

“Welcome to 2018”: Resisting gender inequality in social media discourse

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my group's research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Signed

Meghann Wiens

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Abstract

Through talk and text, people can both create and undo social realities (Edwards, 1997). People have the capacity to produce discourse which perpetuates hegemonic, patriarchal accounts of women, so they should be able to recognise and challenge it (McKinlay & McVittie, 2008). The present study investigates comments on social media in response to the pregnancy announcement of Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's third female Prime Minister, in January 2018. Ardern's case is notable as her pregnancy makes her gender highly salient as she occupies a leadership role commonly viewed as 'masculine'. Research has established that women are evaluated differently to men in leadership roles and are viewed as either warm and incompetent, or competent and cold (Hall & Donoghue, 2013). Representation of women in political leadership is therefore only one step toward gender equality as the underlying structures maintaining sexism need to be challenged. Comments were examined using a synthetic approach to discourse analysis (Wetherell, 1998) to determine how they resisted gender inequality talk. Two themes of resistance emerged from the corpus. Firstly, commenters employed devices that accounted for opposing views as outdated and not the norm in modern society. Arguments were bolstered by presenting factual accounts, diminishing the relevance of sexism, and isolating opposing views to individuals rather than society. Secondly, working motherhood was normalised. This was achieved by focusing on fathers, de-gendering 'parents', and reducing personal stake or interest. The comments examined here embedded radical feminist views into mainstream conversation and worked to undermine gender inequality talk by making alternative accounts robust and available.

“Welcome to 2018”: Resisting gender inequality in social media discourse

New Zealand is a progressive nation for women in politics. It was the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote, and it has had three female Prime Ministers (PMs): Jenny Shipley (1997- 1999), Helen Clarke (1999-2008) and current PM, Jacinda Ardern. Ardern was elected in October 2017, when 46 women held seats in the Lower House, comprising 38.3% of ministerial seats. Therefore, there is ample evidence that women in New Zealand have historically been represented in politics (Ford, 2018).

However, representation has not necessarily led to respect. Female political leaders have still been met with hostile responses (Curtin, 2015). Former New Zealand PM Helen Clarke was portrayed by the news media as unfeminine, and discourse highlighting her childlessness was inherently bound up with this (Ross & Comrie, 2012). Not having the warm characteristics associated with mothers, she was cast in the ‘iron maiden’ role, which could not be more clearly argued than by evidencing descriptors of her such as ‘Helengrad’, ‘dominatrix’, and ‘control freak’ (Ross & Comrie, 2012). Clarke’s ‘steely’ persona undermined her success in the 2008 election where she lost to John Key, who was touted as a ‘blokey’ man of the people. In contrast, when Jenny Shipley was in power her identity as a mother featured heavily in discourse about her personability (Curtin, 2018) . This ‘farmer’s wife’ persona constructed by political media undermined her authority and hampered her perceived capability as PM (Trimble, 2014).

Current New Zealand PM Ardern has been subject to intense scrutiny since announcing her pregnancy just months after taking office. Ardern announced on January 18th 2018, three months after taking power, that she was pregnant with her

first child (Appendix A). The message attracted 1,500 comments, 4,400 retweets, and 26,000 favourites. It also attracted a lot of opinions. The image of the ‘traditional masculine leader’ is in direct contrast to the feminine presenting Ardern, and her pregnancy made the visibility of her hyper-feminine, female body inescapable. The present study will explore how members of the public discussed Ardern’s leadership in the wake of her pregnancy announcement. This novel event in politics presents an opportunity to explore the ways in which Ardern’s pregnancy challenged traditional notions of leadership and working mothers. The analysis will draw from feminist theory to explore the ways in which this issue was constructed, including how Ardern’s capacity to be both a caring mother and a competent leader were called into question by members of the public who juxtaposed those identities as incompatible.

Women in Politics

Despite the obvious social value of greater representation of women in political leadership, little progress has been made. Women are still generally relegated to low level positions in Western political spaces. For example in 2014, only nine women occupied head of state positions, making up a scant 5.9% of world leaders (UN Women, 2014). Women in high ranking political positions are usually assigned to soft portfolios such as social services and education (Deason, Greenlee, & Langner, 2014). In fact, female participation has been declining in some countries, such as Australia.

Australia had only 28.7% female representatives in the lower house in 2016, three years after its first female PM, Julia Gillard. Gillard was voted out during a leadership spill after a tumultuous term. She was subjected to heavy criticism about her choice not to have children, with one commentator describing her ‘deliberately barren’ (Gannon, 2010). Her choice was framed as evidence of a character flaw,

constructing her as ill-equipped for leadership (Donald, 2007). Moreover, major political parties such as the Australian Liberal party resist implementation of gender quotas by constructing appointment as a meritocracy (Murphy, 2018) ignoring the ways in which women are faced with barriers that do not exist for male candidates.

High achieving female politicians are often described as remarkable, unusual, and masculine. For example, Ardern, Clark, Hillary Clinton, and Margaret Thatcher have all been described as atypical, strong, extraordinary, and unique (Graham, 2017b; Lawless, 2009; Peacock, 2014). Women in leadership positions have also been characterised as a novelty or tokenistic (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012); a nanny or matron (Ross & Comrie, 2012); an iron maiden, or the pet or child (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009).

Women in politics are likely constructed as being atypical because the ideal feminine in western societies, is warm, unambitious, motivated towards caring for others, and subordinate (West & Zimmerman, 1987). However, female politicians have to develop tough, masculine personas to get elected and remain in office (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009). They have also been found to use strategies that minimise or deflect from gender entirely (Mendoza & DiMaria, 2018; Sorrentino & Augoustinos, 2016). The opposing expectations and realities of female politicians - warm and caring versus tough and 'atypically strong' - make gender salient when they enter into positions of power and leadership. This attracts greater scrutiny about all aspects of their personal lives than is experienced by their male counterparts (Baird, 2004).

Media coverage of female politicians focuses on their personality, their appearance, and their romantic relationships more than for male candidates (Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008). The platforms and policies of female politicians are pushed to the

background. Rather than possessing an identity based on their policies, media coverage brings gender to the fore. This is readily apparent when examining the frequency and type of coverage afforded to male politicians which tends to focus on their accomplishments, qualifications, and experience, and hardly mention family relationships or appearance (Tolleson-Rinehart & Josephson, 2005, pp. 301-306).

Choice of outfit, hair clip (Laneri, 2010), purse (Parker, 2013), shoe (Eilperin, 2013) whether or not their cleavage is too visible (Carlin & Winfrey, 2009), whether men would want to have sex with them (Lawless, 2009) and whether they are single or unmarried (Sawer, 2013) dominate public discussion about female politicians. This shift of focus from platforms and issues to looks and home life impair their ability to establish identities of professional competence. Every time the family life narrative is produced in an article about a female politician, there is one less article available which describes her political accomplishments. Female politicians are thus, women first and politicians second, whereas men are simply politicians.

The ramifications are significant. Female politicians are presented as anomalous (Ross & Sreberny, 2000) rather than as representing women generally. These discourses reinforces the notion that high achieving women are either unusual and un-feminine (and not likeable) or extraordinary and feminine (but not competent). Thus, the barriers women face to attaining executive positions are maintained.

The appointment of Carme Chacón to Spain's cabinet as Minister for Defense prompted many articles citing her pregnancy as rendering her unable to fulfil the duties of her position (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012). This is a modern

example of the view that the pregnant body is debilitated (Ussher, 2006). Pregnant women experience both external and internal policing of their behaviour, through medical and social discourse about the ideal passive, vulnerable pregnant woman (Ussher, 2006). As discussed by Garcia-Blanco and Wahl-Jorgensen (2012), much of Chacón's criticism focused on her decision to take a flight in her third trimester.

Pregnancy produces visible biological changes that bring gender into sharp focus. The pregnant female body becomes hyper-feminised. A pregnant body is the epitome of all things feminine and fertility a primary way in which women become associated with the social category 'woman' (Ussher, 2006). Pregnancy also highlights a woman's feminine identity because it ascribes her to the social category 'mother', which fits with the traditional stereotypes of a woman as nurturing and warm. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Ardern, a woman in a leadership position becoming pregnant would trigger a public reaction about her competence. This is because of the 'double bind' women face: they are either lovely, feminine, and caring but not competent; or competent, but unlikeable and not feminine (Jamieson, 1995). There has been only one other case of a pregnant head of government, Benazir Bhutto in 1989. Ardern's pregnancy highlights this double bind, and she therefore represents an excellent case study because this is a novel situation.

Working Mothers

Previous research has demonstrated the problematic ways in which working mothers are constructed, reflective of the double-bind. In particular, the stereotypical feminine qualities of motherhood are repetitively framed as being incompatible with leadership (Deason et al., 2014). Working women in all occupations are either viewed as warm but incompetent, compatible with their gender stereotype; or

competent but cold, and therefore incompatible with their gender stereotype (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011). Furthermore, perceptions of working women who become mothers actually change – they lose perceived competence and gain warmth (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004).

Research suggests that in selecting political candidates, voters prefer warmth to competence, but not in women (Laustsen & Bor, 2017). Men can be perceived as both warm and competent, whereas women rarely are. How women are viewed within this binary elicits either hostile or benevolent sexism (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011). Both sexism perpetuate gender inequality by reinforcing patriarchy and justifying traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Benevolent sexism unfolds as a protective and ‘gentle’ dominance, whereas hostile sexism is antagonistic and derogatory (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Both hinder career advancement, for example by shutting women out or ‘protection’ from high stress jobs. When women act in agentic ways considered masculine, they are penalised by being placed in high likelihood of failure positions (Fine, 2010). This is both used against ‘unmotherly’ and ambitious women (as with Gillard), and working mothers.

However, addressing sexism is fraught. Female leaders who have directly called out sexism are described as tactical and underhanded (Worth, Augoustinos, & Hastie, 2015). Women who challenge sexist remarks are less liked by men (Dodd, Giuliano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001). Furthermore, confrontation of gender bias elicits amusement and is considered an overreaction (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). This interplay of dislike and amusement was illustrated by responses to Gillard’s ‘misogyny speech’. She directly named and shamed the sexism she had faced, and public backlash dogged her for the remainder of her career (Holland & Wright, 2017).

The gender equality project

The present study will draw from the conceptual framework offered by radical feminist theory. According to some, the feminist project is finished and gender equality has been achieved. Women have legal rights, paid work, and some representation in leadership roles; thus sexism, when it arises, is an individual rather than systemic issue (Gill, 2016). Those measuring progress by Western, neoliberal ideals of economic agency are unlikely to consider themselves feminists. Furthermore, despite recent resurgence of interest in feminism, it is often employed as a resistance to ‘outdated’ feminisms (Rivers, 2017). Within this framework, feminism is now packaged as both a *thing* we have finished and moved beyond, not required anymore, and also as the *cause* of women’s problems in the workplace today (McRobbie, 2009). Some prominent female executives, such as Sheryl Sandberg, encourage women to ‘lean in’ to their careers, without recognition of barriers such as the glass ceiling (Kee, 2006). Sandberg is reluctant to identify as a feminist, as her goals are to achieve parity *within* the existing system, rather than dismantling it as desired by radical feminists (hooks, 2013). Radical feminism aims to eliminate all forms of domination (hooks, 2015). The appointment of women into leadership positions should not be taken as an indication that systematic oppression has been eliminated (hooks, 2015).

The notion that equality has been achieved is belied by current representations of female leadership and the way the identities and motivations of female political leaders are constructed. Even though they may be described favourably (as in, unique, atypically strong...), those favourable constructions are still very limiting and restrictive of women when it comes to trying to achieve true equality with men. They serve to construct women as having inherent qualities that

are incompatible with leadership. Women who violate gender expectations face social penalties which restrict their success.

One way in which modern gender inequality can be challenged is by calling out sexism and normalising working mothers. Social media provides a platform for marginalized voices to resist dominant structures. Issues of power and accessibility are present but minimised by sites such as Facebook and Twitter, which provide isolated individuals an opportunity to participate in public discourse (McLean & Maalsen, 2013). Resistance and collective action movements have benefitted from the mobilising possibilities of social media (Valenzuela, 2013). However, social media also provides unfettered opportunities for traditional power structures to be reproduced. In the free and democratic domain of Twitter, research has found that more than 90% of the content contributes to patriarchal discourse (Demirhan & Çakır-Demirhan, 2015). Moderation on these platforms is limited and conversations take place that reinforce gender stereotypes, from benign opinions to harsh bullying, and even threats (Hastie, 2013). This underscores the importance of using tools such as follows, likes, upvotes, and re-tweets to centre non-patriarchal discourse and increase the proportion of voices resisting sexism.

Female political representation is not necessarily a sign of progress towards gender equality, but it is a necessary step towards it. Women in parliamentary positions act as role models for women of all ages to become more interested and active in politics (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007). Research has shown that when high-ranking female politicians are visible, adolescent girls report higher levels of anticipated political involvement and perceive political roles as being within reach (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2018). Gender inequality that requires women to distance themselves from their gender to 'make it' (Bourgault du Coudray, 2016) undermines

the impact of these role models. When women are classed as anomalous in political environments, it reduces other women's interest in pursuing opposite gendered activities and Fine (2010) reports that this is due to a sense of lack of belonging. However, by increasing representation, women are given permission to explore political careers as a possibility.

The present study

“There's no doubt that the path for women in politics was laid well before me; I am the third female prime minister so in that regard I'm not a novelty” – Jacinda

Ardern (Ford, 2018)

This brings us to the case of Jacinda Ardern. She is the young, unmarried PM of New Zealand and leader of the Labour party who has also been described as unassuming, an “unintentional feminist hero”, empathetic, and inclusive (Graham, 2017). Ardern also self-identifies as a feminist, widely uses social media to communicate her platform, and is open about her socialist, left-leaning views; a sharp contrast to the neoliberal landscape which has dominated New Zealand's politics for decades.

This research will focus on the way in which Ardern's identity and roles are constructed in language. Language is one way in which we gender people at both an individual and societal level. Men and women are categorised into dichotomous sex-based categories (this is problematic in itself for those who identify as non-binary). This sorting process provides a way for us to develop expectations of the types of behaviour expected from each group (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). These category memberships play out in social practices such as discourse and are

especially prominent when a perceived occurs – such as when a world leader announces she is pregnant.

Some voices in support of working mothers have emerged within the “Jacindamania” surrounding Ardern and they are working to resist gender inequality. The aim of this paper is to examine these voices of resistance and identify how they are undoing sexism in response to a highly salient case of gender role violation.

Analytic approach

The present study uses a discursive psychological approach (Edwards, 2012; Potter, 1996) focusing on the ways on which talk and text are used to construct social realities (Edwards, Potter, & Wetherell, 1993). Social media platforms are accessible ways to examine how the public accomplish these social actions. Discursive psychology provides a framework for exploring discourse to identify the ways talk functions to maintain or resist versions of social reality, and reinforce or undermine what is considered factual and real about the world (Edwards et al., 1993). A constructionist lens was applied, which purports that understanding, meaning, and experiential processes are produced and reproduced in social interaction, such as talk about events and ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A synthetic approach to analysis was used, drawing on aspects of Conversation Analysis (Schegloff, 1987), Critical Discourse Analysis (van Dijk, 1995) and Membership Category Analysis (Sacks, 1974). This synthetic approach (Wetherell, 1998) capitalises on the strengths of each framework. This is most appropriate because discursive psychology is concerned with how everyday talk creates and mediates our views and relationships with the world through our attention to rules and representations of people and things in our descriptions (Edwards, 1996).

The data corpus of this study (see Appendix B for sources) is comprised of public comments retrieved from the social media platforms Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter from the day of Ardern's announcement on January 19th until the 28th of February, 2018. This timeframe was chosen to capture immediate public reactions while Ardern was still in the early stages of her pregnancy. Naturalistic data was taken from social media to capture discourse of people in their everyday context.

The volume of data available on social media is unparalleled. Social media provides discourse researchers with an unprecedented amount of information uninfluenced by researcher presence (Jowett, 2015). Rather than polished, filtered information provided by news outlets, social media is geographically, politically, and socially diverse, and less influenced by corporate interest. The anonymity of the Internet gives power to marginalised voices, whereas popular media is dominated by wealth and status (Morahan-Martin, 2000). The reality of people's responses to Ardern's announcement though cannot be understood outside of the natural environment (social media platform) in which it is being produced ("Naturalistic Data," 2008).

Twitter (twitter.com) is a social networking and microblogging platform, which attracted 336 million users in early 2018. It was chosen for its focus on rapid, succinct communication. It is also the 6th most popular social media site in the world (Statista, 2018). Users "tweet" short messages, images, or videos within a 280-character limit. A search on Twitter was conducted using the terms "Jacinda Ardern", "pregnancy", and "60 minutes". Twitter has moderation policies which involve user self-imposed filters that hide explicit comments, and a second level of moderation where tweets that do not meet community standards are deleted and those accounts suspended.

Reddit (reddit.com) is an online community with 330 million average monthly users, slightly less popular than Twitter. It was chosen for its focus on micro-communities where users generate and discuss content relevant to the theme of the community. It is organised by interest area into 'subreddits'. Users post text or multimedia content and users can reply to or vote posts either 'up' or 'down'. Upvoting helps comments appear closer to the top of a thread, in turn being more likely to appear in web searches. Reddit was searched with keywords "Jacinda Ardern", producing three data sources in the subreddits "Australia", "World News", and "TwoXChromosomes". Each subreddit is governed by rules that may have censored some comments.

Facebook (facebook.com) is a social networking service with 2.2 billion monthly active users. It is the most used social media platform in the world (Statista, 2018), making it a clear choice for data collection. Content posted to Facebook can take the form of updates, comments, images, videos, and links. A search was conducted using key terms "Jacinda Ardern" and "Jacinda Ardern pregnancy". Facebook utilises a relevancy ranking system whereby less relevant comments filter down in the feed, and some comments may have been moderated out entirely.

Comments were screened for their relevance to Ardern's pregnancy and were excluded if they covered other topics such as US politics, the parliamentary system more generally, or inter-user arguments. This resulted in a data set of 9,173 comments. Obvious trolling content (Hardaker, 2010) which was inflammatory or off-topic was excluded. A limitation to the use of public social media comments is that each platform has standalone moderation policies which will have, to some degree, filtered the available comments from viewing. The analysis presented in this

paper will focus on comments that support Ardern's decision, despite a vast amount of negativity. This perspective was chosen because by looking at the ways in which discourses support feminist approaches to motherhood and leadership, positive action can be taken to replicate it in public spaces, helping dismantle systems that perpetuate gender inequality.

Familiarity with the corpus began during transcription as it was examined using a theory-driven thematic analysis, described in Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis identifies patterns and themes in discourse which serves to assist in organisation of the data. This provided an initial exploratory look at what emerged from the data to facilitate an initial, surface-level interpretation of what meaning was being produced by individuals responding to Ardern's announcement. The synthetic approach was then applied to analyzing particular extracts evidencing these themes. Two themes were identified in 568 comments during the thematic analysis: calling out sexism, and normalizing working mothers. Nine illustrative comments were selected from the corpus for the position they take in resisting constructions of working mothers as problematic.

Analysis and Discussion

The following analysis will examine the strategies and devices employed in discourse which called out sexism and normalised working mothers to resist gender inequality and how this was accomplished.

Calling out sexism

A pervasive feature in the corpus was a naming and shaming of arguably sexist comments by illustrating the double bind women face in leadership roles. Many were responses to comments that were not in support of Ardern's pregnancy.

There were three notable patterns of discourse used to accomplish this. Firstly, contrast structures were employed to demonstrate how women face negative consequences both in pursuing a career in politics and not having children, and also having children while working in politics. Secondly, commenters made explicit mention of the year, 2018, framing detractors as being incompatible with modern society. The use of sarcasm and rhetorical questions, as well as dark humour, prevailed as a way of managing this talk. Finally, sexist comments were framed as products of problematic identities, thus undermining their relevance and value.

Ardern was used as a prominent example of how women are expected to belong to (and perform the actions of) two ‘incongruent’ categories at the same time – an impossible task which inevitably results in scathing criticism of either coldness or incompetence. Writers bolstered the factuality of their comments by constructing alternatives as extreme case formulations (ECFs) and minimising any reference to category membership, to prevent the impression that they had a personal stake or interest in the subject.

Extract 1

(Reddit, 18 January 2018)

1. “be female leader with no kids “this childless crone can’t understand the
2. struggles of family!” be female leader, want to start a family “how selfish is
3. she!? Getting pregnant in office! This is an outrage”

This comment uses a contrast structure to overtly illustrate the lose-lose situation women face in being criticised for not having children “can’t understand the struggles of family!” (line 1-2) and also for having them “how selfish is she!?”

(line 2-3). It suggests there is no common sense middle path to take, which is usually what people gravitate towards – the rational and reasonable (Riley, 2001). It creates a dilemmatic situation (Billig, 1988), an uncomfortable state of being for the reader, who seeks mental resolution. This makes accessible the possibility of a moderate, feminist view of either position being acceptable – not having children and being a female politician, or having children and being a female politician.

The writer qualifies “leader” with “female” (line 1), implying that this is a situation specific to women. Both unacceptable views are presented as ECFs (Pomerantz, 1986) – using “childless crone” (line 1), and “outrage!” (line 3). Crone and outrage are both extreme descriptions taking the place of more moderate terms such as ‘childless’ or ‘unacceptable’. They emphasise the contrast structure as an immense distance between the two possibilities, highlighting the impossible expectations that women leaders must contend with. These expectations – the double bind – are thus a legitimate complaint by portraying these two undesirable outcomes and their negative impacts to be of a serious nature. A serious complaint is something to be acknowledge and responded to, rather than accepted as the status quo (Pomerantz, 1986). The use of ECFs in this context de-legitimise the proposed options for women in politics, bolstering the strongest case for the complaint as being something worthy of change. In addition, the extreme constructions of the situation also bring emotion rather than cognitive, logical arguments to the fore - a way of appealing to readers’ emotional rather than logical constructions. It highlights the illogical, impossible expectations put on women in leadership positions by highlighting the incompatible positions representative of the double bind in that it highlights the absurdity of the contrast.

The writer does not make attribution as to the cause of the dilemma, in fact the extract is written in a minimalistic fashion to increase distance from the appearance of stake or interest (Edwards & Potter, 1993). They do not reference themselves, ('I think...') or claim category entitlement ('as a woman...'). This is an effective way of managing the possibility that someone will ascribe particular motivations to their argument (Potter, 1996). They have accomplished this by positioning this response as factual reporting by a disinterested party. Thus, it is seen as more reliable. This presents the argument as irrefutable – something that exists 'out there' in the world of facts rather than in the interior of someone's mind and their (biased) opinions.

The possibilities for women that the writer presents are both problematic. On one hand, 'crone' (line 1) is a particularly emotive term, and is not a neutral description. It makes gender relevant (Stokoe, 2004). Crone speaks to both age and ugliness and is usually used to denigrate a woman who has not married or had children. In many folk stories, crones are also disagreeable and malicious, or sinister and evil with supernatural powers like a witch, with the abilities to control and manipulate (Henneberg, 2010). A crone paradoxically represents both feebleness and incompetence as well as deviousness and coldness, the worst of all possibilities for women (King, 2015).

The use of the passive verb "getting" in "getting pregnant" (line 3) offers a critique of the character of a person who would leave themselves vulnerable or be irresponsible. It forms the actor as passive and receptive of any fate brought upon themselves – not the qualities appreciated in effective leaders and role models. The writer then offers another explanation by using the term "how selfish" (line 2) which suggests a very deliberate act. These two views function to highlight the problematic

ways we view the actions of women – passive and irresponsible, or active and manipulative. Additionally, use of “in office” (line 3) brings her duties as PM into the foreground. This functions to suggest that personal decisions made by Ardern are expected to be made with the obligations of her role as PM foremost.

The writer actively voices a supposed other with “can't understand the struggles of [a] family” (line 1), implying that being part of this category bestows the member with a level of secret knowledge and understanding which must be attained in order to represent the interests of the general public, and without it one is incompetent in their role - a categorization which makes the argument difficult to refute (Edwards et al., 1993). This extract used several discursive devices to construct the impossible standards set for women, and Ardern in particular, thereby arguing a view which is consistent with a radical feminist perspective. It is an explicit recognition that the system is built to ensure women fail, whatever their identity – mother or childfree, they will be seen as lacking competency in the role. This reinforces gender inequality. It provides an alternative version of the negative evaluations that others were making about Ardern and is the counter-argument to both of the arguments it puts forward because of the ironic way in which it presents them, highlighting for readers the absurdity of both perspectives, and subsequently, the impossible standards Ardern is faced with.

The next extract builds on the use of contrast structures to explicitly identify the dilemma in which women in power find themselves – having to choose between one negative outcome and another. It further de-legitimises arguments against Ardern's pregnancy.

Extract 2

(*Reddit*, 18 January 2018)

1. Most of the comments that I have seen is "You cannot be a head of
2. government and be a mother at the same time". Which is funny because
3. apparently you can be a head of government and be a father at the same time.

Extract 2 is another example of explicitly naming the ‘lose-lose’ situation women face by use of a contrast structure. As in Extract 1, it relies on an ironic construction to highlight the absurdity of the double standard. In this case it is deployed to call for an account as to why there are differences in what a head of government can do based on gender (Fuegen et. al, 2004). The writer explicitly occasions gender in the use of “mother” (line 2) and “father” (line 3) to draw the reader’s attention to activities associated with these roles. This makes accessible large amounts of secondary information about the sorts of behaviour we expect mothers and fathers to do, hidden within the label (Stokoe, 2006). Mother and father are not neutral terms. They have cultural values attached to them and have certain status relative to each other and also to their likelihood of holding a “head of government” (line 3) job. The extract is resisting how shared cultural knowledge of gender (what mothers and fathers do) is maintained in talk about Arden’s pregnancy by making salient the double standards women face (Partington, 2007).

The writer opens with “most of the comments” (line 1) and goes on to classify them as “funny because” (line 2) they are odd. This undermines the validity of alternative accounts. If these alternative accounts are odd and absurd, there is no need to engage in further talk of a similar nature as it is framed as emotive, not factual (Edwards, 1997).

Use of the word “apparently” is an important way of establishing an ironic frame for the view presented (Partington, 2007) which is that fathers but not mothers can be head of government. It is a way of expressing that it cannot possibly have only come to the writer’s attention recently, and it is an expression of mock surprise and disappointment that other accounts are allegedly forming the majority of reactions to the announcement.

The writer privileges the role “head of government” each time before either father or mother. This choice of order minimises the effect of gender on what is entailed by the head of government role. It serves to downplay gender and make leadership as an activity, not an attribute commonly ascribed as masculine, more salient (Baxter, 2010). The repetition of “head of government” emphasises similarity rather than difference, reinforcing the argument. As in Extract 1, the writer here is presenting a counter argument to “most of the arguments” (line 1) by highlighting what those comments are through a contrast structure that simultaneously undermines those comments by highlighting the funny, non-sensical position that makes it acceptable for men but not for women to be parents while also head of government. By drawing attention to the double standards in this way, the writer constructs those argument as absurd or illogical.

Many comments constructed sexism as a quaint remnant of the past and as something irrelevant to modern discourse about women in leadership positions. People generally like to believe that as time marches on, we inevitably move forward toward a more progressive, fair, and civil society (Rottenberg, 2013). Writers used this to destabilise arguments against Ardern’s pregnancy by calling attention to time. To increase rationality of their claims the writer downplays the opposing

‘sexist’ accounts as being views held only by the minority rather than the majority of people, making them less important and worthy of discussion.

Extract 3

(Facebook, 19 January 2018)

1. “... We have already had parents as Prime Ministers - your entire statement is
2. based on your assumption she is less capable of balancing parenthood and
3. politics than fathers, so yeah you are being entirely sexist and I don’t want to
4. hear any more of that rubbish thanks. It’s 2018 now.”

Extract 3 builds on the contrasts offered in extracts 1 and 2, by actively calling out sexism in the comment. It begins to make accessible the notion that certain discourse surrounding parenthood (for women, not men) is simply unacceptable and needs to be silenced. The writer here works to end the conversation with “I don’t want to hear anymore” (line 3-4). With this adamant statement, it is purported that there is nothing more to discuss on the topic. The person to whom they are replying is dismissed and have no room for further discussion of ideas on the topic. The view is positioned as not rational or tolerable in 2018.

The writer here specifically uses the term “parents” (line 1) in opening their comment. Using a non-gendered reference works to discredit alternative accounts because if parenting prime ministers were problematic, there would already have been issues. The writer, by using “parent” (line 1) instead of “father” or “mother” makes accessible the notion that parenting is a job for both fathers and mothers, and identifying them as belonging to one, non-gendered category is a way of bolstering the strength of their initial statement that it has already been done without issue. This

problematizes the assumption that mother and Prime Minister is a category pairing that should not exist, because of a lack of risk or issues with historical parent leaders (Speer, 2002). This statement intentionally brings focus to how much of the corpus constructed gender difference by pointing out their assumption that Ardern is less capable based on her gender rather than legitimate reasons. This creates a sense of reasonable, non-biased, and logical argument that is more difficult to refute (Speer, 2002). Similar to Extracts 1 and 2, it constructs the opposing view as illogical, absurd, and non-sensical. Additionally, the use of “we have” (line 1) instead of ‘there have’ brings a sense of unity and joint ownership for creating situations (i.e., voting for leaders who are parents) and that the original speaker was likely someone who voted for a parent in the past, making their actions hypocritical if they are unhappy now only because the parent is a women, rather than a man.

Once sexism is named, the writer uses ECFs to undermine credibility of the opposing view, as in “your entire” (line 1). It creates a context where the original statement is discounted because it is entirely made from assumption rather than of fact. A further way in which the writer minimises the argument is by the use of “your” (line 1). The implication is that it is an error at the individual level, and it is a way of isolating the argument implying that the majority do not hold this view. The writer returns to this theme at the end of their comment by orienting the reader to the date, with “it’s 2018 now” (line 3). It constructs their view as a piece of common knowledge that others need to catch on to. It is a short sentence which holds much meaning. It is rejecting old, outdated traditions that are no longer relevant. It positions people who were responding negatively to Ardern’s pregnancy as being out of touch with modern times, or old-fashioned sexists.

“Entirely sexist” (line 3) is a repetitive echo of “entire” as an ECF in line 1, to create emphasis and power in the argument. As with “it’s 2018 now”, it is a criticism loaded with meaning, framing the previous writer as outdated. “So yeah” (line 2) is a recent colloquialism which functions as an honesty phrase, similar to ‘actually’ or ‘in fact’. It is designed to reinforce that one can expect truth in the forthcoming statement and also evoke an attitude of commitment to the view on behalf of the writer (Edwards & Fasulo, 2006). The writer here uses this device to create a sense that what they are sharing comes from a place of honesty and is correct, rather than having another motive. This handles any accusations of subjectivity – if one is being honest, and speaking the truth, then one is creating objective accounts. It makes it seem more factual. It also acts to frame their assessment (“you are being entirely sexist” line 2-3) as being virtuous, as to speak negatively of someone’s character is usually a delicate move in social exchange.

The use of “thanks” (line 4) presupposes acquiescence. It frames it as more of a demand or entitlement to censor the other view as it is not worth attending to anything more than the writer already has, in calling attention to its supposedly ‘sexist’ basis. It also echoes extract 2 and 3 in the sense that the alternative argument is extremely flawed. The use of “rubbish” is notable as it is a term representing something of no value, to be discarded (*dictionary.com*, n.d.) Accounting for opposing views as being “rubbish” (line 3) is rude, and it is a way in which to gain power in an interaction (Ladegaard, 2012). Similar to Extract 3, other comments expressed an optimistic view that women in 2018 experience benefits that women of other times did not. Extract 3 is again resisting gender inequality by denigrating the arguments against Ardern and establishing those arguments as worthless, outdated, and of no value.

Extract 4

(*Facebook*, 19 January 2018)

1. “this is so cool...working mum as PM, stay at home dad, welcome to 2018 where
2. times are hopefully changing...without doubt there will be the detractors that will
3. wag their fingers and having an 'enlightened' opinion to share, but thankfully the
4. majority of people are stoked for you and Clarke ...great time to be a women
5. watching another glass ceiling get shattered...”

Extract 4 builds upon the notion that in 2018, where the “times are hopefully changing” (line 1-2) not only are opposing views invalid, most people are in fact supportive of female leaders having children and having jobs. The writer here strengthens the facticity of their account (Potter, 1996) by stating “this is so cool” (line 1) instead of a more subjective, ‘I think...’. This wards off the impression of having a personal stake in the issue (Edwards & Potter, 1992). It also sets up expectations for further positive construction of Ardern’s pregnancy and information to answer the question of why it ‘is cool’.

Ardern’s identity is first and foremost formulated as a “working mum” (line 1) which implies this category is the most important aspect, and the actual job involved, being a head of government, is less relevant. This is a way of connecting a PM who is a mother with the more generally normalized phenomenon of working mothers in broader occupations. It also appeals to already well-established notions of ‘working mums’ in the community. It normalises Ardern’s identity as a pregnant PM by linking it to the broader context. Head of government would easily be accepted as one of the most difficult and stressful jobs available, so if a working mum can be a

PM, it opens up possibilities for working women in nearly other fields, especially high stress positions.

“Without doubt” (line 2) is an acknowledgment of alternate views, which increases the writer’s credibility by suggesting that they have both considered and accept that other versions exist, however they are able to discount them based on the rest of the information in the extract. The line, “detractors that will wag their fingers” (line 2) suggests conservative and old-fashioned. “Detractor” also speaks to someone who is overly critical, or a fault-finder, and ‘finger wagging’ is used to illustrate that critics of this have no power to change the outcome; they are disempowered by being able only to watch and disapprove but not take actual action against the process. This positions the viewpoint as having no real power because it is irrelevant and outdated in 2018. It closes off avenues of countering the claim – they will be seen as merely fulfilling the writer’s predictions. Putting the word ‘enlightened’ in quotes makes it clear that the writer means it in a sarcastic sense, whereby in fact they mean the exact opposite.

“Thankfully the majority” (line 3) is a consensus warrant (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2014) which functions to position the approving comments as being both the most ‘normal’, majority view, and that they are a welcome relief from those who would say otherwise. It appeals to the idea that it is a majority view, giving it credibility. Additionally, the use of “thankfully” (line 3) is notable as it appeals to an emotion of relief, that the reader should be pleased that most people feel supportive of Arden’s pregnancy.

The writer concludes with the phrase “great time to be a woman” (line 4). This works to position Arden’s pregnancy as signifying that there is something about 2018 that is beneficial to all women, pregnant or not, working or not. It is

about Ardern's pregnancy being symbolic women's progress in the workplace and having 'arrived'. It implies the unappealing opposite - now is a better time to be a woman than the past times, when those outdated views were the norm, which all of the previous extracts are constructing in a negative way. The use of "glass ceiling ... shattered" (line 5) echoes radical feminist language. It highlights the fact that pregnancy and working mums, especially in high powered leadership positions, have still faced unacknowledged barriers to advancement, but these are being "shattered" by Ardern. Extract 4 builds further on the notion that alternative views of the situation are outdated, absurd, and that they have no place in modern discourse on the topic.

. **Extract 5**

(*Reddit*, 18/01/2018)

1. "Do you apply this thinking to male leaders as well? Funny how being a father and
2. leading a country aren't mutually exclusive, but being a mother is. It's not 1950."

The writer here challenges a preceding comment which indicated that a politician should not parent a young child. The initial question "do you apply...?" (line 1) presupposes a negative response. It is a move to make gender the focus of the discourse rather than other accounts, such as time commitment. It is again, a contrast structure between men and women to make salient the double standard. It is a way of calling out inequality between men and women by highlighting the irrational ways in which women are not given equality with men. Politicians who are fathers do not face concern for the impact their fatherhood would have on them fulfilling their professional role in the way mothers do (Stalsburg, 2010). Thus, the

only available option is to be in support of Ardern's pregnancy as well, at the risk of being hypocritical. "This thinking" (line 1) is way of portraying the preceding comment as being 'out there'. The writer is systematically vague about the details of the argument as a way of dismissing and reducing its credibility (Messner, 1997).

The use of "funny" (line 1) is sarcastic, leading into the point that many world leaders are parents – and also, that many world leaders are men (fathers). The use of "mutually exclusive" (line 2) emphasises the dichotomy of being a mother and PM. Where the writer states, "being a mother is", they are directly showing the contrast between what someone who is categorized as a mother is able to do (not be a world leader) compared to what someone who identifies as father can (be a world leader). This use of categories, father and mother, invoke category bound activities (Sacks, 1974). What fathers and mothers do are understood to represent what all parents do generally, but that these activities differ based on their gender.

"It's not 1950" (line 2) presents a common-sense fact, alleviating the writer of having to account for the remainder of their argument. As with Extracts 3 to 5, it is another three-word sentence appealing to the time and carries much meaning. It works as a rhetorically self-sufficient argument, as in Wetherell & Potter (1992), which demonstrate that time arguments are compelling, for example "you have to live in the 20th century". is considered 'common sense' in that it does not require further elaboration or explanation. This sentence, as in previous extracts, works as a complete argument in and of itself because it appeals to culturally shared notions of common sense – it is 2018. It is invoked here to problematise the previous comment as being out of date. It also serves to subtly position the opposing view as being out of touch. The comment implicitly contends that it is not possible to have modern views and be opposed to Ardern's pregnancy.

This extract again draws attention to the double standard and its inequality, and it is challenged by this writer on the basis that it is unfair, illogical, and outdated.

Common in the corpus were accounts that acknowledged sexism as inevitable but impotent. A common form of resistance was framing views that opposed Ardern's pregnancy as being outdated. This type of argument sought to decrease the credibility of those opposed by explicitly describing them with negative qualities and making it highly personal – rather than an issue being open to debate, they were simply people who had a problem (Augoustinos & Every, 2010).

Extract 6

(Reddit, 18 January 2018)

1. "Congratulations Jacinda. Wonderful news! Slightly worried about all the shit
2. knuckle draggers who'll be coming out of their caves to complain about this."

Extract 6 highlights the way comments framed sexist discourse as coming from unevolved ideologies. The writer opens with explicit support for Ardern, preparing the reader for further constructions of Ardern's pregnancy as positive. However, they immediately move to identify and present opposing views as problematic. It acknowledges that support for her pregnancy is likely to be challenged. The use of "slightly" in front of "worried" (line 1) softens the term, suggesting the writer does not view these detractors as a serious threat. Detractors' credibility is further minimised through the belittling terms used to describe them; terms that are associated with negative, unenlightened qualities, which again work to highlight these opposing views as out-of-date.

Of the aforementioned analysis, Extract 6 is unique in its use of the proposition “shit knuckle draggers” (line 1-2) which is used to bolster the position of the writer. It contains a value judgment of those opposed to Ardern’s pregnancy as being unacceptable and in conjunction with their initial “congratulations” (line 1) works to emphasis the positive attributes of the in-group and the negative attributes of the ‘other’ (Chiluwa, 2012). The language is evocative and humorous, and constructs a degrading caricature of opposing views which underscore their absurdity. It also appeals to a time past, referencing outdated views – however, unlike the previous extracts that appeal to 2018 (a modern take), or 1950 (still within living memory), this is an ECF that draws upon pre-civilised times to emphasise the utterly outdated and therefore worthless views that a pregnant PM is problematic.

All of these extracts appeal to times past, use irony, humorous language, and contrast structures to undermine opposing views as outdated, illogical, and worthless.

Normalising working mothers

Many comments resisted discourses that reinforced the dominant sexist and heterosexist paradigm of the nuclear family. In this paradigm, a father works and thus fulfils his entire parenting function (as a provider of resources) and a mother raises children and supports the father in his role of providing (Smith, 1993). It simultaneously downplays the contribution men make to the family unit through parenting and attends to the notion that having a career, particularly in a demanding leadership position, detracts from a woman’s mothering. Many comments functioned to promote and normalise the identity of working mothers and (primary) caring fathers. Many comments also resisted the notion of fathers as ‘less than’ mothers and constructed parenting as normally undertaken alongside work, as well as

constructing parenting as non-gendered.

Extract 7

(Facebook, 19 January 2018)

1. “(OP) your experience as a mother, however valid, isn’t the universal experience.
2. She’ll do fine, she has a plan, and it’s only six weeks. Have some faith and watch
3. her smash the stereotypes and gender roles that are making you uncomfortable.
4. There’s quite a few recent mums and dads in the house from a variety of parties.
5. She’s the latest addition. Many parents do overseas trips and work very long days
6. too, and this just helps normalise that option of parenting.”

The writer here begins by providing some reassurance and recognition of the opposing point with, “your experience...however valid” (line 1). This is a way of inoculating against a counter-claim that they do not account for individual difference. They go on to make use of a three part list device (Lerner, 1994) at line 2 (“She’ll do fine, she has a plan, and it’s only six weeks”). It functions to show completeness, making their claims more robust to critique. “She’ll do fine” (line 2) reassures; “she has a plan” (line 2) presents Arden as responsible and in control; “only six weeks” implies that this won’t affect her job for outside of the six-week period of leave, minimising the difficulty of pregnancy and birth, illustrating that there is no reason why Arden cannot do this.

Possible fears or concerns about Arden’s ability to fulfill her leadership role are allayed through the rejoinder to “have some faith” (line 2). It has the tone of a parent calming a child who has gotten themselves worked up over nothing. The use

of “watch her” (line 2), builds a sense of momentum, the expectation that Ardern will succeed regardless of how difficult it may or may not be, or of any criticism she may face. The language in this extract has a condescending tone as the writer positions themselves as having a broader, more mature awareness of the situation, while those with opposing views are concerned for no good reason. The use of “smash” (line 3) echoes the radical feminist catch phrase smash the patriarchy, and may also be the colloquial meaning of ‘smash’: to do something well.

Extract 7 moves outward from Ardern to the difference between male and female politicians generally. By highlighting “mums and dads in the house”, comment equalizes men and women by creating an image of working mothers and fathers in the Houses of Parliament. If there is no problem with fathers in the House, it follows that there should be no problem with mothers. It also normalises the notion of politicians as parents “many parents” (line 5), presenting Ardern as just one of many politicians with a family. The writer employs membership categorization by using the term “mums and dads”. Fathers are often excluded, as when people say “parents” it often really means just mothers. By including “dads”, the writer makes accessible the activities we associate with dads as being part of parenting. This frames parenting as gender neutral, not just a euphemism for mothering. This de-gendering is further reinforced by “many parents” (line 5). Discussion of “work very long days too” (line 5-6) serves to normalise working parents in other occupations. The writer finishes their comment with “normalise the option of parenting” (line 6), bringing together both roles to suggest we shouldn’t be making a distinction. It is explicit in recognizing that perhaps we do have some way to go, and normalising working mothers is a process that we have to go through to get to a point where it *is* normalized and we don’t need to *talk about* normalising it anymore. The use of the

word “normalise” is notable in itself. It acknowledges cultural and social expectations about how to achieve greater equality (i.e. by normalising it), while simultaneously recognizing that this is an ongoing process and Ardern’s pregnancy is important because it will assist with that process. Ardern’s pregnancy is framed as a pivotal moment for gender equality. The phrase “she’s the latest addition” (line 5) simultaneously recognises that we still need to actively work on and verbalise this process of normalisation. Extract 7 is notable because it is both actively normalising working mothers and also reflecting on the importance of normalising – it is self-conscious.

Extract 8

(Facebook, 19/01/2018)

1. “She knows she can do it, just like you knew you could do it, and many other
2. women have done it. It's not to say she works harder or is tougher or is better than
3. other mothers - but she's capable and she wants to do this, and that's her choice.”

This comment opens with a three-part list, commonly used to emphasise a point through repetition (Jefferson, 1990; Lerner, 1994). In this instance the writer is calling attention to the part “can do it”, “could do it” (line 1), and “have done it” (line 2). This again undermines arguments against working motherhood as irrelevant because it’s been done before. The writer moves from individual, to local, to global experience in line 1. By leaving themselves out of the list they have inoculated the view against claims of interestedness and bias. The use of “many other women have done it” (line 1-2) seeks to normalise parenting alongside work through pluralisation (Riley, 2001). The writer here, by starting with “she knows she can do it” (line 1)

and coming to “many other women” (line 1-2), is asserting that women know the reality of the situation; that women ‘get on and do it’; and are tougher than stereotypically thought. This is a central tenet of feminism: equality, not being inferior counter-parts to men. Care is taken in the phrasing about returning to the individual – “that’s her choice” (line 3) as in neoliberal society there is pressure to talk about individuals’ personal qualities (“she’s capable and she wants to do this” - line 3). This also makes it very difficult to argue against, as taking away people’s rights to choose is only permissible under very specific circumstances. The writer does this even as they make the categorical explanation that many women “have done it” (line 2), and she is not tougher or better than other women. The writer again uses a three-part list “she’s capable and she wants to do this, and that’s her choice” (line 3) to close their comment. This is an appeal to liberal feminist ideals, where equality means Ardern has the right and capacity to choose, just as a man would in her position. This extract minimises the ‘problem’ of working motherhood and normalises her decision. It also constructs equality ideals as already existing, suggesting that the public should stop critiquing these and let Ardern get on with parenting and leading .

Extract 9

(Reddit, 18/01/2018)

1. “Not sure if you've been in a job in the last century but last time I looked there's
2. been a heap of women who have had to work high stress jobs while dealing with
3. pregnancy and they've done fine. It's a very common occurrence.

.....

6. assuming that this means that the PM will be incompetent during this time is a huge

7. assumption that is unfounded.”

This comment opens with “not sure” (line 1), which draws on some of the irony demonstrated in Extracts 1 and 2. The ECF that follows (“been in a job in the last century”) works as a sarcastic jab at opposing views. It is saying that they are *either* too old to have worked in the last century, appealing to time constructions where the opposing view is situated as out of date, *or* they are totally out of touch with society – either version undermines the relevance of such claims. “Not sure” also buffers the writer against the possibility that they are incorrect in their assumption and a counter argument based on this, which could position the rest of their statement as ‘false’ because they got the first fact wrong. Rather than focusing on whether their respondent has had a job within the last ten, or even twenty years, the writer uses an ECF, “last century” (line 1), to indicate the previous writer is so out of touch they are one hundred years out of date, and have nothing valuable to offer the conversation. There is also a focus on having been “in a job” (line 1) as a necessary qualification to understand that women have been doing work and motherhood for this amount of time. The writer also draws attention that many women with children “had to” (line 2) work while being pregnant, framing it not as a choice but a necessity for women who want both or don’t get a choice. The notion of the non-working wife and mother is a 20th century middle-class construct, formerly a feature of nobility, and is still rare for much of the world. The implication is also that most households require dual incomes, or at least one income, in the case of single mothers. Pluralising “heap of women” (line 2) and describing their jobs as “high stress” (line 2) bring focus to the fact that there are both large numbers of working women and a large amount of them are working high stress jobs. Extracts 7-

9 work to normalise working mothers and also reflect on how much progress is yet to be made towards this goal. They make use of the same sense of irony as seen in earlier extracts calling out sexism, and minimise perceived problems with working motherhood by calling attention to the fact that many, if not most women have faced Ardern's situation and succeeded.

Conclusion

Analysis of social media comments surrounding Ardern's pregnancy announcement demonstrated how discursive constructions of support functioned to silence sexism and challenge the gender inequality generally seen in leadership positions. Across the corpus, sexism was named and shamed (as seen in Extract 1, 2). It was also dismissed as a relic of the past and positioned as sexist, outdated and irrelevant to the current day (Extract 2, 3, 4). People called for accounts as to why sexism still exists in 2018 (Extract 4, 5), problematic identities were constructed for the writers of sexist comments (Extract 6), and people were urged to consider the equal importance of the parenting roles of fathers and mothers (Extract 7). Moreover, the importance of Ardern's pregnancy as a "milestone" for women making strides in equality was downplayed as something that has been achieved thousands of times over (Extract 8, 9, 10), thereby normalising Ardern's decision to have a child while in office, effectively silencing criticisms of that decision.

These predominant constructions challenge and undermine gender inequality, and seek to silence those who would reproduce sexist discourse. In normalising the calling out of sexism in everyday talk, whilst diminishing the credibility of those who engage in gender inequality supportive rhetoric, women and men are both more able to speak openly about the double standards women face, and therefore make actionable choices against it. The discourse calling out sexism in the corpus provides

evidence that social media is a space where gender inequality can be challenged in effective ways. Social media platforms create spaces for challenging hegemony, gender inequality, and sexism (Turley & Fisher, 2018). Social media is a democratizing platform that allows for minority views to have equal footing with majority ones, unlike mainstream media (Morahan-Martin, 2000). This has allowed an investigation into the ways in which discourses supported gender inequality can be challenged. The counter arguments examined help us understand how minority (feminist) voices can build rhetorically robust arguments to challenge discourses that are pervasive and resistant to change.

The examination of this example of real-world talk calling out sexism on social media is consistent with research suggesting that social media platforms have given access and voice to dominated, marginalised groups (Turley & Fisher, 2018). The analysis is also consistent with how gender inequality is produced in discourse and how counter-talk can diminish and undermine it by re-distributing power, which is an outcome of dominating discourses (Wetherell, 2002).

There are some limitations to this work. The views discussed here, illustrative of the way inequality was challenged, were derived from data that was likely limited to western, English-speaking people with means to access the internet. It is likely that those commenting had an interest in both participating in online discourse and in politics. These factors together may result in a systematically different range of arguments than would be gathered from the world population more broadly. Future research could use methods such as interviews or focus groups to minimise the effects of this potential source of bias. However, use of interview and focus group methods would introduce new limitations in that participants may be affected by social desirability bias, wanting to appear a certain way in front of others

during the discussion, which could confound the findings. Social media as a data source provides access to naturally produced accounts due to the anonymous nature of online interaction, which gives insight into less public voices, as seen in Extract 6. This type of emboldened honesty is likely to be found in mainstream media for fear of public backlash and its consequences.

This work does not, and does not intend, to capture all the possible discourses about Ardern's pregnancy, calling out sexism, or normalising working mothers. Nor does it attempt to form a composite of the attitudes or characteristics of the writers of the comments. Rather, it aims to present the common tropes and discourses surrounding motherhood and leadership, that worked to resist sexism. It remains unknown what the implications of the differences between social media platforms and the users that access them may be; however, this could be the focus of further research in this area. Indeed, a dialogical, rhetorical analysis of online interaction could provide valuable insight into the ways in which competing accounts of this issue are defended, justified, and undermined in what is known as the 'cut and thrust' of interaction.

Collective voices create social norms and social realities, and they can change them through alternative discursive accounts. As discussed, female political representation is one step toward gender equality. Challenging the dominant rhetoric about the 'problems' with female leadership require alternative accounts to be accessible in discourse. Examining these accounts can lead us to understanding effective ways of challenging gender inequality by both identifying problematic tropes and how they are counterposed.

In sum, the research presented here has provided insights into the positive constructions generated by members of the public in response to Ardern's pregnancy

announcement that served to further the gender equality project. They have illuminated an area of inquiry which imparts a sense of optimism – minority voices are providing accounts as a viable alternative to available sexist discourses surrounding women in leadership roles.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Ardern's announcement

Ardern made the announcement from her personal Twitter account (@jacindaardern). Her profile illustrates her down to earth attitude: "Prime Minister of NZ. Leader @nzlabour. Won't tweet what I ate for breakfast-make no promises beyond that. Auth Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Parlt Buildings, WLG". The announcement was an image of two large fish hooks side by side, with a small fish hook nestled within the one on the right. The tweet reads, "We thought 2017 was a big year! This year we'll join the many parents who wear two hats. I'll be PM & a mum while Clarke will be "first man of fishing" & stay at home dad. There will be lots of questions (I can assure you we have a plan all ready to go!) but for now bring on 2018" (Ardern, 2018).

Appendix B – Comment sources

Source	Date	Number of Comments	Link
Twitter	27/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/ABCthedrum/status/968734227176009728
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/HopeJules/status/967716382635843584
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/loukentdesign/status/967930024237056000
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/JemShadow/status/968139006880890880
Twitter	28/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/VeritasEver/status/969043529879056384
Twitter	20/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Bobb90744070/status/954898583144181760
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/democracymum/status/954148438307848192
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/RecklessRobyn/status/954196182032633857
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Pugz61/status/954129048111759361
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/tomcourtneyaus/status/954438826444771329
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/GuyMDMacDonald1/status/954491269887045633
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/theworkclass/status/954143877161611265
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/HoockTheSpook/status/954284047567433728
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/SteveRavencroft/status/968274966029393920
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/emily_a_george/status/967707913757184000
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/trisgilla/status/967709189609893889
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/RyanSheales/status/967708328733233153
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Nidaba07/status/968002223018975233
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Diceyadventure/status/968105538767667200
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/MollyWolly8/status/970049590706794497
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/waywardbreed/status/967935197814509568
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/therealdannz/status/967842895301509121
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/BeepeeNZ/status/967846078346227712
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/top40_charts/status/968060132528566272
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Collingwoodfc10/status/967875195833794560
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/jeanfin46831889/status/968392316074496002

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Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/MENARESMARTER/status/967862752772419584
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/brettscoast/status/967883809692704768
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/RugbyReg/status/967722003858731008
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Catriona_A/status/967734714965442561
Twitter	18/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/3isbliss/status/954160097734701056
Twitter	18/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/PMatist/status/954161614478962688
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/ANessie39/status/954464712405680129
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/jrostant/status/968255524662734848
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/TheAviator1992/status/968319749896724482
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/SeanBradbery/status/968056705459273728
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/A_V_Williams/status/967980746697670658
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/karensweeney/status/967969573705142272
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/tra_i_all/status/968129110831747073
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/MikeCullen73/status/967933071390461952
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/SeanBradbery/status/968013500592242689
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/australiawhisky/status/968269379149348865
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/wabisabist/status/967854702044958720
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/coltheman1/status/967857012443721730
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/alicialoxley/status/967706867391606784
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Joseph0407M/status/968108142495084544
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/feather1952/status/968057560845631488
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Kim_AussieGirl/status/968042226713415680
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Laudafinem/status/968028215955673089
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/izzybilton/status/968009140177027072
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/MissAlKanan/status/968052722619551744
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Xsathrie/status/968103342223314945
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/2fish1whale/status/968000427643072512
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/nuenge2/status/968005759974993920
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/docrtd/status/968025360213397504

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Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/nikcommons/status/968224087045632002
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/burntpaoddock/status/19683614724422287316
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/DreamHxx/status/968037848292122624
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/biggu_s_tweetus/status/968035964340727809
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/tahachaiechi/status/968012723563855873
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/BrizRon/status/968109547654078464
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/democracymum/status/967918750996443136
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/beauzami14/status/968313876335996930
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/ofthependulum/status/968600629638672384
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/AviHaisHaisman/status/967945774079254530
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/FlyingFiretruck/status/968164383862939649
Twitter	26/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/ajf247/status/968052186608427008
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Disciple_1776/status/968037013864644608
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Toyosu_CuteyPie/status/967970534574182400
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/AOKWalter/status/968014168551866369
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Ancray/status/967927752513892352
Twitter	25/09/2018	1	https://twitter.com/yadbro/status/967936095949266945
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/GuardianAus/status/967926680005283840
Twitter	25/02/2018	1	https://twitter.com/moanatribe/status/967870244306874368
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/carol_stirling/status/954117686467772417
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/cade_rh/status/954244539610316800
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/JohnMichaelOlay/status/954309133959798784
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Pj57793235/status/954192629557637121
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/ObjectTyler/status/954192699829243905
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/ObjectTyler/status/954340420322021376
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Jeffinance/status/954200174921908224
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/matt_42017/status/954202995830517760
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/himoverthere4/status/954479212001284097
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/stephenlesliejo/status/954206343216451584

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Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/zakjbro/status/954194624838594561
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/SWTGallagher/status/954108889422749696
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/davrosz/status/954302833213362177
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/vlcnz/status/954154374711820288
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/sara_burnheart/status/954158377524850688
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/LaborFAIL/status/954274769515438081
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/xskinn/status/954266402352906241
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Pollicheck/status/954443268342755328
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Nihilon45/status/954300045033062400
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/bongindustryz/status/954268658737360897
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/anneabella0811/status/954617939059032064
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Matthew14401085/status/954284848406970369
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/CanberraUser/status/954385576140009473
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/5oh19/status/954294865927507969
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/Efficiencydude/status/954541220214132741
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/sammi1907/status/954219328836022272
Twitter	19/01/2018	1	https://twitter.com/GeorgieHmcleod/status/954141304870457344
Reddit	19/01/2018	112	https://redd.it/7rdgk5
Reddit	19/01/2018	224	https://redd.it/7rlpri
Reddit	19/01/2018	1065	https://redd.it/7rdckh
Facebook	19/01/2018	7585	https://www.facebook.com/jacindaardern/photos/a.10151312135452441.1073741827.45300632440/10154987366582441/?type=3
Facebook	19/01/2018	85	https://www.facebook.com/7newssydney/videos/1972865949404195/

Appendix C – Project Summary

“Welcome to 2018”: Resisting gender inequality in social media discourse

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Supervisor: Dr. Brianne Hastie

Research Completed: October 2018

Introduction: Social realities and power relationships are constructed by ways of talking about events and ideas. Commonly accepted social descriptions of doing ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ become evident in evaluations of women occupying traditionally masculine roles. This is especially noticeable when these women exhibit feminine qualities. Where gender inequality talk is produced there is an opportunity to counter it with alternative accounts and change the dominant way of thinking. Women in political leadership positions face gender inequality and this is evidenced in the difference in talk between them and men in similar roles. Representation of women in political leadership is therefore only one step toward gender equality as the underlying structures of discourse maintaining sexism still need to be challenged.

Context and Research Aims: Research has established that women are evaluated differently to men in leadership roles and are viewed as either warm and incompetent, or competent and cold. This double bind (Cuddy, Glick, & Fisk, 2004) hinders the success of women who achieve leadership positions. The present study investigates comments on social media in response to the pregnancy announcement of Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand’s third female Prime Minister, in January 2018. Ardern’s case is notable as her pregnancy highlights her femininity while she occupies a leadership role commonly viewed as ‘masculine’. This violation of dominant social norms should elicit gender inequality talk. The aim of this study is to identify patterns of resistance to this talk and examine how resistance is accomplished.

Methodology: This study used a discursive psychological approach informed by a constructionist, radical feminist framework. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was initially conducted to organise the corpus and identify common themes and patterns. Comments were then examined using a synthetic approach to discourse analysis (Wetherell, 1998) to locate the use of discursive devices to resist gender inequality talk. Illustrative comments were selected and analysed in depth to demonstrate how this resistance was accomplished.

Results: Consistent with the findings of existing research, much of the corpus was comprised of comments opposing Ardern’s pregnancy for a myriad of reasons representing common tropes about women. However, two themes of resistance emerged: calling out sexism, and normalising working mothers. Firstly, commenters employed devices that accounted for opposing views as outdated and originating in sexist others. Arguments were strengthened by increasing factuality, framing sexism as irrelevant, and isolating opposing views to individuals rather than wider society. Secondly, working motherhood was normalised. This was achieved by highlighting

contributions of fathers, de-gendering the category of 'parent', and reducing the appearance of personal interest.

Implications: The comments examined here embedded radical feminist views into mainstream conversation which was re-creating common tropes about femininity being incompatible with leadership. This made alternative accounts robust and available to a wide audience and contributed to the feminist project by undermining gender inequality arguments. The visibility of these accounts may inspire young women to view political leadership as a possibility, further normalising women's representation and contribution to global society.