



Bulldozing Brexit: the role of masculinity in UK party leaders' campaign imagery in 2019 UK General Election

Jessica C. Smith

To cite this article: Jessica C. Smith (2021) Bulldozing Brexit: the role of masculinity in UK party leaders' campaign imagery in 2019 UK General Election, Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, 31:4, 450-469, DOI: [10.1080/17457289.2021.1968414](https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2021.1968414)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2021.1968414>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



[View supplementary material](#)



Published online: 19 Aug 2021.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 1274



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 1 [View citing articles](#)



OPEN ACCESS



Bulldozing Brexit: the role of masculinity in UK party leaders' campaign imagery in 2019 UK General Election

Jessica C. Smith

Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Southampton,
Southampton, UK


ABSTRACT


Political science asks how women navigate gender on the campaign trail – do they run “as women” or do they exhibit more “masculine” behaviours to increase credibility. The role of masculinity in men’s campaigns has received less attention. Yet, men “play the gender card” too. This paper analyses the use of gender in the campaign imagery of the two male party leaders in the 2019 UK General Election campaign via an examination of their campaign tweets. It finds that the male leaders did, indeed, “play the man card”. Both leaders overwhelmingly used masculine visuals on Twitter during the campaign. Johnson demonstrated elements of “hypermasculinity” exaggerating his strength and dominance in images of traditional, working-class masculinity. Despite calls for more compassionate, read feminine, politics, Corbyn’s campaign remained located in masculine imagery through consistent displays of agency. This paper makes three main contributions to current understandings of gender and election campaigning. Firstly, it offers the beginnings of a framework of types of masculinity in campaigning. Secondly, it adds support to the thesis that men play the gender card, and that it can take different forms. Thirdly, it raises questions about the use of binary frameworks in studying gender’s role in campaigning.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 19 November 2020; Accepted 25 June 2021

Introduction

Since taking over of the leadership of the UK Conservative Party, there have been accusations that Boris Johnson displays “bolschie” masculinity and a “laddish” political style, a resonant image of the 2019 UK General Election campaign was Johnson crashing through a wall on a JCB digger emblazoned with his slogan “Get Brexit Done”. In contrast, his opponent the Leader of the

CONTACT Jessica C. Smith  j.c.smith@soton.ac.uk

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2021.1968414>.

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Opposition Jeremy Corbyn presents a softer masculinity, known for being a “grandfatherly” figure, with a “crumpled old geography teacher” appearance and for calling for a more compassionate style of politics (ITV News 2019). This paper examines the use of gendered imagery by the two male party leaders in the 2019 UK General Election campaign through an examination of visual images in their campaign tweets. It speaks to the critique of current gendered accounts of campaigning, which under theorizes how “men play the gender card too”, and the binary focus of current frameworks. The paper offers the beginnings of a conceptual framework for types of masculinity in campaigning. Observations from critical studies of masculinity and men, international feminist studies and communication studies are brought into gender and election scholarship to construct three possible types of masculinity: (i) traditional – an association with traditionally stereotyped male traits and behaviours; (ii) new man – a blend of masculinity with feminine representations, most notably through the use of fatherhood; (iii) hypermasculinity – purposeful and aggressive displays of masculinity with exaggerated displays of traditionally stereotyped male characteristics.

An analysis of the images posted to the male leaders’ Twitter feeds during the 2019 UK General Election finds that the male leaders did, indeed, “play the man card”. Both leaders’ campaigns displayed high levels of masculine visuals and neither men used the types of feminine imagery associated with “new man” masculinity. Johnson demonstrated elements of “hypermasculinity” showing his strength and dominance in the form of traditional, working-class masculinity and exaggerated displays of toughness. He was pictured on building sites and in factories sporting hard hats and high-vis jackets. Despite calls for more compassionate, read stereotypically feminine, politics, Corbyn’s campaign was still located in masculine imagery through consistent displays of agency, addressing rallies of supporters. This paper makes three main contributions to current understandings of gender and election campaigning. Firstly, it offers the beginnings of a theoretical framework of types of masculinity in campaigning. Secondly, it adds support to the thesis that men play the gender card, and this can take different forms. Thirdly, it raises questions about the future use of binary frameworks in studying gender’s role in campaigning.

Literature review

Gender and campaigning

Whilst the presence of gender stereotypes can vary between campaigns and “normal” times (Aaldering and Van Der Pas 2020), campaigns provide insight into how politicians “do” politics and the characteristics and behaviour politicians think is needed to win elected office (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles 1996).

For gender and politics scholars then, campaigns offer a chance to study the performance of politics, and the gendered dynamics of political leadership.

The common hypothesis is that leadership is associated with male coded traits and behaviour, such as strength, assertiveness and agency and traditionally masculine policy areas like foreign affairs, and defence (Fridkin and Kenney 2009; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). When women campaign they may explicitly emphasize “masculine” characteristics, although this can lead to backlash for them appearing insufficiently feminine (Okimoto and Brescoll 2010). Alternatively, in contexts where feminine issues or traits are desired it is advantageous for women to run “as women”, for example, the 1992 US Congressional elections, women could capitalize on voters’ desire for a return to domestic issues (Dolan 2014). Large-N studies of campaign ads used in US Senate, gubernatorial or Congressional campaigns have analysed differences between male and female candidates’ campaigning style and the gendered traits and issues they emphasize in their ads. Some find women actively “run as women” in campaigns, reinforcing gender stereotypes (Herrnson, Celeste Lay, and Stokes 2003; Schneider 2014a). Another set of work contends that candidates strategically employ both male and female stereotypes in campaigning dependent on factors such as context and their opponent’s sex (Schneider 2014b; Windett 2014). Alternatively, a body of work suggests that male and female candidates campaign similarly and factors such as partisanship, or prior experience matter more to campaign strategy (Dolan 2005; McDonald, Porter, and Treul 2020).

Primarily, this paper works to theorize more fully what we mean by the masculine norm in understandings of gender and campaigning. The concern in current literature with when women do, and whether women should, “play the gender card” masks the pertinence of gender for men too. It is undertheorized that men “play the gender card” too. Although aware of this fact, often masculinity or male candidates are treated as the norm comparator by political scientists examining gender’s role in campaigning. Yet, women and men both have, and perform, gender (Carver 1996). In the words of Bjarnegård (2013, 1), “we must take seriously the fact that a gendered analysis is as much about men and masculinity as it is about women and femininity”.

