations. On its own, content analysis is therefore insufficient to understand the gendered structures and complex meanings produced through social media messages.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

To bridge the gap between the latent and manifest meaning, scholars often use a mixed methods research approach by combining complementary quantitative and qualitative methods (Feltham-King and MacLeod 2016, 2; Trimble and Treiberg 2015, 241). As such, my research employs a second method: qualitative discourse analysis. Simply put, researchers use discourse analysis to interpret the latent content, or the underlying meaning of a text. Importantly, this methodology enables the research to reveal the "relationship of a text to its context" in addition to the "broader relations of power and authority which shape that context" (Halperin and Heath 2017, 335). Using discourse analysis in my research serves as a means to understand the connection between violence and gender in social media texts.

More specifically, I use a feminist critical discourse analysis as the theoretical foundation of my analysis because it focuses on "how gender ideology and gendered relations of power are (re)produced, negotiated and contested in representations of social practices" (Lazar 2007, 150). This approach emphasizes the ways in which society constructs gendered relations and identities

through discourse. Importantly for my research, a feminist lens draws out how online forms of communication produce and sustain "gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations" (Lazar 2007, 142). Fundamentally, employing a feminist critical discourse analysis makes visible the power relations and ideologies underlying the language used online. Michelle Lazar (2007, 145) notes that a central concern of those using a feminist critical discourse analysis is to critique the discourse supporting and maintaining the current "relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude, and disempower women as a social group". This approach challenges the status quo and is a form of resistance which aims to create "critical awareness and develop feminist strategies for resistance and change" (Lazar 2007, 145). Importantly, adopting this framework helps to reveal the ways in which the discourse occurring on Twitter aimed at women in politics contribute to the reproduction and sustainment of a "hierarchically gendered social" order (Lazar 2007, 141). As such, my research employs a feminist critical discourse analysis and Tuchman's concept of symbolic annihilation to answer the following questions: What forms of trivialization and condemnation are communicated in the tweets? What meanings are communicated about gendered power relations, especially perceptions of women's place at the upper echelons of power?

To treat the discourse analysis empirically and ensure a nuanced interpretation of the messages, my analysis adopts the "three-step procedure" commonly used for coding qualitative data (Wesley 2015, 248). The first step of this process involves "open coding" of the data, which refers to the initial textual reading (Bryman 2011; 569; Neuman 2014, 481; Wesley 2015; 248). While both the content and discourse analysis methods require the coding of data, the two differ in their approaches. Quantitative research codes data according to "preconceived standardized codes" (Bryman 2012, 568). As further outlined below in the "Coding Content Analysis" section, my quantitative approach uses the framework established by Rheault et al. (2019). Alternatively, a qualitative approach to open coding entails locating the general themes present in the data and keeping an open mind as new themes emerge (Neuman 2014, 481). I conducted the open coding process by reviewing each tweet before taking detailed notes to document the manifest and latent forms of online GBV. I listed any themes, tropes, and narratives that appeared to trivialize or condemn the women in the tweets and then grouped them according to overarching themes. In addition, I highlighted any messages that explicitly or implicitly contested women's existence in the political sphere. The second stage of the process involves "axial coding," where the

researcher completes a second read-through of the initial coded themes and data. It is during the second stage that the categorization and organization of ideas and themes begin, and the linkages become clearer. During this second read-through of the tweets, I identified the themes of hysteria and agency, or lack thereof. The third and final stage involves re-examining the codes and notes to ensure a complete analysis and resolve any discrepancies (Neuman 2014, 484; Wesley 2015, 250).

As my findings from the content analysis did not fully reflect the literature, I decided to look more broadly. Drawing on my review of the discourse analysis, I approached the full data set inductively using the themes I found within the top 200 "liked" tweets for each of the two women cabinet ministers. As there were 23,649 tweets in the larger data set, I searched those tweets using keywords associated with the uncovered themes. For example, once I noticed tweets referencing the emotionality of the subjects through terms such as "screeching" and the notion the women were "crazy," I searched for the appearance of words such as "scream," "hysteria," and "hysterical" in the larger data set.

As discussed, a key benefit of discourse analysis is its ability to draw out the underlying meanings. Therefore, even if a social media message contained no explicit gendered themes according to the content analysis results, this does not preclude the existence of implicit gendered meanings. Despite the benefits of discourse analysis, a limitation remains in its subjective nature. How someone interprets the content and meaning behind a message, including social media texts, is open to negotiation. This drawback calls into question the validity of the research and emphasizes the importance of using both content and discourse analysis together.

CODING CONTENT ANALYSIS

To identify and operationalize online GBV, I modified the methodology of Rheault et al. (2019) from their article "Politicians in the Line of Fire." Focussing on the "phenomenon of incivility directed at politicians online," Rheault et al. (2019, 3) classified tweets as either civil or uncivil. Their coding scheme defined uncivil texts as any tweet containing at least one of the following: "1) swear words; 2) vulgarities; 3) insults; 4) threats; 5) personal attacks on someone's private life; or 6) attacks targeted at groups (hate speech)." For the purposes of my research, I disaggregated uncivil discourses into four distinct categories of analysis. I captured swear words, vulgarities, and insults in an "offensive language" group (Type 1). In addition, the

"attacks targeted at groups" were included in the category of gendered attacks. The final coding scheme ended up as follows:

1) Offensive language
2) Threats (including sexualized threats)
3) Personal attacks on someone's private life
4) Gendered attacks

Type 1 - **Offensive language**: includes direct insults (such as the usage of "idiot," "liar," and "stupid"), swear words, and profanity. Researchers who have studied the expression of vulgar language (also referred to as swear words) on Twitter discovered that those with a liberal ideology and men are more likely to employ profanity than females and non-liberals (Cachola et al. 2018, 2931). Therefore, I expect to find profanity within the tweets because both McKenna and Freeland are Liberal Party MPs and Twitter's demographic skews towards male users (Hootsuite 2019).

Type 2 - **Threats** include any messages threatening the subject to whom the tweet is directed. Threats may also include those of a sexualized nature. An example of a threatening tweet is one directed to former Alberta Premier Rachel Notley in September 2015: "Really you dumb cow, be careful woman, or you'll be the first assassination in Alberta" (Trynacity 2018).

Type 3 - **Personal attacks** entail those directed at the recipient's private life. Cognizant that tweets may express strong criticism of a politician's character, I coded tweets as type 3 if they specifically mentioned an aspect of the subject's private life. For example, a tweet attacking the subject's family members would fall under this category.

Type 4 - **Gendered attacks** include sexualized messages and misogynistic language. Where type 4 differs from type 2 is the absence of direct threat of harm. Instead, the language invoked is sexist, misogynistic, or gendered. For example, this message clearly employs sexist language, but does not threaten harm. For instance: "@cathmckenna it's not sexist to call someone a cunt. Anyone can be a cunt. And it turns out. Someone, somewhere thinks you're a cunt. #cdnpoli."

I then coded each tweet by category. Because a tweet could contain more than one type of harassment, I assigned a code of 1 if the type of harassment was present in the message and a code of 0 when it was not (see Appendix A for the codebook). Coding tweets on a present or not

present scale allowed a tally across all four categories to determine the level of harassment on a 0-4 scale. Zero indicated the tweet contained no harassing content as per the categories, and a level four indicated the message presented features from all four categories. Finally, I determined whether the tone of the tweet was supportive or critical of the harassment.

To summarize my methodology, I incorporated two overarching research methods to analyze the data collected. First, I conducted a content analysis of the top 200 tweets sent to each of the two cabinet ministers, McKenna and Freeland, according to the modified Rheault et al (2019) framework discussed in the section "Coding Content Analysis," above. Through this approach I was able to quantify the volume of abusive messages within the tweets. Secondly, I undertook a feminist critical discourse analysis of the same 400 tweets using the "three-step procedure." This approach involves open, axial, and selective coding. From the themes I found within the top liked tweets, I opened my analysis to the full dataset to better understand the types of messages the subjects received.

DATA COLLECTION

I generated the dataset used in this study by downloading tweets in real-time using the Google Sheet add-on "Twitter Archiver." Twitter Archiver enables users to search a query or hashtag, and all matching tweets then automatically upload into a Google Sheet. Data collection began on October 4, 2019 and ran until the end of the day on October 22, which was the day after the federal election. I chose to focus on tweets sent during the run-up to the election as there is an increased focus on political candidates and sitting politicians during campaign periods. Importantly, Rheault et al (2019) found incivility toward women politicians increased with visibility. Further, as van Aelst and De Swert argue (2009, 150), "a campaign changes the behaviour and the interactions of the three central campaign players (politicians, journalists, voters) significantly". Therefore, I believed the campaign period would provide rich results for analysis. I then decided to include the day after the election as I wondered whether the women would face a backlash if they won re-election.

Before collecting the data, I used two filters in the Twitter Archiver program to ensure I was gathering relevant data and could understand the content: the tweets had to include the politician's handle (@cathmckenna or @cafreeland) and be written in the English language. The inclusion of the politician's handle indicated the message was addressed *to* them specifically,

rather than a tweet merely *about* them. Therefore, any abusive text is likely directed at the politician. This approach also ensures the collection of all tweets which an individual would see on their Twitter timeline. As the literature and media stories highlight, women may self-censor or adjust their behaviours if they witness or become victim to online GBV. Note that the Twitter Archiver only allows the collection of words. As such, this approach is not able to search any images, gifs, or videos, although these media formats can include abusive content.

