

SEMIOTIC VIOLENCE AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

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Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2011

[on the report of the Third Committee (A/66/455 and Corr.1)]

66/130. Women and political participation

(i) To investigate allegations of violence, assault or harassment of women elected officials and candidates for political office, create an environment of zero tolerance for such offences and, to ensure accountability, take all appropriate steps to prosecute those responsible;



Bolivia, Ley 243 Contra el acoso y violencia política hacia las mujeres, mayo de 2012.



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians

Table II Prevalence of various forms of violence against women parliamentarians

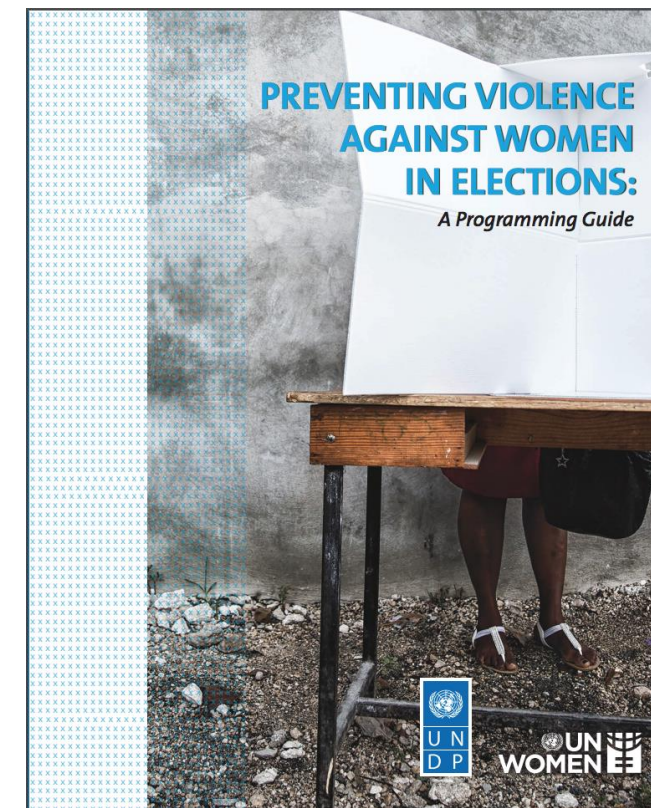
Psychological violence	Yes
Have you been subjected personally to one or more acts of psychological violence?	81.8%
Have you witnessed acts of psychological violence committed against one or more of your female colleagues in parliament?	78.1%
Sexual violence	Yes
Have you been subjected to one or more acts of sexual violence?	21.8%
Have you witnessed acts of sexual violence committed against one or more of your female colleagues in parliament?	32.7%
Physical violence	Yes
Have you been subjected to one or more acts of physical violence?	25.5%
Have you witnessed acts of physical violence committed against one or more of your female colleagues in parliament?	20.0%
Economic violence	Yes
Have you been subjected to one or more acts of any type of economic violence?	32.7%
Have you witnessed acts of economic violence committed against one or more of your female colleagues in parliament?	30.9%

Table III Prevalence of various manifestations of psychological violence

Humiliating sexual or sexist remarks	65.5%
Images of yourself or highly disrespectful comments with sexual connotations about you in the traditional media	27.3%
Terribly humiliating or sexually charged images of yourself spread through the social media	41.8%
Threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction	44.4%
Harassment (exposure to insistent and uninvited behaviour, including unwanted attention or unwelcome verbal contact or interaction that may have frightened you)	32.7%

Among the respondents, 65.5 per cent said they had been subjected several times, or often, to humiliating sexist remarks during their parliamentary term. In the great majority of cases such remarks were made in parliament by male colleagues – from opposing parties as well as their own. Respondents said they had also been subjected to remarks of this kind in the social media and, to a lesser extent, by telephone or email, or during political meetings.

Respondents said they must constantly deal with old-school thinking about their appearance, how they express themselves and behave and the role they should play. More generally, their excessively or insufficiently feminine demeanour is a subject of regular and widespread comment, attacks and derision. The same is true of their conjugal status, emotional, sexual and family life, imagined or real.



