

How do UK newspapers engage in Gendered Mediation when covering female political leaders in 2024?

An Analysis of Gendered Mediation in UK Newspaper Coverage of Kemi Badenoch and Angela Rayner During Their First Three Weeks in Leadership.

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Abstract

Gendered Mediation- a journalistic practice that highlights real and perceived gender differences irrespective of their context and relevance- continues to shape how women in leadership are portrayed in the media. Rather than offering a neutral political analysis, such coverage constructs women as deviations from masculine norms, reinforcing the perception that political leadership is inherently male (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996; Gidengi and Everitt, 1999). In 2024, Kemi Badenoch and Angela Rayner both assumed prominent leadership roles in the UK, offering a timely case study of examining these dynamics. Building on the foundational work of Williams (2021), this study employs a mixed-methods approach. Content Analysis was conducted on 100 newspaper articles to identify the frequency and distribution of four gender tropes - gender, femininity, appearance and personal life- derived from existing research. The Content Analysis revealed that Gendered Mediation persists in contemporary UK newspaper coverage, with the volume of the tropes' presence often depending on the political orientation of the newspaper, suggesting that Gendered Mediation can be utilised as a strategic tool to undermine or humanise a leader. A Thematic Analysis of ten selected articles identified five deeper narratives, including the “Outsider” narrative, the “Motherhood Strategy,” “Macho metaphors”, and celebritised beauty ideals. These findings suggested that whilst the language of media coverage may appear less gendered in 2024 than in previous studies, the underlying structures continue to produce hierarchies. The study concludes that in 2024, UK newspapers engage in Gendered Mediation by consistently portraying female politicians as political outsiders, drawing attention to their gender, femininity, appearance, and personal lives, and shaping their public image through ideologically driven narratives that either trivialise or humanise them based on party alignment.

Key words: Gendered Mediation, UK politics, female politicians, media framing, Content Analysis, Thematic Analysis, Angela Rayner, Kemi Badenoch, Ideology

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1. Introduction

In July 2016, amidst the political turmoil that followed the European Union referendum, Theresa May made history as the United Kingdom's (UK) second female Prime Minister. However, rather than directing their attention towards her stance on Brexit, the media discourse swerved, straight down to her feet. Headlines were dominated, not with political policy, but with fascination over her "red kitten heels", and filtered May's leadership through personalisation and appearance (Williams, 2021). This is a classic example of Gendered Mediation (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996), a journalistic process by which women in politics are trivialised or evaluated on traits irrelevant to their political competency or agenda. This dissertation builds on Williams's (2021) analysis of May's portrayal to examine how such Gendered Mediation persists in 2024. It has specifically investigated how mainstream UK newspapers represented two contemporary female politicians, Kemi Badenoch and Angela Rayner, during their first three weeks of leadership in 2024. A supplementary question further considers how Gendered Mediation may differ depending on the political orientation of the newspaper.

The political environment in the UK has changed in recent years. After women were initially granted the right to serve as MPS in 1918, the number increased gradually until it accelerated in 1997 with the election of 120 women. Since then, the proportion of female MPS has kept rising, and the 2024 election marked a milestone in British politics as 40% of MPS and 50% of Cabinet members were female (Buchanan et al., 2025). However, despite the evident progression in female representation in UK politics, scholars argue that the pathway to equality for female politicians remains obstructed by a range of structural barriers. Scholars say that one of the most significant obstacles is the inherently masculine framework of political systems, as observed by Sullivan

(2023, p. 884), politics is a “field created by men for men”. This reinforces the historic public/private divide, where men are associated with roles in publicity and women are confined to private spaces. This perception continues to influence perceptions of political authority, reinforcing male hegemony and marginalising female politicians.

Therefore, the interaction between politics, the media, and female representation is extremely important in the current political environment. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception which makes it influential to how political figures are portrayed to the public (Langer, 2007; Ross, 2002). Gendered Mediation, therefore, poses a threat to substantive equality by framing female politicians as an extension of traits such as emotion, appearance, and personal life, rather than their political competency and leadership capacity (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996; Williams, 2021). Recent studies have found that while Gendered Mediation has evolved to become more subtle in its framing techniques, it nonetheless persists in modern political coverage and continues to shape the portrayal of female politicians (Trimble, 2017; Thomas et al., 2021; Williams, 2021).

In 2024, Angela Rayner was appointed as Labour’s Deputy Prime Minister, and Kemi Badenoch became the leader of the Conservative Party. Their parallel ascent to power provides an important opportunity to examine how Gendered Mediation functions in 2024 and across party lines. Existing research has thoroughly examined the media portrayal of previous UK political leaders such as Theresa May and Margaret Thatcher (Williams, 2021; Worthy et al., 2024); fewer studies have focused on more contemporary politicians or how Gendered Mediation differs across ideology. Building on studies by Trimble et al (2013) and Thomas et al. (2021), who argue that Gendered Mediation has evolved from being overtly stereotypical and sexist to becoming more coded and strategic, this study examines whether ideological bias influences the application of

these gendered narratives and the primary ways that Gendered Mediation appears in news coverage in 2024.

To execute this research, a mixed-methods research design was employed. First, a quantitative Content Analysis of 100 articles from five UK newspapers (The Guardian, The Sun, The Sunday Times, Metro and Daily Mail) was conducted to examine the presence of four gendered tropes - gender, femininity, appearance and personal life (Williams, 2021, Langer, 2007). Second, a qualitative Thematic Analysis was applied to a smaller sample of 10 articles, to explore deeper patterns of Gendered Mediation which revealed the presence of themes such as “Feminine Outsider” (Shames, 2003), “Motherhood Strategy” (Lemish & Tidhar, 2000), “Hysteria Diagnosis” (Neville-Shepard & Nolan, 2019), “Macho Metaphors” (Blankenship & Kang, 1991) and the celebritised beauty ideals.

Although it appears that UK media portrayals of female politicians have improved, since William’s (2021) study of May, with less blatantly stereotypical framing, the results suggest that Gendered Mediation is still prevalent and continues to influence UK news in 2024 through more subdued and ideological means. Female Politicians are still subject to significant obstacles within the media, which tend to frame them as an anomaly in a male-dominated political sphere. Moreover, the extent and style of mediation are often dependent on the political orientation of the publication, which indicates that Gendered Mediation is not an unconscious bias but is used as a strategic tool of political framing. This supports Ross’s assertion that Gendered Mediation is not accidental, but a deliberate technique employed to reinforce narratives about women’s lack of authenticity in leadership roles (Ross, 2008)

2. Literature Review

The relationship between media and gender has been extensively studied, with a focus on how female politicians are portrayed in the press. This literature review aims to show existing research on how female politicians are portrayed in UK newspapers. Drawing on common themes within existing research, the literature review is organised into five sections: 1. Gendered Mediation. 1. A. Gendered Mediation in Newspapers 1. B. The Changing Nature of Gendered Mediation 1. C Ideologies' Effects of Gendered Mediation 2. Personalisation of Female Politicians 3. The Double Bind and Female Politicians 4. Intersectionality and Media Representation, and 5. Portrayals of female politicians in 2024. Together, these sections provide a conceptual framework and critical context that underpins the research questions explored in this study.

2. 1. Gendered Mediation

A new phase in the study of women, politics, and the media occurred in the late 20th century, as scholars began to move beyond concerns about the quantity of women's representation in the media and towards a focus on the quality of framing of that coverage. Early critiques such as Tuchman's (1978) concept of "symbolic annihilation" of women in media highlighted their marginalisation, but as women's prominence in the media grew, the focus changed from the volume of coverage to the nature of that coverage. Gendered Mediation is a factor that limits female politicians' credibility and authority. The phrase "Gendered Mediation" was employed by Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross (1996) in their seminal study of British female MPS. They showed that the mediation of politics is highly gendered and reinforces men as the norm and

women as novelties, rather than being neutral or objective as in the traditional upholding of "objective journalism" (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996, p. 112). Ross (2009) has since added to her original research and found that the mainstream news media produce stereotypical content by using the 'real' world (pp. 90–91), making them a form of restriction for female politicians, adhering to Gendered Mediation.

Further research has been conducted, building on Ross's concept of "Gendered Mediation." For instance, a study was carried out in 1999 on the news coverage of the 1993 Canadian Leaders' Debate (Gidengil and Everitt). The press was found to represent women who seemed to adopt a more masculine style as being more aggressive than their male counterparts, and even women who had a less confrontational style were perceived as hostile. According to Gidengil and Everitt, the news media disproportionately highlighted actions that went against gender-based preconceptions. Thus, female leaders seemed trivialised and less suitable for leadership roles than men.

A. Gendered Mediation in Newspapers

Much of the literature has emphasised the role of newspapers in reinforcing Gendered Mediation, particularly through their journalistic norms, which are embedded in gender hegemony. At the heart of the Gendered Mediation argument is the assumption that news is a "masculine narrative" (Rakow and Kranich, 1991, p8). Thus, Van Zoonen (1994) contends that it is critical to consider the gendered structure of news production. Her analysis of men's dominance in politics and journalism revealed that men have dominated the news media, supporting what Sreberny Mohammadi and Ross (1996, p114) referred to as the "news industry's masculism standards," leading to Gendered Mediation in the mainstream news media.