Due to the volume of tweets addressed to the high-profile politicians, the analysis excluded duplicates and reposted tweets (retweets). After the removal of excluded tweets, I used a non-probability purposive sampling method to select the tweets for analysis. I selected a sample size of 200 tweets directed at each politician. Specifically, I selected the top 200 "liked" tweets. Twitter describes "likes" as "represented by a small heart…used to show appreciation for a tweet" ("How to like a Tweet," n.d.). I focused on the top "liked" tweets because they tend to indicate approval of the tweet's content. Moreover, the most liked tweets are the most circulated and engaged with and therefore had the highest level of resonance.

Users can also "retweet" to forward a tweet from another source to their own followers. I chose not to focus on the number of retweets as some people use them to demonstrate their opposition to the original tweet's content. In fact, many users add a disclaimer to their bio that "retweets do not mean endorsement" to disassociate themselves from the original tweeter and ensure others do not misconstrue their retweet practices (Metaxas et al. 2015, 660).

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

A limitation of my research relates to the focus on the top 200 "liked" or "favourited" tweets by users, rather than, say, a random sample. This approach was chosen to purposively and strategically limit the amount of data being analyzed. The intention was to capture tweets with the largest engagement. Further, purposive sampling is appropriate when conducting an in-depth exploration to "gain a deeper understanding" of case studies (Neuman 2014, 274).

After I completed a review of the top 200 tweets for each subject and produced the discourse analysis (as discussed in Chapter 4), I came to realize a limitation about the coding framework I adopted. The limitation of the coding stems from its narrowness, as it failed to pick up messages that explicitly told the subjects to "shut up," which is a powerful form of silencing and a significant form of abuse. Essentially, I tested a framework and found it wanting as it did

not fully capture all forms of symbolic annihilation. I overcame this limitation through two processes. First, the discourse analysis made visible the implicit meanings and allowed the capture of silencing discourse. With the knowledge gained through the discourse analysis, I then employed an inductive approach and analyzed the entire universe of tweets by searching for key words linked to the themes I found in the initial content and discourse analysis of the top 400 tweets. I then located many examples of Twitter users telling the two women to "shut up." Additionally, as discussed in the section "Symbolic Annihilation" within Chapter 4, I found themes of hysteria and the lead role of men. While I found the most liked tweets provided a good measure of the prevalence of the four forms of abuse circulating on Twitter, by going beyond this sample of tweets I developed a better sense of the forms of symbolic annihilation.

Another possible limitation relates to the subjects of analysis. My focus on two white cis-female members of cabinet ensured homogeneity thereby removing variables known to impact online abuse and other forms of online harms. However, this sidelined any opportunity to discuss the intersectional nature of abuse, an area in need of further exploration. Yet as discussed, this approach afforded a most similar case comparison and drew attention to the key independent variables shaping different levels and forms of abuse directed at the two women.

TWITTER EXTRACTION LIMITATIONS

It is important to note that there are several limitations to extracting information from Twitter. One such limitation is the company's application programming interface (API). An API is the way in which computer programs communicate with each other to request and send information. Twitter provides access to its API through three streams at different price points: Standard, Premium, and Enterprise. The Standard API stream is free to use but with limits placed on the number of requests. This search API restricts user access to approximately 1% of all tweets (Twitter 2019). The Twitter Archiver uses the Standard API stream. For my research, this means the Twitter Archiver could not extract all tweets sent to the subjects during the period under analysis. Moreover, Twitter does not disclose how their API chooses the sample, resulting in researchers regarding the use of Twitter data as "highly problematic" (Pfeffer, Mayer, and Morstatter 2018, 2).

Additionally, Tweets deleted by Twitter either in response to users breaking the platform's rules and policies, or by the users themselves, may not be included within the dataset,

which therefore may lead to underreporting of the true level of abusive and problematic tweets each politician received. Yet, the number of removed tweets may be low, as indicated by the criticism Twitter has received over the platform's slow response to removing abusive and harassing messages (Wagner 2017). Nevertheless, in recent years the platform claims to have made strides in finding and removing abusive content. For example, in early 2019, Twitter announced they had made gains in proactively removing abusive content. However around 62% of the abusive messages still require users to flag them for Twitter's attention (Wagner 2019).

Finally, my research method relied on textual communications. Textual messages make up most of the communication on Twitter. Nevertheless, users may use images, videos, gifs, and formats in place of a text or alongside it to convey a message. At times, those messages may have conveyed abusive content which were ultimately missed in this analysis.

CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Below I present my findings on the prevalence and nature of online GBV against Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland, beginning with the content analysis of the top 200 liked tweets sent to both subjects. As I show, there are important differences between the types of responses each woman received. Confirming the international research, each woman received gendered and misogynistic messages. McKenna received a staggering 18 gendered attacks, however, while Freeland received only one. Somewhat surprisingly, Freeland received the only tweet coded as a threat. Overall, I found a large imbalance regarding volume of abusive messages received by the subjects, with McKenna receiving the majority. Following a review of the content analysis, I present the findings of my critical discourse analysis of the tweets through a feminist and symbolic annihilation lens. I argue that the abusive messages sent to McKenna and Freeland act as a form of symbolic annihilation—particularly through the gendered forms of abuse and the depiction of the women as crazy, hysterical, and lacking agency. Throughout this chapter, I provide examples of the violent and abusive messages directed toward the subjects. Following scholar Emma Jane (2014a), I do not censor the language and instead invoke a "deliberate strategy" to speak of the damaging rhetoric "so as not to perpetuate…the tyranny of silence" about the problematic nature of the material (533).

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Volume of Tweets

Overall, during the analyzed period (October 4 – 22, 2019), there were 25,480 tweets directed toward McKenna and 2,214 toward Freeland. After the removal of duplicates and retweets, 23,649 tweets remained: 22,081 about McKenna and 1,568 about Freeland. The sample size of 200 tweets directed at McKenna represents just 0.91% of the tweets she received during the period under analysis, while the same sample size represents 12.76% of the total tweets Freeland received during the same time period. The variation in the number of tweets each subject received is surprising, as both women have a similar number of followers. In fact, as seen in Table 1, Freeland takes the lead in terms of Twitter followers. McKenna's higher volume of

engagement with Twitter may partially explain this gap. During the study time-period, McKenna tweeted more than three times as much as Freeland, at 28 and 7 tweets respectively.

Table 1. Tweets Sent and Received During the Study Period by Politician

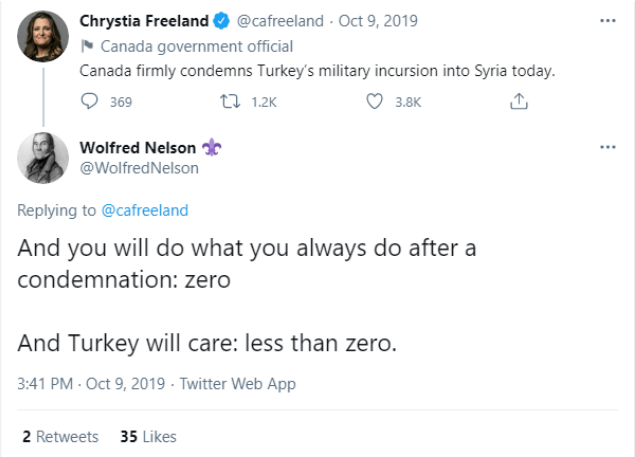
	Catherine McKenna (@cathmckenna)	**Chrystia Freeland (@cafreeland)**
Followers	131.6K	149.2K
Number of Tweets Received	25,480	2,214
Number of Tweets after Removals	22,081	1,568
Tweets from Subject	28	7
Time Period	October 4 - 22nd, 2019	

The Most "Liked"

Filtering the tweets by the highest number of "favourited" or "liked" tweets provided the identification of tweets for analysis. This focus on the most "liked" tweets is important as it typically indicates approval of the message. People may also "retweet" messages they like, but it is possible that, just as often, those who "retweet" messages do so with the intention of rebuking the original message.

Chrystia Freeland's October 9th tweet stating, "Canada firmly condemns Turkey's military incursion into Syria today" precipitated the tweet that received the highest number of likes (51) on her Twitter timeline during the analyzed period. A response by user @WolfredNelson read: "@cafreeland And you will do what you always do after a condemnation: zero And Turkey will care: less than zero" (figure 4). As an aside, since the tweet's extraction in October 2019, the number of likes for the message has actually decreased, indicating that users rescinded their like for the tweet, or their account is gone from the platform.

Figure 4. Top Liked Tweet to Chrystia Freeland



The top liked tweet from messages directed to McKenna arose from an image she posted emphasizing the importance of the youth vote in the upcoming election (figure 5). User @Lumberist received 232 likes for the following message "@cathmckenna The choice is easy Vote for proven corruption, racism & dishonesty. Vote for the firing of women while women like you looked the other way & preach 'Girl power'. Vote for people who use fake racism & terrorist attacks as political weapons. Or don't. I vote #CPC." The tweet is now unobservable as the user's account is gone.