Masculinities in politics

Although gender and election work has attended more to women’s use of gender in campaigning, some scholars have examined men’s use of masculinity and its representations in media coverage. Studies of the US presidency suggest there is a competition to be “the most masculine” in the campaign (Conroy 2015; Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman 2018). Conroy’s (2015, 75) study of the media coverage of all-male US presidential races

from 2000 to 2012 finds a “gender conflict framing” in all-male races where “one candidate is framed as more masculine and the other is framed as more feminine”. There is an advantage, Conroy argues, reserved for the most masculine candidate. Similarly, Fahey’s examination of the 2004 US presidential campaign found that John Kerry was depicted as an effeminate French poodle with a high-pitched voice in contrast to a more masculine dog “Barney” with a low gruff. “Frenchifying” Kerry played on anti-French rhetoric of their heterosexuality being jeopardized “by a gendered discourse of weakness, submission, emasculation, and sexual deviance or objectification” (Fahey 2007, 138). Such rhetoric was seen in the 2016 US Presidential race where Donald Trump often emasculated the other Republican presidential nominees, calling Marco Rubio, “little Marco” and a “frightened little puppy” (CAWP 2016). Thus to say that “politics is masculine” does not mean that all men will inevitably benefit. The male advantage in politics may only be reserved for “masculine” men, and/or the most masculine candidate. In this way, the gender politics amongst men is laid bare.

More attention has been given to how masculinities are produced and reproduced across society in critical studies of men and masculinities (CSMM) (Gottzén, Mellström, and Shefer 2020) which particularly utilizes the concept of hegemonic masculinity – the configuration of gender practice which claims authority in any particular context (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is about domination, working as an idealized reference point which plays a crucial role in the production and reproduction of male supremacy and the subordination and femininity and other masculinities. Admittedly, hegemonic masculinity is a “slippery notion” determined by what it excludes and what it seeks to dominate – namely women and certain men. It can change over time amid shifting contexts. As MacKinnon (2003, 11) argues, that the discourse of masculinity is subject to change means that masculinity, subordinated and dominant/hegemonic alike change “and is of necessity plural”.

Types of masculinity

Applying this to the political sphere CSMM offers the concept of political masculinity – “any kind of masculinity that is constructed around, ascribed to and/or claimed by ‘political players’” (Starck and Sauer 2014, 6). In identifying the types of masculinity in political leadership then it is considered which masculinities have been dominant or idealized in recent political leadership, thinking about the framework of hegemonic masculinity. Whilst not an exhaustive list of all types of masculinity, it is those that have been more prominent within the political leadership literature. This is an initial exploration of a topic that requires a more in-depth treatment. Three types of masculinity are identified in British politics – traditional, “new man” and hypermasculinity.

Traditional masculinity

Traditionally it is thought that political leadership is coded as “male” i.e. associated with stereotypically “masculine” traits such as strength and assertiveness (Fridkin and Kenney 2009; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). A common measurement of displays of masculinity is the association with, or emphasis of, these traits by political candidates, both male and female (Conroy 2015; Kahn 1993; Lee and Lim 2016; Sapiro et al. 2011; Schneider 2014a). The contention that men (and perhaps also women) need to be the “most masculine” suggests men need to emphasize these traditional “masculine” traits (Conroy 2015). This aligns with the more traditional style of masculinity seen in politics (A. Smith 2016). Conroy (2015) found that in all but one of the US Presidential elections examined the candidate with greater associations with masculine traits won the election.

In line with the idea of dominance and subordinating femininity, work on the US presidency suggests this emphasis on masculinity comes alongside a derision of femininity as candidates routinely feminize their opponent to discredit them (Conroy 2015; Fahey 2007; Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman 2018). Yet, an alternative theory contends that rather than deriding femininity, such traits and behaviour are becoming incorporated into political masculinities (Deason, Greenlee, and Langner 2015; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen 2003; J. C. Smith 2018) Femininity is thought to be demonstrated in displays of communality and compassion. These are often linked to the role of women as mothers and primary caregivers (Fridkin and Kenney 2009; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). This feminization can be linked to a “new man” masculinity.

New man

“New man” leaders adopt a more feminized approach, balancing masculine with feminine visuals, such as domestic images. Prevalent in British politics for some time the “new man” was epitomized by Tony Blair, who, in his bid for the Labour leadership, gave interviews from his family home and talked about fitting in time with the kids around his busy schedule (J. C. Smith 2018). The hegemonic status of this masculinity is seen in how other politicians tried to imitate this political style. David Cameron followed a similar mould presenting himself as the middle-class, modern “family man”, as part of his modernization of the Conservative Party. Imagery included Cameron patting the stomach of his heavily pregnant wife on stage and webcasts from his family kitchen washing up the children’s breakfast bowls (A. Smith 2020). In line with men’s use of femininity, Schneider’s (2014a) analysis of campaign websites in US elections found male candidates were more likely to pursue a gender incongruent trait strategy than women.

Hypermasculinity

However, recently a backlash against feminized masculinity and a return to traditional masculinity has been seen in the strongman leadership associated with rising populism in Europe and the US. The backlash against what we might class as “feminine” liberalism and the rise in right-wing populism has been associated with an explicitly dominant masculine style of leadership and campaigning. Work in CCSM has identified a “populist political masculinity” in the performance of masculinity with populism. This kind of populism has been associated with sexism and anti-feminism, re-establishment of traditional family and associated gender roles and a strong-man style of leadership (Löffler, Luyt, and Starck 2020). For instance, Eksi and Wood’s (2019, 735) examination of the leadership of Putin and Erdogan found not just a macho style but, “their machismo combines a deeper bullying, masculine set of performances with a paternalistic dominance that claims to protect their ‘own’ people”. Both leaders relied on an outsider status as authentic working-class men when seeking office and presented themselves as the “good father” saving the nation once in power. Higgins (2020) found similar representations of Brexit leader Nigel Farage, with heroic imagery used and the prominent display of himself as an “ordinary bloke” through the association of masculinity with alcohol through his trademark pint of beer.