As several studies have demonstrated (Blankenship, 1976), news portrayals of political campaigns that use images of sports and combat are one way journalism has contributed to creating this "masculine narrative.". Blankenship and Kang (1991) found that even in the 1984 US vice presidential debate, where a woman was present, the war and sport narrative continued and did not shift the metaphors being used. Whilst it was unsurprising metaphors were being used, Ellen Goodman noted "When media coverage is dominated by such 'macho metaphors', women politicians may be subtly disadvantaged. The not-too subliminal message is that politics is just another game men play" (Goodman, 1984, cited in Blankenship and Kang, 1991). This further excludes female politicians from the political sphere because the overly stereotypically masculine picture conveys the idea that women do not belong in politics because they lack the skills needed to participate. This implies that news media keep the masculine narrative alive and make it difficult for women to be seen as powerful leaders.

B. The Changing Nature of Gendered Mediation

With more women working in journalism, the news landscape has shifted in recent years, affecting the material created and challenging Gendered Mediation (Chambers, Steiner, and Fleming, 2004). The effects have, in some cases, been positive, with some media outlets becoming more mindful of gendered biases, but others have become more vigilant in scrutinising powerful women.

Recent findings suggest that the concept of Gendered Mediation has evolved since earlier case studies, such as the 1993 Canadian Leaders' Debate (Trimble, 2017; Thomas et al., 2021). Trimble (2017, p. 212), in her seminal study of female prime ministers, noted that although gendered news coverage continues to assess women as ineffective and inauthentic, it also shows signs of challenging traditional gender roles. Increased visibility of female leaders, she argues, can offer

moments of optimism by celebrating female leadership and challenging stereotypes. Nevertheless, she presents extensive evidence that women are still viewed through the “lens of their gendered identity,” referencing the media treatment of Hillary Clinton during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.

Quantitative and qualitative approaches have further demonstrated how gendered narratives persist globally. Quantitative studies show women are still significantly underrepresented in news media—even in countries like Scandinavia where gender parity is actively promoted (Gill, 2007). Qualitative research shows that newspaper articles continue to highlight women’s physical appearance over political capability (Ross, 2009), reinforcing stereotypes that stretch across professions, from sportswomen to politicians (Baxter, 2018).

Baxter (2018) also notes that many British national newspapers continue to portray female politicians in stereotypical ways, despite advancements made by women in political leadership. This finding aligns with Thomas et al. (2021), who found that although overt questions about marriage and family life have declined, this absence is sometimes interpreted as a lack of compassion, thus subtly undermining credibility. This indicates that while Gendered Mediation has shifted in form, it continues to function as a barrier through evolving societal interpretations.

This persistence is further illustrated in Williams’ (2021) longitudinal study, which examined how eight major UK newspapers portrayed Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May. Using Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, Williams found that, defying her expectations, coverage of May was more focused on gender than Thatcher’s. This suggests that despite the passage of time and changes in media discourse, women continue to be represented as outsiders in the political sphere, with their gender being intertwined with their political identity.

Modern Gendered Mediation, therefore, often operates through more subtly coded narratives. While coverage may appear neutral on the surface, it still draws on gendered assumptions. One such example is the “first woman frame” (Murray, 2009), in which women are celebrated primarily for symbolically breaking barriers rather than for their political competence (Norris, 1997). Harmer et al. (2017) found that while it is important to recognise such milestones, this framing can ultimately reinforce the perception that women are “extraordinary” (Ross and Byerly, 2008)—unnatural figures in a political system still defined by masculine norms. As such, this subtler form of Gendered Mediation maintains traditional hierarchies beneath an illusion of progress, continuing to cast women as outsiders in political leadership.

C. Ideologies' Effects on Gendered Mediation

There is evidence that more right-wing papers have higher levels of Gendered Mediation. For example, Shor (2018) investigated whether the political slant of a US newspaper influenced the portrayal of women and discovered that conservative state newspapers presented women in a less favourable light. Studies on female politicians have supported this claim. Williams (2021) discovered that the right-wing, conservative press paid greater attention to May's gender and used more stereotyping than the liberal, left-leaning press, implying that right-wing papers have a greater tendency to emphasise gender.

Williams (2021) identifies a gap in the study of Gendered Mediation. In her conclusion, she points to a question for future researchers on whether the political affiliation of the leader affects the media portrayal of a female politician. For instance, would a predominantly conservative paper cover a Labour leader using an increased rate of Gendered Mediation than they would a

conservative leader? She argues that this is a factor that has been overlooked in the analysis of female political leaders, and therefore a relevant point of research.

2.2. Personalisation and Celebrity Politicians

To analyse female politicians and political leaders, researchers have recently turned to Gendered Mediation and personalisation theory (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996). It can be argued that personalisation is led by Gendered Mediation of political reportage (Trimble et al, 2013). Personalisation refers to the rise of candidate-centred politics, which has had an impact since at least the 1960s, primarily in Western Democracies (Mughan, 2000). In the book, *The Personalisation of Politics in the UK* (2007) Langer argues that British politics has increasingly shifted focus from parties and policies to individual leaders and examines how this trend shapes political communication and reflects broader societal changes (Langer, 2007). Personalisation gave rise to the concept of “Celebrity Politician” (Street, 2004), referring to political figures who gain public appeal through their personality traits and media presence, blurring the lines between entertainment and political news.

There are several issues relating to the rise of personalisation and “celebrity politicians” in the 21st century and their impact. Firstly, they shift political discussion away from political content and focus on the individual (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2011). This can diminish the public view and lead to the emergence of populist leaders who prioritise personal appeal rather than policies (Mazzoleni, 2009). Moreover, they can create a divide between men and women. This is illustrated by evidence from Trimble et al. (2013), whose study of Gendered Mediation in newspaper coverage of Canadian leaders over time found that more scrutiny was directed toward the personal attributes

of female candidates. This directly relates to Jamieson's theory of the Double Bind (Jamieson, 1995), which is explored in the following section. While examining a man's private persona can be valued by the public as simply their "softer side" (Langer, 2007, p. 175) and thus gain public support, the same expression of emotion from women is often labeled as a "weakness" or "lack of control" (Langer, 2007, p. 175). Personalisation plays a role in the opportunity for the media to enforce stereotypes onto female politicians. Compared to their male counterparts, female candidates in Canada received more news attention that concentrated on their personal lives and physical attractiveness (Trimble et al., 2013). Like this, Falk's (2010) study looked at press bias against female presidential candidates in the United States between 1872 and 2008 and discovered that they were portrayed as unviable, with a focus on their status, gender, and looks. This suggests that women are disproportionately targeted by personalisation, which views them as feminine symbols rather than political figures. Nevertheless, there was a dearth of studies on media, personalisation, and female politicians from the same nation, making this a relevant point of research.

Furthermore, the rise of "Celebrity politicians" poses an issue for women in leadership roles. Whilst men can utilise the notion to receive more public support, van Zoonen (2006) argues that celebrity coverage of female politicians poses gender specific risks because it "confines female politicians to notions of femininity which are not easily transposed to the political field" (van Zoonen, 2006, P. 291). Whilst on in a sense, the rise of "Celebrity Politicians" and personalisation has given women more visibility, it has also activated common stereotypes, and put more emphasis on their role in the private sphere, furthering Gendered Mediation (Campus and Giammaria, 2014).

2.3. The Double Bind and Female Politicians

Gender mediation is closely linked to the concept of the “Double Bind” (Kanter, 1993). This theory highlights the conflicting expectations placed on women in traditionally masculine roles. This is especially true for women in political leadership positions. While they are expected to exhibit conventional masculine traits like power and assertiveness, they are also expected to exhibit feminine traits like nurturing and care (Jamieson, 1995). However, if this Double Bind is not successfully balanced, it can undermine a woman’s public image (Eagly, 1995). The concept of the Double Bind originates from Jamieson, who lays out five different binds relating to women in leadership in her book, *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership*. These consist of: “1. Womb/ Brain, 2. Silence/ Shame, 3. Sameness/ Difference, 4. Femininity/ Competence, and 5. Ageing/ Visibility” (Jamieson, 1995, Contents).

According to early research, female politicians were more frequently covered for their attractiveness, family, and personal lives compared with men, with a greater emphasis on their personalities (Byström, Robertson, and Banwart, 2001). However, more modern literature has found an emergence of the Double Bind, with women being encouraged to create a narrative and public image that convinces the public that they can make decisions just as clearly and independently as any man, but with greater compassion and reliability (Williams, 2021). This causes a dilemma for female leaders and how they are portrayed in the media. If they present themselves as strong and assertive leaders, they are at risk of the media making them seem cold and dislikable (Connor and Fiske, 2018). If they portray themselves traditionally femininely, they violate the norms of leadership, making them appear weak and with a low level of competence (Bauer, 2017).

