

Women Leader Stereotypes in Newspapers

Abstract This chapter argues that the dominant message across many British newspapers is that women are unsuitable for leadership. A key way in which this message is constructed is by means of gender and sexual stereotyping. To illustrate this, I apply the perspective of four women leader stereotypes (iron maiden, seductress, mother and pet), originally developed by Kanter (Men and women of the corporation, Perseus Books, New York, 1993) to the discursive constructions of women leaders across different professions. From this perspective, I use a combination of semiotic analysis (Bignell in Media semiotics, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002) and discourse analysis (Gravells in Semiotics and written text: How the news media construct crisis, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) to analyse articles on the British Prime Minister, Theresa May's first day in office as constructed by *The Daily Mail*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Guardian*.

Keywords Role traps · Leadership stereotypes · Female political leaders
Semiotic analysis · Discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

The first perspective from which I analyse the newspaper construction of women leaders is Kanter's (1993) conceptual framework of women leader stereotypes. I suggest that this perspective is a valuable way for

scholars to identify and bring gendered assumptions to the surface within articles because it shows how discursive constructions of women leaders are rendered down to familiar stereotypes that convey a single, negative message: women are unsuitable for leadership.

The idea that women are deemed unsuitable for leadership is supported by considerable research in organisational studies (e.g. Adams 2016; Brescoll 2016; Eagly and Heilmann 2016; Hoyt and Murphy 2016). One way in which this message is constructed and delivered in talk and texts is by means of gender stereotyping that ranges from open demonisation of individual women to more subtle types of caricature. Gender stereotypes are generalisations that are shared in a society about the attributes of women and men. These include both descriptive components (i.e. describing how women and men are) and prescriptive components (i.e. prescribing how women and men should or should not be). Kanter (1993) argues that women leaders are targeted in their professions because they are highly visible as people who are different and whose appearance and behaviour do not conform to normative expectations of leadership. They stand out in a crowd, but not in a good way. They are often women working in a male-dominated domain, who are 'perceived to aspire inappropriately to the privileges of the dominant order' (Kanter 1993: 211).

Kanter was one of the first scholars to suggest that senior women are both consciously and unconsciously stereotyped by their colleagues in the workplace as a way of reducing their threat potential. She famously argued that senior women are 'tokenised' in male-dominated organisations in which they form a small proportion of senior managers. They are recruited as tokens by the 'dominants' (men) to avoid public criticism that their organisation does not do enough to appoint women to executive positions. Because senior women pose a threat to the dominant order, they are forced into gendered but approved subject positions, or in her terms, 'tokens' or 'role traps'. Kanter identified four such role traps across institutions in the western world and gave them amusing but helpful names—iron maiden, seductress, mother and pet—based on familiar, historical archetypes of women in authority. She argued that while, on the one hand, role traps offer women a range of professionally approved 'tokenistic' leadership positions in male-dominated corporations, on the other, these act to subordinate women's professional

identities to their ‘gender category’. Women are ‘assimilated’ as a ‘numerical rarity’ into a range of gender-stereotyped roles that are deemed acceptable for women to perform within an organisation mainly led by men. Thus, women are primarily treated on the basis of their gender rather than on the basis of their achievements as leaders.

Kanter further claimed that role traps significantly constrain the way women’s individual expertise and experiences are perceived and valued, which could have a detrimental effect on their career performance and progression. She argues that these roles are in no way natural to women, and indeed ‘when men and women are in similar situations operating under similar expectations, they tend to behave in similar ways’ (1993: 312). While, on the one hand, tokenism ensures women an instant, highly visible identity, on the other, they ‘are not permitted the individuality of their own unique, non-stereotypical characteristics’ (Kanter 1993: 211). Once trapped in these roles, the decision for women is stark: in order to assert their presence in an organisation, either they can choose assimilation by becoming insiders and turning against their social category as women, or they can opt for isolation, generating a counter-culture among tokens, but risking exclusion from key political activity or informal social events. In Kanter’s view, patriarchal gendered conditions were wholly responsible for producing these four role traps within the business domain. Although she wrote over 25 years ago on these matters, it is perhaps unsurprising that her insights are still very current.

The idea of ‘stereotype threat’ has been further developed in recent research literature. Stereotype threat—the stereotyped lack of fit between women’s characteristics, skills and aspirations, and those deemed necessary for effective leadership—is one of the most widely studied topics in social psychology (see Hoyt and Murphy 2016 for review). This body of literature suggests that traditional leadership is still strongly associated with the view that ‘men take charge’ whereas ‘women take care’ (Hoyt 2010). These stereotyped expectations of female inferiority can be so threatening to women that they may be contributing to the shortage of women leaders across many professions. The effects of stereotype threat include impairing the performance of women in leadership; undermining women’s sense of belonging in a field or organisation; suppressing their desire to pursue success or promotion; and finally, disengagement

from a domain that is threatening to women's self-worth and motivation (Hoyt and Murphy 2016).

Within this context, Kanter's theories of tokenism and role traps continue to have resonance for, and relevance to today's newspaper media. This is partly because some sections of the industry still hark back to earlier times when gender roles were more sharply polarised (Ross and Carter 2011). Furthermore, at a time when women are making remarkable strides within many professions, conservative forces tend to invoke stereotypes in times of threat to the social order in order to instil distrust of social change and to act as a brake to such progress (ibid). Below, I discuss how each of Kanter's four stereotypes continues to act as a retrogressive force in the construction and representation of women leaders.