We can see this as a return to the “traditional masculinity” described above – with an emphasis on traditionally masculine traits and a rejection of femininity. However, I theorize that there is something different about this “remasculinisation” (Ashwin and Utrata 2020) of politics. Masculinity studies identify a type of toxic- or hyper-masculinity which is, “in short, an exaggerated form of hegemonic masculinity” (Daddow and Hertner 2019). I call this third type “hypermasculinity”. It involves purposeful and aggressive masculine displays, an exaggerated display of characteristics usually associated with males. It asserts dominance over femininity and the dominance of one type of masculinity over others (Daddow and Hertner 2019; Eksi and Wood 2019; Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman 2018; Wood 2016). An epitome of such masculinity is Vladimir Putin who carefully choreographs an image of hypermasculinity. Numerous photographs capture him embodying strength and manliness, and an image of him as sober, handsome and strong (Wood 2016). Donald Trump borrowed from Putin’s playbook in his use of sexism and deliberate degrading of other types of masculinity and any femininity. Both leaders use hypermasculinity to appeal to fears of status loss amongst men and those who are nostalgic for a stronger, greater “state” (Ashwin and Utrata 2020; Wood 2016).

Heldman, Conroy, and Ackerman (2018) suggest we this type of masculinity is prominent in times of social unrest and when social order is shifting. In this way, we can link it to the backlash against liberalism and the rise in

right-wing populism. The current UK context offers such conditions. Brexit has been understood as both a cause and a result of political unrest and social change and has been framed as a primarily masculine project in its architects and design (Hozić and True 2017; Jennings and Lodge 2019). The rhetoric of the “left behind” and “taking back control” that is synonymous with the Brexit project appeal to notions of a crisis in masculinity, where white, working-class men, in particular, are feeling adrift in a changing economic and social environment (Bhambra 2017).

The 2019 UK General Election campaign

The leaders of the two main parties at the time of the 2019 election were Jeremy Corbyn (Labour Party leader) and Boris Johnson (Conservative Party Leader and Prime Minister). Both are thought to have very different leadership styles which lead to two general predictions about the level of masculine and feminine imagery in their campaigns.

Johnson is more likely to display hypermasculinity with extremely high levels of masculine imagery in his campaign. His exaggerated, “bolschie” style of masculinity is combined with a degradation of femininity – he has been accused of using sexist language, calling a Supreme Court judge a “girly swot”. Johnson was one of the most senior and prominent Conservative politicians in support of leaving the EU. His association with Brexit and “blokey” (albeit upper class) showmanship has led to comparisons with the populist Brexit leader Nigel Farage and the “strongman” populist leadership seen recently in Europe and the United States (J. C. Smith 2019).

The Labour leader in 2019, Jeremy Corbyn, is associated with a softer form of masculinity as is likely to balance masculine and feminine imagery. Corbyn is a “grandfatherly” figure, with a “crumpled old geography teacher” appearance (ITV News 2019) he is known, for instance, for his love of making jam with fruit from his allotment. Specifically, Corbyn balances femininity and masculinity in a new man way, with feminization playing a role in the politics he espouses – he is known for calling for more “compassionate” politics.

Visual imagery and social media

Visual images posted on the official Twitter accounts of the two main British political party leaders, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn¹ are examined. Both leaders used Twitter to post campaign videos and party broadcasts as well as information about their campaigns and manifestoes. Visual imagery is of course only one way that gender may be presented, the rhetoric of a leader, for instance, can tell us much about their gendered self-presentation

¹Jeremy Corbyn resigned as leader after losing the election.

(Bligh and Kohles 2008). Yet, visuals are key to understanding the presentation of gender in campaigns. Images portray a great amount of information at once to voters and individuals process visual information before written or verbal. Politicians make strategic choices about the images they put across to voters, especially in the age of social media where Twitter is a vital campaign tool (Drew and Grimes 1987; Schill 2012). Yet previous Twitter analyses focus on the text of tweets and visual imagery is often understudied in gender stereotyping and campaigning literature (Mattan and Small 2021).

Some US work examines gender's role in campaign ad visuals. Carpinella and Bauer (2021) found that female candidates were more likely to air a campaign ad with feminine visuals compared to male candidates; and that female candidates air ads with a higher proportion of feminine than masculine visuals. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996) found that presidential image construction presented the presidency as masculine, despite the presence of some feminized elements. For instance, the feminine image of family emphasized masculinity instead, showing the men as protectors and breadwinners.

Method and data

Quantitative content analysis was carried out on the images tweeted by the political leaders. Tweets were collected from 14th November 2019 (the deadline for candidate nomination) to 12th December 2019 (the day of the election). Although a short time span it is thought this will represent the fiercest period of campaigning in a clear countdown to the polls. Tweets were collected retrospectively from each leader's official Twitter page.² Tweets were collected manually so that all tweets could be collated from the time period, avoiding the use of the Twitter API. Tweets containing visual imagery, either pictures or videos, which included the leader were retained for analysis. In total 393 tweets were retained for analysis; 277 of these included visuals in the form of photographs and 116 included visuals in form of videos.

A pre-tested coding instrument is used: the visual coding instrument from Carpinella and Bauer's (2021) study of visual imagery in US Senate campaign ads (Table 1). The coding instrument includes the overall stereotype category of feminine or masculine visuals and the characteristics these visuals take. There are good theoretical reasons to use this framework as it categorizes imagery in traditional binary conceptions of masculinity and femininity common to current political science approaches to gender and campaigning. Using this framework may provide an opportunity to test these binary conceptions in light of taking the masculine norm more seriously. Beginning in this way may offer insight into

²Tweets collected August 2020.

Table 1. Visual coding instrument.