Contributing to Jamieson's theory, Fox (2010) conducted research analysing the media portrayal of three female politicians in the 2008 United States presidential race according to the Double Bind theory, and found that women fell into the category of "too hard" or "too soft", reinforcing the double bind. She also observed that family life was still focused heavily upon, aligning with earlier research. Adding to Fox's work, McKay (2018) used the Double Binds as a framework to study two female political leaders, Theresa May (UK) and Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand), advancing the claim that Gendered Mediation (Gidengil and Everitt, 2003) conveys significant messages about their democratic inclusion. She concluded that even if there are clear indications of change when women effectively negotiate gender experiences, media coverage still tends to reinforce Double Binds and put women against the prevailing male political narrative. Both examples adhere to the work of Jamieson, who refers to the concept that women "are judged by a masculine standard and by that standard, they lose, whether they claim difference or similarity" (Jamieson, 1995, p. 18).

An instance of a female politician who successfully was able to "walk the line of the Double Bind by communicating they are masculine enough to lead without violating feminine gender role expectations (Winfrey & Schoebelen, 2019, p.121) was Margaret Thatcher. To avoid being portrayed as "unwomanly and unnatural" (Webster, 1990, p. 88), Thatcher blended a stylish, feminine, and well-groomed professional appearance with a depiction of a respectable and traditional personal life (Williams, 2021).

However, it may be argued that it is now harder to "walk the line of the Double Bind" because of the proliferation of mass media in Western society since Thatcher (Winfrey & Schoebelen, 2019).

Female politicians are now subject to greater scrutiny across various media outlets. Many scholars have drawn similarities between Thatcher and Theresa May and their leadership skills. While Thatcher was considered a transformative leader, May's leadership failed. Both prime ministers adopted an "outsider" and "heroic" (Richards-Grey et al., 2023, p. 1) narrative to appeal to the voters. May tried to convey her femininity by balancing her image with a more tender family side, following Thatcher's example. However, in response, she was labelled the "May Bot" by *The Guardian* in interviews (Crace, 2016). Williams contends that this was not totally May's fault, and despite her efforts to walk the Double Bind, this endeavour was hampered by the media. Due to the media's increased personalisation and intrusion, the emphasis was more on her looks, gender, and femininity than it was under Thatcher (Williams, 2021).

2.4. Intersectionality and Media Representation

Intersectionality refers to the concept that different social stratification categories, such as gender, race, sexuality and class, interact with one another, influencing how women are portrayed in the media. Scholars have pointed out that not all women are treated the same, and different factors play into how they are portrayed in the media (Crenshaw, 1991). Whilst not the primary point of research of the study, the concept suggests that female politicians' portrayals in the media are not primarily based on their gender, and other factors go into it, and marginalised women face further layers of scrutiny and prejudice in the media.

Banks conducted a study in 2014 that found that whilst white politicians do face scrutiny in the media relating to their gender, women of ethnic minorities face a broader range of media scrutiny and are often stereotyped (Banks, 2014). Sobande (2019) found that Black women in the British media are portrayed through stereotypes that ignore their identities and rather characterise them as

overly aggressive or assertive. This can be further demonstrated by Duerst-Lahti and Kelly (1995), whose study found that black, female politicians were more likely to be depicted in the media as “angry” or “uncontrollable”, adhering to racist stereotypes.

The negative media portrayal of working-class women further exacerbates how intersectionality can amplify Gendered Mediation. Skeggs (2004) investigated the impact of class on the Gendered Mediation of female politicians and found that working-class women are frequently perceived as being less sophisticated or legitimate, according to the study, which perpetuates class-based hierarchies.

2.5. Portrayal of UK Female Politicians in 2024

Limited research has been conducted on the portrayal of UK female politicians in 2024, making it a relevant point of research. The 2024 UK election saw a record number of female MPS elected, 263, representing 40 per cent of all MPS, adding to a continued increase of female MPS over the last two decades (Allen, 2024). However, despite there being an increase in representation of female politicians in the UK, a study at Loughborough University found that the election coverage was dominated by male voices, with only seven out of the top twenty most prominent figures in the media being women. During the week of 23 to 29 June, Keir Starmer, Nigel Farage, and Rishi Sunak received 70 per cent of the media coverage, compared to only five per cent for Rachel Reeves. (Deacon et al., 2024)

Existing studies have focused mainly on the visibility of women during the 2024 general election (Deacon et al., 2024) rather than the portrayal of female politicians once elected. This presents a gap in the literature that this research aims to address. Despite there being a shift in female representation in recent years (Allen, 2024), according to research, this does not shield women

from Gendered Mediation. According to a study by Williams (2021), May's coverage in 2016 was more gendered than Thatcher's in 1979 during their first three weeks in office. This implies that in 2024, female politicians will still be victims of Gendered Mediation.

2.6. Research Questions

Based on the insight offered by the literature review, the main research question emerged:

How do UK newspapers engage in Gendered Mediation when covering female political leaders in 2024?

To further explore the dimensions of the main research question, a sub-question was generated. This question addresses specific aspects of Gendered Mediation from different perspectives.

AQ- *How does Gendered Mediation manifest differently across newspapers with varying political alignments?*

This question aims to uncover the patterns of Gendered Mediation in UK Newspapers and the potential influence of ideological bias within the press, providing a foundation for analysis.

Methodology

The methodological strategy used to further examine the gendered representation of female politicians in UK newspapers will be described in this section of the research report. Existing research has demonstrated that Gendered Mediation (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996) shapes media coverage of female politicians in newspapers, framing them as political outsiders rather than equals. The concept of the Double Bind (Jamieson, 1995) demonstrated further how women in leadership are trapped and are scrutinised whether they conform or defy leadership roles. These theoretical insights from the literature review inform the choices made in constructing the methodology.

Building on Blair William's piece entitled "*Tale of Two Women: A Comparative Gendered Media Analysis of UK Prime Ministers Margaret Thatcher and Theresa May*" (2021), this study will contribute to ongoing discussions on how newspapers shape female politicians using a qualitative and quantitative technique. This part of the paper will explain the suitability of the chosen research design. It will outline the sampling methods, data collection process, ethical considerations, study limitations, and emphasise the hypothesis before the research commences.

3.1. Research Design

To critically examine how female politicians are framed in UK newspapers, this study adapts a two-pronged approach: using both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Williams, 2021).

- Content Analysis - this systematically examines word choices, frequency of gendered terms and themes to identify patterns in UK newspaper reports
- Thematic Analysis- this will explore recurring narratives and patterns in the selected texts

Thematic Analysis is for identifying key patterns within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006), whilst Content Analysis is useful in “objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). By integrating both quantitative and qualitative insights into gender representation, it will help to identify gender portrayals and narratives that sustain Gendered Mediation in 2024. Ultimately, Content Analysis identified the qualitative patterns, and Thematic Analysis explained why and how these patterns exist, pulling in specific examples.

The Politicians

Two contemporary female leaders from opposing political parties were examined in UK newspapers. Using two is justified by the fact that the outcomes will be less individualised and more dependable.

The two politicians selected to be analysed in the study are:

1. **Kemi Badenoch** - Conservative Party Leader (Since November 2024)
2. **Angela Rayner**- Deputy Prime Minister and secretary of state for housing, communities and local government (Since July 2024)

The contrast in party affiliation allows for an examination of whether political ideology influences the Gendered Mediation of female politicians.

The Newspapers

Newspapers, which are still referred to as "powerful cultural forms," are examined in this work because they frequently highlight and reveal gender stereotypes and hegemonic cultural norms (Trimble et al., 2013, p.463). Newspapers are still a valuable medium to examine since they may have a significant influence on a society's political agenda, even though social media and online news platforms have increased the number of ways we may currently obtain news (Langer and Gruber, 2021). According to Nielsen (2017), they continue to be a significant news source for a large portion of the British population, making them an appropriate medium to examine in this research.

A total of five British newspapers have been chosen for the research. The selected newspapers are the five "most popular newspapers in the United Kingdom (UK) in the second quarter of 2024", according to Statista (2024), which makes them suitable sources for analysis due to their extensive reach to the British public. Statista is a reliable source because it is rated as *least biased* and has high credibility (Media Bias/ Fact Check, 2024). Content Analysis, along with Thematic Analysis, can be utilised to reveal discrepancies among various political perspectives presented by the newspaper industry. This is especially pertinent in the context of the UK, which has a wide range of publications expressing different ideologies in its "Liberal Media System" (Hallin and Mancini, 2022). To examine whether the political leaning of the newspaper affects the portrayal of female political leaders, a variety of newspapers have been used, looking at both more conservative papers (such as *The Sun*) and more progressive ones (such as *The Guardian*). Additionally, there is a mixture of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, increasing the diversity of publications.