Figure 5: Catherine McKenna's Youth Vote Messaging

While there appears to be an element of anger or frustration in both posts, neither of the tweets fall under the coding categories explained in Chapter 3 (offensive language, threats, personal attacks on someone's private life, and gendered attacks). Instead, I understood such tweets as critical but acceptable discourse.

Hypothesis #1

The first hypothesis that Catherine McKenna would receive more harassing tweets than Chrystia Freeland received support from the data. As seen in Table 2, McKenna received 23 abusive tweets, representing 11.5% of the sample of 200 tweets she received, almost three times as many as Freeland at 4% (8 tweets classified as abusive). While the percentage of abusive tweets sent to Freeland is at the upper end of the "normal" range according to the literature—which indicates that abusive content constitutes around 2 to 4% of messages sent to politicians (Dhrodia 2018; Gorrell et al 2018; Ward and McLoughlin 2020, 58)—the number of abusive tweets received by McKenna is substantially higher than the literature would predict. These results add support to the research by Theocharis et al (2016), who found the extent of harassment and abuse a politician receives correlates with their level of engagement with Twitter. As the literature reveals, "the more a candidate attempts to engage [with Twitter], the more material she will provide to potential trolls" (Theocharis et al. 2016, 1012). I explore the different types of abusive tweets each woman received below.

Table 2. Number of Abusive Tweets by Category and Subject

	Type 1 - Offensive Language	**Type 2 - Threats**	**Type 3 - Personal Attacks**	**Type 4 - Gendered Attacks**	**Total # (%) of Abusive Tweets**
Catherine McKenna	6	0	0	17	23 (11.5%)
Chrystia Freeland	6	1	0	1	8 (4%)

Table 3 provides results based on coding of whether the tone of the tweet was supportive or critical of the harassment.

Table 3. Tone of Tweet by Subject

	Tweets Critical of Harassment	**Tweets Supportive of Harassment**
Catherine McKenna	1	23
Chrystia Freeland	0	8

Despite the high level of media attention paid to the abusive events McKenna endured before the 2019 election, only one tweet expressed indirect criticism of the online GBV. Professor Katharine Hayhoe, a Canadian climate scientist, wrote: "@cathmckenna You get it twice as much as me! Carry on sister :)" in response to a post by McKenna highlighting the rampant "trolling of climate scientists and others working on climate change" (Figure 6). Kayhoe's supportive tweet garnered 15 likes. On a more positive note, there were five other tweets, representing 2.5% of the sample, that expressed gratitude to McKenna on matters unrelated to the online GBV taking place. For example, @DanWoy, a user who identifies themselves as involved with climate policy and politics in their bio, wrote on the evening of the election: "@cathmckenna Congratulations. You're one of the hardest working ministers I've ever worked with. Well-earned." On the other hand, 23 tweets directed at McKenna indicated support for the harassment she endured. I coded no messages sent to Freeland as critical of harassment she had received. Due to the comparatively lower levels of abuse for Freeland, this is not surprising.

Figure 6. Sole Tweet Critical of Harassment of McKenna

Before diving deeper to discuss the variety of problematic tweets each woman received, it should be noted that the term "shut up" appeared twice in the dataset concerning McKenna and yet was not coded as abusive. While I agree with previous studies on incivility and abuse that the term "shut up" qualifies as uncivil, or at the very least impolite discourse (Papacharissi 2004; Southern and Harmer 2019) and is used to silence marginalized members, I did not believe it crossed the line into the abusive framework described in chapter 3. A fifth category should be included in future frameworks to include terms with explicit or implicit references to silencing or censoring another user (i.e., "shut up," "stop talking,", "stfu" etc.).

The two instances were as follows:

> "@cathmckenna Montreal sewage dump Victoria sewage Dump Grassy narrows FN boil advisories May I suggest shutting your trap about clean water" (@kpac_15, October 4, 2019)

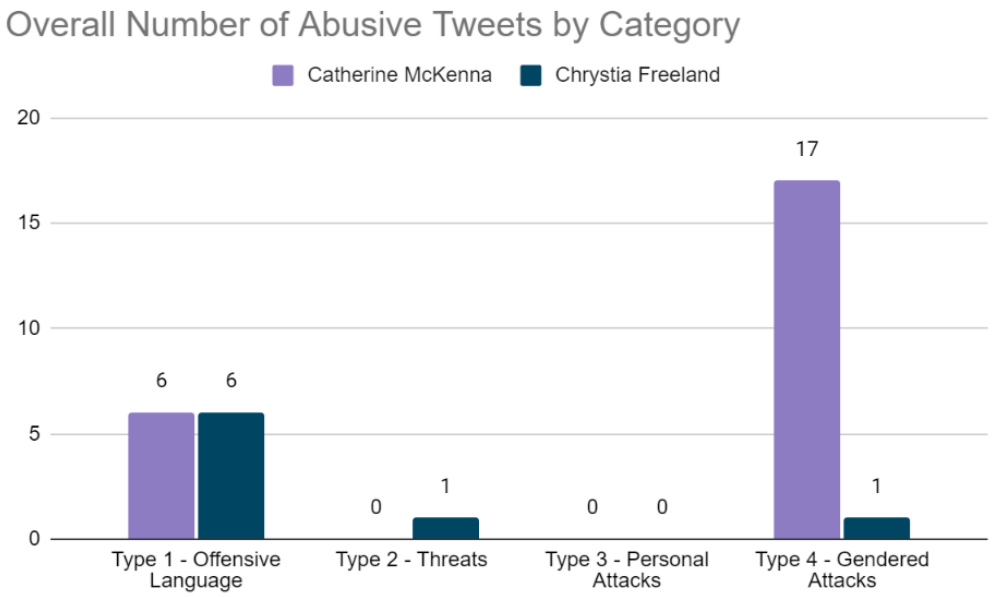
> "@cathmckenna Catherine ! They eat tide pods for Christ's sake. U think you'll get more votes take it from this mother of four,,,I have a greater impact on my children then you do and frankly I have to fix your " the world is ending" narrative ever single god damned day. Shut up already" (@DefinitionHolly, October 15, 2019)

No user explicitly told Freeland to silence herself.

Hypothesis #2

While the first hypothesis received strong support, the second hypothesis that both women would receive more abusive tweets invoking gendered language (type 4) than the other three abuse categories held for McKenna but not for Freeland, as shown by Figure 7. Below I explore the findings by category, illustrating the differences in tone and meaning in tweets directed at the two cabinet ministers.

Figure 7: Overall Number of Abusive Tweets by Category



Chrystia Freeland: The Two-bit Player in the Red Dress

While McKenna received 17 abusive tweets containing gendered attacks (constituting 8.5% of all tweets and 74% of the abusive messages in total), Freeland received only one. I coded this tweet as a gendered attack because it focused on Freeland's appearance, with a criticism of her choice of clothing: "@cafreeland @R_Boissonnault Ugh ! Another red dress !" wrote user @BigelowKirk (figure 8).

Figure 8: The Red Dress

Rather than employing gendered attacks, most of the abuse directed towards Freeland used offensive language. Of the abusive tweets sent to Freeland, 3% of those contained offensive language (Table 2). Users called Freeland "nothing more than a two bit player on the World Stage" whose opinions are "worthless." Other insults focus on Freeland's intelligence by describing her as a "moron" and "useless."

In a now deleted tweet, user @keele5080 stated: "@cafreeland @JustinTrudeau She is just as well liked as Trudeau. Where is her vest?" I coded this tweet as a threat (type 2). It may not appear initially that there is a threat present, yet it becomes clearer when placed in context. At the time of the tweet (October 13, 2019), news outlets reported that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau took the "unprecedented" step of wearing a bulletproof vest while election campaigning (Burke and Gollom 2019). While officials did not disclose the details or nature of the threat, the Prime Minister appeared in front of supporters surrounded by extra security (Berthiaume 2019). This event, in conjunction with the previous threats against McKenna prompting RCMP protection, led me to conclude that there exists a hateful and threatening tone to the question "Where is her vest?" It suggests Freeland was so disliked she was in need protection of against a shooting attempt.

Catherine McKenna: The Climate Barbie

From the top 200 liked tweets directed towards McKenna, six contained offensive language. A Twitter user told McKenna to "fuck off," and others called her a "dimwit" and "dumb." There was one instance in which a tweet contained both offensive language and a gendered attack:

> "@cathmckenna WTH [what the hell] have U done for Canadians except *rape us* for our money. You send millions in foreign aid while Canadians are suffering. This govt. Is a joke. Send money to dictators so they can get rich. The Liberals r going down. U don't give a *rats ass* about Canada or Canadians [emphasis added]" (@bimvision, October 18, 2019).

