

PREFACE

Despite their resounding achievements in so many professional spheres, women leaders face gender discrimination on a daily basis through the ways in which they are represented or ‘discursively constructed’ in British national newspapers. At times, women are demonised through explicit gender stereotyping, and at other times, the discrimination is barely noticeable, but implied through subtle innuendo, humour, hinted assumptions and even patronising forms of praise. In many cases, the use of gender stereotyping sends out the message to readers that women are unsuitable for leadership.

This book has four aims. The first is to explore the extent to which constructions of women leaders from different professions are (or are not) gendered in articles from three national UK newspapers, printed and online, that cross the political spectrum—*The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail*. As part of this aim, I consider whether or not women leaders are generally deemed to be suitable for leadership. As these newspapers are ones to which I have regular access, they do not represent the readership and politics of *all* British newspapers, but they do offer a range in terms of their political orientation, readership, editorial policies and semiotic format (The Paperboy 2017). The second aim is to analyse constructions of women leaders in articles across the feminist agenda spectrum, that is, according to their implied orientation towards the feminist movement. For example, there are articles that are hostile to women and/or anti-feminist, those that are apparently gender-neutral and those that are female friendly and/or pro-feminist.

The purpose behind this analysis is to argue that certain types of text openly demonise women leaders, whereas others *conceal* or *repackage* gendered assumptions in either gender-neutral or modernist feminist ways. The third aim of this book is to explore the use of three distinct critical perspectives in order to analyse and evaluate their respective, discrete and overlapping contributions to analysing potentially gendered newspaper texts. The final aim is to consider the future potential of the third critical perspective that offers a poststructuralist, ‘reflexive’ approach to analysing newspaper texts. The approach builds on principles of feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA), which were originally designed to analyse spoken interactions (Baxter 2003). The reflexive approach combines familiar deconstructionist strategies (e.g. Barthes 1973; Derrida 1967) that encourage readers to read a text ‘against the grain’, with supplementary ‘reconstructive’ strategies that help readers to reassemble the text to produce more positive and diverse insights. Overall, the book will develop a clear, step-by-step methodology for discourse analysts to explore how and why newspapers portray women leaders in the ways they do, and to enable students of leadership, language and gender, and media studies to re-read such articles with more agency and empowerment.

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Women Leaders and Gender Stereotyping in the UK
Press

A Poststructuralist Approach

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2018, XV, 162 p. 5 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-64327-4