The following newspapers have been selected for analysis, due to their popularity, political diversity and format variation:

Newspaper	Political Alignment	Format
The Guardian	Left Wing/ Liberal	Broadsheet
The Sunday Times	Centre-right	Broadsheet
The Sun	Centre-right/ Conservative	Tabloid
Metro	Centre-left/ Liberal	Tabloid
Daily Mail	Right-wing/ conservative	Tabloid

3.2. Collecting data and sampling process

To systematically collect newspaper articles of relevance, purposive sampling will be employed to ensure the article is relevant to the research question. The study will use the Nexis UK database and filter the articles using the politicians' full names and the first three weeks of their leadership as the time frame. However, as *Metro* is not available on Nexis, the articles were taken directly from the company's website, by searching the name of the politician and filtering the timeline to the first three weeks of their leadership.

The number of articles will be as follows:

Newspaper	Angela Rayner	Kemi Badenoch
<i>The Guardian</i>	10	10
The Sunday Times	10	10
The Sun	10	10
Metro	10	10
Daily Mail	10	10
Total	50	50

One hundred newspapers from various publications were examined in total. Since these parts frequently feature the most overt gendered framings, the articles were taken from news reports, editorial columns, and opinion pieces. Key narratives, including leadership qualities, emotionality, physical attractiveness, and family responsibilities, were identified using thematic coding (Ross, 2009).

Aligning with the work of Williams (2021), the first three weeks in their leadership roles were taken and analysed to see how they compare. This captured the initial framing of the two women that often has a great influence on public perception and sets the tone for the rest of their time in the leadership position (Trimble, 2017).

The timeframe of analysis is:

1. **Kemi Badenoch:** November 2- November 23, 2024
2. **Angela Rayner:** July 4- July 25, 2024

3.3. The Approaches

Firstly, Content Analysis was executed. To identify the categories, I used the work of Williams (2021), who found overarching themes in media coverage that she labelled “Gendered tropes” (p.406). Gendered tropes refer to the important and recurring themes that the media use when reporting on female politicians and political leaders, including the gender norms and stereotypes that are frequently repeated and support the current gender order. (Williams, 2021). To identify the tropes, I used three tropes inspired by Williams (“gender, femininity and appearance”), and I have also added a trope based on preexisting research (Langer, 2007) labelled “Personal Lives”, that adds more clarity of the personalisation of female politicians in UK newspaper articles.

Gendered Trope One- *Gender* Does the article mention the gender of the politician? E.g.- women/ woman/ female/ mother/ aunt

- Code: Yes/ No

Gendered Trope Two: *Femininity*. Does the article frame the politician through stereotypically female norms? E.g. Emotional, warm, passive

- Code: Yes/ No

Gendered Trope Three: *Appearance*. Does the article mention the appearance of the politician? E.g. clothing choices, skin, hair, figure, etc.

- Code: Yes/ No

Gendered Trope Four: *Personal life*. Does the article mention the personal life of the politician? E.g. family, relationships, childhood, hardships, etc.

- Code: Yes/ No

Next, ten articles (five for each politician) will be used to conduct thematic analysis. Thematic analysis refers to “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This approach is appropriate because it offers flexibility and can produce value and complex data. The approach will adopt an inductive thematic analysis, meaning the themes will be derived from the data, rather than being influenced by preexisting theories. This allows for a more open-ended exploration of meanings and themes within the analysed articles. A constructivist lens, which examines how realities are shaped by broader discourses, will be applied to help understand how Gendered Mediation manifests in newspaper coverage of female politicians. It is important to be transparent and note that the thematic analysis will not be a passive process, and I (the researcher) will be playing an active role in selecting and interpreting the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Because the study is based on secondary sources, ethical risks are limited but are still appropriate to address in this section. One issue to consider is research bias. To combat this, efforts were made to systematically code and categorise content rather than relying on personal and subjective interpretations. Additionally, all articles were cited correctly and found on public sites, avoiding copyright risks.

3.5. Quality of Data and Limitations of the Study

Systematic sampling, the utilisation of reliable sources, and methodological rigour have all contributed to the study's data quality. As previously mentioned, the Nexis database ensured access

to verified articles, reducing the risk of misinformation or unreliable sources. Using both Thematic Analysis and Content Analysis as methods increases the depth and reliability of the results. Nonetheless, it is necessary to acknowledge the study's weaknesses. First, social media now plays a larger role in influencing political events and frequently intensifies female scrutiny. (Sikirski and Kubin, 2021). Nonetheless, newspapers are the only source of media coverage used in this study. Nonetheless, one may argue that newspapers in the UK continue to have a significant impact on political agendas, which makes them a suitable research medium. A further drawback is that it only examines three weeks of coverage, capturing initial coverage without considering how it evolved. However, as the newspapers under examination are from the previous year, the emphasis is on how female politicians are portrayed today rather than contrasting them with prior leaders—a subject that has already been extensively studied (Williams, 2021). In addition, the contexts of the articles may differ, which could affect how the female politicians are framed. During a time of scandal, for instance, the portrayal of the leader's scrutiny could be heightened.

Despite these limitations, the study's findings will contribute to ongoing academic discussions on gender and the media and explore the Gendered Mediation of female politicians in UK newspapers. Using both Content and Thematic Analysis will examine narratives that sustain Gendered Mediation and increase the results' depth and reliability.

3. Findings and Discussion

In applying Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis to five UK newspapers in the first three months of Badenoch and Rayner's leadership, trends were identified concerning Gendered Mediation. The findings address my two research questions: (1) *How do UK newspapers engage in Gendered Mediation when covering female politicians in 2024?* And (2) - *How does Gendered Mediation manifest differently across newspapers with varying political alignments?* To address these questions, first, the results from the Content Analysis are laid out, with the sections divided into the four gendered tropes: (A) Gender, (B) Femininity, (C) Appearance and (D) Personal lives. Next, the findings from the thematic analysis will be discussed, focusing on the identified patterns: (A) The "Outsider", (B) The "Motherhood Strategy", (C) "Macho Metaphors", (D) The "Hysteria Diagnosis", (E) Celebritised Beauty Ideals.

4.1. Persistence of Gendered Tropes (Content Analysis)

A. Gender

The initial gender trope examined in the Content Analysis was gender itself, frequently employed by news texts to portray female politicians as outsiders (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996). In this instance, gender refers to a socially manufactured identity that places bodies in a distinct hierarchy, where women are disempowered and males are powerful. The media purposefully employ labels that reflect their gender (Butler, 1990). Romaine (1998) argues that in Western society, men are the norm and women are the other, which is often shown by the Gendered Mediation of female politicians, where women are presented as a form of other (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996). In addition, labelling female politicians as gendered subjects ties

into the Double Bind Theory. As Jamieson outlines (1995), female leaders face a no-win situation in the media, with criticism being thrown at them whether they are shown as too feminine or too masculine. By emphasising and labelling their gender, they are at risk of being viewed through a stereotypical lens that, in turn, undermines their political authority.

Table 3 shows that gender was mentioned in a significant proportion of the articles, particularly for Kemi Badenoch, who has a higher overall percentage (48%), compared to Angela Rayner (38%). This implies that Badenoch’s gender, intertwined with her racial identity, may change her media portrayal, as intersectionality often intensifies Gendered Mediation (Crenshaw, 1991). When examined through the lens of political alignment, the *Daily Mail* was the paper that mentioned gender the most, with 100% of its articles on Badenoch and 70% of its articles on Rayner. This implies that the *Daily Mail* tends to emphasise identity and more personal-based angles. Likewise, the other right-leaning newspapers, *The Sun* and *The Sunday Times*, consistently mentioned gender at moderately high rates. This complies with William’s (2021) findings that discovered that right-wing conservative papers had a greater tendency to pay attention to the gender of politicians. However, left-leaning sites also had a comparatively high rate; for example, *The Guardian* had 60% of stories noting Badenoch's and 40% of articles citing Rayner's gender. Given that both right- and left-wing ideologies frequently emphasise a female politician's gender, this suggests a more balanced framing. By framing these women as the "other," this gender-focused approach perpetuates prejudices that continue to link women to the private realm and erode their political power.

Table 3, Percentage of newspaper articles that mentioned gender

Newspaper	Angela Rayner (%)	Kemi Badenoch (%)
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The Guardian	40%	60%
The Daily Mail	70%	100%
The Sun	40%	30%
The Sunday Times	20%	30%
Metro	20%	20%
Overall Percentage	38%	48%
Combined overall percentage for Rayner and Badenoch	43%	

B. Femininity

Feminine characteristics are often used as a form of Gendered Mediation to portray the individual as weak and lacking in competence, which was the second trope examined in the content analysis (Bauer, 2017). Our society views femininity as a learnt performance that naturally evolves from being a woman and is linked to actions that fit gendered standards and stereotypes. It is formed in binary opposition from "masculinity," the natural attribute of men, and is recognised as the natural traits of women (Butler, 1990, p. 16). When examining femininity, Jamieson points out that it's critical to acknowledge that the focus on femininity isn't always a bad thing, but it does turn negative when feminine characteristics are viewed as less desirable than masculine ones (Jamieson, 1995). After an extensive literature review, it was determined that newspapers frequently portrayed female politicians as compassionate, emotional, and warm to highlight their femininity (Dolan and Lynch, 2013), rendering these attributes pertinent for consideration during

the Content Analysis. Whilst these feminine tropes can be seen as neutral, often newspapers use them to make the political leader seem weak and an outsider in the political sphere (Bauer, 2017).