Surprisingly, no tweets directed to McKenna met the criteria for type two (threats). This result is unexpected as, before the 2019 election, McKenna received a series of misogynistic online attacks serious enough to prompt the RCMP to provide her with a security detail (Rabson 2019). Furthermore, neither woman received messages coded as a type three abuse (personal attacks on their private lives), another surprising finding. The literature highlights the emphasis news outlets place on reporting about politicians' families (Trimble 2017). More so, the media tend to accentuate the role of family life of women politicians and ask the women questions about how they how they hope to balance family life with their political work (Miller 2017, 156; Thomas and Lambert 2017, 140). Both McKenna and Freeland are mothers to three young children and when political leaders challenge "the traditional boundaries of marriage and motherhood," news reports evaluate a candidate's intimate relationships for political meanings (Trimble, Auer, Wagner 2019). News outlets have long conveyed interest in the personal lives of politicians and deploy personal details as indicators of a political candidate's identity, character, and ability (Trimble 2017, 91). As the news caters to what the public cares about in order to receive attention, I expected social media would mimic, to a certain extent, the themes found in news stories, whether positive or not.

The absence of threats directed at McKenna, or attacks on either woman's personal life during the specified period, suggests the presence of these forms of messages on the most widely circulated tweets is low. Therefore, it is possible that users are not "liking" or retweeting the abusive messages containing threats and personal attacks due to their perceived unacceptability. These sorts of attacks may exist on the fringes of Twitter discourse instead. Alternatively, either

the API may not allow the Twitter Archiver to extract those types of tweets or Twitter removed the tweets before extraction due to the seriousness of threats.

For McKenna, the slur "climate Barbie," which originated from a right-wing newspaper in 2017 and has plagued her ever since, appeared in 11 tweets (5.5% of the total tweets she received), constituting most of the gender-based insults. Figure 9 provides an example of a user employing the moniker "Barbie" to demean McKenna.

Figure 9: Barbie Moniker

One user, who claimed the Twitter handle @ClimateBarbie, features prominently in posts to McKenna, with a critical tone in every instance. Using the entire universe of tweets during the period under analysis, I searched for the monikers "Barbie" and "climate Barbie." Table 4 contains a sample of messages from Twitter user @ClimateBarbie. As discussed later in the section titled "The front role of men," the user focuses on criticizing McKenna based on her association with Trudeau.

Table 4: User @ClimateBarbie Messages to McKenna

@cathmckenna kinda gonna miss the entertainment value of / morbid fascination with your crazy hysterical insanity after #elxn43 there #ClimateBarbie may have to get Netflix 🤦‍♂️🔑

@cathmckenna says #ClimateBarbie who stokes FEAR and DIVISION 24 / 7 #TeamTrudeau is #TrudeauBlackface

@cathmckenna #Grope and hand jerk in action 👋! #TeamTrudeau 🎙 #TrudeauBlackface #TrudeauGroper #BlackfaceTrudeau

@cathmckenna @JustinTrudeau @liberal_party You don't even get a single positive comment on your inane tweets, #ClimateBarbie. We're just not that into you! You'll understand that on October 21

@cathmckenna @GregFergus @WillAAmos @liberal_party @OCFLA @JustinTrudeau even if you say it LOUDER, #ClimateBarbie, it will never be as loud as #TrudeauBlackface 🕴🔑

@cathmckenna sooooo weird how you never say #TeamTrudeau anymore! almost like the name is toxic from all his scandals 🕴🔑 #TeamTrudeau #TeamTrudeau #TeamTrudeau #TeamTrudeau #TrudeauBlackface

@cathmckenna why are you no longer 'choosing' #TeamTrudeau, #ClimateBarbie? is it because the name #JustinTrudeau has become totally toxic to your electoral chances? ... because of his racism / sexism / misogyny / incompetence / dishonesty because #TrudeauBlackface?

@cathmckenna your boss looks like an underground coal minor with that #TrudeauBlackface ... oops! i mean "miner" (Freudian slip; I heard he likes minors)

Attacking McKenna by likening her to an inanimate object insults her and further devalues her knowledge, capability, and opinions. The moniker plays on McKenna's appearance as a slender blonde woman and attempts to cast her as an outsider who is too stupid to compete in a male-dominant field. To describe or compare McKenna to a doll diminishes her capacity to fulfil her leadership role as cabinet minister and belittles her accomplishments.

McKenna has affirmed that she "subscribes" to a feminist perspective (Salinas 2017) and often tweets in support of feminist policies (for examples, see figures 10 and 11 below). McKenna's connection to feminism is a possible consideration for online abusers in their choice to construct McKenna as a doll with the hope of devaluing her role and influence. As the literature highlights, McKenna's relationship with feminism challenges the male dominance of politics in more than one way (Krook 2017, 82). Feminism and "political ambition pose a threat to the existing power relations and male dominance of the political sphere" (Trimble 2017, 139), which tends to elicit a spike in abuse (Jane 2014, 563). Emerging research further suggests the

misogynistic language deployed against McKenna may be linked to the feminization of climate change. Brough and Wilkie (2017) found that men distanced themselves from environmentally friendly behaviours due to the men perceiving the acts as emasculating. Another study showed that people may question a man's heterosexuality if he engages in eco-friendly activities such as recycling (Swim, Gillis, and Hamaty 2020).

Figure 10 – 11: Catherine McKenna's Support for Feminism

Other insults based on appearance were also present, with one user noting, "@cathmckenna @Sheila_Copps I can't tell which is bigger: Sheila's hangover or McKenna's hands." Sheila Copps is Canada's former deputy prime minister (1993–1997) who has faced harassment both online and offline (CBC News 2014). As discussed in the next section, insults also focused on the emotionality of McKenna and cast her as "hysterical," thereby unfit for office.

SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION

Two qualitative questions guided this research project. Through the lens of symbolic annihilation, I sought to determine what forms of trivialization and condemnation are communicated in the tweets. In addition, I explored the meanings communicated about gendered power relations, especially perceptions of women's place in political institutions. In this section, I answer these questions with a focus on the two prominent themes I found throughout the tweets. One theme focused on characterizing the women, particularly McKenna, as crazy and hysterical. The second concerns the criticism both women received because of their relationship with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. After noticing these trends in the 400 most-liked tweets, I decided to look more broadly at the full data set to understand more fully the gendered forms of attack each woman received. I used detailed readings of these 400 tweets to derive the themes. As there were 23,649 tweets in the entire universe of data, I searched the data using keywords related to the themes found within the most-liked tweets. For example, I searched "crazy," "hysteria," "hysterical," "screech," and "scream" to find tweets drawing on the theme of hysteria. In the following section, I use examples from both the most liked tweets and the full dataset. All examples from the full dataset are indicated as such.

To recap, symbolic annihilation maintains that excluding, trivializing, or condemning a particular group conveys a message about the societal value of the group's members (Tuchman 1978). Symbolic annihilation of women in politics occurs not only from their literal paucity in parliament or media representations, but through the language deployed against them. Words sent online offer important signals and tools for preserving the gendered status quo. Not all violence against women in politics resorts to physical harms; instead, powerful women "may be taken down imaginatively, rather than literally, by vilifying, demonizing, belittling, humiliating, mocking, lampooning, shunning, and shaming them" (Manne 2018, 76). While neither McKenna nor Freeland was literally absent from social media, through abusive tweets trivializing and condemning their character, and through insults towards their intelligence, capability, and appearance, as well as through belittling comments using hysterical descriptors, both women were symbolically annihilated. These efforts to discredit them were prevalent throughout the tweets.

Crazy Women

Gendered rhetorical choices of "scream" and "screeching" may be used to cast women as overly emotional. As Kathleen Hall Jamieson writes, these gendered descriptors exist to condemn "the expressive woman" and urge her into silence: "be quiet and submissive, or suffer public shaming" (Jamieson 1995, 82). In response to a post by McKenna discussing the potential negative consequences of a Conservative electoral win, one user wrote: "@cathmckenna I guess you just didn't *scream* [emphasis mine] loud enough" (Figure 12). Of note, at the time of archiving, this tweet received 25 likes. As of February 2021, the tweet has amassed 321 likes. The user who created the tweet, @TheoFleury14, is a former professional hockey player for the Calgary Flames with over 100,000 followers. He is therefore not a man on the fringe of social media. This indicates that gendered attacks and other forms of online GBV do not *always* sit on the fringes of social media typed out by "trolls" or bots. Rather, those with a large following and the ability to encourage further abuse also engage in misogynistic attacks. Although this particular tweet may seem insignificant or mundane when compared with the rape and deaths threats others have reported, this is an important insight into the unfairness attached to the conventional wisdom of advising women to simply "ignore the trolls." When your "troll" is a figure on the national stage whose message was retweeted 30 times, disregarding it becomes more difficult not only for the subject at the end of the harassment but also for onlookers. As discussed within the literature review, in addition to the target at the end of the messages there is also a detrimental impact on those who witness misogynistic and abusive comments (Bardall 2013; Krook 2017; Lenhart and Zickuhr 2016; Shepherd 2014).