Theorizing violence against women in politics

What is 'violence'?

Two Concepts of Violence

Vittorio Bufacchi

Minimalistic: violence as an **act of force**

Perspective of the perpetrator

Focus on the intention behind violent act

One moment in time

Comprehensive: violence as an **act of violation**

Perspective of victim/survivor

Focus on the experience of violence

Longer-term 'ripples of violence'



Unsocial Media: Tracking Twitter Abuse against Women MPs

- Diane Abbott received almost half (45.4%) of all abusive tweets in the run up to the Election
- Excluding Diane Abbott, black and Asian women MPs in Westminster received 35% more abusive tweets than white women MPs
- Online abuse cuts across party lines, affecting women from all UK political parties

Queensland Parliament security breach as MP allows in man charged with stalking female MP

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

- Murder
- Kidnapping
- Beatings

Sheila Copps: I was raped and sexually assaulted

Former deputy PM says public discourse on sexual harassment and politics inspired her to come forward

'It's gone too far': 17 ranking female French politicians expose rampant sexual harassment

Le desea por las redes a una diputada catalana que "la violen en grupo" y la despiden de su trabajo

El comentario, que fue calificado por los defensores de "movimiento #MeToo" contra ella, fue respaldado por los líderes de distintas tendencias políticas.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Rape
- Sexual harassment
- Sexualized threats

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

- Threats
- Character assassination
- Stalking



ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

- Property damage
- Denial of salary/office

Violence against women in politics

Bias and hatred against women in political roles

Structural: stratify opportunities by group

Cultural: justify inequality, maltreatment

Symbolic: restore hierarchy of domination

Semiotic violence

Use of **semiotic resources** to deny women's right to participate in politics, based on their gender identity

→ Part of continuum of VAWIP

→ General message to society

→ Dehumanize, degrade, dominate women

Widespread, hidden, and trivialized form of VAWIP

Semiotics

Study of signs: how meanings made, reality constructed

→ **Language** (philosophy of language)

→ **Images** (philosophy of art/aesthetics)

Signs are 'sites of struggle'

Whose realities are privileged/suppressed

Deconstruction necessary to de-naturalize signs

Language/images as violence

Assaultive speech/slurs/sexist humor

→ Words that wound and exclude

→ Psychic injury, like a slap in the face

Pornography/image-based sexual violence

→ Exploitative, degrading, shame-inducing

→ Notion of 'embodied harms'

Semiotic violence against
women in politics

Two forms of semiotic violence

Rendering women **invisible**

→ Denying women's presence in politics

Rendering women **incompetent**

→ Framing women as 'unfit' for leadership

Delegitimize women and silence their voices in politics

Rendering women invisible

Message: women must be 'symbolically annihilated'

Mechanism: reinforce the male as norm

- Men are the only legitimate participants
- Men are the only ones whose presence 'counts'
- Cognitive dissonance that women can be politicians

Symbolic annihilation

Living With Television: The Violence Profile

by George Gerbner and Larry Gross

Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation. Being buffeted by events and victimized by

Excluding women from political spaces

Saudi Arabia Orders Women Segregated From Men in Council Meetings

Ruling deals setback to women's rights after recent municipal elections

Eufrosina Cruz cambió la historia de las mujeres mexicanas

[El Mundo](#) 28 Ago 2018 - 10:00 PM

Por: Daniela Quintero Díaz

A los 12 años dejó su pueblo en Oaxaca, estudió y logró un cambio en la Constitución de México que garantiza que las mujeres puedan ser elegidas para cualquier cargo.