There was a significant gender gap between Rayner and Badenoch, as Table 4 illustrates. Rayner's femininity was referenced in 36% of the publications, while Badenoch's femininity was mentioned in only 22% of the articles. This difference in the way femininity was represented in both women's media coverage highlights the different treatment they received, which may reflect the public's varied perception of their feminine characteristics. It was also suggested that Rayner was framed as more traditionally feminine than Badenoch, who is less associated with femininity in the media. This may indicate intersectionality playing into gendered mediation, as often black women are portrayed in less of a feminine light as more "angry" or "uncontrollable" in news outlets, adhering to racist stereotypes (Duerst-Lahti and Kelly, 1995).

Looking at Table 4, it becomes evident that media outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* focused on femininity when covering Rayner and covered it a lot less when looking at Badenoch. The Guardian, for example, referred to Rayner's gender 80% of the time, compared to 40% for Badenoch. It's interesting to note that, whilst Rayner's was cited 20% of the time, Badenoch's femininity was not addressed at all in the Centre-right broadsheet *Sunday Times*. *The Metro* (Centre-left/liberal) paper, in contrast, referred to Badenoch's femininity 40% of the time and made no mention of Rayner's. This could illustrate the paper's efforts to position the politician, who aligned with their paper's ideology, as competent and strong by not associating them with feminine traits. This implies that often the level of Gendered Mediation of female politicians varies, depending on which politician the news outlet is supporting.

Table 4, Percentage of newspaper articles that mentioned femininity

Newspaper	Rayner (%)	Badenoch (%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	80%	40%
The Daily Mail	50%	20%
The Sun	30%	10%
The Sunday Times	20%	0%
Metro	0%	40%
Percentage	36%	22%
Combined overall percentage for Rayner and Badenoch	29%	

C. Physical Appearance

Table 5 illustrates the media's continued emphasis on female politicians' physical attributes, with Rayner and Badenoch's appearance being mentioned in 24% and 22% of the newspapers, respectively. Although the difference between the two is marginal, the variation across newspapers is more revealing. As with the gender trope, the *Daily Mail* featured the highest proportion of appearance-based coverage for both female leaders (50% for Rayner and 40% for Badenoch), aligning with William's (2021) findings. Notably, *The Guardian* mentioned Rayner's appearances in 30% of its articles, contrasting with only 20% for Badenoch, implying a potential ideological bias in the portrayal of women from a differing political party. In addition, a similar trend was identified in *The Sun*, where Rayner was mentioned in terms of appearance three times more than Badenoch. Moreover, *Metro* mentioned Rayner's appearance in none of the articles, whereas 20% for Badenoch. This indicates that the framing of appearance could be used as a strategy for negative

framing for a political leader who opposes the newspaper's ideology. Overall, the combined figure of both politicians was 23%, which implies that around one in four articles continues to use appearance-based framing, suggesting that appearance continues to be a form of Gendered Mediation. It is relevance to note, that when conducting Content Analysis, often appearance was portrayed in more subtle ways than implied by the literature review, which could imply that recent movements such as the #Metoo has influenced the way women are portrayed, with journalists becoming more aware of gender imbalances in the media (De Benedictis et al. 2019).

Table 5, Percentage of newspaper articles that mentioned appearance

Newspaper	Rayner (%)	Badenoch (%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	30%	20%
The Daily Mail	50%	40%
The Sun	30%	10%
The Sunday Times	10%	20%
Metro	0%	20%
Overall Percentage	24%	22%
Combined overall percentage for Rayner and Badenoch	23%	

D. Personal lives

Personal and family life is a key way that the media reinforces Gendered Mediation (Bystrom, Robertson, and Banwart, 2001). and were therefore an appropriate final gendered trope in the content analysis stage. Personalisation is seen as a feature of modern politics that is driven by the

media and tends to focus on leader's lives in the private sphere rather than their political competence (Langer, 2007). Personalisation affects all political leaders in the modern day, however, as found in the literature review, Personalisation disproportionately affects female politicians (Langer, 2007), as the media tends to put a greater emphasis on being a wife or mother or their background, rather than focusing solely on their leadership abilities, furthering Gendered Mediation (Ross et al., 2013). Whilst men can use this "celebrity politician" (Streets, 2004) image to their advantage, the focus on women's personal lives can often further Gendered Mediation (van Zoone, 2006).

The data in Table 6 reveals that mentions of personal life in the coverage of Rayner and Badenoch are equal overall (both at 24%), but the distribution across the different newspapers is uneven. For instance, *The Guardian* emphasises Rayner's personal life significantly more than Badenoch's (50% compared to 10%), whereas the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun* focus more on Badenoch's (40% each) in comparison to Rayner (20% and 30%). This implies that the newspaper's ideology plays a role in shaping how the female politicians are portrayed, with the left-wing newspapers focusing more on Rayner's personal life and, conversely, right-leaning papers putting a greater focus on Badenoch's life. This implies that they are using the inclusion of personal lives strategically, perhaps to soften their images and portray them as empathetic and grounded. This relates to Thomas et al's (2021) study found that often women are not asked about their marriage and family situations to paint them as less compassionate. Thus, the ideology of the newspaper affects how the leader is perceived, with right-wing papers (*The Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *The Sunday Times*) being more likely to focus on conservative leaders, Badenoch's family life and more liberal leaning papers (*The Guardian*) putting a greater emphasis on Rayner's.

Table 6, Percentage of newspaper articles that mentioned personal and family life

Newspaper	Rayner (%)	Badenoch (%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	50%	10%
Daily Mail	20%	40%
The Sun	30%	40%
The Sunday Times	10%	20%
Metro	10%	10%
Overall Percentage	24%	24%
Combined overall percentage for Rayner and Badenoch	24%	

4.2. Thematic Analysis

Several themes emerged from the thematic analysis, each revealing how Gendered Mediation continues to shape how female politicians are represented by Gendered Mediation. The themes demonstrate the way that the media reinforces, resists, and

A. The “Outsider”

The first theme that emerged during the thematic analysis was the notion that women are merely outsiders in the world of politics. The concept of “outsider status” is an idea in political discourse where individuals from non-elite backgrounds are separated from the political elite, making them seem trivialised. Shauna Shames (2003) labels this “The feminine outsider strategy”, which

refers to the way media outlets (and often politicians themselves) can often utilise a female politician's status as a woman to frame her as fundamentally different from mainstream, male politicians. Shames (2003) notes that this strategy can have positive and negative implications. On one hand, this strategy may resonate with voters desiring change and promote political diversity; however, it also risks perpetuating the notion that women are anomalies in the political sphere and less qualified for positions of authority. This connection between their political legitimacy and gender stereotypes, rather than their capabilities, serves to reinforce Gendered Mediation.

The first way this was identified was by the “first woman frame” (Murray, 2010, p. p230), consistently when referring to the politician. This was particularly true for Badenoch; achievements as a woman were often mentioned before her political status. For instance, in *The Sun* and *The Sunday Times*, she is labelled as being the first Black Female Tory leader (Willock 2024, Lloyd and Assheton, 2024). Whilst this frame acknowledges her revolutionary position, it simultaneously places her identity – a Black female—over her political stance. This relates to the “First Woman Frame” (Murray, 2010, p. p230), where the media puts a focus more on their gender rather than political policies. As Murray puts it, the framing is “both a blessing and a curse” (p. 30). While it acknowledges milestones in female representation in politics, it also makes women seem like outsiders who are challenging political norms, setting them up for failure as they are given unrealistically high standards (Norris, 1997).

This idea was further reflected by the overemphasis on the politicians’ political journeys, which disregarded their political careers. Using initial textual analysis, a pattern identified was a rags-to-riches, fairytale-like journey taken by the politicians to become leaders (Heffer, 2024; White, 2024; Vine, 2024; Seigh, 2024; Mykkanen, 2024). Rayner is said to have “worked her way up the

hard way” (Heffer, 2024), whilst The Sun’s headline to describe Badenoch is “Maccy D flipper to leader of the Tories” (Sleigh, 2014). Their struggles are then explored in more detail. This is especially prevalent with Rayner, whose working-class beginnings and struggles are outlined “Rayner looked after her mum, who has bipolar disorder, from when she was a kid. I left school pregnant at 16. She raised three sons - the first with her teenage boyfriend, the others with her now estranged husband. Became a nana at 37. All the while building an extraordinary career” (White, 2024). Likewise, there is an emphasis on Badenoch’s struggles, in a Sunday Times article, where Badenoch describes her upbringing as “very tough”, with her childhood in Nigeria which has a “more misogynistic culture”. She later moved to the UK as an immigrant where she felt like an “outsider” (Lloyd and Assheton, 2024). Despite these struggles, both women defied the odds and became political leaders in the UK.