Figure 12: Theo Fleury's Gendered Attack

Like the tweet in figure 12, the following examples use the role of a woman's emotionality and ties into the broader theme of hysteria. A few messages were less discrete with their implications and directly used the term hysteria to refer to McKenna and the Liberal Party:

> "@cathmckenna Here's hoping, we've all worked hard to decimate the @liberal_party. Hopefully in a few days I will never here climate *screeching* [emphasis mine] again & we can tackle issues like adults in an intelligent manner without fear & scaring children. Fingers crossed. Time to save Canada" (@Lumberist, October 10, 2019)

> "@cathmckenna your *hysteria* [emphasis mine] is showing again #ClimateBarbie" (@CIimateBarbie, October 7, 2019)

> "@cathmckenna #ChattyCathy is at it again! #BlahBlahBlah The Canadian National Anthem, O Canada, is a song! Who changes the words to songs, someone who has no talent and sense of reality! The anthem has zero to do with gender! #Liberal*Hysteria* [emphasis mine] #McKennaMustGo #TrudeauMustGo #Scheer4PM." (@20Charger11, October 16, 2019)

Describing a woman as hysterical is inherently gendered and degrading. Hysteria has a long and abhorrent history of pathologizing women's emotion and their sexuality. Historically, hysteria as a "disease" has been constructed "as a feminine disorder or a disturbance of femininity" (Showalter 1993, 286). While the association of irrational behaviour among women existed during the Greek era, the term "hysteria" first emerged during the witch trials of the Medieval age as an "explicit diagnostic category with the development of demonology"

(Rousseau 1993, 98). Historically the "cure" for hysteria—which comes from the Greek word for uterus—was pregnancy and marriage, thereby keeping the gendered notions of womanhood and motherhood intact (Devereux 2014, 20). Into the 19th century, claims of women suffering from hysteria continued but the framing of the "disease" changed. Claims made against women shifted from the "demonically possessed" witch to the "nervous" and "neurotic" woman (Rousseau 1993, 99). Almost any "symptom" could lead to diagnosing a woman as hysterical, including "aggressive speech and action and overt sexuality" (Jamieson 1995, 91). There was, however, one particular mark or "symptom" that became particularly damning to women of the late 19th and into the early 20th century: participation in the growing feminist movement (Showalter 1993, 305).

In a patriarchal society with the ever-growing threat of feminism, "one obvious defense was to label women campaigning for access to the university, the professions, and the vote as mentally disturbed… Any woman manifesting symptoms of hysteria aroused suspicions of a silent revolt against her domestic, class, and reproductive role" (Showalter 1993, 305-306). As Rousseau (1993) further states, "the history of hysteria is … the 'his-story' of male fear" (93). Claiming feminist movements were filled with hysterical women "was one of the principal means by which [the movement] was popularly discredited" (Lisa Tickner quoted in Showalter 1993, 306).

Figure 13 below provides a cartoon example showing how the connotations of hysteria were projected onto the suffragists who dared to challenge the status quo and campaigned for the right to vote. The cartoon, published in 1906, illustrates two women outside a Liberal Party meeting. The so-called "Sensible Woman" is dressed as a middle-class woman who addresses the poorly dressed working-class "Shrieking Sister": "You help our cause? Why, you're its worst enemy!" The significance of this cartoon is that it associates values of virtue and credibility with the calm, wealthier suffragist and represents the suffragette as dishevelled, hysterical, shrieking, and uncontrollable. These characteristics had a simple end goal: undermine the concept of the women's movement through "discrediting them by misrepresenting them" (Denney 2017, 11). We see these same tactics used to trivialize and condemn McKenna by referring to her speech as "screeching" and outright stating she is "hysterical." McKenna's speech threatens the established order of patriarchy (Jamieson 1995, 89). The emotionality associated with women's speech is devalued, and considered excessive and disorganized, while "manly" speech is venerated and

regarded as synonymous with effectiveness (Jamieson 1995, 91). Characterizing women's voices as "shriek"-like, "hysterical," "manly," and so on works to punish women who use their right to speak. Women then face the option to "stay silent and be powerless, [or] speak out and be shamed" (Trimble 2019). There is no sound choice.

Figure 13: Bernard Partridge's "Shrieking Sister" 1906 Punch Cartoon

Eventually, hysteria entered the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1952 as an illness said to only affect women. Despite the declassification of hysteria as a mental disorder in 1980, it has continued to act as a control mechanism over women (Devereux 2014, 19). Insults evoking hysteria, pit women "against her own mysterious, unruly body, a body" that has disqualified women "from positions of power and a general sense of autonomy" (Espach 2017). From the suffragettes in the 19th and 20th century to today's high-profile political women who challenge the existing order, they face subjugation through abusive discourse marking them with the stigma of hysteria (Espach 2017).

While many people may not know the historical connotations associated with the term hysteria, it *is* common knowledge that society primarily reserves this term for women. Coupling the gendered trope of the emotionally unstable woman with comments on their bodies often aims to discredit and delegitimize women. Denigrating a woman as overly emotional or too loud acts as a weapon to put women "back in their place." Abusers employ derogatory terms to trivialize their speech as "shrieking" and "screaming" to simply dismiss women's voices. Just as women in positions of political power are continuously scrutinized and evaluated through the media

(Trimble 2014; Trimble, Auer, Wagner 2019; Wagner, Trimble and Sampert 2019), social media users continuously assess women politicians on their voices, appearance, and other features irrelevant to their positions. In an analogous manner to media outlets that shame women's speech (Trimble 2017), abusers online openly condemn and mock women politicians. Whereas "descriptions such as 'witch' and 'bitch' once served to mark women as heretics and whores, and they now serve as a strategy of control" (Trimble 2017, 185). Women may be able to engage in politics, and operate online, but their behaviours continue to be "closely watched and interrogated" (Trimble 2017, 187).

Moving away from the top 400 "liked" tweets and looking at the entire data set, there are many more examples of gendered attacks against both McKenna and Freeland. In addition to describing McKenna as a "shrieking" "Barbie," users called her "desperate," "drama queen," "bitch," "bimbo," "cunt," and "witch" (see Table 5 for a sample). Similarly, Freeland received messages calling her "batshit crazy," and others claiming she has "derangement syndrome" and only got her job due to her body (see Table 6 for a sample). The insults "bitch" and "cunt" occurred alongside the sexualized comments telling Freeland to "stop spreading her legs." From the examples, we see how users weaponized gender against both women.

Table 5: Gendered Examples – Catherine McKenna (larger data set)

"@cathmckenna Liberal party: More Climate Barbie More Mr. Dressup More $ to Third World countries More illegal border crossings More ISIS fighters in our cities More scandals More climate change hysteria More cabinet ministers flying / flaunting privilege while lecturing US on CO2 SHUT UP" (@CalloutCanada, October 17, 2019)
"@cathmckenna Stop preying on children, scaring them witless with your fear mongering hysterical climate crisis nonsense. Stop Debt Fukking Canadian children" (@baletown_crawl, October 18, 2019)
"@cathmckenna I can smell the desperation. You're slipping in the polls as your lies become more hysterical and strident. You have 6 more days on the public payroll- better start cutting back on the caviar and champagne." (@place_robs, October 15, 2019)
@cathmckenna Wow according to the drama queen here a conservative victory would be the death blow to all things Canadian. This type of hysterical embellishments are why most don't believe your climate garbage!" (@captintrips, October 13, 2019)

"@cathmckenna Ya sure C. Barbie, are youth can't even count change back to customers so let's have them decide whose best to govern. #Usillybimbobitch!" (@ErvRoyals12, October 16, 2019)

"@cathmckenna Hey SILLYBITCH.. you know Harper isn't running in this election don't you? #stunnedbitch" (@HeavyKevy666, October 21, 2019).

"We Alberta gonna pump that oil bitch" (@WilliamVillen10 October 13, 2019)

@cathmckenna Fuck off ya lying cunt" (@LinehaulDisptch, October 18, 2019)

Figures 14 - 17 Examples of Gendered Attacks against McKenna

Table 6: Gendered Examples – Chrystia Freeland (larger data set)

"@cafreeland How's those two Canadians imprisoned in China doing? #FreelandMustGo #LiberalHysteria #TrudeauMustGo" (@20Charger11, October 18, 2019)
"@cafreeland @liberal_party #batshitcrazy" (@johnkellypi, October 14, 2019)
"@cafreeland @SohiAmarjeet Advice from the gender balanced appointment Freeland where the only qualification is a vagina because a liberal female MP with a vagina + a brain= 1 floor crosser, 1 independent & 2 booted out. Is that not the same as a man who thinks with his penis?" (@sbnovascotia, October 20, 2019)
"@cafreeland @R_Boissonnault Cellulite queen..." (@DanMacD38871411, October 20, 2019)
"@cafreeland @VGarneau OH, there it is...Harper Derangement Syndrome! Get help! And just for the record! You've lost the moral authority to speak for women! LIAR! (@c_hopp2014, October 11, 2019)
"@cafreeland @team_freeland @liberal_party SURE THERE ARE! A VOTE FOR FREELAND IS A VOTE FOR A SEXUAL PREDATOR, CRIMINAL, UNETHICAL LYING THIEF AND HIGHER TAXES! WORSE SHE SUPPORTS A BLACKFACED RACIST FAKE FEMINIST! ANY WOMAN WHO SUPPORTS THIS TOTALITARIAN SHOULD BE SHAMED! DISGUSTED!" (@c_hopp2014, October 21, 2019
"@cafreeland You look so FAKE" (@marcel_bujold, October 19, 2019)

Figures 18 – 20: Examples of Gendered Attacks against Freeland

Castigating women as too dumb, too emotional, too hormonal, too manly, too feminine, and so on are common tropes used against women in politics. Gender-based stereotypes are often invoked to shame women online. In many cases, the perpetrators of these attacks aim to devalue the contribution and ideas of women. Just as traditional media value men and their pursuits over women (Tuchman 1978, 2000), social media users hone in on women and posit gender as a disqualifying feature in the political realm. The sexualization and condemnation circulating through these messages "acts as a form of discipline because it undermines their agency and legitimacy as political actors" (Trimble 2017, 139).