WOMEN LEADER STEREOTYPES

Iron Maiden or Battle-axe

The 'iron maiden' or 'battle-axe' is ostensibly the most authoritative and stereotypically masculinised of Kanter's four stereotypes (Fig. 2.1). The iron maiden is seen as unnaturally virilised in so far as she is considered to speak and behave aggressively, and she is routinely represented by colleagues as 'scary', 'tough', 'mean', 'hard', 'bullying', 'calculating' and perhaps 'bitchy' (Baxter 2010). In the show of toughness, there may also be a touch of madness: the Lady Macbeth persona. In line with this, being tough and hard is against a woman's caring and nurturing female nature, so logically, women who behave in this way must be crazy or mad. Feminists, according to Kanter, may be characterised as iron maidens, and consequently as 'men-haters'. Although this stereotype appears to encapsulate the most explicit power of the four, it is potentially limiting for women leaders. This is because the iron maiden is so independent and resilient that she experiences no problems of her own and thus does not require support from her colleagues. She may also be the butt of cruel jokes from both men and women about her presumed lack of femininity, warmth or sexuality. She may be described as 'just like a man'.



Fig. 2.1 The iron maiden/battle-axe

Seductress

The 'seductress' encapsulates an objectified view of women as primarily serving the sexual needs of powerful men (Fig. 2.2). According to Kanter (1993), the seductress usually forms an alliance with one very



Fig. 2.2 The seductress

senior man in the organisation; she uses her sexual/feminine appeal to gain influence with other senior men and consequently is a source of threat and suspicion to both male and female colleagues alike, who in turn may avoid and marginalise her. She may be seen as drawing upon magical or witch-like charms to flirt with and captivate men who are powerless to resist her. Thus, the outward attractiveness of the seductress is used by colleagues to belittle her inward intelligence and abilities. This is conspicuously a more vulnerable and threatening position for a senior woman than the other role traps because the seductress is considered to be using her sexual attractiveness to succeed in the organisation rather than her expert, professional abilities.

Mother or School Marm

The ‘mother’ or ‘school marm’ encapsulates a traditional position of authority, if usually located either within the domestic and private sphere of the family, or within conventionally feminine occupations such as teaching (Fig. 2.3). According to Kanter, the role of the mother is socio-emotional rather than reliant upon professional expertise; she is expected to provide the service of comforter and sympathiser to colleagues; she is regarded as dull and ‘safe’ in that she is not a sexual threat to men and may be described as ‘warm’, ‘caring’ and ‘approachable’. The ‘school marm’ is also seen by colleagues as sexless, who treats men and women alike as children (Baxter 2010). However, both positions are fundamentally limiting for senior women. The mother in particular is not seen as a powerful role, as she is expected to provide a support service to peers rather than to be respected for her independent, professional and critical abilities. The school marm is seen as equally powerless because she is only capable of treating senior managers like children rather than as mature and intelligent adults.



Fig. 2.3 The mother/school marm

Pet

Arguably, the stereotype of the pet is least likely to be applied to women leaders today because of its implications of girlishness and dependence (Fig. 2.4). According to Kanter (1993: 235), the pet 'is adopted by a male group as a cute, amusing little thing and symbolically taken along on group events as a mascot'. The pet is expected to be teased by her senior male colleagues, but in compensation, she may be described as 'cute', 'funny', 'a laugh' and 'a good sport' (Baxter 2010). She may be seen as innocent and somewhat naïve. This is likely to be a limiting discursive role because the senior woman is encouraged to be pleasing and self-effacing, not capable of acting on her own or being a proper grown-up,

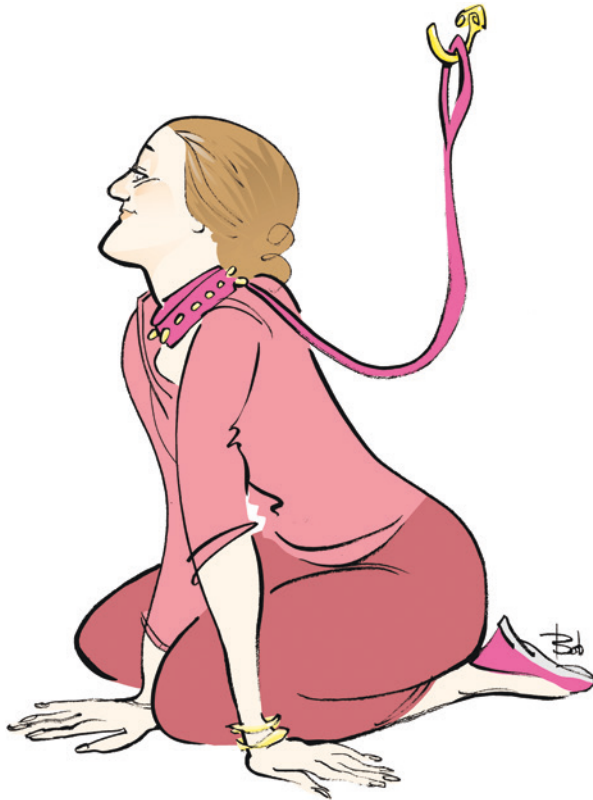


Fig. 2.4 The pet

thus preventing her from displaying real power or competence as a leader. She could be viewed as two-faced, presenting one deferential face to the senior executive and another more assertive face to her own team.