Removing/not portraying women



Misrecognizing women as 'not leaders'

Five-term Rep. Yvette Clarke still gets asked for her ID entering the U.S. Capitol

Black MP Dawn Butler reveals she was victim of racism in Parliament after fellow MP assumed she was a cleaner

'I was in the lift and some other MP said 'This lift really isn't for cleaners'

Insisting on/using male pronouns

**DILMA ROUSSEFF – PRESIDENTE OU
PRESIDENTA DO BRASIL?**

La RAE explica por qué citar a 'diputados
y diputadas' es artificioso e innecesario



Denying women's right to speak

Fawzia Koofi: 'The leadership turns off our microphones when we speak'

Republicans Vote To Silence Sen. Elizabeth Warren In Confirmation Debate

February 8, 2017 · 5:16 AM ET

Exiting when women speak

Minnesota Lawmaker Calls Out Her ‘White Male’ Colleagues for Ignoring Women of Color

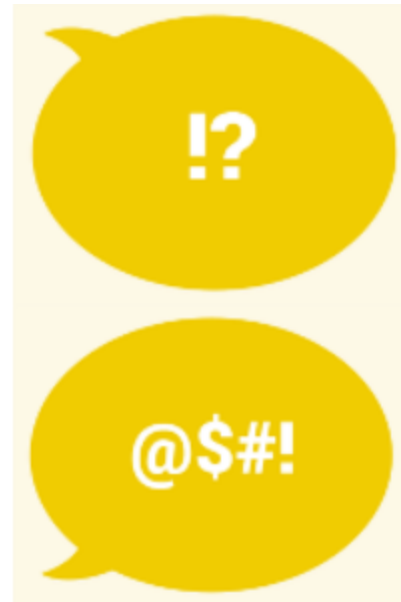
protests similar to Martin Luther King’s march in Selma, Alabama. Noticing that several male members of the House were absent during Omar’s speech, Hortman, a Democrat, then moved for a “call of the House,” which requires absent members to return to their desks on the house floor.

“I hate to break up the 100 percent white male card game in the retiring room, but I think this is an important debate,” Hortman said, before a herd of white, male representatives returned to the chamber.

'Manterrupting' women's speech

Surprise! Female Politicians More Likely To Be Negatively Interrupted Than Their Male Colleagues.

"I sometimes wonder if I am being taken as seriously as my older male colleagues."



MPs primarily report hearing heckles on the subject being debated, their ideological positions, and their party. But women MPs also report hearing heckles about gender, age, language, religion and even their appearance.

Heckling can affect the work done in the House: 20% of respondents, especially those who are female, reported that heckling not only affects their job performance in the House but even reduces their willingness to participate at all.

Rendering women incompetent

Message: women are not 'fit' for political leadership

Mechanism: emphasize role incongruity

- Politics is not women's proper role
- Women lack political qualifications
- Political women are 'failed' women

Role incongruity

Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders

Alice H. Eagly
Northwestern University

Steven J. Karau
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

A role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders proposes that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to 2 forms of prejudice: (a) perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and (b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman. One consequence is that attitudes are less positive toward female than male leaders and potential leaders. Other consequences are that it is more difficult for women to become leaders and to achieve success in leadership roles. Evidence from varied research paradigms substantiates that these consequences occur, especially in situations that heighten perceptions of incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles.

Denying women's qualifications

Italian senator says black minister has 'features of orangutan'

Roberto Calderoli is condemned after speech in which he also said Cécile Kyenge should work as minister 'in her country'

But some of it has been very personal and vitriolic. Mario Borghezio, a member of the European parliament for the League, said in April that Kyenge wanted to "impose her tribal traditions from the Congo" and branded Letta's coalition a "bongo bongo" government. "She seems like a great housekeeper but not a government minister."