Imagery	Visual characteristic	Examples
Feminine Visuals	Family	Presence of family, couples (husband and wife)
	Children	Presence of young children, or holding, touching, kissing babies
	Feminine Location	Schools, hospitals, homes, public parks, playgrounds, grocery store
	Displays of communality	Communal displays with supporters by touching. Hugging. Kissing, embracing
Masculine Visuals	Feminine appearance	Casual attire, skirt, no jacket sleeves rolled up
	Female supporters	Presence of female supporters
	Feminine figures	Presence of teacher, nurse, caregiver, elderly person
	Male supporters	Presence of male supporters
	Masculine location	Construction sites, manufacturing plants, skyscrapers, sports arena, laboratory, office
	Non-physical supporter interactions	Giving supporters individual attention but not embracing or touching the person
	Masculine appearance	Formal attire business suit, no rolled up sleeves, tie for the men
	Displays of agency	Commanding a group of individuals, leading a meeting, supporters tightly packed into an event space, a sea of attendance at rallies.
	Masculine figures	Presence of military personnel, the business community, construction workers/blue collar and first responders, sports players/coach, scientist/lab coat worker

whether these frameworks still work to capture the use of masculinity and, or how we might better capture variations in masculinity.

Feminine imagery characteristics include locations that denote communality or female policy areas such as schools and hospitals. Images of family or children prime associations with the domestic sphere and caregiving. Feminine appearance includes clothing outside of a business suit. The sex of supporters was coded if the candidate is interacting with one supporter or a small group of supporters. Communal displays of supporter interaction include kissing, hugging and touching. Non-physical interactions were coded as masculine, except shaking hands which counted as masculine as it is a business style interaction. Business suits are masculine as they denote agency. Masculine locations and figures included traditionally male spheres and roles which are tied to masculine traits like strength and toughness, e.g. construction workers, building sites, soldiers, and factories.

For each tweet, two binary variables were created for whether it included (i) masculine and (ii) feminine imagery overall, i.e. if it included any of the masculine or feminine visual characteristics identified. For each tweet, the type of masculine and feminine characteristics (e.g. female supporters or masculine locations) was also coded. For example, a video of the leader visiting a school and talking to school children whilst wearing no jacket and tie would be coded as containing feminine imagery with the feminine characteristics of feminine appearance, children and feminine location. An image of the candidate shaking hands with a male supporter whilst dressed in a business suit

would be coded as containing masculine imagery with the characteristics of male supporter, masculine display and masculine appearance.

In line with Carpinella and Bauer (2021) in the first instance, each visual was parsed out as a separate item. For instance, if a tweet included four photos from a campaign visit to a school this was coded as four separate visuals. For videos, a visual was counted as one scene in the video. However, visuals within one tweet are likely to be related as tweets were generally themed to a certain issue or event. Analysis at the level of individual visuals was compared to conducting the same analysis at the level of tweets as individual items. Conducting the analysis at the visual or the tweet level made little difference to results (Appendix 1). For ease of interpretation, analysis was kept to the level of individual tweets.

Results

Overall, more of the tweets from Boris Johnson than Jeremy Corbyn featured a visual element, i.e. video or picture, which included the candidate. For Boris Johnson, 69.9% of tweets from his official account featured an image of Johnson compared to just 37.4% of tweets from Jeremy Corbyn's which included an image of Corbyn. As discussed, only tweets including an image of the candidate were retained for analysis.

For each tweet, it was coded if, overall, it included any of the feminine or masculine visual characteristics as set out in the coding instrument in Table 1 in the picture or video tweeted. Given that appearance was always coded as masculine or feminine, all tweets included some form of gendered imagery. Overwhelmingly, for both leaders, tweets included an element of masculine imagery, 95% of tweets for Johnson and 92.9% for Corbyn included masculine imagery. In comparison, 32.6% of tweets for Johnson included some form of feminine imagery, compared to 37% for Corbyn. Tweets could include both feminine and masculine imagery. Figure 1 shows the proportion of tweets which contained masculine imagery only, feminine only or a combination of both masculine and feminine imagery in the tweet's visuals. Most commonly, leaders' tweets included male imagery only. For both leaders over a quarter of tweets included both masculine and feminine imagery, although in a slightly higher proportion for Corbyn. Only a small proportion contained only feminine visuals, again this was slightly higher for Corbyn, but differences were small.

For each tweet, the type of masculine and feminine characteristics (e.g. female supporters or masculine locations) was coded. For each tweet, a score of 1 was given for each characteristic if it was present, and 0 if not present.³ Figure 2 shows the mean proportions of tweets which included the masculine and feminine characteristics identified in the coding schedule.

³A 10% sample of tweets were secondary coded by another researcher. The Cohen Kappa for each category is in Appendix 2, all were rated as substantial or almost perfect agreement.

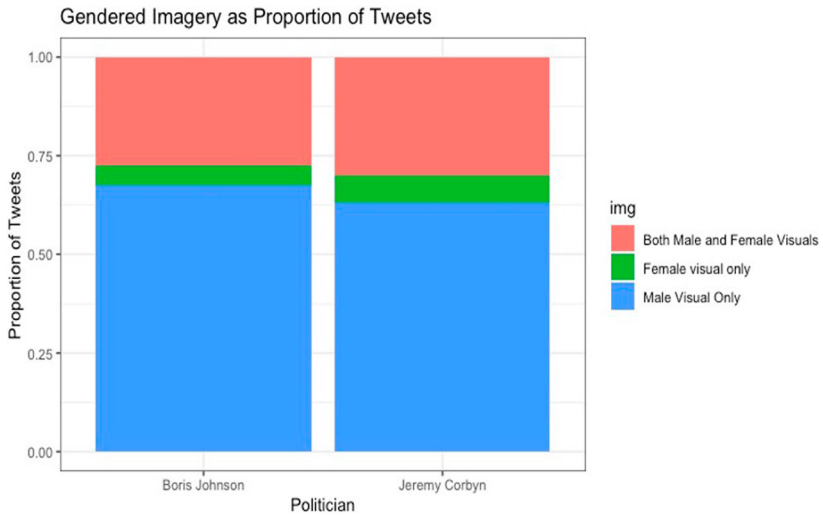


Figure 1. Proportion of Tweets containing masculine and feminine imagery.

Since these characteristics could be present (1) or not (0) the mean proportions are the same as the proportion by which they appeared in the total tweets.

The high levels of masculinity in Corbyn and Johnson’s campaigns were driven by their masculine appearance in the majority of tweets (see Figure 2).

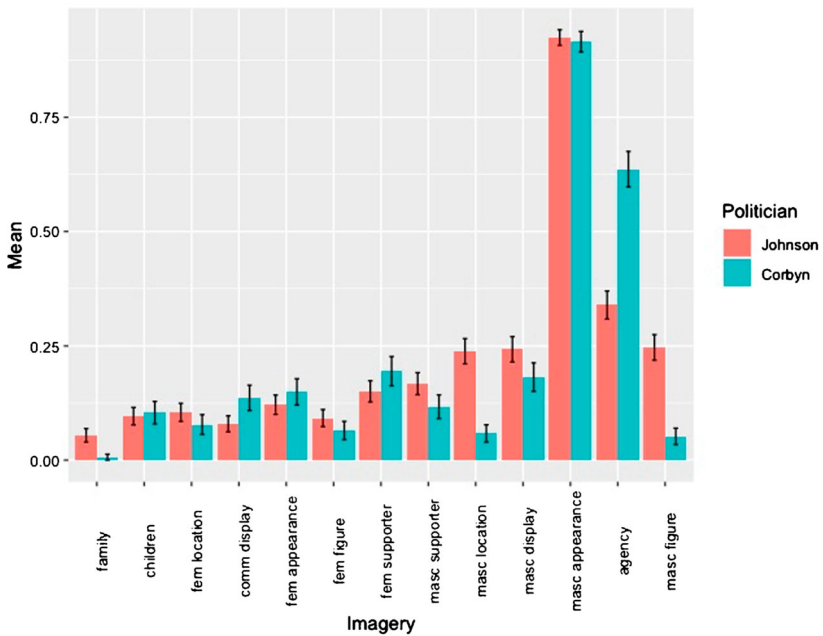


Figure 2. Proportions of masculine and feminine visual characteristics.

Both commonly wore traditional business suits. For Johnson, this was nearly always paired with a tie, for Corbyn he often did not wear a tie, which can be seen as more informal, although was still coded as masculine dress according to the coding instrument.⁴

Coding all appearance as masculine or feminine could be masking variation in gendered imagery. Furthermore, the notion of a business suit as being solely masculine is perhaps outdated as women increasingly occupy formal political and business roles. Therefore, the analysis was rerun without masculine and feminine appearance. [Figure 3](#) shows the mean proportions of tweets which included the masculine and feminine characteristics identified in the coding schedule, or no gendered characteristics once candidate appearance was removed.

Masculine or feminine appearance accounted for the only gendered imagery in about 1 in 5 tweets for both leaders (20% for Johnson, 18% for Corbyn). This meant that whilst not all visual tweets included gendered imagery, the vast majority did. [Figure 3](#) shows that once the appearance was excluded 81% of tweets from the candidates included some form of gendered imagery. Masculinity still dominated, with 71.5% of tweets including masculine imagery and male visuals only being most common, at similar levels for Johnson and Corbyn. Again, little difference is seen between the candidates.

Feminine visual characteristics were present in the tweets but at lower levels than masculine visuals, and most commonly appeared in combination with masculine imagery ([Figure 3](#)). Counter to the “new man” trend in recent political representations of masculinity few of these feminine visuals included either leaders’ family. Only one campaign video for Corbyn included old family footage of his sons. For Johnson, no imagery included his children. Several included his partner (although often in the background and never explicitly referenced). The only family explicitly referenced for Johnson was in images of Johnson door-knocking with his father, Stanley Johnson, a known public figure and former conservative politician himself.

Masculine displays of interaction with supporters were more common than feminine for both leaders; however, communal displays were significantly more common for Corbyn. He was depicted hugging or kissing supporters in line with a more feminized style of supporter interaction. Corbyn’s visuals also more often depicted him interacting with female supporters, although this difference was not significant.

Range of gendered imagery

A total was then calculated for the feminine characteristics and masculine characteristics in each tweet. Given there are six feminine characteristics

⁴Confirmed in correspondence with paper’s lead author.

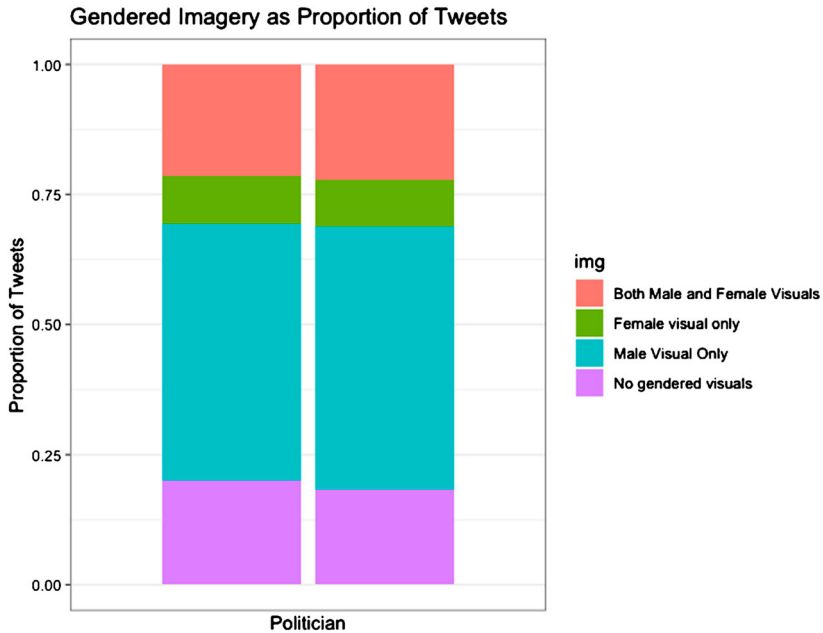


Figure 3. Proportion of Tweets containing gendered imagery.

that could be present and five masculine (discounting appearance) the totals were rescaled to run from 0 to 1. The descriptives for the scales are in Appendix 1.

