# Representation of female and male politicians in American news media during the 2020 presidential elections:
## A comparative analysis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract


Erityisesti länsimaissa sukupuolten välinen tasa-arvo ja tasavertainen kohtelu ovat olleet jo pidemmän aikaa toistuvasti esillä yleisessä ja poliittisessa keskustelussa. Tässä maisterintutkielmassa pyrin selvittämään, kuinka potentiaalisesti eri tavoilla yhdysvaltalaisista mies- ja naispoliitikoista rakennettiin representaatioita amerikkalaisissa uutismedioissa vuoden 2020 presidentinvaalien aikana. Sukupuolet ja niiden välinen tasa-arvo olivat myös kiivaasti keskustelun alla edeltävissä presidentinvaaleissa Yhdysvalloissa, kun Hillary Clinton ja Donald Trump olivat demokraattien ja republikaanien ehdokkaina.

Tämän maisterintutkielman tavoitteena oli analysoida sitä, kuinka The New York Times ja The Washington Post -sanomalehdet rakensivat representaatioita kuvaillessaan yhdysvaltalaisia mies- ja naispoliitikoita vuoden 2020 presidentinvaalien ja poliitikkojen vaalikampanjoiden aikana. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää mitä mahdollisia eroavaisuuksia ja samankaltaisuuksia representaatiosta löytyy vertailemalla mies- ja naispoliitikkojen kuvailuja toisiinsa. Tutkimusta toteutettiin yhdistelemällä multimodaalisen diskurssianalyysin ja kriittisen diskurssianalyysin menetelmiä seuraten erityisesti Fairclough'n kolmen ulottuvuuden viitekehystä diskurssintutkimukseen. Tätä viitekehystä seuraten tutkielman analyysiosio eteni uutisartikkeleiden sisällön kuvailemisesta niiden prosessointiin diskursseja tulkitsemalla ja lopulta näiden tulkintojen selittämiseen laajemmassa sosiaalisessa ja yhteiskunnallisessa kontekstissaan.

Tutkielman tulokset viittaavat siihen, että mies- ja naispoliitikkojen representaatiossa ilmeni eroavaisuuksia erityisesti sukupuolen korostamisen, fyysisen olemuksen, sopimattoman käytöksen ja luonteenpiirteiden osalta. Tutkimustulokset vastasivat pitkälti aiempia tutkimuksia, mutta myös eroavaisuuksiakin ilmeni. Lisäksi tämä maisterintutkielma tarjosi hyvinkin tuoreen esimerkkitapauksen erityisesti poliitikkojen representaatiosta ja niiden eroavaisuuksista uutismedioissa. Aiempaan tutkimukseen verraten tästä tutkielmasta ilmeni esimerkiksi, että poliitikkojen uran ulkopuolisen elämän, heidän ikänsä ja terveytensä sekä kykynsä hoitaa työtehtäviään kuvailemista esiintyi myös miespoliitikkojen kohdalla.

Asiasanat – Keywords

representation, critical discourse analysis, gender, media, newspapers, politicians, multimodality

Säilytyspaikka – Depository

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Muita tietoja – Additional information

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the feminist (second wave) and gender equality movements in the 60s, the 70s, and the 80s, the research of the connection between gender discourses, gender equality, and language have been widely studied (Coates & Pichler 2011). This research has been multi-disciplinary, and it has been occurring, for example, in the fields of gender studies, linguistics, sociology, communication, anthropology, and cultural studies. Within the research of gender discourses and gender representation the focus has often been on differences in power, identity representation, prejudice, biases, and social and societal statuses (Weatherall 2002).

The present study will be focusing on the possible differences in media representation between male and female politicians during the 2020 US presidential elections. The data is gathered from two American news websites that did reporting on the 30 original presidential candidates (6 female and 24 male candidates). The criteria for sample choice will be based on popularity of the candidates – the three most popular male and the three most popular female candidates. The data samples will be collected from two different American news organizations that post their news online – The New York Times and The Washington Post. The timeline of the collected data samples is focused on a point of time in which the candidates in question were still taking part in the presidential race. I am mostly interested in the examples of word choices,

descriptions, and discourses used by journalists to create representations of these politicians.

I got interested in this topic when I was following the 2016 US presidential elections and noticed some differences between the media representation of the final two presidential candidates Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. For example, Baikalova's (2016) analysis shows that Clinton's political representation in media was filled with masculine representation. She argues that Clinton as a politician was mostly represented as being masculine and more feminine descriptions were used for showing Clinton's weaknesses as a politician (Baikalova 2016).

The topic of the media representation of female politicians has also been widely discussed in Finland. For example, the former Finnish president Tarja Halonen has made comments about the treatment of female politicians by media in an interview conducted by Yle (Vilén 2016). In this interview, Tarja Halonen described how during her career her clothing choices, looks, personality, and well-being were criticized, while simultaneously her male colleagues rarely faced similar criticisms (Vilén 2016). At the University of Turku, Railo (2011) has studied portrayals and representations of male and female politicians and their differences from data samples collected from a Finnish magazine called "Anna". Railo (2011: 128) argues that within portrayals of male politicians, there are fewer comments about body types, masculinity or gender identity, and their fit for public work tasks as politicians was not questioned, while especially the portrayals of aging female politicians contained reassurances that they are able to control their bodies and health in ways that would not negatively affect their work as politicians (Railo 2011: 252-253).

In this thesis, I will address and analyze a very recent example of female and male politician media representations that will hopefully be a valuable addition to the existing research.

# 2 BACKGROUND

This section will include the theoretical background frameworks chosen for, referred to, and applied in this study. I will consider the theoretical approaches of discourse studies and critical discourse analysis, which is the primary approach to the media contents analyzed, in relation to the topic of this study. I will also briefly discuss the meaning and creation of media representations regarding gender discourses and representation. Also, theoretical background on multimodal analysis will be presented.

## 2.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis and discourse have been defined quite ambiguously in the past with many researchers having their own slightly different definitions for it. For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using the Linguistic Society of America's (2021) definition of discourse analysis while also acknowledging Wodak & Meyer's (2001) perspective of language as a social practice and Fairclough's (1995b) views on discourse analysis as the study of language in use. According to the Linguistic Society of America (2021), discourse analysis is a method of research for studying and analyzing spoken and written language beyond the sentence in relation to its larger social and situational contexts. The general purpose of discourse analysis, in comparison to studying and analyzing grammar, collocation, genres, and other forms of more traditional text

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analysis, is to understand how language is used in actual real-life situations and contexts.

### 2.1.1 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

Within the field of critical discourse analysis, language can be seen as a social practice (Wodak & Meyer 2001: 1). This means that social and societal factors, such as power relations, politics, gender, media, laws, institutions, class, and ethnicities influence language and that they are influenced by language. According to Fairclough (1992: 12) CDA does not only attempt to describe discursive practices and occurrences, but also the analysis is meant to show how discourse is built and shaped by power relations, ideologies, and other social and societal effects that are not implicit or apparent to the discourse participants in the various communication situations. In relation to this thesis, the theoretical background and the approaches of critical discourse analysis will allow me to consider the potential power relations, gender roles, and other societal factors that might influence the possible differences between the media representation of female politicians and male politicians.

According to Oughton (2007) the main starting point of critical discourse analysis that differentiates its approaches in comparison to other theoretical frameworks within text analysis, is the focus on the relations of power and the ideological assumptions that are embedded in text. Critical discourse analysis tends to draw from and combine features from the disciplines of social sciences, linguistics, political science, and history (Lê, Lê & Short 2009). In this study, different aspects of linguistic, discourse, communication and social analysis will be applied to the news articles and to the representations that they create.

Predicting potential differences in the news media representation of female and male politicians, taking the position of analyzing and wishing to understand, or in some cases to even resist, social inequalities is typical for critical discourse analysis.

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According to van Dijk (2008: 85) "Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context.". For this thesis, this viewpoint provides a perspective on the imbalances in social and cultural power that exists between the genders on a broader societal and historical level in Western countries. Especially, the reproduction of different representations that might reflect the social inequalities between the genders is of interest when analyzing the news articles included in the present study.

### 2.1.2   Discourse and discourses

According to Hall (1997 : 6) discourses are fundamentally the ways of using language to refer to or construct knowledge about a particular topic – a sort of a cluster of images, ideas, and practices which provide and control forms of knowledge and the ways in which people talk about specific topics and how to socially conduct oneself when doing so. In practice, these clusters of information define and guide people about what is appropriate in their language use and social practices in relation to a specific subject or a site of communication, meaning that they essentially work as a social manual telling people which knowledge is considered useful, relevant, or true in the given contexts (Hall 1997 : 6).

Fairclough has also defined discourse and discourses separately from discourse analysis. According to Fairclough (2003 : 124), discourse or several discourses as countable nouns refer to the ways of representing aspects of the world. This includes the material world and its structures, relations, and processes, the mental world of feelings and thoughts, and the social world (Fairclough 2003). In relation to the present study, this definition of discourses as countable nouns provides a viewpoint to study the ways in which the analyzed news media articles and the discourses that they contain represent broader aspects of the world, especially in terms of US politics, the media

representation of female politicians in comparison to their male counterparts, and more generally the issues of gender inequality in Western countries.

### 2.1.3 Fairclough's three-dimensional framework

For this thesis, critical discourse analysis will provide a valuable perspective as a theoretical background providing a point of view and an approach that take power imbalances and societal factors of media representations of the politicians into account. The main approach to the analysis of the media contents will be Fairclough's three-dimensional framework ( Fairclough 1995a : 98). The first dimension of Fairclough's (1995a : 98) framework is text analysis (description). During this stage of the framework, one needs to describe the text by illustrating the immediate contents of the text, the word choices, and the manners in which they are produced. Fairclough (1995a : 98) refers to this as the process of production.

The second dimension in the model is the processing analysis of the discourse practice. Fairclough (1995a : 98) refers to this as the process of interpretation. In this stage of the analysis, one should consider the discourse practices and conventions that the text belongs to in addition to the social, material, and mental contexts. For example, a doctor's appointment or a chat between friends at the pub – what kinds of speech acts or language is expected and what kind of structure can the interaction be expected to have?

The third dimension in the three-dimensional framework is the social analysis of the sociocultural practice. Fairclough (1995a : 98) refers to this as the process of explanation. For example, in the case of the discourse convention of a doctor counselling a patient, the larger sociocultural practice could be seen as involving the practice of medicine, the authority of the medical establishment over the doctor's profession, and so on. Here, the researcher should utilize the previously defined discourse practices and the sociocultural practices to produce a detailed explanation of  the interaction.

## 2.2   Multimodality of online news articles

When analyzing online news articles, the elements of multimodality are important to take into account. According to Kress (2013 : 132), multimodality as a term draws attention to the meaning making tools beyond merely writing and speech. Modes themselves are different culturally and socially made resources for representation and communication (Kress 2013 : 132). These include, for example, speech, writing, vocalization, gestures, images, colour, gaze, layout, voice, video, music, and so on. According to Jewitt, et al. (2016), modes can be seen as socially organized sets of semiotic resources and organizing principles, which are recognized within communities as realizing meaning. Online newspaper articles often contain a combination of both visual and verbal texts with the addition and availability of images, pictures, video, audio, hyperlinks, and other media contents. Analyzing these texts and the representations of politicians that they create and build, it would be insufficient to only acknowleedge the written text in the articles. According to Fairclough (2001 : 22), even though the majority of news articles may be written, these written texts are also connected to other potential visual clues and social cues provided via photos, video, and audio. Meaning that the ways in which the objects are presented in the photos, their gestures, expressions, and poses also affect the representations that are created in the news articles. In order to draw conclusions about the representations and the ways in which they are built to create various meanings, one must take the aspects of multimodality into account.

According to Kress (2012), Multimodal discourse analysis as a theoretical framework refers to the addition of studying and analyzing visual and autiorial communication to discourse analysis. Within MMDA, text is seen as a multimodal semiotic resource, which serves the purpose of providing an understanding of the relation of various meanings of a community and its semiotic practices (Kress 2012 : 37). According to Jewitt, et al. (2016), a semiotic resource is a meaning making resource that has developed and over time through its use within communities and in response to the

social needs and requirements of said communities. For example, a news article containing both text and images. It should be noted that the multimodal elements in online news articles do not exist by themselves in a vacuum, but they also interact with the written text and all the other semiotic resources. Semiotic resources are essentially the tools that people have at their disposal to create, represent, and communicate various meanings to their audiences. According to McIntyre, Lough, and Manzanares (2018 : 975), the relationships between images and words in news articles are very complex since each of the different elements transmit messages to the audience. Visual contents in news stories are used to enhance the ways in which audiences process and remember news (McIntyre, Lough, & Manzanares 2018 : 975).

For this study, the approach of multimodal discourse analysis provides the perspective of acknowledging other modes of communication as parts of the representations created in the news articles. Meaning, that its framework will serve as a theoretical background to understanding and analyzing the representation of politicians in news media articles including all the available semiotic resources and modes outside of and including the written text.

## 2.3  Gender and representation

In order to fully comprehend the topic of gender representation and gender discourse, one must first be able to understand what is meant by "gender". The academic enterprise of studying gender, equality, feminism, and sex relies heavily on the distinction between "gender" and "sex" (McElhinny, 2003: 22). Sex or sexes are widely understood as the two major forms of individuals that are distinguished as male or female, especially based on their biological functions (Merriam-Webster, 2021a). Gender has been more recently understood as the cultural, behavioral, and social differences between the male and female sexes (Merriam-Webster, 2021b). According to McElhinny (2003: 23), the term gender can also be seen to express a range of other identities that

do not necessarily correspond with either of the two sexes, which means that based on identity expression, there are more than two genders that would be based on the two sexes.

For the purposes of my thesis, gender expression beyond the gender dichotomy related to the two sexes might not be implicitly relevant. However, it should be noted that gender discourse which emphasizes the binary distinction between sex and gender or lack of counting for identity expression could be seen as potentially emphasizing heterosexuality and enforcing masculine and feminine stereotypes in the media representation of politicians.

Gender as discourse refers to the ways in which the ideologies of language affect the patterns of how genders and their perceived representatives talk, are talked about, and what kind of social and cultural behaviors along with other symbolic activities are expected from them in different contexts. According to Xue (2008 : 55), discursive psychologists have insisted that gender itself is constructed through and in discourse. Discourse in terms of gender can be seen as referring to the extensive range of various symbolic activities, such as, clothing style, consumption patterns, ways of carrying oneself and moving around, and communicating with others (Xue 2008 : 55). According to Xue (2008 : 55), these symbolic activities are used in broader contexts to both reproduce and construct gender identities.

### 2.3.1 Representation

Representations can be understood as the fragmentary compilation of images, descriptions, portrayals, texts, and assumptions that are created and crafted within a society and that are combined in social action to describe different groups of people (Paasonen 2010 : 40-42, 46). Representations play a vital role in meaning making processes within the social interactions of people (Hall 1997 : 15). In this thesis, I will be analyzing the portrayals of male and female politicians in American news articles

from two news organizations whilst simultaneously paying attention to potential differences that may occur.

According to Hall (1997), representation is one of the central practices that produces culture in the "circuit of culture".
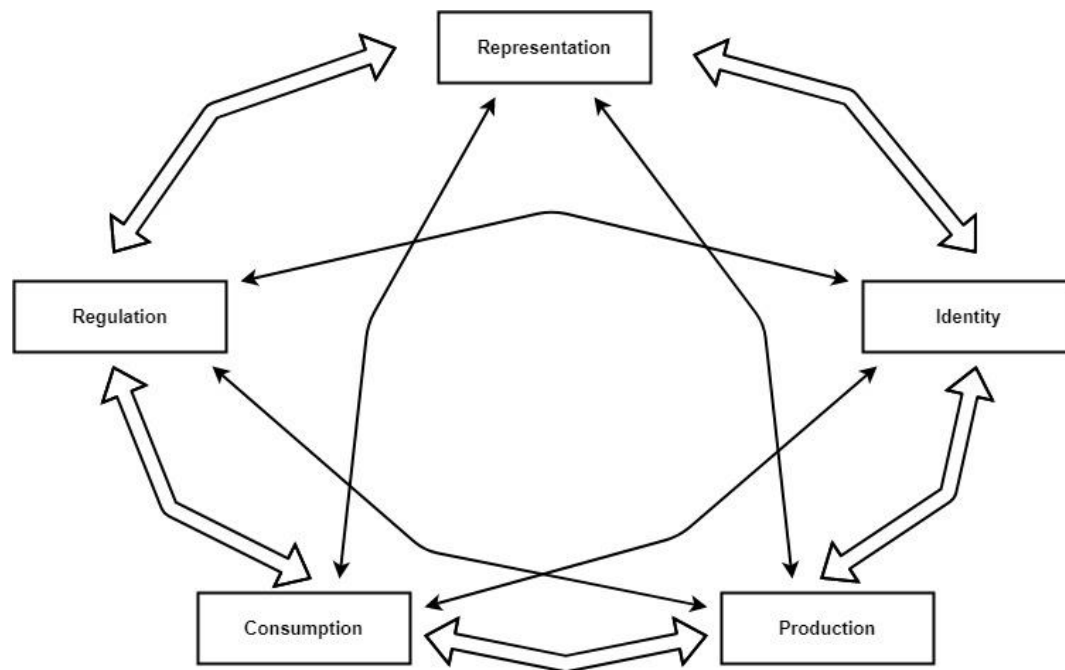


Figure 1. The circuit of culture. Adapted from Hall (1997 : 1)

In this figure, Hall (1997) demonstrates how representation along with identity, regulation, consumption, and production, is an important central "moment" in the production of culture of shared meanings and understandings that allows communities to interpret the world and its communicative events in similar ways. Language can be seen as operating as a system of representation, since people use its symbols, signs, sounds, and even objects to represent to other people their ideas, concepts and feelings. Thus, the representation via language can be seen as a central process that produces meaning.

### 2.3.2   Media representation

When analyzing representations of politicians in American news media, it is important to keep in mind the highly polarized atmosphere and discourse that could potentially affect the news reporting. For example, a poll by Knight Foundation and Gallup (2018) suggested that in The United States, the general public's trust towards news media and journalism has dramatically decreased since 2015 and Pew Research Center (2014a) have done a study showing how the American general public has become increasingly divided and polarized ideologically and politically. Jurkowitz et al. (2020) argue that this has led to the supporters of the Democrats and the Republicans to be divided in their trust, following, and support for different news organizations.

Discussing representations in the media and the reasons for which disparities and dissimilarities between different politicians occur, can be highly complicated. According to Fairclough (1995b) these representations can be skewed or distorted due to issues of power, ideologies, bias, or manipulation. One crucial step that I have taken within this thesis in order to avoid issues created by hidden agendas embedded in the analyzed texts, is the conscious choice to only use articles from two different and reasonably reputable news organizations and to focus my analysis in comparing articles and representations during a period of time when all of the candidates had as equal of a footing in the race as possible considering their popularity and position in the presidential elections. These hidden agendas could be, for example, political affiliations and beliefs that affect the reporting and media representation of the politicians in question, societal and social activism, and other societal factors that could affect the ways in which journalists report on the candidates.

According to Pietikäinen & Mäntynen (2009: 45), the research within the fields of discourse studies and representation analysis both tend to focus on the relations of power and how different underlying factors within these the representations build their meanings in societal discussions. For example, in relation to larger marginalized

groups, one could be asking which entities have the societal "right" to describe and represent which groups of people.

In the case of male and female politicians, the representations created by news organizations will potentially affect larger societal conversation once they reach their audiences. They can also affect the ways in which, for example, younger people who potentially look up to these politicians will possibly alter their own behavior and discourses based on the representations they see in the media. According to Fürsich (2010), research has shown that mass media communications play a significant role in creating, shaping, and upholding problematic stereotypes especially in the contemporary communication environment where there exists a propensity of visual imagery, that actively works to maintain, confirm, and recreate representations that could be seen as problematic.

### 2.3.3 Gender representation

Taking into consideration Paasonen's definition of representation (2010 : 40-42, 46) and McElhinny's definition of gender (2003 : 22), gender representation can be seen as referring to the ways in which people who identify with different genders are represented, for example, in media. As discussed before, this thesis will be focusing on the potential differences and the comparison of the representation of female and male candidates in the 2020 US presidential elections.

In the past, the study of gender representation focused on researching and establishing the extent to which mass media contents departed from reality in their representations (Gallagher 2014 : 23-24). According to Gallagher (2014), the earliest analysis tended to be driven by personal experiences of the authors. For example, in the 60s a former journalist released her study focusing on how the cultural definition of femininity had changed in the United States. About a decade later, more systematic, and objective studies were published. They tended to focus more on the gender

stereotypes that were then used to argue how the mass media organizations had created idealized versions of femininity that did not correspond with reality (Gallagher 2014).

As this particular field of study continued to develop, the focus of research proceeded to move further from the personal experiences of scholars and more towards addressing the social, societal, political, cultural, and historical factors that affect the ways in which the genders are represented in news media and entertainment. According to Artz and Venkatesh (1991), when studying gender representation, it should be acknowledged that gender encompasses the social and psychological categories of sex roles, the psychological categories of feminine and masculine identity, and the psycho-behavioral category of sexuality along with the biological category of sex. Thus, during the analysis of gender representation in media, one should consider and pay attention to the stereotypical sex roles that are connected to the culture in question and the general assumptions of what can be expected from the behavior and manifestations of the feminine and masculine identities within social interactions.

In previous studies focusing on gender representations and more specifically, the media representations of male and female politicians, for example, Railo (2011) argued that in the Finnish magazine Anna, portrayals of female politicians contained more criticism and descriptions of health, age, clothing, and fitness to properly work or function as political leaders. Compared to the male politicians discussed in the Anna magazine, Railo (2011) also argued that their portrayals contained fewer mentions about their body types, masculinity, looks, or their fitness to be successful in their work (Railo 2011 : 249-253).

Focusing more on the numbers or the levels of representation, Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes (2007) explained the differences in the levels of representation by focusing on the supply-side, the demand-side, and the cultural and international aspects and influences. According to them, women's levels of political representation could be lower

due to gender gaps in political knowledge, interest, and ambition. Also, barriers for political participation, history of female involvement in politics, and pressure from international organizations were seen as affecting the levels of representation and the number of females entering the political landscape in general (Paxton, Kunovich & Hughes 2007 : 266-272).

## 2.4 CDA research on gender, politics, and representation

In this part of the background section, I will briefly introduce past research that has been done on a similar subject matter of gender and politics or media representation of female and male politicians using critical discourse analysis methodology and frameworks.

Power, Rak, and Kim (2020) argued in their critical discourse study of women's representations in Forbes, Fortune, and Bloomberg BusinessWeek that in the business sector of media, women appeared to be underrepresented quantitatively in the articles published on these North American business magazines when compared to their male counterparts. In terms of the contents of the articles, Power, Rak, and Kim (2020) argued that women were most often represented highlighting their humanity, actions, and occupations. Notable, they found in their article that the appearances of women were given no consideration in the analyzed articles of the business magazines, the women were seldomly directly evaluated, and the articles were paying more attention to what the women in question do, instead of what they might be said to "be" or to whom they are related (Power, Rak & Kim 2020 : 14). The findings differed quite substantially from the expectations that the researchers had before the study. According to Power, Rak, and Kim (2020 : 2), previous research has established that the media representations of women have often been found to be more stereotypical or trivializing, focusing on appearances, private life, and family relationships whilst simultaneously neglecting their professional lives, attributes, and achievements.

Ali and Batool (2015) studied how news media articles represented Pakistani women. In addition to more general representations, they also included political and sports coverage of women in their research. According to Ali and Batool (2015), the texts and multimodal contents in news media articles represented the women in question in relation to the ideas of femininity and gender identity present and prevalent in the Pakistani culture and they argued that the representations created and reproduced in the news media contents were highly insensitive reflecting the patriarchal culture of Pakistani society (Ali & Batool 2015 : 709). In regard to the political coverage, Ali and Batool (2015 : 705-706) argue that the news media reporters were not as interested in writing about female politicians or that they were not considered as important or newsworthy when compared to male politicians.

Wagner, Trimble, and Sampert (2019) analyzed gendered media discourses in Canada. The focus of their research was on the potential differences in the representation of leadership qualities attributed to male and female candidates in news reports. According to Wagner, Trimble, and Sampert (2019), the female candidates in question were subjected to more gendered and negative assessments in regard to their intellect, professional experience, and communication skills when compared to the male candidates. They concluded how all of the candidates, regardless of gender, were subjected to scrutiny and questioning about their linguistic skills, but the female politicians faced more questioning about their communication skills and political experience (Wagner, Trimble & Sampert 2019 : 155).

In comparison to the present study, the methodology of critical discourse analysis and the analyzed contents of media articles are very similar when compared to the examples of past research described above. The framework and approach to the analysis of contents differs quite a bit and the focus on one gender instead of building a comparative analysis is also quite different in the studies. It is quite typical for critical discourse analysis on gender, representation, and politics to focus on one gender instead

of doing a comparative analysis discussing the potential similarities and differences that might occur in the data.

# 3   DATA AND METHODS

The goal of this present study is to analyze and compare how the most popular male and female candidates of the 2020 US presidential elections were represented in news media. More precisely, in The Washington Post and The New York Times. The purpose of this thesis is to see whether or not there were any major disparities or differences in the representations of male and female politicians by analyzing, describing, and comparing them. The research question of this thesis is:

"What were the differences regarding the representations of male and female politicians in American news media during the 2020 presidential elections?"

For the purpose of sufficiently and concisely answering this question, I have chosen data samples focusing on the three most popular female and the three most popular male candidates that were still in the race during the primaries from the two dominant parties in the American political system - the Democrats and the Republicans. When deciding which candidates to analyze, I focused on the beginning of the race back when the two parties still had thirty candidates – 6 female and 24 males. It should be noted that the number of female candidates compared to their male counterparts was already providing an imbalanced starting point regarding the representation of the genders both in the news media and American politics in general.

The data samples were collected from two different North American news publications that post their news articles online – The New York Times and The Washington Post. The reasoning for choosing these news organizations was based on their reputation, rank in circulation numbers, and the archives and search functions that they have on their websites that allowed me to go back to view all of the articles written about the candidates from September 2019 to May 2020.

The articles themselves were chosen based on topics that did not explicitly have contents about the candidate's politics. I focused on these articles, since it allowed me to narrow down the selection of articles for analysis. As exemplified in Table 1 and Table 2, the data that from the two news websites contained 34 796 articles within the timeline that mentioned at least one of the candidates that were chosen for analysis in this thesis. A huge majority of these articles were brief mentions of the candidates in journalistic pieces that focused on the frequently held debates or gave updates from the presidential race in broader contexts. While these might have also given interesting insights to the media representations of the candidates, I simply did not have the tools or means to read through all of the articles within the appropriate timeline. Choosing articles that did not explicitly report on the candidate's politics and focused more on their persons also gave another common starting point for analysis in case of all of the candidates, since the amount of articles overall were quite uneven in numbers. In addition to analyzing the texts, additional focus will be placed in analyzing other multimodal resources used in the articles to create meaning and build the representations.

As explained earlier, I will be focusing on the representation of the three most popular female and the three most popular male candidates that were in the presidential race in the beginning of the election cycle and made it all the way to the primaries. According to Burns et al. (2020), the three most popular female candidates were Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar, and Tulsi Gabbard all of whom represented the Democratic Party in the 2020 presidential election and the three most popular male candidates

were Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders from the Democratic Party and Donald Trump representing the Republicans.

Choosing the timeline of the analyzed articles, I have decided to collect data from points of time in which the candidates in question were still part of the presidential race. Elizabeth Warren dropped out March 5, 2020, Amy Klobuchar suspended her campaign March 2, 2020, Tulsi Gabbard dropped out of the election March 19, 2020, Bernie Sanders announced that he will suspend his campaign April 8, 2020, and Joe Biden and Donald Trump were the final two candidates of the Democrats and the Republicans in the presidential race. Thus, I will be choosing the articles for my analysis from the fall of 2019 to May 2020, depending slightly on the candidate in question. Doing this will allow me to create a common starting point with all of the candidates still in the race at the time of the news articles. I found this to be an important part of the analysis during the stages of data collection. For example, the personal lives of both Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden were rarely discussed in the news cycle during the race. However, after the presidential elections were over and Joe Biden had become the new president of The United States, more and more news about his past, his religious beliefs as a catholic, his Irish heritage, his family life, and the actions of his dog were written on the selected news websites.

I also utilized the multimodal elements of the chosen articles in the analysis section of this thesis. I have reproduced some images from the articles in this thesis under fair use for university thesis work that will not be commercialized in any shape or form. In other words, they are included solely for nonprofit academic purposes. The inclusion of images and photos in the present study is for the purposes of examination and analysis to provide a broader understanding of the representations created in the news articles in question. Each of the images contains copyright information inserted in the captions. Here, one can find the person who took the photo, the year, and the place in which it was originally published.

## 3.1 The New York Times

The New York Times is a New York based daily broadsheet newspaper and it was ranked 3rd highest by circulation out of all American newspapers in 2019 (Watson 2020). The New York Times have been widely rewarded with different journalism awards and it has won more Pulitzer prizes than any other newspaper. The website that I will be using for my data samples has been running since 1996 and it has a since developed a large and international audience.

In terms of political leanings, according to a study by Pew Research Center (2014b), the consumer base of The New York Times is mostly liberal with 65% of the respondents having political values that are left of the political center. In the same study, it was also found that the New York Times had the 9th highest overall trust rating out of all the studied newspapers with 34% of all panelists trusting it as a news source (Pew Research Center 2014b).

## 3.2 The Washington Post

The Washington Post is an American daily newspaper that is published in Washington, D.C. and it was ranked 4th highest by circulation in 2019 (Watson 2020). The Washington Post has won the second most Pulitzer prizes (69) right after The New York Times (Washington Post 2020). The news organization itself was founded in 1877 and the website that I will be using for my data collection was launched back in 1996.

In their study, The Pew Research Center (2014b) found that the consumers of The Washington post are mostly liberal with 61% of the online respondents having political values left-of-center. The Washington Post was also found to be the 13th highest in

overall consumer trust with 27% of respondents trusting their news (Pew Research Center 2014b).

## 3.3 Method

As described in the theory or the background section of this thesis, the analysis and discussion parts of this study will include analysis of the disparities and differences found in the articles between the male and female politicians. Also, multimodal approach to discourse analysis will be applied to consider the effects that the images, videos, or audio included in the news articles have on the perceived representations. After the media data is chosen and collected from the online news sites, they will be securely archived in the case that they would be deleted during the writing process of this thesis.

The main approach that I will utilize when analyzing the media texts, is the three-dimensional framework developed by Fairclough (1995a) for conducting discourse analysis.

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│  │ Process of production                 │      │
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│  │   │   Text                  │─────────┼──── Description (text analysis)
│  │   │                         │         │      │
│  │   │                         │         │      │
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│  │                                       │──── Interpretation (processing analysis)
│  │ Process of interpretation             │      │
│  │                                       │      │
│  │      Discourse practice               │      │
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│  │                                       │──── Explanation (social analysis)
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│       Sociocultural practice                     │
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│   (Situational; institutional; societal)         │
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      Dimensions of discourse          Dimensions of discourse analysis
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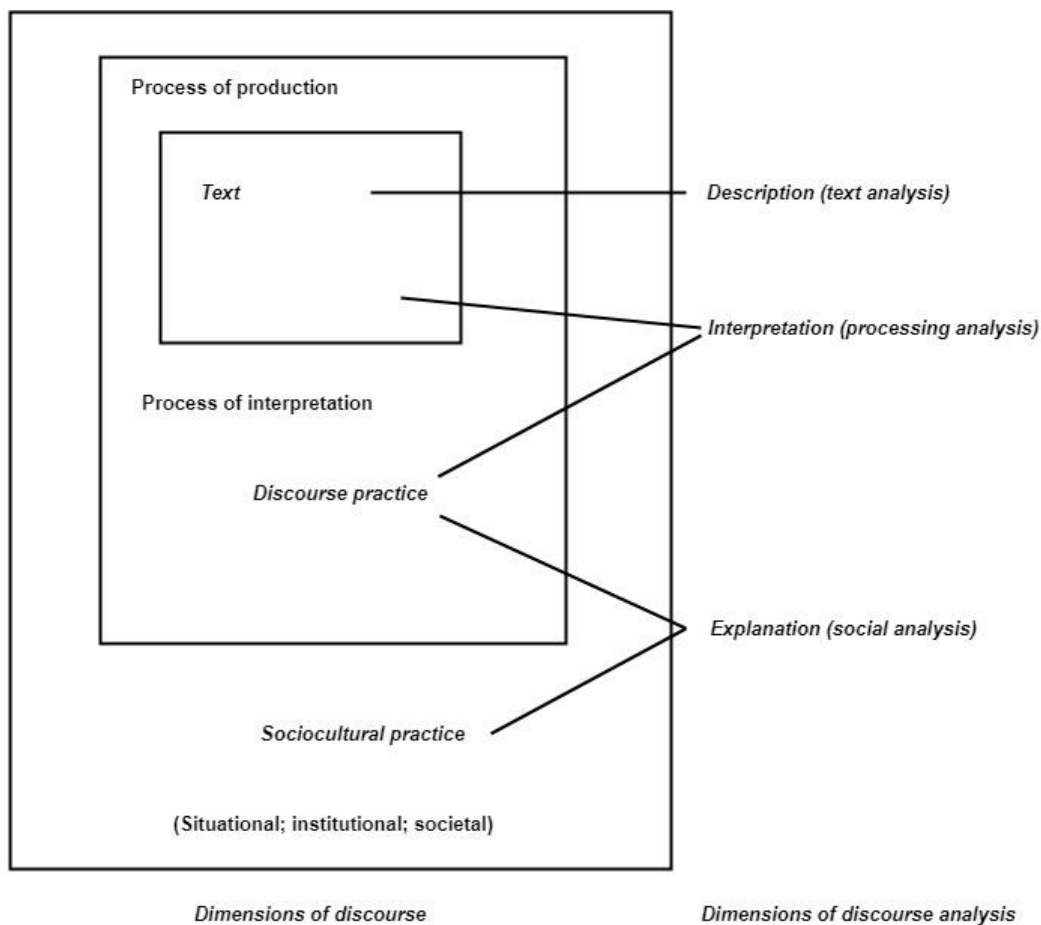
Figure 2. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis. Adapted from Fairclough (1995a : 98).

In this framework, text and discourse overlap in the interpretation stage of the analysis and this overlap will be reflected in the analysis of the news media articles. The first step in the analysis part of this thesis will focus on describing the text while also focusing on the word choices used to describe and represent the candidates in question. The second step will be to interpret the texts in terms of their discourse practices. The final step of the analysis will be to try and explain the findings and the analysis of the previous steps in terms of their potential effects on the representations of the candidates.

According to Fairclough (1995 : 97), discourse and specific instances and actions of discursive practices can be seen as simultaneously a text, discourse practice, and

sociocultural practice. For example, a social interaction between marital partners can be read and described in terms of that particular relationship, interpreted through relationships between romantic partners within the family as an institution, and explained by analyzing gender relationships in the larger sociocultural context of society (Fairclough 1995 : 97).

In terms of this thesis, I will follow this three-dimensional concept of discourse and its method of discourse analysis by first describing how the individual candidates are represented in the texts and the different multimodal elements of meaning making in the articles. After describing the texts in the articles, I will be moving on to interpretation by comparing the potential similarities and differences in the media representation of the male and female politicians that were discovered in the description stage of the analysis.

Finally, I will be discussing my findings of the similarities and differences of media representations more broadly in the context of societal communication practices and cultural views on gender in Western countries. According to Salinas and Bagni (2017), in the past 50 years, significant progresses in gender equality has been made worldwide with especially Western countries having implemented initiatives to work towards a more balanced workforce in terms of gender. However, there are still differences in the ways in which the genders have representation in the workplace and various institutions or how much they are paid and how they are treated (Salinas & Bagni 2017). In addition to professional endeavors and the imbalances that occur in them, Okin (1979 : 273-279) has argued that women in Western countries are still expected to be the primary caretakers of children, various tasks related to family life and homes are generally attributed to women, and in terms of politics they have been disenfranchised for long periods of time, which is still affecting their barrier for entry or ambitions to enter the politics. Although Western countries have been making significant progress in terms of gender equality, there still exist cultural and communicational

practices and views on gender that are imbalanced or disproportionately affecting one gender.

# 4   ANALYSIS

In this section of the thesis, I will be analyzing articles written about the three most popular female and the three most popular male candidates in the 2020 US Presidential elections from The New York Times and The Washington Post. The analysis will follow Fairclough's (1995a : 98) three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis and focus on the representations created by the two news organizations about the politicians.

This model or framework consists of three interrelated analysis processes connected to three interrelated dimensions of discourse. Following this framework, the analysis of the present study will consist of the processes of text analysis, processing analysis, and social analysis. The analysis will begin with a description of the textual objects; the written text of the news articles and the multimodal elements that are included in them. In the next part, the described textual objects will be interpreted by processing their relationship to the discourse or discourses in question. Here, the textual objects will be divided by gender, summarized, and compared in order to interpret how they represent aspects of the world and how they build the media representations of the male and female candidates. Finally, these interpretations will be tied to broader social phenomena by explaining them in relation to the socio-historical conditions which potentially govern how the representations of the politicians are created.

In addition to the critical and multimodal discourse analysis, tables describing and showing the number of articles written about the candidates will be included in the analysis, since they also portray a part of the representation. Not necessarily how or how differently the male and female politicians were represented, but they do show the volume or level of representation that each candidate had in the number of articles that mentioned their names on the news websites during the presidential race of 2020.

## 4.1   Representation in numbers

The following tables show the number of articles that contained a mention of the analyzed  male and female politicians in The New York Times and The Washington Post online websites published between the September of 2019 and May of 2020. This data shows that the male candidates had more mentions of them in the published articles on both news websites. The data was gathered using the search functions of the two websites.

| Candidate | Gender | No of Articles with mention | % of Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Biden, J.** | Male | 1,923 | 12 | |
| **Gabbard, T.** | Female | 157 | 1 | |
| **Klobuchar, A.** | Female | 686 | 4 | |
| **Sanders, B.** | Male | 2,040 | 13 | |
| **Trump, D.** | Male | 9,297 | 59 | |
| **Warren, E.** | Female | 1,735 | 11 | |
| | | 15,838 | | |

Table 1. Representation in The New York Times (September 2019 – May 2020)

| Candidate | Gender | No of Articles with mention | % of Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Biden, J. | Male | 5,432 | 29 | |
| Gabbard, T. | Female | 448 | 2 | |
| Klobuchar, A. | Female | 1,370 | 7 | |
| Sanders, B. | Male | 3,563 | 19 | |
| Trump, D. | Male | 5,281 | 28 | |
| Warren, E. | Female | 2,864 | 15 | |
| | | 18,958 | | |

Table 2. Representation in The Washington Post (September 2019 – May 2020)

These tables demonstrate how all of the most popular male candidates in the presidential race had more mentions in The New York Times and The Washington Post articles from the first of September 2019 to the first of May 2020 than any of the most popular female candidates during the same time period. In the New York Times 16% of the articles contained a mention of the female politicians and 84% of the articles contained a mention of one of the male politicians. Similarly, in The Washington Post, 24% of the articles contained a mention of the most popular female politicians, while 76% of the articles contained a mention of the most popular male politicians. It should be noted that during these elections, the current president of The United States was Donald Trump, which at least partly explains the sheer volume of articles that mentioned him during this time. It should also be noted that Bernie Sanders suspended his presidential campaign nearly a month later than his female counterparts and Joe Biden was the eventual winner of the race, all of which must have at least partly contributed to the male politicians in question having more of a spotlight in the American news media during the presidential elections of 2020.

The data presented in these tables was gathered using the search functionalities on The New York Times' and The Washington Post's webpages. The New York Times'

website allows users to search for articles that were published within a given time period and it also provides the user with the number of published articles of the selected type. On the Washington Post's website, the search function is much more limited and only provides the user with the possibility of searching for articles that were published within 24 hours, one week, 60 days, 12 months, or since 2005. On their website, each page of search results contains 20 articles in total. The numbers in the "Representation in The Washington Post" table were calculated by counting the number of result pages per candidate between the period of September 2019 to May 2020 times 20 and subtracting the additional articles in the first and the last page that were not published during that time.

## 4.2   Media representation of the candidates

In this section, I will be looking at the representation of the politicians in news media articles from The New York Times and The Washington Post. The criterion for choosing the articles for analysis, was that they particularly focused on the candidates in question and did not explicitly concentrate or focus on their political careers or their political positions on issues. Within the three-dimensional framework of Fairclough (1995a : 98), this part of the thesis is the text analysis dimension where I will focus on describing the written textual and the multimodal contents of the articles in terms of the representations that they produce. The titles or the subheadings in this part of the analysis contain brief summarizations of the themes or the aspects of the candidates' personalities, personal lives, culture, and personal pasts that were discussed in the news articles.

### 4.2.1 Joe Biden's age, health, and allegations

The New York Time's article "Is Age Only a Number, Even When You're Running for President?" (Lerer 2019) discusses the effects of age on a potential president's capabilities in leading the country. In the article, Lerer (2019) writes about the "trio of septuagenarians" consisting of Joe Biden, 76, Elizabeth Warren, 70, and Bernie Sanders, 78 considering the effects that their ages have on their health and stamina. The article also takes the reader back to the last elections in 2016 when Donald Trump questioned Hillary Clinton's health.

(1) Mr. Biden has been dogged by questions about his physical fitness and condition – concerns he has tried to alleviate by bounding through parade routes and shaking dozens of hands in steamy summer weather.

In this example, Lerer (2019) discusses the reoccurring questioning that Joe Biden has faced during the presidential race about his physical condition and stamina in relation to his age. According to Lerer (2019), Joe Biden has tried to alleviate these concerns by "bounding" through the parade routes and engaging with fans and political followers in an excruciatingly hot weather.

The conscious choice of the word "bounding" is obviously used here as an exaggeration of Joe Biden's physical movements. In terms of the media representation of Joe Biden, these types of word choices could be linked to Biden's perceived issues with health and aging. The alleviation of concerns for one's physical health by acting overtly active or strong in the public eye and not minding harsh weather conditions could be seen as exemplifications of stereotypical masculine behavior. According to Railo (2011 : 128), previous research has exemplified how representations of male heroes typically include portrayals of men demonstrating their capabilities of controlling their bodies perfectly and using their bodies to reach their goals. Joe Biden has also exhibited similar behavior in other instances. Viser & Wootson Jr. (2019) wrote an article for The Washington Post titled "Joe Biden is a 'healthy, rigorous' 77-year-old, his

doctor declares" where they report and discuss how the presidential candidate has challenged voters and reporters to wrestling matches and push-up contests to demonstrate his vigor.

(2) Mr. Biden appeared to be moving his mouth in a strange fashion during the last debate, which led to questions about whether he wore dentures.

Here, Lerer (2019) writes about the potential dental issues of Joe Biden. The observed bizarre movements of Joe Biden's mouth during a presidential debate had led to questions about whether or not the 76-year-old candidate was wearing prosthetic teeth.

(3) At Mr. Biden's campaign events, voters question whether his verbal missteps can be attributed to his age.

In this part of the article, Lerer (2019) discusses how voters have wondered about the mistakes and blunders that have occurred in Joe Biden's speeches during his events and if those slipups can be attributed to his old age. The very same mistakes were also discussed in The New York Times article "The Many Ways That Joe Biden Trips Over His Own Tongue" (Glueck 2019). According to Glueck (2019), Joe Biden's style of speaking is choppy, and it might work against him in the presidential race by alienating potential voters.

(4) He takes circuitous routes to the ends of sentences, if he finishes them at all. He sometimes says the opposite of what he means, He has mixed up countries, cities, and dates, embarked on off-messages asides and sometimes he simply cuts himself off.

In Glueck's (2019) article, she describes the various ways in which Joe Biden has struggled during his speeches. This comprehensive list of Biden's mistakes during his speeches makes the issue and his current situation seem quite severe. It should be

noted, that Glueck (2019) acknowledges in her article, how Joe Biden's verbal output has been an issue in his political career all the way from 1988 and that during his adult life he has overcome his childhood stutter.
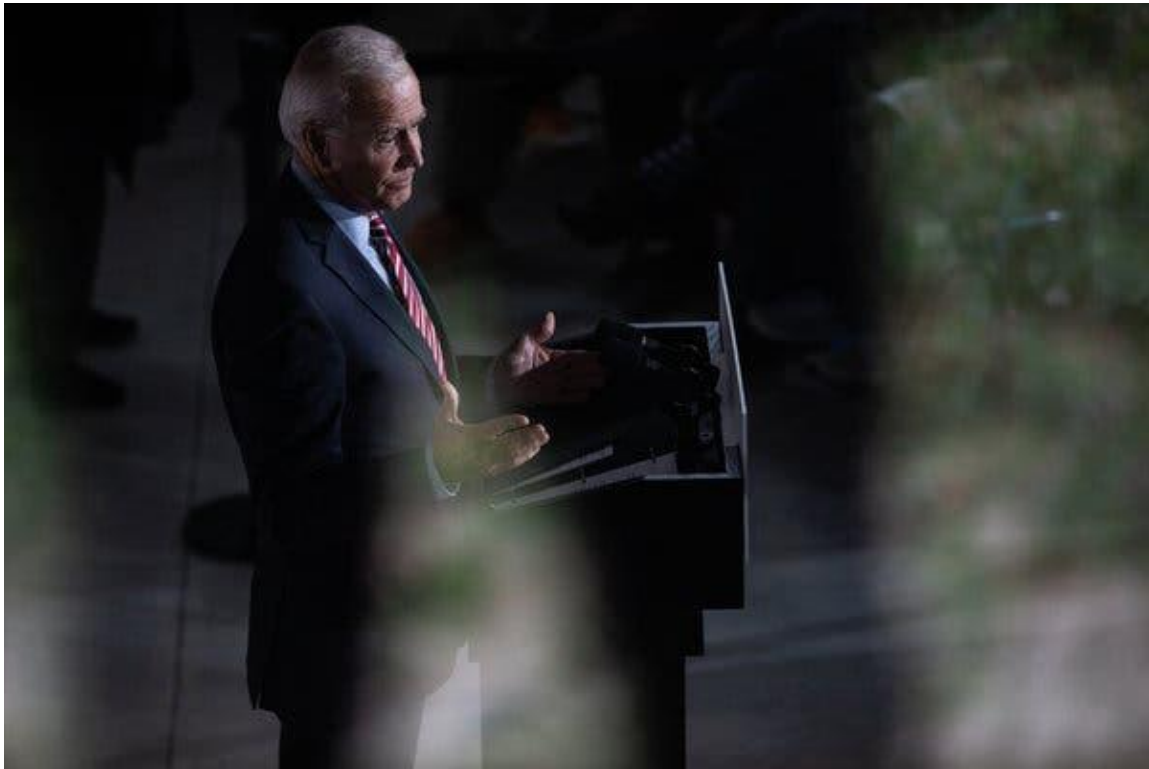


Image 1. Joe Biden standing at a podium. (Glueck 2019) © 2019 Jordan Gale/The New York Times.

The photo included in Glueck's (2019) article shows Joe Biden standing at a podium with both of his hands up looking at the audience with his mouth closed. The blurred background of audience members' feet and the foggy texture in the foreground of the image accompanied with reporting of Joe Biden's age and the ways in which he struggles during speeches could potentially be interpreted as a portrayal of him not being completely present during his events. Losing one's trail of thought, not being present, and struggling to communicate one's thinking at an older age could be associated with

diminishing mental capabilities associated common health issues that can come with age.

During the presidential race, Joe Biden also faced allegations of sexual harassment, misconduct, and similar questionable behavior around members of the opposite sex. In an article published on The New York Times by Glueck, Lerer, and Ember (2019) titled "Biden Denies Tara Reade's Assault Allegation: 'It Never Happened'", the writers describe how several women had come forward accusing Joe Biden of kissing, hugging, or touching them in public in a way that had made them feel uncomfortable at the time. According to Glueck, Lerer, and Ember (2019), Joe Biden had stayed quiet about these issues for a while but had then addressed the issue by stating that the women's claims should be taken seriously, but in these cases the claims are false.

### 4.2.2 Tulsi Gabbard's clothing choices, fitness, and background

In an article published by The New York Times "Tulsi Gabbard's White Pantsuit Isn't Winning", Friedman (2019) rather harshly criticizes the clothing that Tulsi Gabbard was wearing during a presidential debate.

(5) It was only a mere presidential election cycle ago, after all, that the white suit was thrust into the limelight as a symbol of so much: women's advancement and opportunity, and the possibility of a change

In this part of the article, Friedman (2019) reflects back to the previous presidential elections of 2016 when Hillary Clinton narrowly lost to Donald Trump. According to Friedman (2019), during that time, the white pantsuit worn by Clinton became a trademark symbol that was also attached to women's rights movements, gender equality, and equal opportunities.

(6) Her white suits are not the white suits of Ms. Clinton… …Rather they are the white of avenging angels and flaming swords, of somewhat combative right-eousness (also cult leaders)

The stark comparison is made between Tulsi Gabbard and the former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton wearing similar clothes. Friedman (2019) argues that Tulsi Gabbard is not interested in connecting with women's rights movements, but rather is using the white pantsuit to portray herself as mythical white knight coming to save voters from another regime war. According to Railo (2011 : 249-253), especially in the past, the clothing choices of female politicians have been more closely followed and criticized in news media when comparing the news articles written about them to their male counterparts. Friedman (2019) further differentiates the meaning and impact of the clothing choices of Clinton and Gabbard by concluding the article with a statement that clothes in the optics of politics are only as meaningful as the content that fills them.



Image 2. Tulsi Gabbard with her surfboard. (Flynn 2020) © 2020 Cheryl Senter/AP.

In a The Washington Post article titled "A Tulsi Gabbard fan asked if she could beat Biden in a push-up contest. She took on the guy in the crowd instead", Flynn (2020) describes how one of Tulsi Gabbard's supporters questioned whether Gabbard could win against Biden in a push-up contest as a reference to the time when Joe Biden was challenging voters to similar tests of athleticism. The article contained an image of Gabbard on the beach, wearing a wetsuit and holding a surfboard while looking into the distance. This photo and the textual contents of the article both connect Tulsi Gabbard with sports, activities, and fitness. The athleticism focused contents of the article and comparisons to Joe Biden's fitness along with a picture of Tulsi Gabbard with a surfboard could be interpreted as exemplifying an active lifestyle and youth. It should be noted that out of the three most popular male and the three most popular female candidates in the 2020 US presidential elections, Tulsi Gabbard was the youngest at 38 years of age.

(7) Born in American Samoa, she was raised in Hawaii by a Hindu mother and Catholic father and was exposed to a religious sect throughout her childhood…

(8) She had never left Hawaii as an adult until joining the military.

Later in the article, Flynn (2020) goes into detail about Tulsi Gabbard's cultural and religious past, family relations, military experience, and travelling experience. This kind of a comprehensive description of a candidate's past was quite uncommon in The New York Times and The Washington Post articles analyzed in this thesis. These particular cultural points and family relations along with religious and ethnic aspects of Tulsi Gabbard's past are not explicitly related to her politics, her career as a presidential candidate, or her campaign.

### 4.2.3 Amy Klobuchar's personality, manners, and past work

In an article published on The Washington Post website "Forget 'Minnesota nice.' Amy Klobuchar's rage is exactly what she needs now", Olsen (2020) goes into detail how Amy Klobuchar's shift in personality and how she conducts herself might give her an advantage in the presidential race. According to Olsen (2020), male audiences view Klobuchar's more aggressive manners and communicational output in negative ways by thinking that she loses her cool, has a weak personality, and is being over-the-top, while female audiences celebrate that she is standing up for herself in the presidential debates.

(9) Many people will say she should go back to the "Minnesota nice" persona that she has perfected over the years. They're wrong… …She won't get there by playing nice. She needs to ride this for all that it's worth.

According to Atkins (2008), "Minnesota nice" refers to a vaguely identified and defined set of cultural characteristics and stereotypical behavior of people who are from Minnesota. These characteristics and behavioral traits include politeness, friendliness, aversion to confrontation, emotional restraint, tendency towards agreements, and self-deprecation (Atkins 2008 : 242-248). In this part of the article, Olsen (2020) argues that these behavioral and personality traits are something that have been closely related to the political and public persona of Amy Klobuchar in the past and in order to be able to compete with her male counterparts, Klobuchar should move on to conducting herself in a more aggressive and competitive manner.

Image 3. Amy Klobuchar walking the picket line. (Olsen 2020) © 2020 Melina Mara/The Washington Post.

The photo included in The Washington Post article shows Amy Klobuchar amidst a group of workers protesting at Palms Resort & Casino in Las Vegas with an approachable and a smiling facial expression. In relation to the article as a whole, this photo exemplifies the niceness and friendliness that Klobuchar has been known for in the past. The different ways in which male and female audience members perceive and react to Klobuchar's personality traits, behavior, and manners and the changes that have occurred during her political career discussed by Olsen (2020) included some intriguing remarks. Olsen (2020) argued that male audience members view Klobuchar's aggressiveness and competitiveness in negative ways while female audiences celebrate her clashes with her political opponents and view them as being empowering.

According to Vecchione et al. (2012), normative societal pressures and gender-based social and cultural expectations affect personality traits by requiring females to develop high levels of positive interpersonal capabilities in their communication and other social practices, meaning that females tend to be friendlier, more agreeable, and more empathetic in general. Displaying character and personality traits that differ from societal expectations could be seen as at least partially explaining the divided response that political audience members have had to Amy Klobuchar's personality traits and manners according to Olsen (2020).

In addition to the representation of Amy Klobuchar's personality and manners, her past work as a prosecutor was frequently written about in news media during the presidential race. For example, an article published on The New York Times titled "Amy Klobuchar Is Pressed on 'The View' Over Her Record as a Prosecutor" (Corasaniti & Astor 2020) discusses how Klobuchar's handling of a conviction during her time as a prosecutor had recently been questioned and under inspection.

In their article, Corasaniti and Astor (2020) write about how Amy Klobuchar's actions as a prosecutor and as a head of the Hennepin County attorney's office potentially discriminated against or disproportionately affected people of color.

(10) Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota faced tough questions from a host of "The View", Sunny Hostin, during an interview on Tuesday regarding her handling of the conviction of a black teenager when she was a county prosecutor.

(11) Ms. Hostin also pressed Ms. Klobuchar on other aspects of her record as head of the Hennepin County attorney's office, including the fact that the office did not prosecute any of the more than two dozen killings by police officers in the county in the eight years Ms. Klobuchar was in charge.

These two excerpts from the article exemplify the ways in which Amy Klobuchar's past work had been questioned and critiqued during the presidential race of the 2020 elections. In her responses, Amy Klobuchar stated that there are issues of systematic racism in the criminal justice system of The United States, but the allegations towards her are misplaced. According to Klobuchar (Corasaniti & Astor 2020), when she was working as a prosecutor, the incarceration rates of black people decreased, the office staff had become more diverse, and that during the presidential race there had been several key figures in the Minnesotan African-American community that had supported her and campaigned for her.

### 4.2.4 Bernie Sanders' health, lifestyle, personality, and accusations

The age, health, and lifestyle of Bernie Sanders were frequently written about during the presidential elections of 2020. For example, Ember (2020) describes in her article published in The New York Times "After Heart Attack, Bernie Sanders Takes Long Walks and Eats Salads" how the presidential candidate has been going through a lifestyle transformation after suffering a heart attack on his campaign trail.

(12)  Ms. Sanders is ensuring that her husband is getting adequate rest, and he has been requesting fish for dinner instead of steak or ribs.

(13)  He has been wearing more stylish sweaters – and to rein in his previously unkempt hair.

These were some of the examples how Bernie Sanders changed his lifestyle to appear healthier to his audiences after a sudden heart attack made the future of his presidential candidacy uncertain. According to Ember (2020), Sanders' health and age have had his campaign under more scrutiny than ever before and when voters of the Democratic Party started to express reservations about his condition, he began to actively display determination and willingness to change in order to prove his energy,

endurance, and resilience. These included a strict regimen of healthier dietary choices, frequent exercise, and sufficient rest. Similar to the media representation of Joe Biden demonstrated in this analysis section, discussion and media articles about Bernie Sanders' health, age, and fitness and the following actions that Sanders took to display that he is essentially fit to be the next president of The United States, could be viewed as demonstrating stereotypical masculine traits and behavior. Railo (2011 :128) discussed in his article how representations of male heroes typically included demonstrations of physical capabilities and having absolute control over their bodies. In addition to the healthier lifestyle choices, Ember (2020) reported that Bernie Sanders began to put more effort into his looks with new clothing and hairstyling.

In another The New York Times article, Thrush and Ember (2020) go into detail discussing Bernie Sanders' personality. The article titled "The Bernie Sanders Personality test" contains a detailed description of Sanders personality exemplified by incidents that have occurred during his campaign events, social encounters and experiences with employees and subordinates, and the ways in which Sanders speaks, carries himself, and conducts himself.

(14) Presidential candidates have often tried to soften their image as they gain traction… …Mr. Sanders, who during a campaign event in September ordered a crying baby to "keep that down" not so much.

(15) His critics may see his unreconstructed personality as an extension of his deeply uncompromising politics. But this seal of authenticity is the key to the Bernie brand, the idea that what the public sees is the genuine, unmediated Bernie.

(16) People who have known Mr. Sanders for years say that, if anything, he is more intense and can be insensitive to people who encounter his moods.

(17) The intensity can sometimes cross the line. He has a history of angry outbursts.

In these excerpts and the majority of the rest of the article, Thrush and Ember (2020) portray Bernie Sanders as an uncompromising, intense, and strict leader who is very much stuck in his ways and can quite easily snap at other people around him.



Image 4. Bernie Sanders giving a speech. (Thrush & Ember 2020) © 2020 Erin Schaff/The New York Times.

This photo included in The New York Times article "The Bernie Sanders Personality Test" shows Sanders in the middle of his speech looking down with a stern facial expression. According to Thrush and Ember (2020), part of the Bernie Sanders personal brand is the unmediated and genuine approach of speaking straight, having a

relatively unkempt appearance in general, and not attempting to artificially soften one's image in order to try and appeal to larger audiences. In comparison to the

During the presidential race, Bernie Sanders also faced allegations of sexism and sexist behavior. In an article published on The Washington Post "A woman can't win? Alleged comment reopens feminist grievances against Bernie Sanders", Chiu and Shepherd (2020) write that audiences have been divided on Bernie Sanders in regard to his views on feminism and gender equality since the last presidential elections of 2016. According to Chiu and Shepherd (2020), the backers of Sanders have seen him as a standard-bearer for gender equality while other audiences have accused him and his followers of having sexist views and some have even partly blamed him for Hillary Clinton's loss in the previous elections.

### 4.2.5 Donald Trump's ethics, morals, and maturity

In an article written on The New York Times titled "For Trump, Lying Is a Super Power", Blow (2020) describes Donald Trump's relationship with lying, ethics, and morals.

(18) Trump, as a person and politician, is riddled with flaws. But he also has an ignominious super power: He is completely unencumbered by the truth, the need to tell it or accept it

(19) He has no greater guiding principles. He is not bound by ethics or morals.

According to Blow (2020), Donald Trump both as a politician and as an individual is willing to bend the truth and facts to serve his personal ambitions and to reach his goals. In this article, Trump is portrayed as a shameless showman who is never able to admit fault.

In a similar vein, The Washington Post has been keeping up a database of false or misleading claims made by Donald Trump. According to Kessler, Rizzo, and Kelly (2020), at the time of the 2020 US presidential elections, the database included 18,000 false or misleading claims that had been made by Trump within 1,170 days. The majority of these reported false or misleading claims were related to the economic situation in The United States, the coronavirus outbreak, tax cuts, and the border barrier being built at the Mexican border. Accessing the database today, one can find that it has been last updated Jan.20, 2021 and it contains 30,573 claims made in four years.



Image 5. Donald Trump during a briefing. (Blow 2020) © 2020 Al Drago/The New York Times.

In an article written on The Washington Post titled "Trump has handled the coronavirus the way he handles everything: Like a toddler", Drezner (2020) describes how Trump had been acting like "a cranky toddler" in his public speeches and

presentations. Equating Donald Trump's behavior to that of a cranky toddler could be seen as demonstrating an example of his perceived issues with age as part of regression. According to Freud (1977), regression is essentially a defense mechanism occurring especially among the elderly that causes people's egos to temporarily or permanently reverse to an earlier stage of development. This can cause adults to exemplify socially unacceptable, highly impulsive behavior or inadequate coping to stressful situations (Lokko & Stern 2015).

(20) The Trump White House's inadequate handling of the outbreak highlights his every toddler-like instinct. The most obvious one is his predilection for temper tantrums.

(21) Politico has reported on the myriad triggers for his tantrums: "if he's caught by surprise, if someone criticizes him, or if someone stops him from trying to do something or seeks to control him."

These excerpts from the article by Drezner (2020) are some of the ways in which the writer represents Donald Trump as an immature person with bad impulse control, short attention span and a difficult temperament. According to Drezner (2020), these personal and behavioral traits in addition to thought processes and social reactions make Trump very similar to toddlers.

### 4.2.6 Elizabeth Warren's battle against stereotypes, harassment, and sexism

An article published by The Washington Post titled "Elizabeth Warren faced sexism, shed a husband and found her voice teaching law in Houston" contains a very detailed description of Warren's life all the way from when she was only 19 years old to the current day. In this article, Bailey (2019) describes how Elizabeth Warren's career path began as an assistant professor teaching law at The University of Houston Law Center. From there onwards, Elizabeth Warren had her professional capabilities

questioned, she faced sexism and sexual harassment, and had to constantly battle negative stereotypes to prove herself.

(22) Warren described how Smith had invited her to his office one day just a few months after she had been hired. He shut the door and lunged for her, she said, and as she protested, he chased her around his desk before she was able to escape out the door.

(23) Her colleagues frequently mistook her that first year for a secretary, the school nurse or even a lost student

In this comparatively long article, Bailey (2019) goes into detail how Elizabeth Warren endured belittling, stereotypes, and sexism on her career path. According to Bailey (2019), Eugene Smith, the head of the faculty hiring committee at the University of Houston repeatedly made comments about Warren's appearance and clothing, told dirty jokes, and invited her for drinks and Warren tried to balance maintaining a good relationship with him whilst simultaneously deflecting this kind of behavior that made her feel uncomfortable to keep her teaching job.

Image 6. Elizabeth Warren with her husband at an event. (Bailey 2019) © 2019 Sarah Rice/The Washington Post.

Bailey (2019) continues in her article from Warren's professional career path into her family life describing her motherhood and romantic relationships. The article ends with a photograph taken from a political event where Elizabeth warren can be seen greeting a celebrating crowd after she had gotten re-elected. In this photograph, Warren is also holding the hand of her husband and it almost looks like she is pulling him after her and greeting her audience at the same time. The way this image is set, makes Elizabeth Warren seem like a confident leading figure, who takes other people into account.

Similar to the discussion about Amy Klobuchar's transformation from being Minnesota nice to exhibiting more aggressive and competitive behavior, Elizabeth Warren's personality and aggressiveness were also under inspection in news media

during the presidential race. Vecchione et al. (2012) discussed in their article how societal pressures and expectations, generally speaking, require females to develop their interpersonal capabilities and communication in a way that typically make them demonstrate friendliness, agreeableness, and empathy more than their male counterparts. Deviating from these kinds of social expectations appear to have caused quite strong reactions in Elizabeth Warren's competitors who are male. In an article written for The Washington Post titled "Is Elizabeth Warren 'angry' and antagonistic? Or are rival dabbling in gendered criticism", Viser and Linskey (2019) write about how Warren's colleagues in the Democrats had commented on her ways to approach issues.

(24) Buttigieg laid the groundwork by criticizing Warren's "my way or they highway approach" and suggesting recently that she is "so absorbed in fighting that it is as though fighting were the purpose"

(25) Biden, launching a range of new attacks on Warren, said this week that she reflects "an angry unyielding viewpoint that has crept into our politics.

Viser and Linskey (2019) include quotes in their article from various political strategists and advisers who commented that calling a female candidate angry or aggressive can hurt their chances in the race as it can potentially make audiences question their temper, qualifications, or make them seem unlikable.

## 4.3 Interpretation, comparison, and explanation

Following the dimensions of Fairclough's (1995a : 98) three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis, I will be interpreting the representations of female and male presidential candidates described above by dividing them by gender and summarizing the main points of the individual representations in order to process the information gathered from these articles within their discourse contexts. I will then be moving on to the explanation or the social analysis dimension according to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995a : 98) by comparing the potential differences and similarities in the representations whilst simultaneously seeking to explain the reasons for these similarities and differences in the broader social, societal, and cultural contexts.

### 4.3.1 Representation of the male politicians

The media representations of the male presidential candidates in the news media articles chosen for this thesis focused on personality traits, age, health, authenticity, various allegations, and concrete actions that the candidates had taken during the presidential race.

In terms of health and age, both Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden faced questioning about their physical condition, health, and fitness during the US presidential race of 2020. They had both tried to superficially alleviate these concerns by changing their behavior, appearing more active, healthy, and better put together in terms of their appearances or lifestyle and dietary choices and habits. This sort of behavior could be considered as being an example of the masculine traits of not talking about one's issues and medical concerns, but rather demonstrating one's physical fitness and condition by appearing overtly active and healthy to the public. According to Railo (2011 : 128), previous research indicates that the fitness of the male body is typically associated with representations of masculinity.

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Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump both had news media articles written about their stubbornness, unwillingness to change their opinions, and the ways in which they have been known to be overtly direct with their comments and have built their public reputation around being uncensored and unmediated. In addition to these personality traits, both also had news articles writing about their tendency to lose their tempers by either having a public temper tantrum or snapping at the people around them.

Regarding the male candidates' questionable behavior towards the opposite sex and the allegations that the had faced, Joe Biden had faced several accusations of sexual harassment in the news articles analyzed, Bernie Sanders faced accusations of sexist behavior towards his colleagues and competitors, and while the articles included in this thesis did not contain examples of sexual harassment or misconduct allegations towards Donald Trump, there have been several examples of these since in the news cycle. For example, Relman (2020) has written an article for the Business Insider detailing the cases of twenty-six women who have accused Trump of sexual misconduct. Thus, all of the male candidates, whose representations were analyzed in this thesis, had had mentions about sexist behavior or sexual misconduct in the news media during their political careers and presidential candidacies.

### 4.3.2   Representation of the female politicians

The news media representation of the female candidates analyzed in this thesis concentrated on the looks, personality, manners, and the professional past of the candidates. Also, the issues of gender, sex, and sexism were discussed in the analyzed articles.

Focusing on the personalities and manners of the female candidates, both Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar had articles written about them, where the main point of focus was describing the aggressiveness, competitiveness, or angry social conducts of the candidates. In Amy Klobuchar's case, the aggressive approach to

political discussions was viewed as potentially being negative in the eyes of male audiences and empowering in the eyes of female audiences. Elizabeth Warren had received comments from her competitors and colleagues about her being angry during political discussions or debates and in the articles these comments were viewed as attacks towards her to make her seem unlikable to audiences in general.

All three of the female candidates analyzed in this thesis, had articles written about their personal, cultural, or professional pasts. Amy Klobuchar's past work as a prosecutor and the decisions that she had made during that time were questioned, Tulsi Gabbard's past in terms of her family, culture, and career were written about, and Elizabeth Warren had a detailed article written about her career, family, romantic relationships, and the struggles that she had faced in the past.

In terms of looks or appearances, the detailed professional and personal past of Elizabeth Warren contained examples of the ways in which the way she looks like had been commented on in the Past. The article described how Warren had received comments and criticism about the way she dressed or kept her hair (Bailey 2019). Similarly, Tulsi Gabbard's clothing choices were critiqued in one of the chosen articles by comparing her white pantsuit to Hillary Clinton's clothing, who was a successful female candidate in the previous US presidential elections in 2016. In a study conducted by Power, Rak, and Kim (2020), the researchers were surprised to find that representations of women in business magazines did not involve descriptions or criticisms of appearances, looks, or clothing. In their research Power, Rak, and Kim (2020 were expecting to find mentions of appearance, private life, and family relationships in the representation of women. According to them, previous research has established that media representations of females typically include more descriptions of appearances, domestic sphere, and family relationships (Power, Rak & Kim 2020 : 2-4).

### 4.3.3 Comparison

Interpreting the representations by compiling the summaries of the representations of the male and female politicians by gender, it is clear that there were some differences in the representations and the aspects of the politicians' personalities and personal lives that the news media articles focused on in The New York Times and The Washington post.

The articles written about the male politicians frequently included accusations or allegations of sexist behavior or sexual misconduct while the representation of female candidates included articles about the sexism or sexual misconduct that they had faced. These differences could be explained by the differences in the numbers of sexual harassment, misconduct, and sexual assault cases experienced by or perpetrated by the genders. According to Kearl (2018), in America approximately 81% of women and 43% of men have experienced sexual harassment and/or assault. These statistics could at least partly explain the differences in the news media representations of the politicians.

The representations of the female candidates also had mentions of issues related to sex and gender that the representations of the male candidates seemed to lack. For example, the division of audiences' reactions by gender to Amy Klobuchar's and Elizabeth Warren's aggressiveness was something that never occurred in the articles written about the male candidates. The mentions or focus on sex and gender could at least partly be explained by the ways in which genders are viewed and how gender roles and stereotypes are established in the cultures of Western countries. According to Salinas and Bagni (2017), although there have been implementations, initiatives, and progress made in Western countries regarding the equality of genders, there are still expectations and disparities in the ways that genders are represented in their professional lives, how they are treated, and what is expected of them.

In terms of the perceived aggressiveness, more competitive aspects of personality, and public conduct or behavior attributed to Amy Klobuchar and Elizabeth Warren, it could be argued that the differences in reactions from audience members based on gender could potentially be related to social and societal expectations of communication styles and personality from women or especially female politicians. Wagner, Trimble, and Sampert (2019) argued in their research, that female politicians in Canada faced more negative and gendered assessments on their communication skills, intellectual capabilities, and professional experience in news media reporting. According to Vecchione et al. (2012), women are expected or required to develop high levels of interpersonal skills in their communication and social practices, meaning that women are more often expected to be more agreeable, friendlier, and more empathetic in general.

The articles written about male candidates typically did not contain information about their professional or personal pasts while it seemed that there were numerous articles discussing where the female candidates had come from in terms of their careers and politicians and where they were heading. According to Power, Rak, and Kim (2020 : 2), previous research has established that the media representations of women typically have more stereotypical descriptions related to appearances, private life, and family relationships more frequently neglecting mentions or descriptions of professional lives, achievements, or attributes. Compared to their male counterparts, the representation of female candidates in the news articles analyzed in this thesis appeared to focus on their pasts more frequently.

In terms of the multimodal elements included in the news articles, the images of all of the male candidates included photos of them standing alone at podiums giving speeches while the female candidates were typically depicted in various scenarios that could be related more towards past time activities or personal and social lives. Admittedly, some of the articles did contain photos of the female candidates standing at podium or giving speeches and presentations but they always showed parts of the

crowds and the audiences while the male candidates were typically depicted completely alone. Also, if the photos of the male candidates did include members of the audience, they were either partly blurred or blocked from view by various objects with the camera focused on the politician in question. According to Railo (2011), male politicians in the past have typically been represented as individual, independent, self-sufficient, and free characters. The multimodal contexts of the articles in this thesis appear to include similar representations of the male candidates while the female candidates were represented as more social and communal.

# 5 CONCLUSION

The present study analyzed the media representations of male and female politicians who were candidates in the 2020 US presidential elections. The primary sources of the thesis were The New York Times and The Washington Post, and the politicians included in the analysis were Joe Biden, Tulsi Gabbard, Amy Klobuchar, Bernie Sanders, Donald Trump, and Elizabeth Warren. When doing this thesis, I was interested in the potential differences and similarities that might have occurred in the media representations during the news cycle of the elections. The research question of this thesis was "What are the differences regarding the representations of male and female politicians in American news media during the 2020 presidential elections?".

In order to answer this question, I utilized the approaches and frameworks of multi-modal discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. The main framework behind the analysis was Fairclough's (1995a) three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis. Following this framework, I began the analysis process by describing the texts and images included in the news articles chosen for this thesis. I then moved on to interpreting the texts and the multimodal elements by compiling the findings and then comparing the representations of the male and female politicians created in the news articles. Finally, I concluded the analysis by discussing the representations and their comparisons in the broader contexts of societal communication practices, cultural attitudes, social phenomena, and ideas and statistics related to gender.

The analysis of the representation revealed that there were clear differences in the representations of the male and female candidates both in the textual contents of the articles and the images included in them. According to Fairclough (1992 : 12), the purpose of critical discourse analysis is not to only describe discursive practices and their occurrences, but to also include analysis to show discourses are built and shaped by power relations and social and societal factors that are perhaps not implicitly apparent to the discourse participants. In this thesis, the media representations of the male and female candidates created, built, and reproduced in The New York Times and The Washington Post revealed some differences in the ways in which the politicians were represented. These differences could be, at least partly, explained and defined in terms of the broader social discussions and attitudes towards gender in Western countries.

The present study indicates that while there are clear differences in the ways in which male and female politicians are represented in news media, there has been some development in comparison to older studies revolving around the same subject. This is one of the reasons why studying media and gender representations has significance and academic value since it allows us to study the developments in cultural views and values or social landscapes recreated or reproduced in mass media communications. In comparison to previous studies related to the subject of media representation of male and female politicians, there were some points of focus that did not exactly correlate with some of the past findings. For example, Railo (2011) discussed how the personal lives, age, and health of female candidates have been more frequently discussed in media with questions about their fitness or ability to do their jobs as politicians in comparison to their male counterparts. Railo (2011 : 184) discussed how his research focusing on the differences in the media representations of male and female politicians did not include any mentions of how the male politicians were taking care of their health, bodies, clothing or how they discuss and perceive their own aging. However, the present study showcased some examples of male politicians age and health being put into question in relation to their capabilities of handling being the future president of The United States. Still, it should be

noted that the age differences between the male and female candidates included in this thesis were quite substantial with the male politicians being significantly older in general.

According to Fürsich (2010), past research has indicated that mass media communications, such as news media publications, play a significant role in shaping, creating, reproducing, and upholding potentially problematic stereotypes and representations. The representations of male and female politicians analyzed in this thesis could potentially affect larger social phenomena once they have reached their audiences. According to Hall (1997), representations can be seen as central processes that produce meaning in our communication. Research and studies focusing on media representations are significant in that they can potentially identify and help scholars understand the potentially problematic and socially influential effects that these representations can have. For example, they could affect younger audiences who potentially look up to these politicians. This might eventually affect their behavior and discourses based on the representations that they see in news media. According to Fürsich (2010), the ways in which mass media communications shape, uphold, and create stereotypes and representations is especially amplified in the contemporary communication environment where there exists a propensity of visual imagery.

I acknowledge the limitations of this thesis and the fact that it had a quite narrow scope and approach. When choosing the scope of this thesis and the particular articles for analysis, I consciously left out articles that either only briefly mentioned the candidates in question or that solely focused on their politics or political standings. When I started to go through the thousands of articles, I made the decision that I will only include articles that completely focus on the candidates in question and included contents more about their personal lives, character, personality, family, culture, and so on. If I were to include, for example, articles that focused on the various debates, I could have made more precise, cohesive, or concrete comparisons between

the representations of the male and female politicians by analyzing articles that wrote about several candidates at the same time.

I also acknowledge that starting with a sample data of almost thirty-five thousand articles and then only choosing two to four articles for each candidate to analyze, made this thesis open to the error of leaving out vital information regarding the representations of the candidates. Also, this narrow selection of articles and their analysis effectively cannot be seen as providing the complete picture of how the presidential candidates were represented in news media during the presidential race and the elections. However, I hope that this thesis can provide one recent example of media representation in terms of male and female politicians to the existing research or perhaps serve as a starting point for future studies focusing on similar subject matter.

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