The rags-to-riches analogy and the “First woman frame” show that UK newspapers tend to create a narrative that focuses on the women’s unconventional route into politics. This makes them seem like an “outsider” (Shames, 2003) and distinguishes them from stereotypical, white, male politicians who do not need to cross as many barriers to establish themselves as leaders. Whilst the coverage in a sense, looks like an attempt to celebrate the leaders resilience, it is an instance of Gendered Mediation because it focuses primarily on their personal lives, rather than their policies, reinforcing the idea of women’s societal role being in the private sphere with the public sphere being secondary, portraying them as “interlopers trying to achieve the impossible” (Herzog, 1998; Ross and Byerley, 2008 p48). This idea paints the two women as “extraordinary women” (Ross and Byerly, 2008, p. 48) who are an exception to the stereotypical politician, rather than simply women who are successful politicians; their life in the private sphere is what has made them resilient, not their political competence. This implies that making women seem

like an outsider upholds gender hegemony as women are constantly seen as an anomaly in the political world, who have achieved the impossible rather than as a competent leader.

The findings from the thematic analysis reflect Joanna Coles' (*The Guardian*, 1997) metaphor comparing women in political leadership positions to a boy's public school, where a few clever girls are allowed into the sixth form. This comparison implies that while women may be allowed in the political spaces, their acceptance is more unconventional, and they are still perceived as outsiders. The frame has a dual meaning, on one hand, it acknowledges the exceptional nature of individual female politicians, but on the other, it diminishes their authority by reinforcing that women's roles in politics are not formally normalised, with a reinforcement of their gender and personal lives.

B. The "Motherhood" Strategy

Thematic analysis revealed that both women seemed to be presented in a dependency role such as a "mother" or a "wife", aligning with what Lemish and Tidhar (2000) referred to as the "motherhood strategy" - a media framing technique where journalists emphasise a women's family role over their political identity. Whilst this can be a political strategy to gain public legitimacy by allowing female perspectives to infiltrate a traditionally male dominated sphere, it can also serve as Gendered Mediation by framing female politicians as an extension of their domestic roles, reinforcing stereotypes and diminishing their authority in the political sphere (Lemish and Tidhar, 2000). In both cases, family lives and more specifically dependency roles were mentioned extensively (Lloyd, 2024; Batty, 2024; Wilcock, 2024; Heffer and Sleight, 2024;

Mykkanen, 2024; White, 2024), implying that the “motherhood strategy” identified in 1996 persists in 2024.

Rayner’s early motherhood persists in several articles (Batty, 2024; Heffer, 2024; White, 2024), implying her status as a political leader is secondary to that of a mother. *The Guardian* was quick to introduce her as “Teenage Mother” (2004) in a short passage summarising the new cabinet leaders. In such a short summary, one of the first attributes of Rayner mentioned was her status as a mother, which emphasises the idea that women are associated with their domestic roles, undermining their status as a leader in the public sphere. Interestingly, all three out of the four articles that pointed out Badenoch as a mother were centrist or right-wing, suggesting that using a maternal status can be employed for political gains. An exception to this was *Metro*, which had a full subsection entitled “Does Kemi Badenoch have children?” (Mykkanen, 2024). By using a question, the article implies that a politician's parental status is a matter of public interest, an expectation less likely to be placed on male politicians.

Furthermore, both women’s marital status is reaffirmed by textual selections. Angela Rayner’s marital status is discussed in *The Sunday Times*, where she is described as raising her children first “with her teenage boyfriend, the others with her now estranged husband” (White, 2023). By putting an emphasis on her personal life- *The Sunday Times*, a traditionally right wing paper- could be using her domestic life to perceive her as an unstable, and not conforming to traditional expectations of women in the private sphere- such as to be married, which in turn could be an attempt of subtly undermining her credibility in the public sphere. Badenoch’s marriage was also exposed in the articles, with *The Metro* dedicating an entire article to her life with her husband, Hamish (Mykkanen, 2024). The word “inside” is invasive and implies that the public is entitled

to intimate details of her private life, reinforcing her idea that their personal relationships are open for public discourse.

Another way that the “Motherhood strategy” was shown was in their leadership qualities. For example, the Daily Mail (2024) describes Rayner as the “custodian of traditional values in the face of modernising leadership” (Heffer, 2024). The word “custodian” can also mean an individual of authority, but with an adoption of a gendered lens, the phrase positions her as a maternal figure intent on preserving cultural continuity. This is a stereotype often placed on female politicians, where their leadership is seen as nurturing rather than strong or authoritative (Ross et al, 2009). This is a clear example of Gendered Mediation, where their political identity is shaped not just by their power or policies, but by how they fit into established concepts of femininity.

At the level of discursive practice, the emphasis on family-related framing shows how narratives are shaped and assume audiences are interested in women’s domestic lives over their political competence. The coverage of their family lives exemplifies Jamieson’s (1995) femininity/Competence bind and reinforces the idea that femininity (their domestic roles) is not compatible with political leadership. Whilst such framing may humanise male politicians, with women it risks diminishing their authority and competence (Van Zoonen, 2006). The repeated focus of family life aligns with the normative expectation that women’s primary social role is domestic, even if they occupy high-ranking political positions. Even when the articles are discussing the politicians’ lives in the public political sphere, words like “custodian” are used to reinforce these ideas, meaning their public life cannot escape their status in their private life. This contributes to the notion of Gendered Mediation because female politicians are portrayed through a lens that places an emphasis on gender roles rather than their professional roles.

C. “*Macho Metaphors*”

A textual analysis revealed that a common theme within newspapers was using “Macho Metaphors” (Goodman, 1984, p. 19) when describing the female politicians. While femininity appeared frequently throughout the Thematic Analysis, there was also a consistent pattern of anti-feminine framing, particularly using masculine-coded language. This was particularly noticeable in the case of Badenoch, where femininity was (22%) less present than in the coverage of Rayner. This reinforces the idea that news is a “masculine narrative” (Rakow and Kranich, 1991). This theme was identified by the frequency of battle-related language.

Badenoch’s framing relied heavily on battle-like metaphors. The *Sunday Times* (2024), for instance, used the terms “combative”, “praetorian guard” and “gladiator”, which cast her as a warrior more than a politician. Furthermore, her colleagues are described as “allies”, adding further to the war narrative (Lloyd and Assheton, 2024). These battle-like images are also reflected in *The Guardian* (2024), which described her as someone who knows how to “pick the right fights” and “steal the crown” (Balls, 2024), painting images of battle and conquest, rather than politics. Whilst these images do seem to frame Badenoch in a positive light, they do embody Gendered Mediation by conveying overly stereotypical masculine pictures.

The heavy use of these metaphors reflects what Rakow and Krancich (1991) describe as a persistent tendency to frame politics through a predominantly masculine lens. By embedding language of warfare, these narratives imply that traits associated with masculinity-aggression and competitiveness are requirements for political success. This subtly feeds into the notion of Gendered Mediation because it suggests that women must adopt masculine traits to be a

successful leader. Even though these metaphors are used largely in a positive way, they reinforce a power dynamic that frames men as natural leaders and women as intruders in a masculine space (Blankenship and Kang, 1991). As a result, Badenoch is not validated via her femininity, but how well she performed based on a male-coded framework of leadership.

D. The “Hysteria Diagnosis”

Thematic analysis revealed several ways that femininity appeared in the newspapers. The most frequent frame employed was the portrayal of female politicians as emotionally unstable, reinforcing a societal narrative that women are less emotionally controlled than their male counterparts. This can be labelled the “Hysteria Diagnosis” (Neville-Shepard et al., 2019), a frame used in the media to suggest that femininity is inherently irrational, thereby upholding societal power structures that marginalise women. This echoes historical stereotypes of female “hysteria” (meaning uterus) (Showalter, 1993). Neville-Shepard et al. (2019) found that even though the concept is outdated, the “Hysteria Diagnosis” remains a powerful tool for delegitimising women in politics by framing their emotions as evidence of irrationality or unfitness to lead, most notably seen in the media portrayal of Hillary Clinton during the 2016 U.S. election. This theme was identified in the thematic analysis through references to emotional outbursts, excessive displays of emotion, and negative labelling of assertive behaviour.

This trait is exemplified by the language used to describe Rayner in the phrase “although she was rather more ecstatic on ITV” (Vine, 2024). The word “ecstatic” implies an overly emotional display, framing her as unprofessional and excessive. In contrast, the same article describes Wes Streeting as “remarkably restrained” (Vine, 2024), creating a stark juxtaposition. Likewise, the

language used to describe Badenoch was subject to a similar form of Gendered Mediation. *The Daily Mail* dubbed her the derogatory nickname “Kemi Kraze” (Willock, 2024), a term that trivialises her political persona and frames her as emotionally unstable. It suggests irrationality and unpredictability. Additionally, *The Sunday Times* (2024) states, “They do worry that she could blow up at any time, and it’s not a stupid worry” (Lloyd and Assheton, 2024), which further reinforces the stereotype that women are incapable of controlling their emotions.