Misogyny as Policing

Following philosopher Kate Mann's (2018) definition of misogyny, I view online GBV as an extension of misogyny. Misogyny, according to Manne's characterization, goes further

than the basic idea that men hate women. Instead, people direct their hostility towards "particular women and particular kinds of women" and although it may take on a personal tone, it is a "political phenomenon" (Manne 2018, 33). More explicitly, misogyny is the "system that operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women's subordination to uphold male dominance" (Manne 2018, 33). It is within this definition we can see Tuchman's idea of symbolic annihilation come to fruition when analyzing social media texts. Insults decrying women as hysterical, crazy, emotional, bitchy, and so forth condemn women who step out of line as per the expected norms. Misogyny is inherent within this act as it is:

> … primarily a property of social systems or environments as a whole, in which women will tend to face hostility of various kinds *because they are women in a man's world* (i.e., a patriarchy), who are held to be failing to live up to patriarchal standards (i.e., tenets of patriarchal ideology that have some purchase in this environment). Because of this, misogynist hostilities will often target women quite selectively, rather than targeting women across the board. (Manne 2018, 34)

Political women who challenge or violate the norms and expectations of their gendered class face the consequences: symbolic annihilation. McKenna and Freeland are seen to represent hostile figures challenging the male-domination of politics. Moreover, they challenge it in a high-profile manner through their positions as cabinet ministers. They are not mere backbenchers; they each have prominent portfolios and are highly visible. They "cost" men through the deprivation of "masculine-coded goods": a seat in parliament (Manne 2018, 114).

In the late 1980s, geographer Gill Valentine examined the relationship between how women used physical public spaces and their fear of male violence. Valentine (1989, 389) described the ways in which "public space is used, occupied and controlled by different groups at different times". Noting that women were constrained by the fear of violence, Valentine (1989, 389) argues "this cycle of fear becomes one subsystem by which male dominance, patriarchy, is maintained and perpetuated". The inability of women to move and speak freely online without the fear of facing condemnation, ridicule, and trivialization restricts the use of the public space of social media by women. Online GBV acts as tool, a form of enforcement, to regulate women who transgress "the stability of the public/private divide in patriarchal societies" (Megarry 2014, 53).

The fear women in politics have while operating in online spaces largely occurs because of the gendered attacks against women which reproduce traditional notions about women's roles

and the spaces considered appropriate for them to exist within. These gendered attacks cast women as the "novelty other" and emphasize that politics "is a man's game" (Ross et al. 2013, 4). Essentially, these attacks, while not always crossing over into the behaviour that can be coded as abusive, foster perceptions of who legitimately belongs in the political sphere and who does not (Trimble 2017). By constructing men as rational beings and the women as crazy, the discourse positions the men as legitimate gatekeepers to political power. At its core, painting a woman as hysterical, or a bitch, presents them as unmanageable and mysterious (Devereux 2014, 20). The inherent instability tied to hysterical women reduces their credibility within the political world and goes further to dehumanize them. The misogynistic language, at times subtle and absent explicit threats, is still problematic as it communicates that women are incapable and underserving to take up space in the public political sphere.

Characterizing female politicians and their behaviour with highly negative gendered language is unfortunately very effective at reinforcing the message that women do not belong in politics. As discussed within the literature review and elsewhere, studies have shown that women who witness online GBV change the manner in which they engage with social media, at times adopting a self-censoring approach (Amnesty International 2018b; Lenhart and Zickuhr 2016). Others have highlighted its chilling effect on women's political aspirations (Bardall 2013; Krook 2017; Shepherd 2014). Moreover, the commonality of online GBV against women in politics has led to its dangerous minimization even by those who experience the abuse. Lewis et al. (2017) found that self-proclaimed feminist women who experienced online abuse would often minimize their own experience as less severe than experienced by others, sometimes going as far to blame themselves "for using social media incautiously" (1474). Despite the belief by some victims that the frequency of online abuse lessened its impact, unsurprisingly, the data indicated the opposite (Lewis et al. 2017, 1474). As the researchers go on to discuss, this normalization raises concerns surrounding the long-term impacts of online GBV and the dangerous shift to viewing threats as "normal."

The Lead Role of Men

A second theme I would like to draw attention to is the positioning of men. Notably, messages towards Freeland included a unique subject not found within replies to McKenna's tweets: Nazism. Connections of Nazism to Freeland stem from her grandfather, Michael

Chomiak, and his role during WWII. After the German invasion of Krakow, Poland, Chomiak became the chief editor of *Krakivs'ki Visti*, a Ukrainian language newspaper that produced Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitic content. While there have been disagreements as to Chomiak's roles and intentions, as journalist and Canadian senator Paula Simons correctly articulates: "… Chomiak isn't our foreign minister. Freeland is… Let's judge her on her merit – not what her grandfather did, or didn't do" (Simons 2017). Despite these sentiments, this has not stopped users from attacking and attempting to shame Freeland for her ancestor's behaviours (see Table 7).

Table 7: Sample of Tweets Connecting Freeland to Nazism (larger data set)

"@cafreeland @R_Boissonnault Was he a Nazi like your grandfather ?" (@DanMacD38871411, October 20, 2019).
"@cafreeland @JustinTrudeau I don't understand why you are dragging down the Liberals instead of running as a PPC candidate. Justin made a huge mistake not firing you for lying to us about your family's nazi history. Luckily we can fire you ourselves next week. Go to hell Freeland. With your granddad." (@suppaichew, October 14, 2019)
"@cafreeland and also since you have ZERO credibility left thanks to a drunk #ClimateBarbie exposing the use of your grandfathers NAZI handbook on governing tactics. Was NAZI Goebbels a close friend of your NAZI grandfathers or just aquaintances?" (@sbnovascotia, October 9, 2019)
"@cafreeland @SohiAmarjeet Don't forget the use of NAZI governing tactics employed by the liberals. Likely got the idea from Freelands Nazi grandfathers handbook. Thank you drunk #ClimateBarbie for exposing Furhrer trudeau & your fellow Comrades. Keep drinking who knows what else you'll expose." (@sbnovascotia, October 20, 2019)

Drawing attention to Freeland's grandfather is a smearing technique. Rather than focussing on the policies Freeland and her cabinet present, much of the focus on Twitter, and in the press during 2017, was on the scandalous innuendo about Freeland and her grandfather (Brewster 2018). Freeland's political credibility was placed on the line through the insinuation that her grandfather's behaviours reflect on her capabilities. While smear campaigns are nothing new in politics, particularly those apparently stemming from a Russian disinformation operation, there is a gendered component here. Like many public women, there is an attempt to hold Freeland accountable for the actions of a man, in this case the sins of her grandfather.

One of the most prominent examples of attempts to smear women for a man's behaviours relates to Hillary Clinton and the infidelity of her husband, former president Bill Clinton. Throughout the years, Hilary often faced disparaging abuse placing the blame onto her for Bill's adultery, or at the very least "enabling" the indiscretions (Reilly 2016). Both social media and traditional media ramped up their attacks against Hilary as she ran for president in 2016 (Hunt, Evershed, and Liu 2016). Then Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump himself often attacked his opponent by using her husband's infidelity as tool to demean her (Jaffe 2016). Media outlets also suggested Hilary should answer for her husband's sexual conduct during her presidential campaign (Twohey 2016). MSNBC host Joe Scarborough called out the double standard by stating the coverage signalled "that the free pass…editorial boards gave Bill Clinton 20 years ago" would clearly not extend to Hilary (Scarborough 2016). It is difficult to view this hypocrisy and blame game as separate from the misogyny women in politics endure.

While McKenna's tweets did not mention Nazism, many messages did center on the role of a man: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. On September 18, 2019 just a month before the federal election, photos surfaced of Trudeau in brown- and blackface (CBC News 2019). A few months prior, another scandal appeared in the *Globe and Mail* surrounding Trudeau's alleged attempts to impel then Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada Jody Wilson-Raybould to intervene in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin (Fife, Chase, and Fine 2019). These two prominent scandals that dogged the Liberal Party, and Trudeau in particular, throughout 2019 commonly appeared in tweets to McKenna and Freeland. This is expected; the subjects are, after all, cabinet members and open to receive fair criticism as such. Most tweets referencing the scandals fell outside of the coding framework. In other words, they did not cross over to abusive territory. Nevertheless, the scandal theme is important due to the framing of the subjects. In a vein analogous to women cast in supporting roles in television shows and movies (Tuchman 1978), McKenna and Freeland were often portrayed as side characters merely following the party line. For example, one user stated McKenna would never disagree with Trudeau as "...she probably knows she would be fired [and] that doesn't show strength at all" (Figure 21). User @MculleySheila, in a now deleted tweet, wrote to Freeland, "Why didn't you leave during the SNC Lavalin scandal? I used to think a smart cookie like you would go far. Now you just look

like a bobble head nodding yes to everything that phoney says. So sad." Figure 22 provides an example of a tweet adopting a more aggressive tone focusing on the scandals.