AND ONE OTHER ...

Queen Bee

I propose a fifth, common stereotype from the term ‘queen bee syndrome’, which was first identified by Staines, Jayaratne and Tavis in 1973. Kanter (1993: 230) herself alludes to the syndrome as the ‘popularised women-prejudiced-against-women hypothesis’ that women in authority view or treat more junior colleagues more critically if they are female. She does not identify this as a stereotype but as a contested concept which her own theory displaces. However, as I intend to demonstrate, the stereotype is alluded to in current newspaper representations of women leaders and stands up as a phenomenon in its own right. In some ways, the stereotype comprises aspects of the other four. The queen bee is a woman who has worked hard to achieve a very senior position in her company yet is reluctant to help other women to reach equivalent seniority. Like the seductress, she consolidates her status at senior level by developing ‘fan clubs’ of senior men, who are often in awe of her. One way to preserve her mystique is by apparently combining elements of normatively feminine and masculine appearance and behaviour such as the seductress combined with the iron maiden [see Muhr (2011) on the idea of women as ‘cyborgs’]. Another way that the queen bee preserves her sense of mystique and credibility is by maintaining that her success is due to exceptional abilities rather than to gender (Derks et al. 2016). As we will see, it is common to read about cases of top women in multinational organisations who assert that other women must reach senior levels on their own merits in equal competition with men and that there is no place for positive gender discrimination.

All five stereotypes are readily identifiable in the newspaper media as dominant ways in which senior women are routinely represented, as I will show. The women in the newspaper media whom I will be investigating may not actually take up those stereotypes or role traps ‘in real life’. However, they have come to be constructed and represented in those ways in the news and other media. In my view, these familiar and retrogressive stereotypes persist within the popular imagination across western cultures generally and are invoked by the newspaper media to

make sense of female news subjects who remain unusual, exceptional, threatening or otherwise not possible to categorise. It is the newspaper media's continuing attempt to regulate and control the way high-profile women are perceived that enable journalists to mobilise stereotyped roles that should have long been confined to social history.

I now explain how I have operationalised this perspective of women leader stereotypes as an analytical approach for identifying the ways in which the newspaper media construct women as unsuitable for leadership. My approach involves a combination of basic discourse analysis focusing on the lexico-grammatical elements of print texts (Gravells 2017; Johnstone 2008), with methods drawn from semiotic analysis (Barthes 1977; Bignell 2002).

DESIGN OF STUDY

As I introduce in Chap. 1, the design for the research in this book is a qualitative case study in the main, based on a corpus of 100 feature articles of women leaders from three UK national newspapers: *The Daily Mail*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Guardian*. Women leaders are constructed and represented in a wide variety of ways, but my aim was to locate regularly recurring patterns of representation. I did not set out to find Kanter's leader stereotypes in the corpus, but at an early stage, I observed quite explicit instances of women leaders portrayed as iron maidens [e.g. the current German Chancellor, Angela Merkel] and as seductresses [e.g. the erstwhile Ukrainian Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko (see Baxter 2017)]. Generally, the articles I examined constructed women in far less explicit ways than these examples, but to have ignored the use of the familiar Kanter stereotypes simply because I was sensitised to them, would have been a deliberate act of readerly resistance (Barthes 1970/1990). Upon a third and fourth rereading of the 100 articles, I began to code the articles for the five stereotypes along with any others that occurred and to rate the 'strength' of the stereotype from 'very explicit' to 'not relevant'. These were based on rudimentary criteria that emerged through the observation process, consistent with a qualitative data analysis (QDA) approach (see Denzin and Lincoln 2000). 'Very explicit' indexes the article's reference to person, appearance, speech and actions in highly uniform and/or exaggerated ways; 'explicit' indexes reference to three out of four of these categories; 'quite explicit' indexes reference to one or two of these four categories; and 'traces' indexes occasional references to any of these categories (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Explicitness of women leader stereotypes in three British national newspapers

<i>Number of articles per newspaper (100 in total)</i>	<i>Very explicit</i>	<i>Explicit</i>	<i>Quite explicit</i>	<i>Traces</i>	<i>Not relevant</i>
<i>The Daily Mail</i> (34)	8	6	6	7	7
<i>The Sunday Times</i> (33)	0	2	12	6	13
<i>The Guardian</i> (33)	0	0	0	7	26

The Five Women Leader Stereotypes

Having noted the occurrence of the five stereotypes in all three newspapers to varying degrees, I then decided to calculate which of the five stereotypes were most prevalent in the three newspapers. The instances noted in the table below reflect that one article might construct and represent a leader by drawing upon two or more stereotypes. In the following table, it is the number of instances of each stereotype use that is recorded (Table 2.2):

As this was primarily a qualitative study, the numerical calculations I use above were merely a vehicle to enable me to affirm that there were patterns of interest that were worth further investigating through discourse analysis (DA). Analysis of written, printed, multimodal and media discourse is well established in the fields of applied and sociolinguistics and includes methods such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Corpus-based discourse analysis (CADA), semiotics and multimodal analysis, among others. Certain other methods of DA are designed primarily for the analysis of naturally occurring interactions (such as Conversation Analysis and Interactional Sociolinguistic Analysis), and these methods I deemed inappropriate for analysing discursive constructions in the news media.