A further extension of this emotional framing is the frequent portrayal of both women as “outspoken” or volatile. Rayner is described as a “hate figure” due to her “outspokenness” (Batty, 2024), referencing her past use of the phrase “bunch of scum” to describe Conservatives. This framing interprets assertiveness as emotional instability when exhibited by women. While similar behaviour by male politicians is often seen as confidence or strength, women are portrayed as extreme or unhinged. This aligns with Jamieson’s (1995) Silence/Shame bind, where women who speak out are shamed rather than celebrated. However, it is of note, that this behaviour is not always framed negatively, as shown by the portrayal of Badenoch in the *Daily Mail* who is described as an individual who is “Never frightened to ruffle feathers, Kemi Badenoch's willingness to say what others may regard as unsayable has made her the darling of the Tory grassroots (Willock, 2024)”. This, again, reflects the “outspokenness” phrase that is used to describe Rayner, highlighting how similar traits can be framed differently depending on the media outlet. Whilst Rayner’s outspokenness was framed as a negative flaw, Badenoch is framed more positively, described as “the darling of Tory grassroots” (Wilcock, 2024). It’s important to note, however, that this framing comes from a right-wing news outlet, and may only paint her in this

positive light to satisfy what their target audience's idea of female stereotypes is, whilst also praising her.

Both instances demonstrate Gendered Mediation. When men show emotion, it is often interpreted as their "softer side" (Langer, 2007, p.175), earning them empathy and support. In contrast, the same emotional expression by women is framed as weakness, contributing to an uneven power dynamic. This ultimately undermines female politicians' credibility and restricts their political authority and progression (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996).

E. Celebritised Beauty Ideals

Thematic analysis revealed a tendency within mainstream media to portray political leaders through a personalised and celebritised lens. This tendency is consistent with what Langer (1998) refers to as "personalisation," in which the media has the chance to impose preconceptions on female politicians by focussing more on their personalities and looks than their political career. Additionally, the pattern is indicative of the larger phenomenon of tabloidization, which characterises the transition from in-depth political reporting to sensationalised and entertainment-focused stories (Sparks & Tulloch, 2000). It is relevant to note that the media treat politicians as celebrities is not exclusive to female politicians, and male politicians are also victims of this framing strategy. Boris Johnson, for instance, deliberately adopted a personalised style of leadership to further his campaigns, drawing in the media and public support (Brusenbauch, 2024). However, Van Zoone (2006) implies that whilst men may benefit from celebritised coverage, for women it creates a pressure to maintain a highly groomed a styled image, like one adopted by female politicians. This theme was identified in the newspaper coverage by identifying how women were framed in terms of their appearance.

The results differed from previous studies. Williams (2021) found that May's media coverage placed a disproportionate emphasis on beauty standards, scrutinising her clothing, hair styles and mannerisms in great detail- portraying her through a celebritised lens. However, the 2024 coverage of Badenoch and Rayner suggests a more nuanced development. Although appearance-based tropes did remain present, Thematic Analysis revealed that they were expressed in much more subtle ways, implying a shift in Gendered Mediation.

Thematic Analysis revealed that newspapers often try to identify with the media scrutiny women face and ridicule critics who primarily focus on women's appearances. This can be exemplified by *The Sun's* article entitled "Who cares what Angela wears? Just let her do her job" (Moodie, 2024). The article adopts a sarcastic and informal tone to critique those attacking Rayner for her clothing choice. At the surface level, the article adopts a defensive tone toward Rayner, however, a closer textual analysis implies that whilst mocking the critics, it simultaneously reproduces the gendered frames it claims to challenge. The sarcastic tone used - in phrase such as "How DARE the new Deputy PM step out for her first days of duty in snazzy new clothing" (Moodie, 2024), whilst on one hand mimics the outrage that was directed at Rayner, by repeating and emphasising the controversy around her clothing, it keeps the focus on her appearance rather than her political competence.

Whilst on one hand, this can show a progression of the way women are framed in the media, the focus on Rayner's style shifts the narrative towards her appearance rather than her political competence. The fact that *The Sun* – a right-wing tabloid that does not support Rayner's policies-

produced this article reinforces Ross's (2008) claim that the focus on female politicians' style is not an "unconscious process" (p. 65), but a deliberate strategy to divert attention away from their political competence.

4. Conclusions

This dissertation set out to examine how Gendered Mediation operates in contemporary UK newspaper coverage of female politicians, with a specific focus on Angela Rayner and Kemi Badenoch during the first three weeks of their leadership roles in 2024. Through a mixed-methods approach, which combined Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis, it examined not only the presence of gendered tropes, but also their deeper narratives and their strategic framing techniques used by newspapers across the ideological spectrum. The findings affirm that Gendered Mediation continues to shape the representation of female politicians, albeit in more complex and subtle ways. Whilst extreme female stereotypes have declined, more nuanced mechanisms are now employed by journalists to construct women as outsiders in the political world.

Content Analysis revealed that 43% of newspapers labelled the politician's gender in the article, which reinforces the concept that women are exceptions in a male-dominated political framework. This notion was further emphasised by Thematic Analysis, which found an employment of the “feminine outsider strategy”, a concept which paints women as “extraordinary” (Ross et al, 2008, p. 48). This framing was achieved by using the “first woman strategy” (Murray, 2010) and by emphasising their struggles, which they overcame to become a political leader. Whilst at first glance, this can seem empowering on the surface, they reproduce Gendered Mediation by reinforcing the perception that female leaders succeed despite their identities rather than because of their political competence.

The second trope identified in Content Analysis was the trope ‘femininity’, which was persistent

in the news reports of both women (29% of articles). However, the mentioning of femininity was significantly less than Williams' (2021) study of Thatcher (38.3%) and May (53.4%), implying that there has been a gradual shift away from the overt and frequent use of feminine stereotypes in the media portrayal of female politicians. Nonetheless, the use of emphasising humanity continues to be present in newspapers in 2024. This was shown in two main ways. The first way was by creating the image that women are incapable of controlling their own emotions, reinforcing a derogatory concept of hysteria, undermining their rationality in politics. The second way was by employing the “motherhood strategy” (Lemish and Tidhar, 2000) with a huge emphasis on their statuses as “mothers” or “wives”. Thematic analysis additionally revealed that the decline of mentions of femininity could be because there has been an increase in traditionally masculine descriptors used to describe them. This was particularly true with Badenoch, where battle-like metaphors were used to describe her in numerous articles. Whilst at first glance, this may not be a form of Gendered Mediation, this can subtly reinforce the idea that women must disregard their femininity entirely to handle politics and adopt more masculine traits, implying that women are still not normalised in politics (Blankenship and Kang, 1991).

Of all the articles, 23% referred to physical attractiveness. Although this indicates a rise in references to appearance in Williams' (2021) Thatcher research (16.2%), it also indicates a fall in references in comparison to May (28.6%). This implies that appearances have been mentioned far more frequently, although May's appearance was more pointed than either Badenoch's or Rayner's. Thematic analysis showed that the way appearance was mentioned was a way to defend women in the media. Moodie's 2024 article adopted a sarcastic tone, ridiculing media platforms for their portrayal of Rayner. Whilst at first glance, this looks progressive, the

narrative remains focused on her appearance, stirring discourse towards appearance rather than political competence, furthering Gendered Mediation.

In total, 24% of the newspaper articles referenced the politician's personal life, reflecting the idea that women's leadership is secondary to their role in the private sphere, tying into Langer's (2007) theory of personalisation. This gender trope was added to William's framework of Content Analysis due to its role in Gendered Mediation (Bystrom, Robertson, and Banwart, 2001). It was found that 24% of articles altogether mentioned the politician's personal life, suggesting this is a relevant and recurring form of Gendered Mediation. Thematic analysis found that the mention of private lives was mainly focused on framing women as dependable by emphasising their family roles and by discussing their hardships and struggles to achieve political power. The inclusion of personal life throughout the articles reflects the tension between private and public identity for women in politics.

Crucially, the analysis has shown that Gendered Mediation is not only about marginalising female politicians but is also used as a political tool. For example, the media coverage of femininity varied between the two, with right-wing papers putting a much greater emphasis on Rayner's femininity than they did on Badenoch's. Likewise (except *The Guardian*), left-wing papers were more prone to emphasising the femininity of Badenoch than they were of Rayner. This concept can be further exemplified in the appearance trope, where around one in four articles referenced the appearance of Rayner or Badenoch. Whilst the overall difference between the two was small (24% and 22%), patterns across newspapers were telling with appearance being more emphasised for politicians with opposing political parties to the paper's ideology. This implies that femininity and physical

appearance were used to negatively frame opposing female politicians, furthering Gendered Mediation and downgrading political competence. Newspapers also used Gendered Mediation to support politicians, with the “Personal Life” trope being used to make the politicians seem “softer”, with left-wing papers putting a greater emphasis on the personal life of Rayner and right-wing papers on Badenoch. These findings from the Content Analysis reveal that Gendered Mediation can be a strategic tool used to undermine and humanise female leaders to serve ideological purposes. Because of this, Gendered Mediation consists of and strengthens gender hierarchies.