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez ✓
@AOC

Following



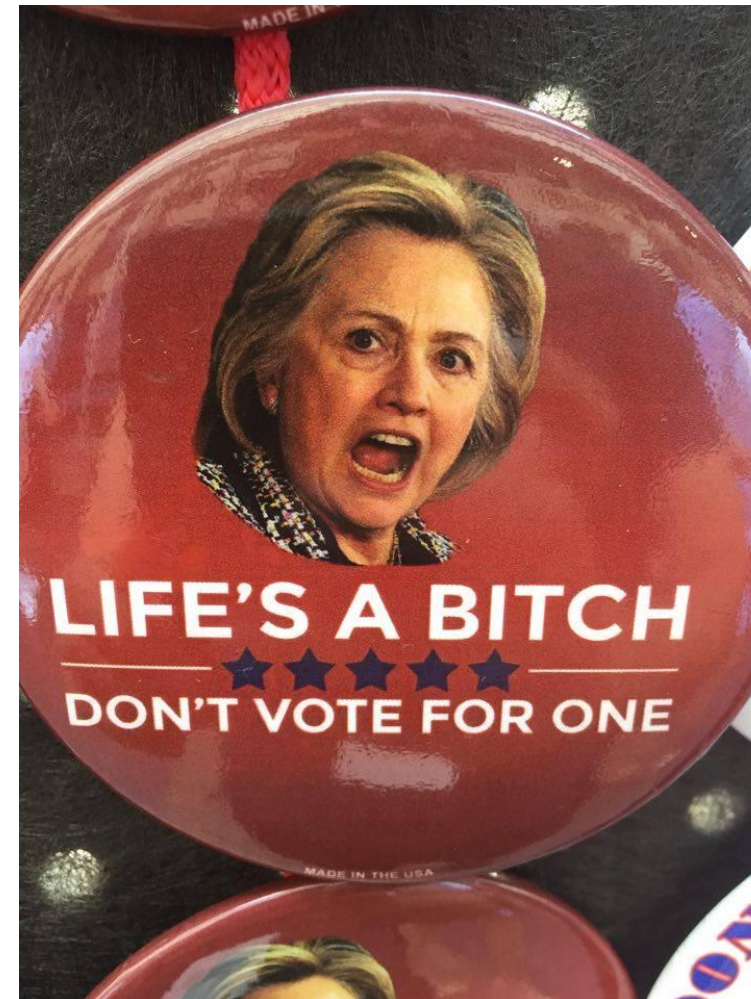
I find it revealing when people mock where I came from, & say they're going to "send me back to waitressing," as if that is bad or shameful.

It's as though they think being a member of Congress makes you intrinsically "better" than a waitress.

But our job is to serve, not rule.

9:20 AM - 8 Mar 2019

Ridiculing women as emotional



'Mansplaining' to women

Even the Prime Minister of Norway has been mansplained to



Erna Solberg, right, on the Davos stage with Christine Lagarde

Image: World Economic Forum



Theresa May @theresa_may · 7 Mar 2018

.@jeremycorbyn: 'to **mansplain** - verb informal - explaining (something) to someone, typically a woman, in a manner regarded as condescending or patronising.' #PMQs #IWD2018



Sexually objectifying women



@TITANSHOMER 🇮🇹
@TitansHomer

Follow

President of Croatia 🇪🇺

Oh! My! God!



7:08 AM - 8 Jul 2018

251 Retweets 641 Likes



Slut-shaming women



RESOLUTION. Female senators file Senate Resolution No. 184 condemning the plan of the House of Representatives to show the alleged video of Senator Leila De Lima at a congressional inquiry.

MANILA, Philippines – They may come from different political parties but female senators on Monday, October 3, joined forces in filing a resolution denouncing the House of Representatives' plan to show the alleged private video of Senator Leila De Lima at a congressional hearing, calling it a form of slut-shaming.

'You're not fit to call yourselves men,' Sarah Hanson-Young tells senators - video



Queensland LNP senator Barry O'Sullivan made a slur against Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young in the Senate yesterday. In retaliation, Greens leader Richard Di Natale called O'Sullivan a 'pig' and then refused to withdraw his comments. Hanson-Young then gave a fiery speech calling out the men she said had 'slut-shamed' her, including Fraser Anning and Cory Bernardi

Judging as 'failed' women



Barren Gillard 'unfit to be PM'

Conclusions

Questions

Is semiotic violence a 'thing'?

→What would strengthen the argument that it is?

Is this the right categorization framework?

Have I missed other sub-categories?

Are there other/better examples I could use?