Discourse Analytic Tools

I required discourse analytical tools that combined the linguistic and visual analysis of the newspaper constructions that I had recorded above. For the analysis of the *linguistic* text, I modelled my DA approach on that used by Gravells (2017), who conducts a close lexical and grammatical analysis of a corpus of 60 news texts focusing on the news event of the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill. While the incident itself

Table 2.2 Number of instances of the five types of stereotype in three British newspapers

<i>Number of articles per newspaper (100 in total)</i>	<i>Iron Maiden</i>	<i>Seductress</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Pet</i>	<i>Queen Bee</i>	<i>Total instances</i>
<i>Daily Mail</i> (34)	16	12	6	2	20	46
<i>Sunday Times</i> (33)	8	2	2	0	16	28
<i>The Guardian</i> (33)	1	0	2	0	4	7

bears little relationship to my focus upon women leaders, the methods of DA that Gravells (2017) develops to analyse the written representation of news subjects and events mirror mine in that they evolved organically from her process of conducting QDA and were intended to be descriptive in the first instance, rather than ‘critical’. This closely resembled my own quest for an initially non-evaluative, emergent approach to the data. In paraphrase, Gravells (2017) proposes that the researcher attends to the following linguistic features in analysing the representation of news subjects:

- *Names and naming*: the lexis used to name a news subject, usually in the form of proper nouns, nouns and pronouns.
- *Classification*: the lexis used to label the social or professional identity, class or grouping(s) to which a news subject appears to belong. This may emerge in the use of ‘facts’, such as descriptors of age, ethnicity and profession, to establish the social identity or grouping of a news subject. Classification may overlap with the use of naming above.
- *Stance taking*: linguistically, this involves evaluation and appraisal, as used by the journalist towards the news subject and by participants and commentators in the news story. This can take various lexical and grammatical forms but would be found, for instance, in the use of modal verbs, evaluative adjectives and adverbs.
- *Reported speech*: the directly or indirectly reported speech of the news subject herself or that of colleagues and experts, which is also an evaluative technique, and which may affirm, neutralise or contest particular stereotypical representations.
- *Imagery*: the linkage of striking images (in the form of metaphor or simile) from apparently unrelated sources with the news subject

to enhance a particular feature of their character, behaviour, appearance and so on.

Semiotic Analytic Tools

Stereotypes are also constructed visually in newspapers by means of images such as photographs and cartoons. For the analysis of such *visual* images, I used Barthes' (1977) semiotic model of analysis for the purpose. Barthes argues that an image is always polysemic or open to a variety of possible readings. He proposes two levels of analysis of a sign or image: denotative, which involves an obvious, common-sense level of interpretation, and connotative, which draws on readers' multiple cultural associations with that image. Where an image potentially has a wide range of meanings, the text of the news story will 'anchor' the preferred meaning of a photograph while discounting others. The text provides connotations from its linguistic signs that set limits to the interpretation of an image and directs us to construct its 'mythic meaning', or cultural significance, in a certain way. Barthes (1977: 26) suggests that the 'text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination'. The caption beside the text provides a set of linguistic meanings that frames our reading of the picture. The news photograph also functions as proof that the text's message is true. Barthes suggests six procedures through which connotations of the text as a whole are generated. The first three relate to the particular choices about what is in the photograph and indicate how they might be interpreted:

- '*Trick effects*:' the photograph has been altered using special effects in order to produce a particular mythic meaning. For example, two pictures may have been combined; a female news subject may be given wings to signify that she is angelic, and so on. Barthes (1977: 21) proposes that trick effects 'intervene without warning in the plane of denotation'; in other words, the surface, obvious meaning has been editorially manipulated to direct readers to a preferred meaning.
- *Pose*: the posture, gestures and facial expressions of the news subject very often provide connotations that affect our reading of the picture and the mythic significance attached to the person. Many connotations can become conventionalised within a culture. For example, a photograph of a woman lying on a rug facing the camera

in a cat-like pose has developed the mythic meaning of a woman who regards herself as sexually attractive, and perhaps, sexually available.

- *Objects*: the presence of certain denoted objects that already possess culturally understood connotations can enable the transfer of those meanings to the news subject. So a woman in a smart suit holding a mobile phone to her ear while carrying a laptop might convey the idea that she is busy, perhaps too busy, on work-related matters, and that she is a career woman (as opposed to a housewife, a mother, a friend).

Barthes' (1977) next three connotation procedures are not related to the content of the photographs, but rather to the manner in which they have been produced through techniques such as lighting, cropping, exposure and printing. These are noted here but are less likely to figure in an analysis of newspaper photographs in relation to the gender stereotyping of women leaders, where the intention would be to exaggerate the perceived, negative aspects of the subject:

- *Photogenia*: the image is made *more* attractive than it really is. In some cases, an image conveys a 'hyper-real world': that is, one that shows a more heightened, gilded version of reality than our mundane, day-to-day life. For example, news photographs of celebrities on the red carpet are likely to emphasise the beauty, glamour and wealth of the news subjects, making them appear different, exotic and out-of-reach.
- *Aestheticism*: the image is made to seem more artistic and aesthetic than it really is; it may be turned into an imitation of art or an art form itself. While it is rare, news photographs can be composed to resemble portraiture or landscape art.
- *Syntax*: a sequence of images are placed together to provide a sense of relationship, chronology or narrative. For example, a series of pictures of a politician's varying body language at a party conference may be used to convey the subject's contrasting moods during the event.