The study has certain limitations that may have been addressed to provide more precise results. First, to have a better understanding of the persistence of Gendered Mediation, the coverage of more female politicians may have been examined. Furthermore, more newspapers representing a wider spectrum of views may have been examined, leading to more reliable findings. Future studies could examine the media coverage through an intersectional lens; although briefly touched upon, this was not the primary focus of the study, it would be instructive to observe whether Gendered Mediation is upheld or challenged and whether a female leader's identity of class, race, or religion influences how the media presents them. In addition, it would be useful for a future researcher to make comparisons to the portrayal of male politicians in the mainstream newspapers to assess whether similar patterns are applied in their media portrayal.

In summary, while Gendered Mediation may be evolving in form, it has not disappeared. It, instead, has become more subtle and an ideological strategy that reinforces the idea that women are the “other” in a male-dominated field. Until women are represented not as anomalies but as competent, standard political actors, Gendered Mediation will continue to shape public

perceptions, enable gendered power dynamics to persist and restrict equality for women in public leadership roles.

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7. Appendix

Ethics Form

COMM3910 Communication Dissertation / COMM5600M Dissertation and Research Methods Ethical Review Form

1. Basic project details

Your name	Annie Spragg
Student ID	201514071
Name of supervisor	Imke Henkel
Provisional title/ topic area	How do UK Newspapers engage in gendered mediation when covering female politicians in 2024?

Ethical review is required for all research carried out in the University involving people (human participants), including research undertaken by students within a taught student module. Further details of the University of Leeds ethical review requirements are given in the Research Ethics Policy available at: <https://secretariat.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/109/2023/12/Research-ethics-policy.pdf>.

For ethical approval on this module, you should discuss research ethics with your supervisor and ask them to review and approve this form. You must submit your form with your supervisor's signature to the submissions area in Minerva by the published deadline (see module handbook), or before you begin fieldwork (whichever is soonest). **Please note that you must not commence**

fieldwork until this form has been approved and signed by your supervisor and the module leader if necessary. You must complete this form even if your research does not involve people.

Please note that you must NOT complete research with participants who are under 18, unable to give '[informed consent](#)', or are 'vulnerable' (e.g., prisoners, asylum seekers, the homeless). This module does not have ethical approval for research with these groups. Also, you must NOT store any participant data on your personal devices. All data related to research participants must be stored on your University One Drive storage facility.

Further Research Ethics Guidance for Dissertations is available in Minerva. Please refer to this Guidance when completing this form.

2. Summarise the aims, objectives, and method of the research (max 300 words).

Provide a summary of the research, outlining the aims and objectives and / or research questions and the proposed methodology. Please explain how you will conduct the research (e.g., how will research participants be identified and recruited and what will they be asked to do, or for online research, how will people's data be selected, used, and analysed?)

The research examines gendered mediation in UK newspapers, with a focused analysis on Kemi Badenoch and Angela Rayner. It also aims to explore additional questions: How gendered mediation differs depending on the political orientation of the newspaper and questions whether female politicians in the UK are trapped in a double bind. To conduct the research the top five newspapers in the UK in 2024 (Statista) were selected (The Guardian, The Sunday Times, The Sun, Metro and Daily Mail), along with two female leaders in 2024- Kemi Badenoch and Angela Rayner. A total of one hundred newspapers will be analysed. Content analysis will take place, with categories based on the literature review along with Thematic Analysis. A total of 10 articles will be subject to Thematic Analysis and they will be selected during the Content Analysis stage ensuring they represent a variety of themes and representations of gendered mediation.

3. Confirm if you plan to conduct fieldwork with (data on) people	Yes	No
Will your dissertation involve conducting research on people (this includes online research methods and researching data on people / secondary data analysis)? Tick as appropriate.		✓

If you ticked **No** to Question 3, you do not need to take further action in respect of ethical approval. Please proceed to the declarations in **Part C**.

If you ticked **Yes** to Question 3, you need to complete **Part A**.

Part A: Ethical Considerations Raised by Your Research

4. What is the source of the data used in your research? (Indicate with an 'X' all that apply)

New data collected for this research	
Data previously collected	
Data already in the public domain (including Internet-based research)	
Other, please state:	

5. How will the data be collected? (Indicate with an 'X' all that apply)

Through one-to-one research interviews	
Through focus groups	
Self-completion (e.g. questionnaires, surveys, diaries)	
Through observation	
Data previously collected	
Data already in the public domain	
Other, please state:	

5. Personal safety: risk assessment

Will your fieldwork be outside the University campus?	Yes	No

If you answer Yes to Q. 6 you will need to complete a separate risk assessment form and send this to your supervisor to review. Supervisors will need to approve the risk assessment before signing this form.

6. Will the project involve any of the following (Tick as appropriate) (Please check the Dissertation Research Ethics Guidance Notes when completing this section)	Yes	No
Discussion of sensitive topics, or topics that could be considered sensitive		
Prolonged or frequent participant involvement		
Researching people without their knowledge and consent		
Cause potential harm to participants or others (including researcher(s))		
Potential conflicts of interest		
Researcher(s) in a position of authority over participants		
Cooperation of an intermediary to gain access to research participants or material		
Internet-based research or other visual / vocal methods where participants may be identified who may not expect their communication to be accessed by third parties:		
Translators or interpreters (other than self)		
Fieldwork taking place outside the UK [See point 3 Personal Safety above]		
Other (please state):		

NB: you must NOT complete research with participants who are under 18, unable to give 'informed consent', or are 'vulnerable' (e.g., prisoners, asylum seekers, the homeless).

7. Research data management

Will the research involve any of the following activities at any stage (including identification of potential research participants)? (Please check the Dissertation Ethics Guidance Notes when completing this section)	Yes	No
a. Examination of personal records by those who would not normally have access		
b. Sharing data with other		

c. Use of personal contact details other than email and telephone numbers (e.g. postcodes, faxes, home / work address)		
d. Publication of direct quotations from respondents		
e. Publication of data that might allow individuals to be identified		
f. Use of audio / visual recording devices		
Explain in this textbox what will happen to the data you collect once you have completed the module: Guidance on management of your research data and on data protection is available in the Dissertation Ethics Guidance Notes		

NB: You must NOT store data on your personal devices: all data related to research participants must be stored on your University One Drive storage facility

If you answered Yes to any of the items in Questions 7 and 8, please ensure you complete Part B of this form which requires you to explain how you will conduct your

research ethically. As noted above, if you answered Yes to Question 6, you must complete the separate risk assessment form and send this to your supervisor to review before signing this form.

If you answered No to all the items in Questions 7 and 8, you do NOT need to complete Part B of this form. Please now complete Part C.

Part B: Addressing the Ethical Considerations Raised

9. For the ethical considerations indicated in Questions 7 and 8 in Part A of this form, provide further details and explain how these issues will be addressed. Please refer as appropriate to the Dissertation Research Ethics Guidance Notes, and the University's [Research Ethics Policy](#), the module reading list, and other resources on ethics and good practice in research available in Minerva.

Response to ethical considerations identified in Question 7:

Response to data-management considerations identified in Question 8:

Part C: Dissertation Research Ethical Approval: Declaration

Student declaration (for all students)	Tick as appropriate
I confirm that the research ethics form is accurate to the best of my knowledge.	✓
I have consulted the University of Leeds Research Ethics Policy available at https://secretariat.leeds.ac.uk/research-ethics/university-protocols-and-policies/ and the dissertation research ethics guidance notes.	✓
I understand that ethical approval will only apply to the project I have outlined in this application and that I will need to re-apply, should my plans change substantially.	✓
If my research will be conducted outside the University campus, I am aware that I need to complete the separate risk assessment form and send this to my supervisor to review.	✓
For students conducting research with (data on) people	

I am aware of the University of Leeds protocols for ethical research, particularly in respect to protocols on informed consent, verbal consent, reimbursement for participants and low risk observation. If any are applicable to me, signing this form confirms that I will carry out my work in accordance with them.	
---	--

Student's signature: ANNIE L SPRAGG

Date: 05/03/2025

For Supervisors	Tick as appropriate
No further action required	
I confirm that the dissertation project is in line with the Guidelines for COMM5600M Dissertation and Research Ethics / COMM3910 Communication Dissertation.	x
I have discussed the ethical issues arising from the research with the student and their risk assessment (if necessary) and I agree that all issues have been accurately and fully addressed at the time of signing this form.	
Further actions required	
Refer to module leader for further review.	

Supervisor's signature:



Date: 31.3.2025.....

Part D: Dissertation / Research Project Ethical Approval: Module Leader authorisation

To be completed by the module leader (only necessary if requested by the student's supervisor)

Yes

No

No further action required

The project falls within the parameters of the module's block ethics approval.

Additional comments

Module leader's signature:

Date: