White Rose Research Online

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York

Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/202964/

Version: Published Version

Article:
Stead, V., Mavin, S. and Elliott, C. (2024) Angela Rayner (Member of Parliament) and the "Basic Instinct Ploy": intersectional misrecognition of women leaders' legitimacy, productive resistance and flexing (patriarchal) discourse. Gender, Work & Organization, 31 (1). pp. 152-170. ISSN: 0968-6673

https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13050

Reuse
This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
University of Sheffield
UNIVERSITY of York

Check for updates

Received: 23 September 2022 | Revised: 5 April 2023 | Accepted: 22 July 2023

DOI: 10.1111/gwao.13050

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

Angela Rayner (Member of Parliament) and the "Basic Instinct Ploy": Intersectional misrecognition of women leaders' legitimacy, productive resistance and flexing (patriarchal) discourse

Valerie Stead[1] | Sharon Mavin[2] | Carole Elliott[3]

[1]Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK

[2]Newcastle University Business School, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

[3]Sheffield University Management School, Sheffield, UK

Correspondence
Valerie Stead, Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster University, Bailrigg, Lancaster LA1 4YX, UK.
Email: v.stead@lancaster.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper interrogates a shift in patriarchal media discourse related to women leaders' recognition and legitimation in the UK. We conduct a multimodal discourse analysis of an online newspaper article about the UK politician and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, Angela Rayner, and analyzed public responses. Understanding the media as a means to distribute power and enable the challenging of norms, we contribute a theory of intersectional misrecognition in media's representation of women political leaders. This reveals an enduring and dynamic subordinate status of women leaders, shown specifically through the intersection of gender and class. We theorize that while women leaders continue to be misrecognized in the media, destabilizing their legitimacy, there is a demonstrable flexing of patriarchal discourse combined with stronger and accelerated resistance to ongoing sexism. We identify this resistance as productive in its call for consequences and a redistribution of cultural values, reflecting a discursive shift toward a productive resistance of resilient gender norms, evident in the intersection of gender with class. Intersectional misrecognition has value in making inequalities explicit for

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2023 The Authors. Gender, Work & Organization published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

women leaders and where there may be productive tensions with potential to mobilize for change.

KEYWORDS
class, flexing, intersectional misrecognition, legitimation, media discourse, productive resistance, women leaders

1 | INTRODUCTION

This study interrogates a shift in patriarchal media discourse related to women leaders' recognition and legitimation in the UK. Research examining the relationship between media outputs and women leaders' recognition and legitimation reveals media's power and critical role in shaping understandings of women in leadership roles (Elliott et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2015; Mavin et al., 2019). Within this research, studies draw attention to the variability of individual leader identity through an intersectional lens, and how media reinforces inequalities through reference to sexuality, race, and age (Pullen & Taksa, 2016). Despite calls for the "reinsertion of class" (Walby et al., 2012, p. 236) in intersectional analyses, attention to how class and gender intersect in media discourse of women leaders is limited. This paper responds to this call and illustrates how class and gender are mobilized through media discourse to subdue a prominent UK woman politician, Angela Rayner. Specifically, we extend research by Mavin et al. (2019) that surfaces how media circulate a patriarchal discourse by insisting upon femininity through appearance from women leaders, and considers the complexities attached to public consumption of powerful women's media constructions, where sexism is visible and visceral. We contribute a theory of intersectional misrecognition, illustrated through a focus on the text and imagery of an article about Angela Rayner, where class and gender prejudices are wielded to demean and delegitimize a woman leader. Our analysis highlights how the intersection of class and gender provokes audience responses that signal a productive resistance. We identify the term productive resistance to describe a resistance to sexist, misogynist, and classist discourse, concerned to make a positive change by simultaneously calling the media to account and demanding consequences.

Our examination of patriarchal media discourse has international relevance given its prevalence across the world's media (GMMP, 2021). The study is situated in a UK media environment that has a concentration of newspaper ownership by a small number of organizations whose partisan approach targets particular audiences and influences political networks. This context has wider relevance in illustrating media's active role in constructing women leaders' representations that affirm socio-cultural stereotypes and reinforce political agendas.

Extending Mavin et al.'s (2019) study we examine a recent online newspaper article, *"Stone the Crows! Tories accuse Angela Rayner of Basic Instinct ploy to distract Boris,"* focused on the UK Member of Parliament (MP) and Deputy Leader of the opposition Labour Party, Angela Rayner. As an MP in the UK Government, Angela Rayner works in an historic organization with entrenched patriarchal values and embedded gendered cultural norms that dictate and regulate expectations and performances. The article's text and images report anonymous men UK Conservative (Tory) party MPs, accusing Angela Rayner of crossing and uncrossing her legs to distract Prime Minister (PM) Boris Johnson during PM's Question Time. We examine the article, responses from Angela Rayner, the public and MPs, to interrogate the extent to which patriarchal media discourse has shifted in relation to UK women political leaders, and the impact for women leaders' recognition and legitimacy.

Our research question is, "how does the case of 'Angela Rayner's Basic Instinct Ploy' impact women leaders' legitimacy and a discourse of resistance?" In exploring this question, we also ask: (i) how does discourse circulate from the *Mail on Line* article through audience responses in various media, and (ii) how, through a perspectival dualism lens, do audience responses illustrate a flexing of patriarchal media discourse reflecting change, and an acceleration of resistance.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Our study applies a theoretical framework encompassing ideas of distributed discourse (Greene et al., 2003) that illustrate the nature of the mediated environment to distribute power, which leads to accelerated pluralism (Bimber, 1998); an increase in attention that helps to solidify challenges or resistance to issues. Our framework incorporates Fraser's (1998, 2003) lens of perspectival dualism, which draws attention to the identity politics of recognition and legitimacy, as a means of subordination through social structures. This enables us to illustrate how patriarchal discourse (mis)recognizes and (de)legitimizes women as leaders, *and* how this connects to social structures and issues of social justice. While recognition from others is essential to being seen as legitimate (Maak & Pless, 2006), Fraser's perspectival dualism alerts us to the importance of locating (mis)recognition within social structures if we are to mobilize change. Adopting this lens provides a means to examine shifts in discourse that disrupt limiting normative representations of women's legitimacy as leaders and offers productive routes for resistance.

We apply the framework to the case of Angela Rayner's representation in the media and understand intersectionality as the inseparability of social differences such as gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and nation which interact across spheres of influence, provoking systemic power relations (Rodriguez et al., 2016). We contribute a theory of intersectional misrecognition to literature on women's legitimacy as leaders in two ways. First, we contribute to understandings of women's (mis)recognition as leaders by surfacing how a continuing focus on women's femininity, appearance, and sexualization intersects with class identity to undermine women leaders' legitimacy. We contribute to the gender, gendered leadership, and media literature by illustrating how misrecognition in the media can impact women leaders' legitimacy, and present insights into a flexing of patriarchal discourse, reflecting stretch and signs of change, to advance understandings of leader legitimacy.

Furthermore, we apply multimodal discourse analysis to examine how imagery and text combine to reinforce legitimacy and gender norms, and simultaneously provoke resistance to shift discourse that challenges those norms. This extends examinations of imagery in relation to women leaders' media representations (Elliott & Stead, 2018; Liu et al., 2015) and deepens understandings of the importance of visual imagery in interpretations of leadership.

Second, research identifies media's significant role in legitimation including the circulation of gender norms that affect legitimation through media constructions (Griffin et al., 2017; Mavin et al., 2019), and media as a space in which legitimation is influenced and contested (Glozer et al., 2019). We advance research on gender, media, and women's leadership legitimation by examining media coverage of a UK woman politician to identify how discourse flexes, indicating the potential shift in audience responses toward a productive resistance to legitimacy and gender norms. We employ the term productive resistance to signal a shift that is not only concerned with calling out sexism, misogyny, and classism, but also calls for consequences which impact on patriarchal media discourse.

2 | WOMEN LEADERS AND LEGITIMACY

While associated with the power-holding position of a leader (Vial et al., 2016), legitimacy is not a given but attributed, and recognized through relations with others (Maak & Pless, 2006). Women leaders' legitimacy is complicated by gender; they experience "comparative devaluation" (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 652), against persistent association of leadership with men, and are less likely to be "accepted" as leaders than men counterparts (Parks-Stamm et al., 2008). The "persisting effects of gender status" (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 647) places expectations upon women to perform femininity, whereas men are rewarded when extending their repertoire beyond performing only masculinity (Due Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Such persistent effects are evident in the everyday nature of sexism (Bates, 2016), including the hyper scrutiny of women political leaders (Pullen & Vachhani, 2021). A dissonance therefore remains between calls for women's advancement into leadership roles and the extent to which they are recognized as legitimate holders of such roles.

The intersection of gender and class slows down the possibility of working-class women becoming recognized as leaders. Working-class women face a "class ceiling" (Friedman, 2022). Friedman's study of the UK civil services' class and gender distribution identifies how women from working-class backgrounds choose to conceal their backgrounds

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

believing it will negatively impact their career aspirations. Men civil servants from similar backgrounds, however, are more likely to discuss openly "and display embodied markers of a working-class background" (Friedman, 2022, p. 503), which they deploy as a form of embodied cultural capital. This allows some working-class men to resist dominant behavioral codes and "brand" themselves as senior leaders with a unique style and perspective (ibid). Working-class women by contrast self-eliminate from career progression, indicating an intersection between the glass and class ceilings. Significantly, "pathologizing depictions" of working-class women have intensified in recent decades particularly with the rise of celebrity culture. Television (TV) and social media "inscribe a particular 'visualization' of working-class women as the exemplar of physical, moral, and sexual 'excess' and therefore deserving subjects of societal contempt" (Friedman, 2022, p. 505).

2.1 | The UK government and historic expectations of women

The UK Government is an historic organization, reflecting deeply embedded patriarchal and cultural values which support traditional gender norms and unspoken rules about "what is suitable work behaviour for women" (Billing, 2011, p. 312). These rules include expectation of a respectable business femininity (Mavin & Grandy, 2016) reminiscent of Victorian social norms, where women leaders' "body and appearance create and maintain liminal zones of acceptable femininity and embodied leadership; credibility and privilege as an elite leader is at risk if women get their looks, movements, and talk 'wrong'" (p. 8).[1]

Billing (2011) argues that the male norm operates differently for women in traditional versus new organizations, highlighting how older organizations, such as the UK Government, may be more resistant to change. We view the media's sexualization of women MP's bodies and subsequent responses as a critical "fight" for power between patriarchy and progress of feminism through women leaders' legitimacy. This is a battle between the UK Government as a patriarchal organization with societal control dominated by men, literally creating and operationalizing the "rule of wom/man/law." Women MPs, simply by being elected, disrupt the social order. They can hold explicit feminist values, and/or have "different dispositions and capabilities to act upon and against gendering" (Billing, 2011, p. 313). Women MPs may not follow traditional rules of "how we do things here" and can recognize how sexualization of their bodies is an attempt at regulation, and a challenge to their role legitimacy.

2.2 | Media and women's legitimation as leaders

Drawing attention to women's legitimation as leaders we examine how media text and imagery position men and women differently, and how media discourse influences the extent to which women are (mis)recognized as legitimate leaders. The limited studies examining women leaders' media representation (e.g., Elliott et al., 2016; Elliott & Stead, 2018; Liu et al., 2015), reveal how the media reifies gender binaries promoting masculinized ideals of leadership and devaluing women's positioning as legitimate leaders. How women leaders' bodies are "read" by others (Pullen & Taksa, 2016, p. 125) affects their positioning as leaders, and perceptions of their legitimacy to hold leadership roles (Griffin, et al., 2017). Legitimacy is not fixed, but is a consequence of dynamic processes of power (Nousiainen et al., 2013).

Analyses of women leaders' media representations, evidence "intricate interplay between women's formal positioning as leaders and the complexity of their agency due to their embodied status as women in traditionally masculine roles" (Elliott & Stead, 2018, p. 5). Existing in a "gray zone" where they remain "a-legitimate" (Nousiainen et al., 2013, p. 53), women are regarded as neither legitimate nor illegitimate. Gendered stereotypes associating men with leadership provoke implicit assumptions that can undermine women's status and perceived leadership competency (Koenig et al., 2011). Women's legitimation is further complicated should they act counter to gendered expectations. Women failing to comply with gender norms may be penalized (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010), resulting in negative reactions and resistance to their authority (Vial et al., 2016).

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Studies of women leaders' media representations challenge the essentialist and dichotomous nature of media representations that reinforce stereotypical thinking (e.g., Mavin et al., 2019) and result in (mis)recognition of women leaders in media texts. While acknowledging the co-constructed nature of women leaders' representations for audience consumption (Pullen & Taksa, 2016), and their potentially destabilizing effect on women's legitimation as leaders (Liu et al., 2015), there remains limited understanding of how audience discursive responses to these media representations impact women's recognition and legitimacy. Research into audience responses, including opposition to media positioning to understand effects on individuals (Törrönen & Simonen, 2015), will provide insight into how media representations are challenged and resisted.

Media texts provide a site for interrogating audience reaction including social media. With its accessibility and ease of interaction, social media operates to distribute power by "democratizing the tools of discourse framing" (Upchurch & Grassman, 2016, p. 2). Through this "distributed discourse" (Greene et al., 2003) media articles reach wider and multiple audiences. The rapid increase in interactivity with a particular article through social media is termed accelerated pluralism (Bimber, 1998), referring to how increased interactivity lowers barriers in how discourse is ordered, enabling mobilization of grievances into social movements (Bimber, 1998). This has relevance for social justice. Social media's facility to distribute discourse and stimulate accelerated pluralism, makes it increasingly difficult to ignore or bury articles and images, especially when they relate to well-known public figures. Audiences' take-up and distribution of an article and/or imagery places the original article firmly in the spotlight demanding acknowledgment and response from protagonists.

To summarize, women leaders' (mis)recognition in media texts can impact on their legitimacy which can be destabilized, or strengthened, through the dynamic relationships between media images, texts, and audience responses. Associated discourses are distributed widely and mobilized, stimulating accelerated pluralism, and provoking response.

3 | PERSPECTIVAL DUALISM: WOMEN LEADERS' (MIS)RECOGNITION IN MEDIA TEXTS

To consider women leaders' legitimacy, and how this can be (mis)recognized, we turn to Fraser's understanding of recognition as an issue of social justice based on the principle of "participatory parity" (1998, p. 2) that enables adult members of society to interact as peers (Fraser, 2003). With this approach Fraser treats recognition as a fundamental social and economic issue, rather than an issue focused on the individual. A major concern of the "psychologization" of recognition (2003, p. 31), is that it risks reducing "injustice of misrecognition to a matter of individual psychological shortcomings or failings" (Garrett, 2010, p. 1521), which can in turn lead to blaming the victim (Fraser, 2003).

Viewing recognition as an issue of social justice, Fraser (1998, p. 3) conceives "misrecognition as a status injury whose locus is social relations, not individual psychology." Thus, the ways in which the media misrepresents women leaders can be understood as a social act of misrecognition. Research on recognition identifies the role of institutions, individuals, and broader social conditions (Lepold, 2018). We draw on Fraser's work because a social justice focus to examine women leaders' legitimacy resists a dominant empowerment discourse in women's leadership that neglects social responsibility for gender inequalities (Stead & Elliott, 2019). Instead, viewing misrecognition as a moral wrong (Fraser, 1998) helps to identify impediments, conditions and "institutionalized patterns of interpretation [that] pervasively downgrade femininity" (Fraser, 1998, p. 4) and that establish women leaders' misrecognition.

Key to Fraser's ideas is the need to move from recognition debates that focus purely on identity politics to embrace a two-dimensional conception of justice that combines the identity politics of recognition with class politics that focus on redistribution. Here redistribution is not just economic, but also comprises cultural values. Linking recognition and misrecognition to the economy and redistribution acknowledges how individuals are connected, and subject to, social structures; they are "nodes of convergence for multiple, cross-cutting axes of subordination" (Fraser, 2003, p. 57). Perspectival dualism enables theorization of "the dynamic forms of status subordination,

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

characteristic of late modern globalizing capitalism" (Fraser, 2003, p. 60). Referring to gender, Fraser notes the impossibility of "an either/or choice between the paradigm of redistribution and the paradigm of recognition" (Fraser, 2003, p. 22). Recognition claims risk being "merely symbolic" or "empty gestures" (Fraser, 1998, p. 10); without redistribution such claims are unlikely to bring any change.

Perspectival dualism facilitates interrogation of how the intersection of gender-class-woman leaders is represented: in the media; the impact on women leaders' legitimacy status; implications of media representation; and changes in discourse in struggles for social justice. Intersectionality offers a more inclusive lens to women's experiences, acknowledging the intersections of gender with other identities "as interlocking roots of inequality," particularly where social positions frame how individuals experience their subjectivities (Holvino, 2010, p. 257). Intersectionality helps develop new considerations of "multiplicity in power relations" which disrupt "notions of a homogeneous category 'woman'" (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 82).

4 | RESEARCH APPROACH

To address the question "how does the case of 'Angela Rayner's Basic Instinct Ploy' impact on women leaders' legitimacy and a discourse of resistance?", and consider how discourses circulate and audiences respond, we followed the approach taken by Mavin et al. (2019) who utilize Elliott and Stead's (2018) multimodal discourse analysis framework. We examined a media text published in the *Mail on Line*, April 24, 2022 through multimodal discursive analysis, and interrogated public responses in the UK over a 2-day period (April 24–26, 2022) including online reporting of newspaper articles, Twitter and daytime TV programmes. In support of Angela Rayner, we have chosen not to show the image here so that we do not contribute to its further distribution.

Media texts and videos were collected on the web through combining the search terms "Angela Rayner," "Basic Instinct" "Sexism" and "Misogyny" to discover public responses most directly relevant to the *Mail on Line* headline. The sources and media were chosen to reflect what we interpreted as compelling data to illustrate multiple responses of challenge to the article (listed in Table 1). The researchers worked together on-line allowing for an iterative series of data analysis points to occur and comparisons between each researcher's interpretations. The researchers met at all four stages of data analysis to compare and discuss their interpretations of the text, the image, the combination of text and imagery, and the audience responses. Particularly compelling data included the recurring interweaving of gender and class in the article and image that calls into question Angela Rayner's authority and status as a leader, and how this messaging provoked outrage in the audience responses.

Multimodal discourse analysis recognizes that the meaning of texts, including online newspaper reports and TV programmes, are achieved through more than one semiotic mode (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). This approach is appropriate to explore how women leaders and discourses are constructed in a range of media outputs, and "the interdiscursivity between constructions" (Mavin et al., 2019, p. 4). For us, discourse is "a focus on relations between linguistic/semiotic elements of the social and other (including material) elements," to gain insight into how discourse reflects wider social relations' (Fairclough, 2005, p. 916). Discourse is socially constitutive (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 358), able to reproduce and transform social norms, and socially conditioned in that it is shaped by the situation and the sociocultural context. Further, "almost any look at mass media representations indicates the strength of forces creating identity regulation in gendered ways" (Billing, 2011, p. 303). One force regulating gendered identity is the concentration of newspaper ownership in the UK by a small number of organizations such as Rupert Murdoch's NewsCorp and Lord Rothermere's Daily Mail. Ownership concentration has political consequences underpinned by business models of news gathering. Murdoch's NewsCorp's partisan approach to news influences political networks and is part of a broader marketing strategy that targets specialized markets (Arsenault & Castells, 2008). Sensationalist news coverage expands newspapers' audience, increasing advertising revenue. Locating our study in the UK media environment has wider relevance by surfacing media's active and partisan role in constructing leader representations.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 1 Data sources.

Accessed	Link to source
23.04.22 (original publication date) we analyzed updated online article published on 26.04.22	Mail on Line https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10746873/Tories-accuse-Angela-Rayner-Basic-Instinct-ploy-crosses-uncrosses-legs-PMQs.html
24.04.22	Daily Record online https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/mps-sexual-misconduct-allegations-westminster-26784786
24.04.22	Mail on Line https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10748141/Labour-deputy-Angela-Rayner-blasts-Tories-sexist-misogynistic-Basic-Instinct-claims.html
24.04.22	Twitter. Angela Rayner's response to the *Mail on Line* article https://twitter.com/AngelaRayner/status/1518126832272486400
24.04.22	The London Economic online https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/angela-rayner-reacts-to-mail-on-sundays-peverted-basic-instinct-smear-320330
25.04.22	National World Views online https://www.nationalworld.com/news/politics/keir-starmer-this-morning-labour-leader-misogynist-culture-westminster-3667357
26.04.22	The Guardian online https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/26/angela-rayner-i-begged-mail-on-sunday-not-to-publish-basic-instinct-story
26.04.22	ITV the Lorraine show: Angela Rayner interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2A_XvUL5P0A
26.04.2022	ITV Loose Women TV program https://www.catchupplayer.co.uk/episode/162427/Loose_Women.html
26.04.2022	Huffington Post online https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/james-heappey-tory-mp-mail-on-sunday-angela-rayner_uk_62678d45e4b0d0774864b1d9
27.04.2022	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-61239321

We frame the *Mail on Line* article and public responses as a case and a discursive event which constitute a portrayal of a phenomenon or occurrence which provokes responses (Jäger & Maier, 2009) as the discourse is distributed and taken up through various media. If it "becomes a discursive event it further influences the development of discourse" (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 49). As a case and discursive event, the analysis necessarily recognizes its "intertextual nature and how the specificities of its intertextuality reflect power relations between the micro (individual actors) and the macro (institutions)" (Mavin et al., 2019, p. 6).

Extending Elliott and Stead's (2018) methodological approach from three to four stages, we focus on argumentation in text and composition of visual imagery *and* consider public responses. In stage one, we examined the

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

arguments, viewpoints, and interests (Hellgren et al., 2002) in the "Angela Rayner's Basic Instinct Ploy" article. Studying how a text lays claim to different representations helps to make explicit the reproduction of discourses (Mavin et al., 2019). Stage two adopted visual semiotic techniques to interrogate how images involve interaction with an audience, how "visual images produce social meaning" (Scollon & Scollon, 2003, p. 217). This facilitates an appreciation of how images are independently organized, structured messages, but are also connected to the written text (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Aspects of visual imagery were studied: representational meaning, which explores what an image includes and how the image's constitutive elements interact; modality, which surveys the extent to which an image is perceived as believable or "real"; composition, which focuses on how the elements in an image are arranged; and interactive meaning, which focuses on the relationship the image creates with the audience (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). The third stage compared the article's text and accompanying images, focusing on how visual imagery and text combine to "heighten" responses to messages (Liu et al., 2015). We attended to how text and imagery were congruent or in tension. These stages and analysis are summarized in Table 2.

The fourth stage of analysis examined audience responses to the article in various media, where, through a perspectival dualism lens, we analyzed across data to identify how discourse is taken up and through media, provokes various responses, and how these illustrate a flexing of discourse reflective of stretch and change, and acceleration of resistance.

5 | FINDINGS

5.1 | Analysis of *"Stone the Crows! Tories accuse Angela Rayner of Basic Instinct ploy to distract Boris"*

The article headline, *"Stone the Crows!"* conveys an exclamation of surprise, shock, or dismay, immediately capturing attention. The use of *"Basic Instinct"* communicates a way of behavior (your natural tendency), and a "*Basic Instinct Ploy,*" in common parlance, is understood as when a woman wearing a skirt and no underwear, briefly opens her legs so her crotch is visible. The terms are derived from the 1992 U.S. film, Basic Instinct, an erotic thriller which follows a police detective investigating the murder of a rock star, who is involved in a relationship with the prime suspect played by actor Sharon Stone. When the detective interviews the suspect, Stone's character smokes a cigarette and uncrosses her legs revealing her naked vulva (Starkey, 2022). The headline communicates how the UK Tory (Conservative) party accuse Rayner (no first name afforded) of opening her legs for Boris (Johnson, no surname needed), the PM, to distract him.

The sub-title *"Denies claim"*: Labour's Angela Rayner (with photo) and in the House of Commons at PMQs (no legs shown), makes clear that Angela Rayner repudiates the claim. The by-line "*They have a problem with women in public"* explicitly communicates that the Conservatives (Tories) are misogynistic. This is ironic considering the content. The first sentence outlines how several anonymous Conservative MPs have accused Angela Rayner of "putting Mr. Johnson off his stride" by crossing and uncrossing her legs. The imagery (photo) of Angela Rayner is largest on the page in a "just above the knee" black dress. Her legs are crossed, wearing tights/pantyhose. This is placed opposite to a still photo of Sharon Stone in the film "Basic Instinct," shot from below, so her bare, crossed legs feature prominently. Both images draw the eye to the women's legs. A surface view of the imagery of both women shows two women sitting with legs crossed, whilst the interactive meaning invites readers to imagine that like Sharon Stone, Angela Rayner will shortly be uncrossing and crossing her legs in a sexualized way, revealing her naked vulva. However, Angela Rayner's legs are clothed, not bare, therefore the *"Basic Instinct Ploy"* is impossible.

The photograph of MPs in the House of Commons is a normalized image of what happens in this workplace, the PM standing opposite a sitting Angela Rayner, who is listening to him; an odd image of normality at work without sexualized connotations, set ironically in contrast to the images of the women. In the House of Commons image, Angela Rayner is normalized yet Othered through the headline, imagery, and article text. This combination symbolically communicates how outrageous the Tory MPs claims are.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

TABLE 2 Multimodal discourse analysis of the *Mail on Line* case.

Stone the Crows **article**	**Stage 1: Text analysis**	**Stage 2: Visual analysis**	**Stage 3: Compare and contrast text and visual analyses**
Basic Instinct is a 1992 erotic thriller film	Initial argument presented *Stone the Crows!* As a headline… an exclamation of surprise or shock; dismay. *Tories accuse Rayner of Basic Instinct Ploy to Distract Boris*, second part of headline. Rayner not afforded first name while Johnson is. *DENIES CLAIM: Labour's Angela Rayner*, subtitle underneath Rayner's photograph gives her first name. *They have a problem with women in public* by-line infers the conservatives' are misogynistic. Rayner needs to use her body to compensate for her lack of élite political leadership skills. Highlighting her teenage pregnancy, and the fact she is a grandmother at 41, suggests a promiscuity/sexuality (her basic instinct) that she still employs to compensate for her working-class background. Differing competing arguments? Attempts to delegitimize Rayner, but comments about her later in the article demonstrate her authenticity and debating skill. How does the article use text to convince the audience? Text is gossipy and classist. "Carry on" in its suggestiveness of Rayner and attention drawn to her body ("she has other skills that he lacks"; "flirty exchanges"). Use of tone Gossipy and demeaning Classist Sexist—stereotypes of working-class women Coverage of particular aspects Covers Rayner's background and uses conservative MP gossip to make allegations about how she uses her body. Whose voices are heard? Writers, anonymous Tory MPs', Rayner's	Representational Photo of Rayner is the largest on the page in a "just above the knee" black dress. Her legs are crossed, wearing tights. Opposite to a still photo of Sharon Stone in the film Basic Instinct. Shot of Stone is taken from below, so her bare crossed legs feature prominently. Both images show women sitting down with crossed legs and draw the eye to their legs. Headline dominates the page in terms of size. Contrast between images of Rayner and Stone and image of House of Commons' chamber. Modality Rayner is dressed in a professional manner wearing tights. Photo of Stone taken from Basic Instinct film. House of Commons' chamber appears to be a stock photo/normalized image of this setting. Composition Text dominated by the headline and photos. House of Commons photo at top left (the given), still of Stone on left (the given) Rayner photo on the right (novel). Interactive meaning Rayner not looking at camera. House of Commons' photo—small, only see top of the people photographed. No one looking at the camera. Labour front bench MPs looking at Johnson. Johnson does not look at Rayner	How are text and imagery congruent? Images and text are not congruent. Image of Stone and Rayner infers equivalence, but Rayner, dressed professionally, in solo image of her. In normalized House of Commons image, you cannot see her legs. How are text and imagery in tension? Textual description of how Rayner performs in House of Commons is not supported by the images. Images and by-line construct ambiguity and irony. Do text and imagery reinforce/negate/contradict each other? Text and imagery contradict each other. Text is also internally contradictory

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

The article delegitimizes Angela Rayner as a leader, sexualizing her through the *"Basic Instinct Ploy"* to imply that she shows her crotch to the PM as a distraction. This is a general parallel to sex discrimination faced by women at work whose bodies put them out of place (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). This appears to be written unashamedly by the journalist as they report views of anonymous Conservative MPs. There is no attempt to hide the explicit belligerent sexism, characterizing overt antagonistic, hostile, and aggressive behaviors in a gendered power conflict (Yarrow & Davies, 2022). However, the textual description of how Angela Rayner performs in the House of Commons is not supported by the images. The images and by-line construct ambiguity and irony. The text and imagery contradict each other, and the text is also internally contradictory.

The text explains that the "basic instinct" distraction strategy happens when Angela Rayner questions the PM in her role as deputy to Labour Leader Keir Starmer in the House of Commons. Her performances at PM question time have become a "highlight," where she is subject to the male gaze and described as "comprehensive school educated," "pitched" against the Etonian educated PM. Here the intersection of gender and social class is used to further undermine Angela Rayner's legitimacy as a woman political leader.

The UK Government's established cultural capital is that of White, elite, privately educated men. The article's text is sexist and classist. The report of an MP saying "she can't compete with Johnson's Oxford University union debating skills but she has other skills that he lacks" conveys these skills as sexual. The text demeans and delegitimizes Angela Rayner through intersectional discrimination; educational, classist, and sexualized. The article's description of Angela Rayner as a "Grandmother at 41 who left school at 16 pregnant without qualifications" landing "blows on the PM" "during flirty exchanges," suggests a promiscuity/sexuality (her basic instinct) that she still employs to compensate for her working-class background. The central argument is that Angela Rayner uses her body to compensate for her lack of élite political leadership skills, her working-class back-ground, her promiscuity, and lack of decorum. Reporting that Angela Rayner has admitted her flirty approach over drinks on the House of Commons terrace, positions her as complicit, leaving her no option other than to respond. Reinforcing women's secondary status and their persistent scrutiny (Pullen & Vachhani, 2021), the argumentation simultaneously evokes class as a barrier to leadership (Friedman, 2022).

5.2 | Analysis of audience responses

5.2.1 | Angela Rayner's response

As the central focus of the article, Angela Rayner's response is key. She responded to the article in her Twitter post:

> I stand accused of a "ploy" to "distract" the helpless PM - by being a woman, having legs and wearing clothes. I am conspiring to "put him off his stride". The rest I won't repeat - but you get the picture.

This is a powerful response in illuminating the erroneous sexist judgments in the article, purely because Angela Rayner is a woman political leader. In a dramatic change to previous situations of sexism toward UK women MPs, for example, the "Brexit-Legs-it" case of Theresa May and Nicola Sturgeon analyzed by Mavin et al. (2019), the case of Angela Rayner is seen as highly topical in terms of public interest attracting wide circulation and attention across media that stimulates responses from the public. This struck us as indication of a challenge and possible change to the embedded patriarchal discourse. The article headlined on BBC news, with the ITV channel dedicating its "Lorraine" program to an interview with Angela Rayner; followed by the "This Morning" program interviewing Sir Keir Starmer, the Leader of the UK Labour Party; followed by the "Loose Women" program hosting a panel debate about the article. On "This Morning," Sir Keir Starmer publicly stated his opposition to the Angela Rayner article as "rank sexism, rank misogyny." Calling for an end to the misogyny he said "there shouldn't be a party-political divide on this."

In a significant change to responses to previous examples of sexism toward women MPs, the prime-time morning ITV program, "Lorraine" gave its key spot to an interview with Angela Rayner, signaling a stretching

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

of discourse by featuring this case of sexism *and* classism on UK national morning TV, and enabling the public to see and hear Angela Rayner's response. The interview was picked up by UK newspapers, with the *Guardian online* using a headline of *"Angela Rayner: 'I begged Mail on Sunday not to publish Basic Instinct story'"* (Elgot & Mason, 2022). In the TV interview, Angela Rayner outlines how she was "horrified" by the article, "fearful" of what people would think of her and that this might be the public's view of her at the dispatch "box" but she had received "tremendous response" of support from "all political parties." She is reported in the *Guardian* as saying to someone at the *Mail on Line* before they went to print: "this is disgusting. It's completely untrue. Please don't run a story like that …"[2]

During the TV interview we understand how Angela Rayner feels obliterated and undermined as a woman leader, justifying why she is wearing a trouser suit: "I want to be defiant because I don't think that women should be told how to dress but I didn't want to distract from the fact that actually it's not about my legs." Significantly, it is not just sexism but intersectional discrimination in the article that is important to Angela Rayner. She calls out this out and notes how the article was:

> Steeped in classism about where I've come from and how I grew up. I must be thick, and I must be stupid because I went to a comprehensive school. Talk about me having a child when I was young as if I was promiscuous which I felt was offensive for people from my background.

Despite evidence that sexism, classism, and double discrimination are everyday experiences for women (see, Bates, 2016), it is rare to hear classism intersecting with gender discrimination being publicly called out. It is also highly unusual in the UK, to see public and explicit challenge to classism, as prejudice toward people based on their social class, along with the naming of the prejudicial characteristics on which this classism is based.

Angela Rayner is provoked into feminism and speaks up for other women from similar backgrounds:

> I don't want them thinking they're not worthwhile because they speak with an accent or they've had children when they were young, or they might be single parents now … [mean] they should be ashamed of who they are. …They should be confident of who they are, and they should be proud of their background and be able to speak about it. I'll never stop speaking about mine because I'm proud of where I've come from.

The intersectional discrimination impacts Angela Rayner. She mentions having to explain the story to her teenage sons, "…trying to prepare my children for seeing things online. They don't want to see their mum portrayed that way and I felt really down about that." As a woman leader, Angela Rayner must confront the undermining of two of her key subjectivities: mother and leader.

We interpret Angela Rayner's TV interview and response on Twitter as claims for redistribution of cultural value (Fraser, 1998). She draws attention to issues of individual identity and social justice, asking for recognition by the public and her colleagues as a woman leader in equal partnership with men and men MPs. She publicly voices her struggles in confronting intersectional discrimination, with courage and vulnerability. Angela Rayner's initial concern is whether the article means that she has lost her legitimacy as a political leader, and if the public now recognize her as legitimate. She connects her own identity and recognition as a woman leader to issues of social justice by adeptly conveying how there is no point in having women MPs who represent their constituency and society, if they are not recognized as legitimate or as economically and culturally valuable (Fraser, 1998). The support she notes from the public and her colleagues reflects a flexing of discourse indicating stretch and change, through overwhelming acknowledgment that the article was unacceptable and a call for consequences.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

5.2.2 | Public responses

Examples of the significant support from members of the public that Angela Rayner refers to include Twitter responses reported by Peat (2022). Rachel Clarke on Twitter calls out the journalist and editorial stakeholders in publishing the article:

> This disgustingly misogynistic piece was written by Glen Owen, political editor of the Mail on Sunday. But subs, designers & editor David Dillon, all thought it just fine to print shockingly, repulsively misogynistic trash about a senior political figure in 2022. Shame on you all.

The tweet does not identify Angela Rayner as a woman but as a senior political figure and communicates how the sexism in the article is unacceptable. This reflects a public calling out of sexism, indicative of a flexing, changing discourse. Dimitry Grozoubinski on Twitter (Peat, 2022) provides a further example of calling out those who thought the article was acceptable to publish:

> The Mail on Sunday story is a stain on everyone involved in briefing it out, writing it, editing it, and approving it for circulation. Multiple people thought it was not only acceptable, but useful in defence of the Prime Minister. Not sure what that says about them, or him.

Sam Freedman on Twitter (Peat, 2022) highlights how regardless of political party, Angela Rayner is "admired" as well as recognizing the discrimination (shit) she deals with. The reference to the Mail on Sunday makes clear that the article is unacceptable:

> Don't share all of Rayner's politics but always admired her, especially given all the shit she has to deal with. The Mail on Sunday can fuck off.

There are also responses on Twitter (Peat, 2022) highlighting where the public can complain about this type of reporting, for example, Life Going Down:

> I've just complained about the Mail on Sunday's misogynistic treatment of @AngelaRayner. You can too ipso.co.uk/complain/ as reported by the London Economic.

Beyond Twitter responses, other MPs, journalists, and TV presenters responded to the article, calling out its sexist nature and demonstrating a consolidated movement toward action. There were 6000 complaints to the Independent Press Standards Organization about the article. The public response demonstrates an acceleration of the calling out of sexism as unacceptable, demonstrating agency in what can be resisted, and reflecting a shift in what the public sees as culturally valued. In the article, anonymous men Tory MPs undermine Rayner's leadership legitimacy, and the public call out sexism and misogyny as unacceptable, re-establishing her legitimacy. This is a flexing of patriarchal discourse, reflecting change through public recognition of women leaders' legitimacy. We interpret this as a call for Angela Rayner and other women leaders to be culturally valued as leaders.

5.2.3 | Political leader responses

As an historic men-dominated organization, establishing laws for how society will operate, the UK government is the pinnacle, and symbolic, of embedded patriarchy. By way of providing important context to the *Mail on Line* article about Angela Rayner, and the culture of the UK Government, on the same day (April 24, 2022), the *Daily Record* online

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

led with a headline "*Over 50 MPs facing allegations of sexual misconduct in Westminster probe"* noting that the 56 MPs have not been named (Crichton, 2022).

The *Mail on Line* reports of anonymous men MPs' views on a woman MP's body and background is a symbolic, material, and critical power play between patriarchy and feminism conducted through women leaders' legitimacy. As such, responses to the article from other members of this organization (MPs) are important to critique potential flexing of the patriarchal discourse.

A *Mail On Line* newspaper article published on the 24th April (Heffer, 2022) leads with the headline *"Boris Johnson leads backlash against "misogynistic" attack on Angela Rayner after "anonymous" Tories accused her of Basic Instinct-inspired ploy to "put him off his stride" at PMQs"* and reports responses to the original *Mail on Line* article from Angela Rayner's political colleagues. The original article, and its wider take-up in the media and by the public, provokes MPs into feminism by publicly calling out misogyny. The PM, Boris Johnson, is reported as "intervening in the row" by posting on Twitter:

> As much as I disagree with Angela Rayner on almost every political issue I respect her as a parliamentarian and deplore the misogyny directed at her anonymously today.

The PM's post recognizes Angela Rayner as a political leader (no reference to her being a woman) and distances himself from the misogyny, which is "deplored." The Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, is reported as offering Ms Rayner her "solidarity from across the political divide" (Heffer, 2022), going further than just calling out misogyny. She recognizes Angela Rayner's leadership legitimacy and offers collective support adding, "It's a reminder of the deep misogyny women face every day." In a video embedded into the article she connects the individual issue of Angela Rayner with wider issues of social justice by publicly calling out misogyny and identifying the need for change, it is not women but men who have to change:

> What has to change is that men have to stop being misogynistic. Not all men are misogynist but misogyny comes from men. That's what's got to change. It's not women who have to change.

In different media, James Heappy, Minister for the Armed Forces of United Kingdom MP, is provoked into feminism, making a vociferous response to the article on Sky News, reported in the *Huffington Post* online under the headline, *"Minister Blasts "Despicable" Tory MP Behind Sexist Smears Against Labour's Angela Rayner"* (Rogers, 2022). In a damning response Heappy calls the article "ridiculous" and "offensive" and his anonymous colleagues "despicable" and "outrageous" for their "sexist slur" and says "women shouldn't have to put up with misogynistic attacks for working in politics." Referring to one anonymous MP he says:

> I just find it outrageous that that colleague who sits within a party that has delivered two female prime ministers, that has two women in the great offices of state, that is surrounded by amazingly capable female MPs on the Conservative benches as well as over on the Labour benches too - I just don't know what parliament they think they sit in. …Female politicians "on all sides of the house" have to "put up with a level of sexism, misogyny every day that frankly, is unfair. It is a disadvantage to them that I don't have to face as a male member of parliament or a male minister."
>
> (Rogers, 2022)

This public condemnation of a political colleague(s) conveys the strength of the patriarchal discourse in the UK Government, in that this sexism exists at all and that it exists regardless of the number of women MPs, including former Conservative Party Prime Ministers. James Heappy distances himself from his anonymous colleagues ("I don't know what parliament they sit in") and demonstrates that this sexism and misogyny is not acceptable. However, he acknowledges that all women MPs face this type of discrimination (that he does not) "everyday," emphasizing the embedded nature of patriarchy.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Significantly, in the public and political leader responses we analyzed, beyond misogyny and sexism, only Angela Rayner herself identified intersectional discrimination and saw the article as "steeped in classism" (Rayner, Lorraine Program).

6 | INTERSECTIONAL MISRECOGNITION OF WOMEN LEADERS' LEGITIMACY, PRODUCTIVE RESISTANCE AND FLEXING DISCOURSE

In asking "how does the case of 'Angela Rayner's Basic Instinct Ploy' impact on women leaders' legitimacy and a discourse of resistance?", we have spotlighted various ways that the article delegitimizes Angela Rayner. Even before publication, Rayner speaks of having pleaded with the newspaper not to run the story, belittling her personally and undermining her as a senior political leader. By publishing, the editor enables anonymous men Tory MPs to voice unfounded, sexist allegations, reminiscent of "bully boy" tactics against an individual. Rayner's discussion with the newspaper and the subsequent publication illustrates the media's power to influence political networks, *and* how women are positioned in society, both locally and worldwide, due to the media's global reach. As legitimacy must be attributed and recognized through relations with others (Maak & Pless, 2006), there is a lack of recognition for Angela Rayner from the MPs and the editorial team, reflecting a serious "status injury" (Fraser, 1998, p. 3) that constitutes a moral wrong (Fraser, 1998). The article is a "pathologizing depiction" of Rayner as a working-class woman, aimed to delegitimize her leadership through constructing a particular view of "working-class women as the exemplar of physical, moral, and sexual 'excess'" (Friedman, 2022, p. 505), used to mobilize societal contempt.

The media text demeans and delegitimizes Angela Rayner through intersectional discrimination; educational, classism, and sexualization, which we theorize as intersectional misrecognition of Angela Rayner as a political leader. The embedded patriarchal culture of the UK Government is articulated by Tory MPs through their shared experiences of elitist education and political skills' development, reinforcing men's power and legitimacy. This is set in opposition to Angela Rayner's working-class "pedigree." She is positioned as simply lacking in leadership legitimacy. The intersection of class and gender is also seen in her alleged promiscuity through teenage pregnancy and early grandparent status, misrecognizing her as a political leader. As a result of her "basic instinct" she could, by implication, be showing her naked vulva to the PM. She does not have cultural value as a woman, less so as a working-class woman, and is denied the status of full participant in social interactions with the PM. Angela Rayner's (mis)recognition reinforces an allusion that perpetuates the implication that she lacks the legitimacy of men in the UK Parliament.

This intersectional misrecognition is conveyed further in the attention to, and judgment of, her short dress and appearance, combining gender with class to signal how Angela Rayner does not conform to norms of respectable business femininity; she lacks the decorum to attract the necessary status as a political leader. The article conveys the dynamics of patriarchal power, albeit at times ironically. We propose that this is an extreme case that through intersectional misrecognition, personifies how legitimacy and illegitimacy are consequences of social relations and gendered power dynamics (Nousiainen et al., 2013). Rather than existing in a "gray zone" where women leaders remain "a-legitimate" (Nousiainen et al., 2013, p. 53), Angela Rayner is illegitimate as a political leader. Therefore, we theorize intersectional misrecognition as accounting for status subordination through sexualization, femininity, appearance, and class identity to undermine women leaders' legitimacy. In doing so we advance understandings of how normative and implicit ideas of legitimacy are strengthened and resisted. Further, intersectional misrecognition offers potential for women-in-leadership research which faces critique for its focus on homogeneous, white, middle-class, privileged women (Calás et al., 2017).

The study also asked: (i) how does discourse circulate from the *Mail on Line* article through audience responses in various media, and, (ii) how, through a perspectival dualism lens, do audience responses illustrate a flexing of patriarchal discourse and an acceleration of resistance? The data show the speed and diverse circulation of responses in various media. Through data analysis and in comparison, with Mavin et al.'s (2019) study of Theresa May and Nicola Sturgeon, we identify a greater agency in political leaders and public responses to call out misogynistic and

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

sexist media representations. The lighthearted, jokey atmosphere of the audience responses in Mavin et al.'s (2019) study were absent in the Angela Rayner case, replaced by immediate and vehement condemnation by MPs and the public, who are provoked into feminism. This reflects a public acceleration of unacceptability in relation to patriarchal discourse as evidenced by: Angela Rayner's own response and media appearance; dedication of an entire morning of ITV TV programmes, and the reporting of the article in mainstream BBC News media, providing "official" condemnation. This demonstrates the media's power to distribute discourse (Greene et al., 2003) via take up of a serious and important story through authoritative channels to a diverse and wide public. The deeply intimate nature of the media attack on Angela Rayner crosses acceptable boundaries (it may be acceptable to discuss women's legs, dress, and appearance but not their vulvas). This breach stimulates accelerated pluralism (Bimber, 1998) where the issue becomes consolidated as a call for action. This reflects a shift from the issue as solely a matter of individual (mis) recognition to an issue of social justice that demands a redistribution of cultural values (Fraser, 1998, 2003).

A significant finding is how the intersection of gender and class are mobilized through distributed discourse and accelerated pluralism. In the article, and in Angela Rayner's response and TV interview, the intersection of gender and class is critical to her oppression and delegitimization. However, responses from MPs and the public call out issues of gender and ignore class.

Through a perspectival dualism lens (Fraser, 1998, 2003) we demonstrate *how* patriarchal media discourse is flexing; there are signs of stretch and change. Perspectival dualism helps us "tease out" gendered hierarchies and "critique existing constructions that may have helped to solidify particular views" (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011, p. 478), including media discourse. It helps us to "reveal" (Lewis & Simpson, 2010, p. 478) hidden aspects of gender and the processes of concealment within norms, practices and values. Angela Rayner receives significant support and therefore recognition from colleagues, the media and the public. MP responses tend to focus on Angela Rayner's identity as a leader. Boris Johnson (PM) focuses on Rayner's identity and recognition without calling for redistribution of cultural values, whereas Nicola Sturgeon (Scottish First Minister) connects the individual to the wider social issue of women's lesser cultural value and the need for change. Without the discursive flex being accompanied by consequences of redistribution of economic and cultural values (Fraser, 1998, 2003), there is likely to be little change.

We identify a flexing of patriarchal media discourse, indicating change through: productive resistance in public responses that are demanding consequences, for example, holding journalists, editors and anonymous men to account, and Angela Rayner asking for economic and cultural value for working-class women and for women MPs who are more representative of their constituency and society. In comparison with the 300 complaints reported in Mavin et al.'s (2019) study, the 6000 complaints about the Angela Rayner article demonstrate agency by the public in what can be resisted and what is culturally valued. We identify a discursive shift; the distributed discourse motivates an accelerated pluralism that helps consolidate a call for social change. While this productive resistance brings about a flex in patriarchal discourse which illustrates an important shift in attitudes, it nonetheless does not accomplish change. The discourse remains heavily weighted toward identity politics rather than cultural redistribution.

Women in powerful positions find it harder than men eliciting respect and achieving legitimacy as credible leaders (Vial et al., 2016). Being misrecognized in the media and by audiences can place women leaders' legitimacy at risk. Our analysis of a media article, including accompanying images of a woman political leader and subsequent public reactions, has illustrated how legitimacy for women leaders is shaped, becomes unstable, and problematized.

7 | CONCLUSION

Exploring how the case of "Angela Rayner's Basic Instinct Ploy" impacts on women leaders' legitimacy, and a discourse of resistance, has demonstrated how women leaders' legitimacy is constrained by gender, and how in the UK political context, the intersection of gender and class leads to women leaders' intersectional misrecognition. Our study has relevance beyond the UK context by surfacing media's power to influence how women leaders are positioned in society. We identify media texts as important sites for understanding how women's legitimacy is constructed, and

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

how media texts operate to distribute power that enables the challenging of norms. We illustrate continuing tensions where we witness women's status subordination through a focus on femininity and appearance, and how they are sexualized. We extend understandings by surfacing how these tensions intersect with class identity to undermine women leaders' legitimacy. We add new understandings to the gendered leadership and media literature by illustrating how media misrecognition can impact women leaders' legitimacy. We identify a productive resistance, providing insights into a flexing of discourse and advance understandings of the discursive mobilizations of leader legitimacy.

The identification of intersectional misrecognition within the UK's political context has wider relevance in making inequalities explicit for women leaders, and where there may be productive tensions that have the potential to mobilize for change. The study finds a simultaneous flexing of patriarchal media discourse that calls for consequences, and a shift toward a productive resistance to resilient gender norms. Further research is needed to explore implications of a reluctance to address issues of class in the political sphere, and how class intersects with gender to delegitimize women leaders.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available in [repository name] at [DOI/URL], reference number [reference number]. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: [list resources and URLs] Accessed Link to Source 23.4.22 (original publication date). We analyzed updated online article published on 26.04.22 Mail on Line https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10746873/Tories-accuse-Angela-Rayner-Basic-Instinct-ploy-crosses-uncrosses-legs-PMQs.html 24.4.22. Daily Record online https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/mps-sexual-misconduct-allegations-westminster-26784786 24.04.22. Mail on Line https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10748141/Labour-deputy-Angela-Rayner-blasts-Tories-sexist-misogynistic-Basic-Instinct-claims.html 24.04.22. Twitter. Angela Rayner's response to the Mail on Line article https://twitter.com/AngelaRayner/status/1518126832272486400 24.04.22. The London Economic online https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/angela-rayner-reacts-to-mail-on-sundays-peverted-basic-instinct-smear-320330 25.04.22. National World Views online https://www.nationalworld.com/news/politics/keir-starmer-this-morning-labour-leader-misogynist-culture-westminster-3667357 26.04.22. The Guardian online https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/26/angela-rayner-i-begged-mail-on-sunday-not-to-publish-basic-instinct-story 26.04.22. ITV the Lorraine show: Angela Rayner interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2A_XvUL5P0A 26.04.22. ITV Loose Women TV program https://www.catchupplayer.co.uk/episode/162427/Loose_Women.html 26.04.22. Huffington Post online https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/james-heappey-tory-mp-mail-on-sunday-angela-rayner_uk_62678d45e4b0d0774864b1d9 27.04.22 https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-61239321.

ORCID

Valerie Stead https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4250-4333
Carole Elliott https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3838-4452

ENDNOTES

[1] We recognize that the Labour party that Angela Rayner represents is itself not immune to discriminatory practices. The analytic focus of this paper, however, is The Mail article and public responses to it.

[2] We note that the UK Labour Party is not immune from discriminatory practices and that Angela Rayner has overcome substantial obstacles to be elected as a Member of Parliament and then as Deputy Party Leader.

REFERENCES

Arsenault, Amelia, and Manuel Castells. 2008. "Switching Power: Rupert Murdoch and the Global Business of Media Politics." *International Sociology* 23(4): 480–638. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580908090725.

Bates, Laura. 2016. *Everyday Sexism: The Project that Inspired a Worldwide Movement*. Macmillan.

Billing, Yvonne Due. 2011. "Are Women in Management Victims of the Phantom of the Male Norm?" *Gender, Work and Organization* 18(3): 298–317. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2010.00546.x.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Bimber, Bruce. 1998. "The Internet and Political Transformation: Populism, Community, and Accelerated Pluralism." *Polity* 31(1): 133–160. https://doi.org/10.2307/3235370.

Brah, Avtar, and Ann Phoenix. 2004. "Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5(3): 75–86.

Broadbridge, Adelina, and Ruth Simpson. 2011. "25 Years on: Reflecting on the Past and Looking to the Future in Gender and Management Research." *British Journal of Management* 22(3): 470–483. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2011.00758.x.

Calás, Marta B., Linda Smircich, and Seray Ergene. 2017. "Postfeminism as New Materialisms: A Future Unlike the Present?" In *Postfeminism and Organization*, 197–228. New York: Routledge.

Crichton, Torcuill. 2022. Over 50 MPs Facing Allegations of Sexual Misconduct in Westminster Probe. The Daily Record Online 24th April (2022). https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/politics/mps-sexual-misconduct-allegations-westminster-26784786.

Due Billing, Yvonne, and Mats Alvesson. 2000. "Questioning the Notion of Feminine Leadership: A Critical Perspective on the Gender Labelling of Leadership." *Gender, Work and Organization* 7(3): 144–157. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00103.

Elgot, Jessica, and Rowena Mason. 2022. I Begged Mail on Sunday Not to Publish Basic Instinct Story, The Guardian Online 26th April (2022). https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/26/angela-rayner-i-begged-mail-on-sunday-not-to-publish-basic-instinct-story.

Elliott, Carole, and Valerie Stead. 2018. "Constructing Women's Leadership Representation in the UK Press during a Time of Financial Crisis: Gender Capitals and Dialectical Tensions." *Organization Studies* 39(1): 19–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617708002.

Elliott, Carole, Valerie Stead, Sharon Mavin, and Jannine Williams, eds. 2016. *Gender, Media, and Organization: Challenging Mis (s) Representations of Women Leaders and Managers*. Charlotte, NC: IAP.

Fairclough, Norman. 2005. "Peripheral Vision: Discourse Analysis in Organization Studies: The Case for Critical Realism." *Organization Studies* 26(6): 915–939. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840605054610.

Fairclough, Norman, Jane Mulderigg, and Ruth Wodak. 2011. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, edited by Teun A. van Dijk, 357–358. London: Sage.

Fraser, Nancy. 1998. Nancy Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, Participation. Discussion Paper FS I 98 -108, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung.

Fraser, Nancy. 2003. "Social Justice in an Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition and Participation." In *Redistribution or Recognition?*, edited by Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, 7–109. London: Verso.

Friedman, Sam. 2022. "(Not) Bringing Your Whole Self to Work: The Gendered Experience of Upward Mobility in the UK Civil Service." *Gender, Work and Organization* 29(2): 502–519. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12776.

Garrett, Paul M. 2010. "'Recognizing the Limitations of the Political Theory of Recognition: Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser and Social Work' British." *Journal of Social Work* 40(5): 1517–1533. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcp044.

Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). 2021. Who Makes the News? 6th Global Media Monitoring Project. https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG_.FINAL_.pdf.

Glozer, Sarah, Robert Caruana, and Sally A. Hibbert. 2019. "The Never-Ending Story: Discursive Legitimation in Social Media Dialogue." *Organization Studies* 40(5): 625–650. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840617751006.

Greene, Anne-Marie, John Hogan, and Margaret Grieco. 2003. "Commentary: E-collectivism and Distributed Discourse: New Opportunities for Trade Union Democracy." *Industrial Relations Journal* 34(4): 282–289. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2338.00275.

Griffin, Martyn, Nancy Harding, and Mark Learmonth. 2017. "Whistle While You Work? Disney Animation, Organizational Readiness and Gendered Subjugation." *Organization Studies* 38(7): 869–894. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840616663245.

Heffer, Greg. 2022. "Angela Rayner Blasts Tories Sexist Misogynistic Basic Instinct Claims, Daily Mail Online." 24 April 2022. https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10748141/Labour-deputy-Angela-Rayner-blasts-Tories-sexist-misogynistic-Basic-Instinct-claims.html.

Hellgren, Bo, Löwstedt Jan, Liisa Puttonen, Janne Tienari, Eero Vaara, and Andreas Werr. 2002. "How Issues Become (Re) Constructed in the Media: Discursive Practices in the AstraZeneca Merger." *British Journal of Management* 13(2): 123–140. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00227.

Holvino, Evangelina. 2010. "Intersections: The Simultaneity of Race, Gender and Class in Organization Studies." *Gender, Work and Organization* 17(3): 248–277. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2008.00400.x.

Jäger, Siegfried, and Florentine Maier. 2009. "Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis and Dispositive Analysis." *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* 2: 34–61.

Koenig, Anne M., Alice H. Eagly, Abigail A. Mitchell, and Tiina Ristikari. 2011. "Are Leader Stereotypes Masculine? A Meta-Analysis of Three Research Paradigms." *Psychological Bulletin* 137(4): 616–642. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023557.

Kress, Gunther, and Theo Van Leeuwen. 1996. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. 2nd ed. London UK: Routledge.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Lepold, Kristina. 2018. *Recognition and Feminist Thought*. Handbuch Anerkennung.
Lewis, Patricia and Ruth Simpson, eds. 2010. *Revealing and Concealing Gender: Issues of Visibility in Organizations*. New York: Springer.
Liu, Helena, Leanne Cutcher, and David Grant. 2015. "Doing Authenticity: The Gendered Construction of Authentic Leadership." *Gender, Work and Organization* 22(3): 237–255. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12073.
Maak, Thomas, and Nicola M. Pless. 2006. "Responsible Leadership: A Relational Approach." In *Responsible Leadership*, 53–73. Routledge.
Mavin, Sharon, Carole Elliott, Valerie Stead, and Jannine Williams. 2019. "Economies of Visibility as a Moderator of Feminism: 'Never Mind Brexit. Who Won Legs-it!'" *Gender, Work and Organization* 26(8): 1156–1175. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12291.
Mavin, Sharon, and Gina Grandy. 2016. "Women Elite Leaders Doing Respectable Business Femininity: How Privilege Is Conferred, Contested and Defended through the Body." *Gender, Work and Organization* 23(4): 379–396. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12130.
Moss-Racusin, Corinne A., and Laurie A. Rudman. 2010. "Disruptions in Women's Self-Promotion: The Backlash Avoidance Model." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34(2): 186–202. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2010.01561.x.
Nousiainen, Kevät, Anne Maria Holli, Johanna Kantola, Milja Saari, and Linda Hart. 2013. "Theorizing Gender Equality: Perspectives on Power and Legitimacy." *Social Politics* 20(1): 41–64. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxs026.
Parks-Stamm, Elizabeth J., Madeline E. Heilman, and Krystle A. Hearns. 2008. "Motivated to Penalize: Women's Strategic Rejection of Successful Women." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 34(2): 237–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167207310027.
Peat, Jack. 2022. "Angela Rayner Reacts to Mail on Sunday's 'Perverted' Basic Instinct Smear." *London Economic*. https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/angela-rayner-reacts-to-mail-on-sundays-peverted-basic-instinct-smear-320330/.
Pullen, Alison, and Lucy Taksa. 2016. "In the Name of the Other: Nicknaming and Gendered Misrepresentations/s of Women Leaders." In *Gender, Media and Organization: Challenging Mis(s)representations of Women Leaders and Managers*, edited by Carole Elliott, Valerie Stead, Sharon Mavin and Jannine Williams, 111–132. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
Pullen, Alison, and Sheena J. Vachhani. 2021. "Feminist Ethics and Women Leaders: From Difference to Intercorporeality." *Journal of Business Ethics* 173(2): 233–243. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04526-0.
Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2001. "Gender, Status, and Leadership." *Journal of Social Issues* 57(4): 637–655. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00233.
Rodriguez, Jenny K., Evangelina Holvino, Joyce K. Fletcher, and Stella M. Nkomo. 2016. "The Theory and Praxis of Intersectionality in Work and Organisations: Where Do We Go from Here?" *Gender, Work and Organization* 23(3): 201–222. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12131.
Rogers, Alexandra. 2022. The Huffington Post. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/james-heappey-tory-mp-mail-on-sunday-angela-rayner_uk_62678d45e4b0d0774864b1d9.
Scollon, Ron, and Suzie Wong Scollon. 2003. *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World*. Routledge.
Starkey, Arun. 2022. The Truth behind 'Basic Instinct' Infamous 'Leg Cross' Scene, Best of Netflix, 2022 10th March. https://best-of-netflix.com/the-truth-behind-basic-instinct-infamous-leg-cross-scene/.
Stead, Valerie, and Carole Elliott. 2019. "Pedagogies of Power: Media Artefacts as Public Pedagogy for Women's Leadership Development." *Management Learning* 50(2): 171–188. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507618806793.
Törrönen, Jukka, and Jenni Simonen. 2015. "The Exercise of Symbolic Power by Women's Magazines from the 1960s to the Present: The Discursive Construction of Fields, Positions and Resources in Alcohol-Related Texts." *Media, Culture & Society* 37(8): 1138–1157. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443715591671.
Upchurch, Martin, and Rickard Grassman. 2016. "Striking with Social Media: The Contested (Online) Terrain of Workplace Conflict." *Organization* 23(5): 639–656. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508415598248.
Vial, Andrea C., Jaime L. Napier, and Victoria L. Brescoll. 2016. "A Bed of Thorns: Female Leaders and the Self-Reinforcing Cycle of Illegitimacy." *The Leadership Quarterly* 27(3): 400–414. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.12.004.
Walby, Sylvia, Armstrong Jo, and Sofia Strid. 2012. "Intersectionality: Multiple Inequalities in Social Theory." *Sociology* 46(2): 224–240. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038511416164.
Yarrow, Emily, and Julie Davies. 2022. "A Typology of Sexism in Contemporary Business Schools: Belligerent, Benevolent, Ambivalent, and Oblivious Sexism." *Gender, Work & Organization*. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12914.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Valerie Stead is Professor of Leadership and Director of the Academy for Gender, Work and Leadership at Lancaster University Management School. Valerie's research interests lie at the intersection of gender, leadership, and learning with a specific interest in women's leadership.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Sharon Mavin is Professor of Leadership and Organization Studies at Newcastle University and Co-Chair of UFHRD. Sharon was awarded the British Academy of Management Medal for Leadership in 2021 and added to the Northern Power Women Power List (2022), Sharon's research interests are women leaders, gendered media representations, vulnerability, and learning.

Carole Elliott is Professor of Organization Studies, and Associate Dean EDI & Development, Sheffield University Management School, UK. Carole's principal research interests are in management and leadership learning, with a primary focus on the critical examination of women's leadership and women's leadership learning.

How to cite this article: Stead, Valerie, Sharon Mavin, and Carole Elliott. 2023. "Angela Rayner (Member of Parliament) and the "Basic Instinct Ploy": Intersectional Misrecognition of Women Leaders' Legitimacy, Productive Resistance and Flexing (Patriarchal) Discourse." *Gender, Work & Organization*: 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13050.

14680432, 0, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gwao.13050 by University Of Sheffield, Wiley Online Library on [04/09/2023]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License