Having identified the pervasive presence of leadership stereotypes in the corpus, I have selected an article from each of the three newspapers for more detailed analysis using the discourse analytic and

semiotic tools described above. The selection of articles is based on the following criteria: a woman leader about whom each newspaper had written a feature article; from the same three-day time period; and the identification of Kanter-like stereotypes in the construction of the news subject, whether explicit or implicit. Based on these three criteria, I selected the current British Prime Minister, Theresa May, as the news subject on the occasion of her first days in office. I start with an analysis of *The Daily Mail*, followed by *The Sunday Times* and finally *The Guardian*.

ANALYSIS

The Daily Mail

‘Bloodbath as May axes Cameron loyalists: Gove, Morgan, Letwin and Whittingdale are sacked from Cabinet as PM hands plum posts to her allies—but Hunt and Leadsom avoid the chop’; by Tim Sculthorpe, James Tapsfield and Matt Dathan, 14 July 2016. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3689419/What-Gove-Leadsom-New-Prime-Minister-Theresa-prepares-finishing-touches-team.html>.

The article is an online, headline newspaper article that reports on Theresa May’s first day as the new Conservative Prime Minister (PM) in Britain, having succeeded the former PM, David Cameron. Her accession to the PM role had been rapid as a consequence of the result of the 2016 British referendum to leave the European Union (EU), popularly known as Brexit. Online, the article runs to 13 A4 pages and includes 26 separate photographs as well as several ‘tweets’ from new and former government ministers. The primary purpose of the article appears to be a report on the series of dismissals of former Cabinet ministers and appointments of new ministers, a routine and familiar action for a new Prime Minister on her (or his) first day. Indeed, much of the article is taken up with listing the names and details of these dismissed and appointed ministers, which is reflected in the photographs showing each of the politicians concerned. However, as the headline indicates, Theresa May (TM), as the main agent of the changes reported, is characterised quite distinctively as a decisive and even aggressive leader, which is set in contrast to her position as a woman and promoter of women. I would argue that TM is principally characterised as an iron maiden or battle-axe and that there are numerous indications of this construction throughout the article.

The use of naming through the deployment of titles constructs TM in various ways. The first reference in the headline names her gender-neutrally as ‘May’, which is a routine technique within newspaper practices for men and women, especially in headlines where information has to be condensed. The article then reverts to the use of her new job role in classifying her as ‘PM’, again an abbreviated, gender-neutral term. The first two words in the article itself are ‘Theresa May’, but from this point, the full use of her name is discontinued. From here on, she is named ‘Mrs. May’, and this term is used repeatedly throughout the article. In contrast, the previous Prime Minister, David Cameron, is not once called ‘Mr. Cameron’ in this article. While such titles might be deemed a term of old-fashioned respect, early feminist scholars (e.g. Miller and Swift 1981) argue that the titles ‘Mr.’ and ‘Mrs.’ are androcentric (i.e. the male term is taken as default) and therefore, they are not ideologically symmetrical. So, while ‘Mr.’ is the default, stand-alone title, ‘Mrs.’ historically declares that the woman in question is married, the wife and possession of her husband. This connotation is contested by TM’s reported actions in the article, but some evidence of the attempt to position her in a subordinate role is also provided in the second photograph, which depicts the ‘pose of ‘Mr. May’ kissing his wife on the cheek as she gets out of the ministerial car for her first day in the office. The repeated use of the term ‘Mrs. May’ throughout the article suggests that TM is primarily a wife and that her actions in the role of PM may be at odds with her normative gender identity.

In tension with TM’s depiction in a wifely role are the repeated references to her decisive and aggressive behaviour as a leader. From the headline onwards, metaphorical parallels are drawn between a military leader on the battlefield and TM’s actions in dismissing and appointing new ministers. In many ways, this is ‘business as usual’ for newspaper discourse. Bignell (2002: 89) argues that ‘popular’ tabloids like *The Daily Mail* use an orally based, restricted set of vocabulary and sentence structures to connote ‘familiarity, camaraderie and entertainingness’ with its readers. This will include the use of metaphor, slang, idioms and clichés to reduce the distance between the journalist, the news actor and the reader. Thus, use of metaphor in all its forms is conventionalised in many newspapers. Furthermore, Koller (2004: 110) contends that the discourse of both politics and business routinely deploys military metaphors as ‘the technology-driven decline in the importance of physical strength in warfare’ is supplanted by the use of robust linguistic debate in Cabinet, Parliament and the boardroom. However, this conventional use

of military metaphor is distorted by the increasing presence of women in senior positions. Koller (2004: 110) suggests that because military metaphors represent 'hegemonic masculinity', they appear perfectly naturalised when used by and about men, but become highly problematic when they are mapped on to the speech and actions of women.