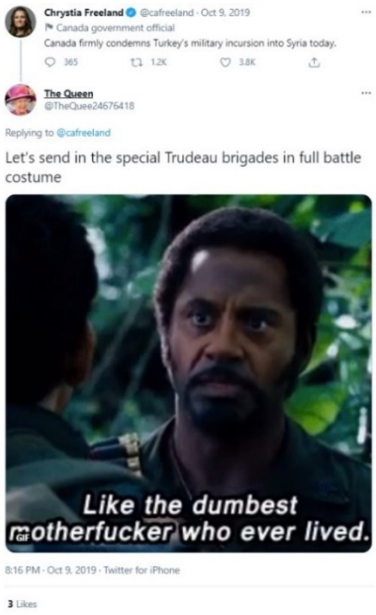
Figure 21: Lacking Strength

Figure 22: Trudeau Scandal Linkage

Another user tweeted "@cafreeland Let's send in the special Trudeau brigades in full battle costume" (Figure 23). Figure 23 is an interesting example as it combines the use of a gif with text to convey an opinion. As my analysis focused on text only, this particular tweet did not fall within the abuse category despite the offensive language. Most messages focusing on the scandals employed a less aggressive tone, yet describing the women as unable to stand up for

themselves and trotting behind their leader removes their agency and is a "form of disparagement" in itself (Trimble 2017, 187).

Figure 23: Blackface Scandal Tweet



The trope of a submissive women relying on a man for identity and power draws out the double-edged sword women deal with while in politics. Speak out and be shamed; stay silent and be accused of complicity, weakness, and submissiveness (Trimble 2017; 2019). Women receive continuous resistance while operating within the political sphere (Sobieraj 2018, 1706). Abusers trivialize and attempt to rob women of their agency. Overall, the rhetoric deployed against the women undermines their "authority and authenticity" as legitimate political actors (Trimble 2017, 188).

This chapter shows how women's voices and engagement within online spaces encounter strong opposition in the form of gendered violence. Rather than merely using gendered abuse in response to a removal of power, users adopt online violence as an expression of power (Strid 2018). This discourse analysis highlights that even outside the framework of messages coded as abusive, gender is at the center of the attacks against women. These attacks aim to shame, condemn, discredit, and trivialize their targets. Employing a feminist critical analysis allows us to conceptualize the attacks occurring online as a tool used by the power and privileged "to defend the existing inequality regime and maintain a social, political, and economic equilibrium (Strid 2018, 61). All of these abuses discussed function as a form of silencing, particularly

against women viewed as having a feminist ideology or achieving the feminist objective of entering and balancing the political domain. These abuses taking place online are both a cause and consequence of unequal power relations between men and women. As Strid (2018) emphasizes “when feminist politics and projects challenge patriarchy, patriarchy fights back” (70).

CONCLUSION

By analyzing the top 200 tweets sent to each woman during the 2019 federal election campaign, this research has demonstrated the extent and nature of online GBV each woman received. Supporting the literature on online GBV, Freeland and McKenna received a relatively high number of abusive and hostile tweets at 4% and 11.5 %, respectively. The findings of my research reveal that, while gender was at the very center of the attacks aimed at McKenna, Freeland received more abusive messages classified within the offensive language category. The stark differences in volume of abuse each woman received raises questions. Is the difference due to the higher levels of engagement by McKenna (Theocharis 2016), or her attachment to environmental issues? What provokes the increased hostility, the misogyny? A feminist lens helps to answer this; McKenna appears to be breaking the norms of a patriarchal society more strongly than Freeland, at least during the period under scope. In response to the claims her grandfather was a Nazi, Freeland suggested to reporters the accusations were part of a Russian disinformation campaign (Pugliese 2017). Also, while McKenna has spoken out about the injustices she has faced both online and offline, I could not find any comments made by Freeland in relation to the online abuse she has received. As highlighted within the introduction of this thesis, McKenna directly called out fellow MP Gerry Ritz who used the moniker Barbie to describe her. Further, she has on occasion tweeted about the online GBV received from the public (see Figure 6 for an example). McKenna’s outspoken nature primes her as a target of symbolic annihilation, as those who dare to speak and draw attention to the attacks tend to face even more hostility (Jane 2014, 563). Jane (2014, 536) describes the intended effect to censor the outspoken as the “tyranny of silence” which parallels with the offline abuse women face daily.

Using a critical discourse analysis enabled the identification of dominant themes and meanings when then provided me the ability to search for these themes more broadly outside the top 400 liked tweets. Through this exploration, I demonstrated how gender is often weaponized

against both women. From drawing on themes of hysteria, to doll monikers, and evaluations of their appearance, the language is explicitly gender-based. Rather than refute the women's policies or the government's action, abusers utilized misogynistic epithets such as "Barbie," "bitch," and "hysterical." Essentially, gender has permeated digital life (Sobieraj 2018, 1708). These insults work to dehumanize and silence their voices in the political public sphere. My analysis further reveals that, while the language deployed against McKenna and Freeland did not always fall into the abusive category as per the coding framework, it did condemn and trivialize them. Serving as a mechanism of social control, these behaviours undermine the efforts of women in political spaces. Harmful and delegitimizing language is deployed in clear resistance to women's visibility and engagement online.

As each woman dared to transgress the norms associated with their gender, they faced punishment. Through the inherent misogyny of online GBV, Twitter users enforce women's subordination and ongoing marginalization. They seek to cast women as incompetent political actors. Generating the idea that these women are unfit for their cabinet positions, the abusive Twitter users "tap into prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypes about women's inability to serve in public roles" (Krook 2020, 188). These acts reinforce men as the norm, the legitimate gatekeepers of politics (Krook 2020; Trimble 2017).

As I have shown with this analysis, far from being a new challenge to women's existence in the public realm, online GBV is merely a modern manifestation of the violent, misogynistic, and delegitimizing behaviours that occur offline. Social media platform users contribute to the "production and reproduction" of violence against women in politics (Powell and Henry 2017, 303). However, social media platforms themselves do not alone create the hostile environment. Rather, online GBV is a "reflection and embodiment of long-standing cultural patterns of misogyny" (Mantilla 2015, 124). Social media platforms merely provide an efficient mechanism to harass women. The "online adaptation" of misogyny situates itself within the broader unequal power dynamics of society that work to "inhibit and shame women from fully participating in public spaces" (Mantilla 2015, 125).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

With women holding less than 29% of seats in parliament, the male domination of politics continues (Griffiths 2019). While Canada has made strides toward addressing the inherent sexism and misogyny existing in politics that inhibits women from running for office and attaining high-profile positions, for example through requiring a gender parity cabinet, women continue to face challenges while operating in traditionally male spaces. When women enter politics, the status quo is threatened; these women "are breaking the rules of an unjust patriarchal system" (Manne 2017, 68). In response, society finds ways to symbolically annihilate these women through misogynistic hostility. For years, women have faced condemnation, trivialization, and omission within traditional media coverage (Astrom 2015; Schneider and Hannem 2019; Tuchman 1978). Today the annihilation takes place in a new arena: social media.

Recognizing the possibility of symbolic annihilation operating online, this thesis sought to answer the following questions. First, how extensively are Canadian cabinet ministers Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland subjected to online gender-based violence on Twitter? What forms of online gender-based violence do the two women experience? And how does online gender-based violence on Twitter function as a form of symbolic annihilation? By conducting content and discourse analysis of the top 200 liked tweets for each research subject, as well as a further exploration of the larger set of messages Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland received in the run-up to the 2019 federal election, I found that both women were symbolically annihilated.

My findings highlight a marked difference in the volume of abuse directed towards the women, with McKenna receiving almost three times as much online GBV as Freeland. Despite expecting McKenna to receive more abusive tweets, the difference is still stark and surprising. I coded over 11% of the tweets sent to McKenna as abusive, which far exceeded the expectations garnered from the literature review. Notwithstanding the variation in the number of abusive tweets Catherine McKenna and Chrystia Freeland received, the results show both women engage in "risky business" when operating online (Theocharis et al. 2016, 1011). Discourse analysis revealed that while there were at times diverse types of hostile misogyny weaponized against the

subjects, there were also themes that held constant across the tweets. Specific differences included the "Barbie" moniker used against McKenna but not Freeland, and Freeland received smearing comments focusing on her relationship to her grandfather, a Nazi collaborator. However, they each received misogynistic discourse through tweets framing the women as hysterical. Moreover, both subjects effectively had their agency removed through the insinuation that they were mere followers of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, with no backbone to stand up to him. Some tweets went further and sexualized each women's relationship with Trudeau by telling them to "stop spreading their legs" for their boss. By directing attention to the women's relationships and appearance, the online GBV questions each woman's legitimacy. In myriad ways, each woman faced trivialization and condemnation through online GBV. Due to Twitter's API limitations, and this project's own restrictions in tweet volume analysis capabilities, the true scale of abuse can only assume to be greater than the results show.

Women's subjugation through abusive discourse does not sit solely in the history books. Gendered abuse continues to act as a form of discipline. Step out of line, enter a man's domain, break the norms, and a woman quickly faces backlash. From the suffragettes of the 19th century to today's high-profile political women who challenge the existing order, others use insults, abuse, and threats to remind women of their marginalized status. Sexist and misogynistic discourse focusing on trivializing, shaming, and condemning women, place them in a cycle of continually having their competency and place in politics called into question.

FUTURE RESEARCH

After extensive research into the subject, I found no other study analyzing the role of symbolic annihilation occurring in social media. Thus, these findings constitute a foundational contribution to this area of research. Additionally, when I first began this project, I could find only one article on the "incivility" Canadian politicians face (Rheault et al. 2019). Since then, there has been a rise in attention paid to the subject, and scholars continue to focus on the concept of incivility in politics (Tenove and Tworek 2020). Few studies have explored the behaviours online through a gendered lens. There is much more to understand when it comes to online harms and Canadian politicians, particularly women politicians. As discussed within the literature review, the concept of online GBV is useful due to its comprehensive nature, and researchers should consider adopting the term. It also fits well with the concept of symbolic

annihilation due to its inclusiveness of not only abuse but also other harmful behaviours that condemn, trivialize, or delegitimize others.

For academics, there is considerable space for future research on the relationship between online GBV and symbolic annihilation. One option for Canadian scholars would be to expand the subjects under analysis and focus on all elected women in the federal parliament or go broader and include those of other gender identities. This would provide scholars an opportunity to better understand not only the volume of abuse politicians are experiencing but the types of abuse received and the role it plays in annihilating the subjects. It is possible, although unlikely, that McKenna and even Freeland are high-profile targets of online GBV due to their portfolios. Were the findings of this thesis reflective of women politicians in federal politics generally, or were my chosen subjects outliers? Supplementing content and discourse analysis of tweets with surveys of those at risk of online GBV would also aid in better understanding this dangerous phenomenon.

By expanding the scope, researchers could incorporate a much-needed intersectional lens. International studies have found that those of the BAME community experience online abuse at a higher rate and yet we are unaware if this occurs in Canada (Dhrodia 2018). There are of course downsides to expanding the subject base too much, however. Due to the volume of subjects and tweets to analyze, many scholars have relied on machine learning models, which often fail to capture the nuance in tweets. It would therefore be a more accurate analysis to ensure the employment of both content and discourse analysis and a balance between machine learning and human coders.

Regarding McKenna and Freeland, much has changed since the 2019 election period under analysis. Both women have changed ministerial roles. McKenna became the Minister of Infrastructure while Freeland now fulfils a more prominent and public role as Deputy Prime Minister and the first woman appointed to be Minister of Finance. It would be interesting to analyze and understand whether the position changes influenced the level and nature of online GBV each woman receives. Perhaps McKenna, now in a less controversial role, has received less abuse while the opposite may prove true for Freeland. On a similar note, how the new Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Jonathan Wilkinson, has fared online would be of interest.

Finally, another area of opportunity is to focus on the discourse between politicians active on Twitter and other social media platforms. In particular, one could broadly ask the following

questions: How do politicians communicate with each other? Is the communication civil, uncivil, or captured within the online GBV framework? Kate Manne (2017) discusses the role of misogyny as an enforcement tool used against women who transgress the norms of their gender. To understand the ways in which Twitter users produce symbolic annihilation, it may be useful to see if they are picking up signals from other politicians. Exchanges online provide "signals about what is permissible in public discourse" and therefore a political actor's "choice of words…can as much restrain and reconciliate, as it can spread division and elevate status of offensiveness from unacceptable to routine" (Theocharis et al. 2020). Do Canadian politicians also deploy symbolic annihilation tactics against their peers?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

While public figures are no longer reliant on traditional media to spread and control the flow of information, this research demonstrates that by operating online they face risk receiving more insults, vulgarity, threats, and gendered rhetoric questioning their legitimacy as political actors. Within seconds of posting their messages online, a politician's assumed control over social media engagement erodes. Social media platforms, including Twitter, have become the new tools of dominance and control over women. While Twitter provides citizens a unique platform to increase engagement between political figures and citizens, it attracts a serious level of vitriol and misogyny. This hostile environment has led many to inhibit their use of online platforms, which is itself a "spatial expression of patriarchy" (Valentine 1989, 389). This moderation of the online sphere through attempts to exclude women's activity presents a message about how society values that group (Tuchman 1978).

Entering digital spaces to engage with the public and share information comes at a significant cost for public women. Women's public presence in traditionally men's spaces—politics, journalism, science, technology—evokes aggression, or a "digital hostility" (Sobieraj 2018, 1705). Their deflection from the social hierarchies and norms that the patriarchal society paves out "may seem like treason or betrayal" to those who work to uphold the system, knowingly or not (Manne 2017, 271). Online GBV is then weaponized; rhetoric seeking to shame, condemn, trivialize, and berate begins to flourish. Women then face the choice to self-censor, silence themselves, get back in line, or risk facing a barrage of gendered insults, sexualized threats, and offensive language. This "drive to preserve traditional gender roles by

preventing women as women from exercising their rights" to engage freely and safely online is part of the larger message that women should face exclusion from politics (Krook 2017, 82). This symbolic annihilation "limits the possibilities inherent in women's lives" (Tuchman 2013, 2), it discourages women from aspiring to enter politics; it emboldens men *and* other women to assign stereotypes, and police and enforce women's activities (Manne 2017, 78).

Many seek to dismiss the violence occurring online as insignificant or the "cost" of entering politics. This "cost" is unacceptable when women are merely exercising their basic democratic rights. Moreover, the discourse of costs and benefits places the onus on the women, the victims (Krook 2017, 81). This cycle of abuse and the blame game perpetuates and preserves the inequalities that exist within politics.

We do not fully understand the long-term impacts of this form of abuse. McKenna and Freeland have not stopped using social media, although they do continue to engage with the platform at strikingly different levels. However, we do have evidence of online GBV leading women to remove themselves from the political sphere. Lisa Helps, Mayor of Victoria, BC, went offline in response to the barrage of online harassment she faced in 2018 (Smart 2018). More recently, 18 British female members of Parliament decided not to run for re-election in the December 12, 2019 general election, citing the online vitriol as a significant factor (Specia 2019). In fact, research conducted by the Women and Equalities Committee in the UK found that two thirds of women MPs say that progress on tackling violence against women in politics, including acts committed online, has an impact on their willingness to stand for re-election (WEC 2019). On the other hand, this consideration affected only 24% of men MPs. In addition, online GBV has a considerable impact beyond the intended victims on those considering public life (Bardall 2013; Shepherd 2014).

Recent events in Canada and abroad have shown that the hatred politicians face online often precedes violent episodes occurring offline. The distinction between online and offline spaces is fuzzy and is best viewed as a continuum (Ruth, Rowe, and Wiper 2018, 530), with the "dynamics of intimidation and harassment" found online as not totally separate from "threats and acts of physical violence up to and including murder" (Krook 2017, 75). Most prominently, there is the case of Jo Cox, a UK member of parliament murdered in public a week before the Brexit referendum in 2016 (Flippone 2019). Quite simply, online GBV is the manifestation of offline misogyny and an important modern-day expression of violence against women in politics.

Driving women away from participating in political discourse undermines the integrity of democracy (NDI 2018). These serious challenges to Canadian democracy enable the ongoing gender disparity in political positions, which in turn promotes a gender-bias in policies. In addition, online GBV has a considerable impact beyond the intended victims on others already in politics and those considering public life.

This work reminds researchers that women face unique victimization when participating in politics in ways that threaten men's political dominance. Yet through the study of online GBV, feminist scholars can challenge the prevalence of misogynistic messaging and further work towards disrupting the inherent norms of a patriarchal society. Exposing and condemning online GBV is a crucial first step to correcting the misperception that insulting, sexualizing, and threatening others is merely "trolling" and rather a conscious strategy to put women "back in their place" and reinforce the patriarchy and male dominance in politics (Krook 2017, 81). We must confront this toxic online atmosphere.

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APPENDIX

CODEBOOK

Variable	Name	Label	Values
1	Case ID	Case ID	M1: McKenna 1 F1: McKenna 1
2	Retweets	Number of Retweets	#
3	Likes	Number of Likes	#
5	Type 1	Offensive Language. Is it present?	0. No 1. Yes
6	Type 2	Threats. Is it present?	0. No 1. Yes
7	Type 3	Personal Attacks on One's Private Life. Is it present?	0. No 1. Yes
8	Type 4	Gendered Attacks. Is it present?	0. No 1. Yes
9	Level	Level of harassment on a 0 – 5 scale.	On a count from 0 - 5
10	Tone	The tone of the tweet with at least one of the 4 types of harassment categories present.	1. Supportive of Harassment 2. Critical of Harassment