The higher the score on these scales suggests a greater range of gendered imagery being used. For example, a higher mean score on the masculine visual characteristic scale means on average the candidate is displaying a higher range of masculine images in the photos and videos shared, i.e. more masculinity is being displayed by the leader. Figure 4 shows the mean scores for the two leaders on the masculine characteristic scale for tweets containing masculine imagery and the feminine visual characteristics scale for tweets including feminine imagery. When using masculine imagery, Johnson uses, on average, more types of male visual characteristics in his tweets than Corbyn. Although the difference between the men on this scale is small (0.06) it is significant. There is no significant difference between the mean score for feminine visual characteristics used by the leaders.

For Johnson, the high level, and range, of masculine imagery was driven by the characteristics of masculine locations and masculine figures. At least one of these characteristics appeared in 31% of his campaign tweets, and these characteristics appeared significantly more often for Johnson than for Corbyn (Figure 2). Johnson used masculine locations and figures to display traditional ideas of masculinity linked to strength and toughness. A common image was Johnson visiting building sites, factories and warehouses

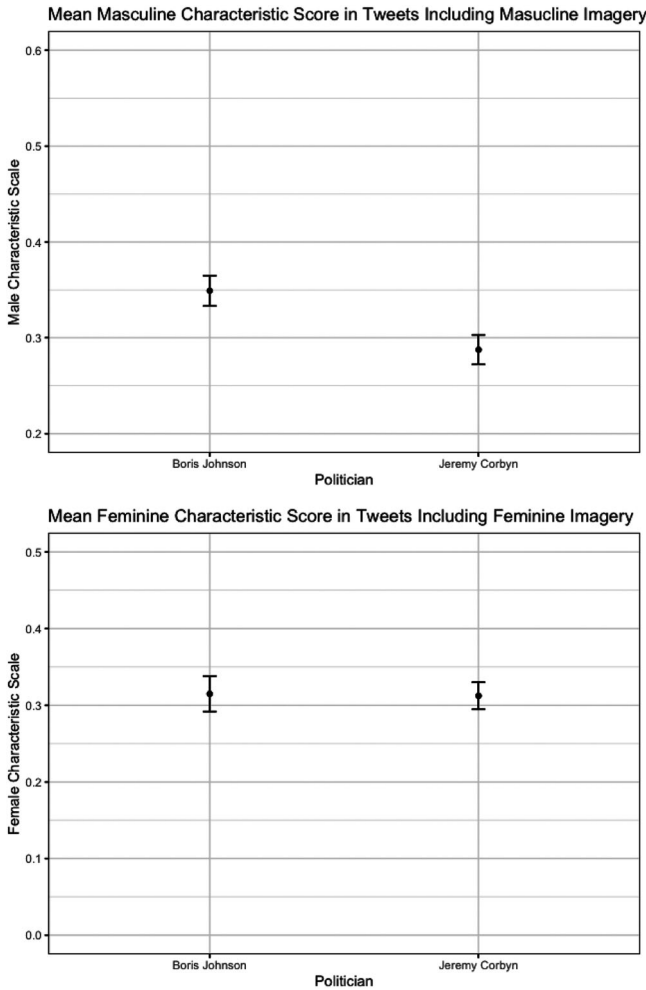


Figure 4. Mean scores on masculine and feminine characteristic scales.

associating him with traditionally working-class, manual and male spheres of work, and physical strength and toughness. Still images (Figure 5) of Johnson on these visits in his high visibility working gear suggest an explicit display of masculinity. Given Johnson’s elite background these images can be seen as a deliberate exaggeration and manipulation of his masculinity, in line with the empirical expectation of Johnson showing hypermasculine tendencies. At times this was an exaggerated and aggressive display, encapsulated by the iconic image of the campaign – Johnson driving a JCB digger through a wall emblazoned with the slogan “Get Brexit Done”.

Although similar overall levels of masculinity were seen for Corbyn his masculinity derived more from appearances of the agency. The consistent



Figure 5. Example Johnson Tweets.



Figure 6. Example Corbyn Tweet.

image was of Corbyn addressing large rallies of supporters (Figure 6). Displays of agency appeared in 64% of Corbyn's tweets, compared to just under a quarter for Johnson, and this difference was significant.

Conclusions

Although increasingly aware that men "play the gender card", too often political scientists treat masculinity or male candidates as the norm comparator when examining gender's role in campaigning. An analysis of the visual

imagery tweeted by the two male leaders in the 2019 General Election made it clear the men were running as men. Overall, 81% of tweets overall including some form of masculine imagery. Whilst reticent to make specific hypotheses I began with two empirical assumptions; (i) that Boris Johnson would display hypermasculinity, (ii) that Jeremy Corbyn would balance masculine and feminine imagery. Support was only found for the first, Johnson's imagery contained elements of hypermasculinity. This paper makes three main contributions to our current understandings of gender and election campaigning. Firstly, it begins to theorize types of masculinity in campaigning. Secondly, it adds support to the thesis that men play the gender card, and it can take different forms. Thirdly, it raises questions about the future frameworks for use in studying gender's role in campaigning.

Firstly, by combining current political science work with CCSM, communication studies, and international feminist scholarship this paper offers the beginning framework of types of masculinity in campaigning: (i) traditional masculinity – an association with traditionally stereotyped male traits and behaviours; (ii) new man – a blend of masculinity with feminine representations, most notably through the use of fatherhood; (iii) hypermasculinity – purposeful and aggressive displays of masculinity with exaggerated displays of traditionally stereotyped male characteristics.

Secondly, analysis of the images tweeted by the two male leaders in the 2019 UK General Election lent evidence to the contention that men “play the gender card” too. Masculine imagery dominated both leaders' campaign and both most frequently tweeted images including male visuals only. The lack of feminine imagery, especially any using leaders' family, goes against recent trends in the UK of the “new man” political leader, often seen through hands-on fatherhood (A. Smith 2016; J. C. Smith 2018). Admittedly, this is one election and must be put in context. Corbyn has adult sons and is on his third marriage and Johnson has faced controversy for his private life and questions on his true number of children so neither candidate is likely to emphasize family. Whether this lack of the domestic marks a movement away from the more feminized “new man” model of leadership remains to be seen, but it suggests that traditional masculinity may still work well for men in politics despite previous movements away from this model. It also adds to the contention that men have an “opt out” clause in any concentration on parenthood which has not been seen for women in studies of parenthood and politics (Deason, Greenlee, and Langner 2015; J. C. Smith 2018).