Within *The Daily Mail* article, there are various repeated ways in which TM is constructed and evaluated as an unnaturally virilised 'battle-axe'. The first word of the article sums up her actions of dismissing and appointing ministers as a 'bloodbath' and frames the way in which the reader receives subsequent information. Colloquial verbs of extreme violence such as 'axes', 'firing' and 'brutally sacking' are used to convey the speed and supposed shock of TM's actions upon the victims, mainly members of the previous government and, by implication, the reader. Even when TM appoints new ministers, this is described in equally violent terms with connotations that refer us to our assumed, prior, cultural knowledge of certain news stories (e.g. of Brexit):

Mrs. May last night made the bombshell appointment of leading Brexiteer Boris Johnson to the Foreign Office

TM's actions are set within the greater narrative of a political 'battle' between the new leader and the previous incumbent, David Cameron and his followers, who are implied to represent the enemy. This is neatly summarised in the headline: 'Bloodbath as May axes Cameron loyalists'. It is also captured in the caption below a photograph of TM arriving at Downing Street, which comments that she has spent 'a brutal morning...sacking a series of colleagues from the Government'. The article as a whole is structured as a narrative dichotomy between the losers and the winners: the first half lists the details of the ministers whom she has unceremoniously 'sacked', and the second half lists those ministers she has just appointed. The use of listing, while clearly 'factual data', also has the connotation of a firing line. Echoed in the 'syntax' of images of each sacked and appointed minister, the listing technique graphically represents the sheer size and scale of TM's decisive actions. Indirectly reported speech is used towards the end of the article to pass judgement on TM's first actions as PM, thus exculpating *The Daily Mail* of any direct criticism:

One MP said it brought a 'brutal end' to the reign of the Notting Hill Tories, who have run the Conservative Party since David Cameron became leader in 2005.

While there is plenty of content in this article that would allow a discerning reader to read the article from a more positive, divergent or pro-feminist perspective (e.g. see the references to the appointment of ‘eight female members of the Cabinet’; also see Chap. 5 for conducting readings against the grain), my overall reading of the article is that Theresa May’s actions have shocked the establishment and are inappropriately non-consensual and unmerciful for a woman. It is impossible to say whether, had the new PM been a man, the same evaluative terminology would have been applied, or whether journalists and commentators would have produced the same assessment of ‘his’ actions. Overall, I would conclude that this article is an explicit (rather than a ‘very explicit’) expression of the ‘iron maiden’ persona as she is not described as such in person; rather, the negative stereotype is implied through the use of language conveying TM’s actions of usurpation and lack of mercy against a metaphorical enemy.

The Sunday Times

‘The Steel Lady Strikes. The ruthlessness with which Theresa May has established her authority has stunned Tory MPs, but could it also have sown the seeds of trouble’; by Tim Shipman; 17 July 2016. <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-steel-lady-strikes-fndhsftm2>.

As a broadsheet aimed at the moderate, ‘middle ground’ of British politics, one might reasonably assume that this Sunday newspaper would take a more balanced stance than the centre-right *The Daily Mail*. However, there are shifting tones and styles in this article from, on the one hand, a fairly demonising stance towards Theresa May (TM), particularly illustrated in the headline and the accompanying cartoon, to a more liberal, humanising and positive stance, on the other.

The article occupies a full quarto-sized page and is positioned on the right-hand side of the centre pages of the newspaper. This commanding position in the layout suggests that it is considered an important feature article. The immediate and overriding message of the article is established by a cartoon by Gerald Scarfe, which occupies the top half of the page. Along the top of the cartoon are the words ‘May’s Coronation 5-page special’, and superimposed upon the bottom are the antithetical statements, ‘Forging a New Caring Tory Party: The Steel Lady Strikes’. The image itself denotes a woman with grey hair, a receding chin and long slim legs wearing kitten-heel, leopard-skin shoes. The shoes are

echoed in the leopard print of her dress, details that are culturally known to index TM. She wears a broad smile and is carrying a very large axe dripping with blood. The information carried in the cartoon is enough for those with cultural knowledge of the objects and pose to recognise that this is Theresa May. The blood is dripping upon a line of much smaller, male followers trooping behind her. These provide enough semi-otic clues to allow culturally-aware readers to recognise new members of TM's Cabinet including the new Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson (dressed as a clown). Two heads lie on the ground, providing the semi-otic clues for us to identify two dismissed ministers, George Osborne and Michael Gove, key players in David Cameron's former government. Before we have even read the article, we are being invited to view TM as a victorious but bloodthirsty leader. The leopard-skin dress and shoes connote TM's leopard-like qualities; like a large cat, she has attacked her prey sneakily and 'ruthlessly' and then left them for dead. The headline 'the steel lady strikes' sums up the intended characterisation of this article: TM is viewed as both a battle-axe and iron maiden. Indeed, there is the suggestion in the word 'steel' that she is even tougher than the first British woman Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who was famously known as 'the iron lady'. This association is indeed affirmed in the article itself which comments at one point:

[TM] is commendably ruthless. The right will see her as another Maggie.

In comparison with the cartoon and headline, the article is relatively tame (if the reader will excuse the pun!). The first third of the article positions TM's first days in power in a moderate and balanced way, attempting to visualise this experience from TM's own perspective and reporting her consideration for the colleagues who supported her and their corresponding admiration for her. However, from that point on, there is a sudden shift in tone and style with the words:

Yet with direction there was also steel.

Use of imagery runs through the article, with repeated analogies to weapons, the violence of warfare ('the two had clashed repeatedly') and to animal savagery ('May's ruthlessness may come back to bite her'). The leopard image resounds in superlative grammatical constructions such as:

This weekend, many of [the dismissed ministers] are licking their wounds after she carried out the most ruthless Cabinet cull in living memory.

How do we know that TM is being demonised in this way because she is a woman rather than simply a strong leader? The mythic meaning that when women leaders take decisive actions such as dismissing colleagues, this action is perceived as more ruthless and cruel than if carried out by the corresponding man, may be deeply embedded in our cultural psyche (Eagly and Heilman 2016). However, as dominant discourses of sex discrimination in western cultures now make it increasingly less acceptable for journalists to criticise women directly in the news media, stylistic tropes are deployed in their place. In the use of the following imagery, it is hard to see that journalism has become much more implicit:

May was even more brutal than Harold Macmillan's 'night of the long knives'. He sacked seven of his Cabinet ministers on July 13 1962, 54 years to this day. May's 'day of the long stilettos' distanced her socially from what has gone before.

This sexualising of May's action by means of comparison with a corresponding male Prime Minister and the metaphorical allusion to glamorous footwear (a stiletto was originally a short dagger with a tapering blade) carries resonances of the mythological cruelty of the strong woman.

Finally, while the demonising stereotype of the battle-axe/iron maiden is the more prevalent in this article, there are hints of TM's dual characterisation as a queen bee. As I described above, the queen bee phenomenon is where successful, senior women fail to encourage and promote more junior women, seeing them as a threat to their own status. Such a stereotype was largely missing from *The Daily Mail* article, and indeed, the opposite impression was given in the stress upon detailing the line-up of women whom TM had appointed to Cabinet positions. However, in *The Sunday Times* article, a 'women beware women' discourse (Sunderland 2004) is evoked in the indirectly reported speech of an unidentified source named 'some':

Some see in the removal of [Nicky] Morgan, the former education secretary, and the loss of Anna Soubrey, the anti-Brexit business minister, the

demise of strong-minded female politicians who might have been more likely to challenge [TM].

Bignell (2002) has suggested that by using vague terms such as ‘some’, this allows journalists to hide their view behind an apparent source. The use of agentless, nominalised sentence structures allows the journalist to imply that TM is to blame for the ‘removal’ of two senior women without accusing her directly. This implication that successful women try to impede the career progress of other successful women is then reinforced in another unattributed, reported comment:

Another ousted minister said: ‘There’s a feature in some women where they will not promote other strong women.’

Owing to the widespread news practice that unattributed sources are allowable, we will never know whether this evaluative statement was made by a male or a female minister, or indeed, whether the comment was made at all. Overall, then, I suggest that this article constructs Theresa May explicitly according to two familiar leadership stereotypes, the iron maiden and the queen bee, both of which serve to undermine and criticise her. While we are given the means to read parts of this article ‘against the grain’ (see Chap. 5 for techniques), the preferred reading we are invited to take up is to view TM as a savage leader using excessive ruthlessness to achieve her goals.

The Guardian

‘Theresa May’s first pledge as PM was for a ‘one-nation Britain’. Can she deliver?’ By Toby Helm, Saturday 16 July 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/16/theresa-may-one-nation-britain-prime-minister>.

Aimed at a professional, middle-class readership and reputed to be centre-left politically (The Press Gazette 2016), it might be expected that this *The Guardian* article describing Theresa May’s (TM) first moments as Prime Minister would not be wholly sympathetic to her political stance but would be more positive (or at least neutral) towards her position as a Conservative Party woman leader. Accessed online, the article does indeed adopt a different way of positioning May from the

other two newspapers, but not as anticipated. TM is located primarily as a character within a mythical tale about ‘a total revolution’ in which the old ruler (David Cameron) is decisively deposed by the new ‘pretender’ (Theresa May). She is also positioned as one aspect of the journalist’s greater argument about delivering the government’s required promise for a ‘one-nation Britain’ as well as Brexit: the British referendum decision to leave the European Union. This positioning is indicated in the headline above, which asks a rhetorical question for the rest of the article to answer. Given these two discursive structures—a story and an argument—TM becomes a character in the *dramatis personae* of a Shakespearean-style ‘history’ and one component of a complex argument. While there are discernible traces of the iron maiden and queen bee stereotypes in this article, these are deployed to serve the greater objectives of the mythical tale and the journalist’s thesis.

In terms of TM’s narrative role, the genre of political tale is established in the first line of the article:

As Theresa May was driven into Downing Street from Buckingham Palace at 6 pm on Wednesday, she arrived to the sound of a divided country.

In Labov’s terms (1972), we get the initial orientation (who, what, where, when, why) in this first line, as well as the positioning of TM as the lead character in the tale. The photograph accompanying this article anchors TM as the leading character. It shows her entering 10 Downing Street for the first time as the new PM, with her husband walking behind her in the pose of a subordinate. Photogenia is used here as a form of hyper-reality to enhance the reader’s engagement with the experience. The photograph is taken *inside* Downing Street, so that we are given a privileged sense of *welcoming* TM into this special home. All this is likely to encourage sympathy with TM as a leader rather than to alienate us from her.

The newspaper text then positions the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, as the ‘departing hero’, the anti-hero and possibly as the victim of the piece, but the report implies that the reader sees through the eyes of TM as the main protagonist:

[Cameron’s] successor, delivering her first words as Prime Minister from outside her house, rose to the moment...the country needed reassurance.

Part of the speech TM delivers is then reported in respectful terms, and a further part is quoted verbatim. There are explicit references to an iron maiden characterisation in the descriptions of TM as rather too purposeful and decisive. In line with the previous articles above, war imagery is deployed throughout to describe how TM dispatches former members of the Cabinet:

Osborne's was the first summons in a 24-hour blitzkrieg which laid waste to the old order. The Cameroons were blown away...

The use of the agentless passive verb form here indexes a remote form of leadership; TM is made to appear detached from the act of dismissal itself. This is followed by the use of the German word 'blitzkrieg', referencing the German bombing of British cities during the Second World War, which serves to demonise TM's actions as a leader. Throughout, the news report is expressed in military imagery as a dramatic struggle over power. The 'complicating action' (Labov 1972) or core event within the narrative is the 'total revolution' lead by a 'politician at the height of her power'. Despite TM's 'soothing words and pledges', her succession will produce 'hostages of fortune' who will eventually 'not be shy of seeking revenge':

Brexit was the reason May realised her ambition to become Prime Minister. It destroyed Cameron's premiership and wrecked his legacy creating a void that no Brexiteer was on hand to fill in the referendum's chaotic aftermath.

There is repeated use of violent imagery here ('destroyed'; 'wrecked'; 'chaotic aftermath') conveying the power and destruction of TM's leadership actions. Connotatively, the juxtaposing of the sentence about TM's 'ambition' next to a sentence describing her rival's destruction does invite the calling up of intertextual references of other, mythically ambitious women—such as Lady Macbeth's 'vaulting ambition' for her husband in Shakespeare's tragedy, and its dire consequences for the principal characters. There are hints here and throughout the storytelling that TM's actions are so excessive that they may not end well.

Thus, the narrative structure not only helps to tell a great 'war story' about contemporary politics, but it also serves to reinforce the journalist's argument. The article is also structured according to Hegelian dialectics: that is, a pattern of thesis—antithesis—synthesis, in which the question 'can she deliver?' is put to the test. The argument is embellished

throughout with reference to TM's iron maiden persona. The 'thesis' is that the new Prime Minister has made a powerful start ('[a]fter political turmoil, a new Prime Minister mixed reassurance with steely resolve'); the antithesis is that her actions have caused mayhem and destruction which cannot be without serious consequences ('having stamped her mark with such a spectacular demonstration of Prime Ministerial power, her real test must begin'); and the synthesis is left open with the rhetorical question in the headline not finally answered:

If, whenever she leaves Downing Street...her reputation in her own party might even surpass that of the first female Prime Minister to reach No.10. However if she fails, it is likely to have been Europe that will have done for yet another Tory MP.

There is hence an inconclusive synthesis or 'coda' (Labov 1972) about how TM should be positioned and evaluated. Mixed messages about how we are expected to read TM's accession are given throughout and not clarified in its conclusion. In future, either she may be revered and celebrated as Britain's second-only, female Prime Minister or she may be dismissed and devalued as 'yet another Tory MP'. Given that the article finishes on the second half of the antithetical structure, we are positioned to consider that the second, more doom-laden of the two predictions is more likely.

In conclusion, there are explicit references to the iron maiden stereotype once again in this article through the use of violent, military imagery, but these are subordinated to the greater purpose of *The Guardian* article: that is, to tell a compelling political tale of modern times and to deliver a persuasive argument in which TM's potential abilities as a leader are assessed, questioned but certainly not dismissed.

SUMMING UP

In these three articles, there is a reasonable body of evidence to suggest that the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, is constructed according to the stereotype of iron maiden and battle-axe, and to a lesser extent as a queen bee. There are slight hints of other stereotypes in her construction, such as associations with the seductress, found in *The Sunday Times*' use of the leopard to represent TM as feline: charming, sexy yet cruel. There is also a sense that TM is being characterised in direct opposition to the 'mother' stereotype in its use of the headline: 'Forging a

new caring society: the steel lady strikes'. There is no appearance of the 'pet' stereotype, which is hardly surprising given that TM is constructed as in charge, beholden to nobody, and with the executive power to hire and fire.

The perspective of women leader stereotypes offers various insights into the ways in which women in power are constructed in newspaper articles crossing the political spectrum. Overall, the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, is not necessarily depicted as *unsuitable* for leadership; rather, she is constructed as a *monstrous* version of what a leader is expected to be. In all three articles, the use of the iron maiden caricature helps to convey the extreme sense of shock that the news media wants the reader to feel in response to TM's decisive leadership actions on her first day. Second, the use of violent and warlike imagery conveys the sense of threat that readers are asked to experience in response to leadership actions that transgress gender norms. TM's decisive actions would be surprising and unexpected if they were conducted by a new, male Prime Minister, but they are constructed as excessive, unnatural and frightening when conducted by a woman Prime Minister. The use of stereotype is the news media's way of controlling a phenomenon that is unfamiliar, unpredictable and outside of normative practices. The more stereotyped the construction, the more univocal and didactic the viewpoint that newspaper texts wish to project. Yet alongside these reductive and hostile constructions of women leaders, there are hints of alternative and contesting voices. *The Daily Mail* balances its iron maiden caricature with reference to the women TM is planning to promote; *The Sunday Times* expresses veiled admiration of TM's decisiveness alongside its excoriation of her 'ruthlessness'; and *The Guardian* raises the possibility that TM will make an outstanding leader. In each case, there is subtextual evidence for reading the dominant message 'against the grain' in order to release more positive readings of the leader, an approach I will examine in detail in Chaps. 4 and 5.

In the next chapter, I explore the second critical perspective from which I analyse the newspaper constructions of women leaders—the feminist agenda spectrum.

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