As predicted, Johnson's campaign aligned him with ideas of hypermasculinity. His campaign images associating him with traditional working-class, manual and male spheres of work, linking Johnson with ideas of strength and dominance. In line with hypermasculinity, this was an exaggerated form of traditional masculinity. Johnson smashed through a wall on a JCB digger and posed in a boxing ring. The purposeful and exaggerated nature

of this masculinity is more pertinent given Johnson's elite background, the imagery associating him with working-class masculinity suggesting an explicit manipulation of his masculinity. Further questions follow about who this imagery is aimed at. Was a hypermasculine image crafted to appeal to the "left-behind" synonymous with the Brexit project but also the "red wall" voters so prominent in this election, white working-class men who may feel adrift in changing economic and social environments (MacLeavy 2018). It should also be considered whether these representations of masculinity hold in traditional campaigning media, given Twitter was the source of campaign imagery for this study.

Elements of hypermasculinity in Johnson's campaign lend further, limited, support to the suggestion that contained in the backlash against "feminine" liberalism in Western Europe and the US is a return to traditional masculinity in leadership (Löffler, Luyt, and Starck 2020). The association of Johnson with working-class masculinity is similar to the strongman leadership styles that have been seen in populist right-wing leaders such as Nigel Farage, Vladimir Putin and Recep T. Erdogan (Eksi and Wood 2019). The association of Brexit with masculinity may also ring true here. The consistent issue pushed by Johnson was Brexit, and his most aggressively masculine displays of bulldozing through a brick wall included the slogan "Get Brexit Done" emblazoned on the digger.

Against expectations, Jeremy Corbyn's campaign was dominated by masculinity with no greater use of femininity than Johnson's. This was most often seen in clear displays of agency with images of him addressing large crowds. Whilst still a clear display of what is stereotypically thought masculine, it was based less on strength and toughness compared to Johnson. Corbyn also had more female supporters present in his visuals and significantly more often interacting communally with supporters. It is hard to separate out the context from these small N elections. Jeremy Corbyn is known for these big rallies, "Corbynmania" in 2015 won Corbyn, an unknown backbencher, the Labour leadership in 2015. However, Corbyn is also known for pushing a more "caring" and "compassionate" politics. Yet, overall, masculine imagery dominated his campaign. The differences in the types of masculine visuals between Corbyn and Johnson could further be a function of their partisanship which needs further examination in a larger N study. However, if the use of masculinity varies by the party of the candidate, e.g. if conservative or right-wing leaders in the UK display more traditional masculinity in line with Johnson in this campaign, that needs further exploration in itself.

The final contribution of this paper is a thought on the predilection for using binary conceptions of gender in political science measurements of gender in campaigning. The framework used in this paper categorized images according to these traditional binary conceptions of masculine and feminine (e.g. Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). Whilst there were good

theoretical grounds for the use of this framework, I also want to address how we might expand our measurements. The framework usefully demonstrated the prevalence of masculinity and some delineation in how this imagery was presented in the use of masculine locations and figures by Johnson and displays of agency by Corbyn. However, at times these traditional conceptions of the masculine and feminine jarred. For example, in the coding of any business dress as masculine. The limitations of the binary framework perhaps came to light when examining male-only cases, perhaps it is more apt when comparing female politicians to the “male” norm. However, as this paper has argued we need to properly interrogate what this norm of masculinity means, and the different forms it may take. Masculinity is “of necessity plural” as MacKinnon (2003) argues, and more recognition of types of masculinity could be beneficial in these frameworks. For instance, consider Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996) finding that men used family but in a way that located them as the patriarch and in traditional gendered norms. A binary framework would simply code family as feminine. Beginning with the typology set out in this paper we may begin to imagine how we could create a framework of analysis based around nuanced ideas of masculinity, beyond the simple counting of masculine traits or issues.

Disclosure statement

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

References

- Aaldering, Loes, and Daphne Joanna Van Der Pas. 2020. “Political Leadership in the Media: Gender Bias in Leader Stereotypes During Campaign and Routine Times.” *British Journal of Political Science* 50 (3): 911–931.
- Ashwin, Sarah, and Jennifer Utrata. 2020. “Masculinity Restored? Putin’s Russia and Trump’s America.” *Contexts* 19 (2): 16–21.
- Bhambra, Gurminder K. 2017. “Locating Brexit in the Pragmatics of Race, Citizenship and Empire.” In *Brexit: Sociological Responses*, edited by William Outhwaite, 91–100. New York: Anthem Press.
- Bjarnegård, Elin. 2013. *Gender, Informal Institutions and Political Recruitment: Explaining Male Dominance in Parliamentary Representation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bligh, Michelle C., and Jeffrey C. Kohles. 2008. “Negotiating Gender Role Expectations: Rhetorical Leadership and Women in the US Senate.” *Leadership* 4 (4): 381–402.
- Carpinella, Colleen, and Nichole M. Bauer. 2021. “A Visual Analysis of Gender Stereotypes in Campaign Advertising.” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 9 (2): 369–386.
- Carver, Terrell. 1996. *Gender is not a Synonym for Women*. Boulder, CO: L. Reinner.
- CAWP. 2016. *Finding Gender in Election 2016: Lessons from Gender Watch*. Centre for American Women and Politics and Barbara Lee Foundation.
- Connell, R. W., and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept.” *Gender and Society* 19 (6): 829–859.

- Conroy, Meredith. 2015. *Masculinity, Media, and the American Presidency*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-1-137-45645-8> (March 4, 2020).
- Daddow, Oliver, and Isabelle Hertner. 2019. "Interpreting Toxic Masculinity in Political Parties: A Framework for Analysis." *Party Politics*. doi:10.1177/1354068819887591.
- Deason, Grace, Jill S. Greenlee, and Carrie A. Langner. 2015. "Mothers on the Campaign Trail: Implications of Politicized Motherhood for Women in Politics." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 3 (1): 133–148.
- Dolan, Kathleen. 2005. "Do Women Candidates Play to Gender Stereotypes? Do Men Candidates Play to Women? Candidate Sex and Issues Priorities on Campaign Websites." *Political Research Quarterly* 58 (1): 31.
- Dolan, Kathleen. 2014. *When Does Gender Matter?: Women Candidates and Gender Stereotypes in American Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Drew, Dan G., and Thomas Grimes. 1987. "Audio-Visual Redundancy and TV News Recall." *Communication Research* 14 (4): 452–461.
- Eagly, Alice H., Mary C. Johannesen-Schmidt, and Marloes L. van Engen. 2003. "Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership Styles: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Women and Men." *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (4): 569–591.
- Eksi, Betül, and Elizabeth A. Wood. 2019. "Right-Wing Populism as Gendered Performance: Janus-Faced Masculinity in the Leadership of Vladimir Putin and Recep T. Erdogan." *Theory and Society* 48 (5): 733–751.
- Fahey, Anna Cornelia. 2007. "French and Feminine: Hegemonic Masculinity and the Emasculation of John Kerry in the 2004 Presidential Race." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (2): 132–150.
- Fridkin, Kim L., and Patrick J. Kenney. 2009. "The Role of Gender Stereotypes in U.S. Senate Campaigns." *Politics & Gender* 5 (03): 301.
- Gottzén, Lucas, Ulf Mellström, and Tamara Shefer, eds. 2020. *Routledge International Handbook of Masculinity Studies*. London: Routledge.
- Heldman, Caroline, Meredith Conroy, and Alissa R. Ackerman. 2018. *Sex and Gender in the 2016 Presidential Election*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Herrnson, Paul S., J. Celeste Lay, and Atiya Kai Stokes. 2003. "Women Running 'as Women': Candidate Gender, Campaign Issues, and Voter-Targeting Strategies." *The Journal of Politics* 65 (1): 244–255.
- Higgins, Michael. 2020. "Political Masculinities and Brexit: Men of War." *Journal of Language and Politics* 19 (1): 89–106.
- Hojić, Aida A, and Jacqui True. 2017. "Brexit as a Scandal: Gender and Global Trumpism." *Review of International Political Economy* 24 (2): 270–287.
- Huddy, Leonie, and Nayda Terkildsen. 1993. "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates." *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (1): 119.
- ITV News. 2019. "Corbyn Will Lead with 'compassion' in 'Very Different' Labour Government. ITV News. <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-11-06/labour-jeremy-corbyn-general-election-campaign> (September 10, 2020).
- Jennings, Will, and Martin Lodge. 2019. "Brexit, the Tides and Canute: The Fracturing Politics of the British State." *Journal of European Public Policy* 26 (5): 772–789.
- Kahn, Kim Fridkin. 1993. "Gender Differences in Campaign Messages: The Political Advertisements of Men and Women Candidates for U.S. Senate." *Political Research Quarterly* 46 (3): 481–502.
- Lee, Jayeon, and Young-shin Lim. 2016. "Gendered Campaign Tweets: The Cases of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump." *Public Relations Review* 42 (5): 849–855.

- Löffler, Marion, Russell Luyt, and Kathleen Starck. 2020. "Political Masculinities and Populism." *NORMA* 15 (1): 1–9.
- MacKinnon, Kenneth. 2003. *Representing Men: Maleness and Masculinity in the Media*. London: Arnold; Distributed in the United States of America by Oxford University Press.
- MacLeavy, Julie. 2018. "Leave-Voting Men, Brexit and the 'Crisis of Masculinity'." LSE Brexit.
- Mattan, Andrew J. A., and Tamara A. Small. 2021. "Worth a Thousand Words: The Study of Visual Gendered Self-Presentation on Twitter." *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 54 (2): 477–490.
- McDonald, Maura, Rachel Porter, and Sarah A. Treul. 2020. "Running as a Woman? Candidate Presentation in the 2018 Midterms." *Political Research Quarterly*. doi:10.1177/1065912920915787.
- Okimoto, Tyler G., and Victoria L. Brescoll. 2010. "The Price of Power: Power Seeking and Backlash Against Female Politicians." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36 (7): 923–936.
- Parry-Giles, Shawn J., and Trevor Parry-Giles. 1996. "Gendered Politics and Presidential Image Construction: A Reassessment of the 'Feminine Style'." *Communication Monographs* 63 (4): 337–353.
- Sapiro, Virginia, Katherine Cramer Walsh, Patricia Strach, and Valerie Hennings. 2011. "Gender, Context, and Television Advertising: A Comprehensive Analysis of 2000 and 2002 House Races." *Political Research Quarterly* 64 (1): 107–119.
- Schill, Dan. 2012. "The Visual Image and the Political Image: A Review of Visual Communication Research in the Field of Political Communication." *Review of Communication* 12 (2): 118–142.
- Schneider, Monica C. 2014a. "Gender-Based Strategies on Candidate Websites." *Journal of Political Marketing* 13 (4): 264–290.
- Schneider, Monica C. 2014b. "The Effects of Gender-Bending on Candidate Evaluations." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 35 (1): 55–77.
- Smith, Angela. 2016. "Mediated Political Masculinities: The Commander-in-Chief vs. the New Man." *Social Semiotics* 26 (1): 94–110.
- Smith, Jessica C. 2018. "Politics and Parenthood: An Examination of UK Party Leadership Elections." *Parliamentary Affairs* 71 (1): 196–217.
- Smith, Jessica C. 2019. "Boris' Missing Women." In *UK Election Analysis 2019: Media, Voters and the Campaign*, edited by Daniel Jackson, Einar Thorsen, Darren Lilleker, and Nathalie Weidhase, 27–28. Centre for Comparative Politics and Media Research (Bournemouth University).
- Smith, Angela. 2020. "Just Call Me Dave: David Cameron's Perilous Populist Status." *Journal of Language and Politics* 19 (1): 10–29.
- Starck, Kathleen, and Birgit Sauer. 2014. "Political Masculinities: An Introduction." In *A Man's World? Political Masculinities in Literature and Culture*, edited by Kathleen Starck and Birgit Sauer, 3–10. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Windett, Jason Harold. 2014. "Gendered Campaign Strategies in U.S. Elections." *American Politics Research* 42 (4): 628–655.
- Wood, Elizabeth A. 2016. "Hypermasculinity as a Scenario of Power." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18 (3): 329–350.