

ABSENCE AND RHETORICAL (NON) CIRCULATION:
“NASTY WOMAN” KAMALA HARRIS IN 2020

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DEDICATION

To my dad, Max Oliver Williams Jr., and my grandmother, Gilberta Knox Williams,
for their lasting inspiration; to my mother, Mildred McRae Williams,
and my wife, Kim, for their love.

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I would like to acknowledge the many people who have guided, supported, and inspired me for this dissertation project. First, I thank my wife, Kim, for her love and support; without her, this adventure would not have happened; without her, I could not have kept the faith during this project. Second, I thank my committee chair, Dr. Dundee Lackey, for her patience, good humor, and great ideas. I am also grateful to my committee members, Drs. Jackie Hoermann-Elliott and Brian Fehler for their encouragement and for the right words at the right time. I also thank fellow students who went before me and always answered my questions, including Drs. Justin Cook and Elizabeth Cozby. I thank my friend and colleague, Salena Parker, for the many “study buddy” sessions, coffee, and dialogue. I extend gratitude to faculty in the Language, Culture, and Gender Studies program, including our chair and co-chair, Drs. Genevieve West and Gretchen Busl. Finally, as noted in the dedication, I honor the memories of my father, Max Oliver Williams Jr., and my grandmother, Gilberta Knox Williams. The latter inspired me to go as far as I could in my education, though she did not get past 6th grade. My father, a first-generation student who attended and finished college when I was in kindergarten, remains always in my heart.

ABSTRACT

MARGARET V. WILLIAMS

ABSENCE AND RHETORICAL (NON)CIRCULATION: “NASTY WOMAN” KAMALA HARRIS IN 2020

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This project is an activist one that adds to digital scholarship, applies to praxis in writing classrooms, and has the potential to inform future political practices. In particular, this project traces the absence, presence, and—ultimately—the transformation of nasty-woman rhetorics related to Kamala Devi Harris during the fall 2020 presidential election in the United States. Nasty-woman rhetorics entail the persistent, deeply embedded practice of containing, silencing, and demonizing women in public spheres by labeling and stereotyping them. This project weaves a womanist perspective with actor network theory (ANT), a weaving that accounts for the intersectional dynamics of nasty-woman rhetorics in terms not just of sexism but also racism. Then-president Donald J. Trump labeling Harris “nasty” in 2020, in short, is inherently different from calling Hillary Rodham Clinton “such a nasty woman” in 2016. This difference surfaces in the absenting of Harris in circulating news-media headlines and social media, in overemphasis on the “nasty” label, and in tweets about Harris as a Jemima or Jezebel (two stereotypes often applied to Black women). Transformation—a hallmark of rhetorical circulation—is also revealed as ebb and flow of nasty-woman rhetorics over time, as well as changes in affect. These transformations were driven by the intra-action of news-media coverage, social-media posts, and events related to Harris. Through such findings, this project offers an ethical framework for feminist scholarship; it also offers a set of strategies for countering nasty-woman rhetorics, from reclaiming our time to understanding (y)our media ecology.

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CHAPTER I

NASTY-WOMAN RHETORICS

[It's] not always enough to "lean in," because that shit doesn't work all the time.

—Michelle Obama

Prelude

I remember telling my department chair that I was not interested in writing a political dissertation, despite the many years I had spent covering local and regional politics in Asheville, NC. I called myself a "recovering journalist," which was nicer than admitting I was burned out after two decades in the business (M. Williams, 1999). I made a name for myself, back then, by covering local politics with a wry but fair perspective. Truth is, I am still a journalist at heart, but I want to go beyond reporting. I want to untangle the hows and whys powering the events I witness, such as the complexities and rhetorics involved in an April 17, 2022, tweet by Dannie D. featuring a photograph of actress Viola Davis as she portrayed former first lady Michelle Obama (see Figure 1). I want to know the rhetorics, whether I am teaching composition, assessing a writing program, tracking current events, or analyzing texts. Furthermore, that work includes acknowledging my position, which a good reporter resists doing and cloaks behind "objectivity." I am a queer White woman who has longed called herself a feminist but has been deeply influenced by Black feminism and cultural rhetorics. This project troubles all these threads. That is, by the summer of 2020 I had picked a political dissertation topic that would require blending journalistic practices with rhetorical theories and methods. I had picked a topic that would also challenge me as a White feminist: nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to Kamala Devi Harris, a woman of color, during a few weeks of the 2020 presidential election season. In

this project, I trace and analyze these rhetorics by weaving actor network theory (ANT) with a womanist framework.

Figure 1

Viola Davis as Michelle Obama in Showtime's The First Lady



Note. (Dannie, 2022)

A Definition Nasty-Woman Rhetorics

During the fall 2020 presidential election season, nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to Kamala Devi Harris ebbed and flowed as they circulated in public discourse, but ultimately these rhetorics declined over time and, in some media ecologies, were absent. Why? How? What do I mean by nasty-woman rhetorics? First, by the “fall 2020” season I mean a 6-month period that runs from shortly before Harris’s selection as the vice-president nominee through the week after her inauguration (Aug. 2020-Feb. 2021). Using this timeframe as a backdrop, I focus in this project on a few select weeks in August. Second, I define nasty-woman rhetorics as the persistent, deeply embedded, multimodal practice of labeling, containing, silencing, and demonizing women in public spheres by labeling and stereotyping them. Third, I turn to womanist frameworks as more inclusive and intersectional than feminism has been, historically. Feminism has been White,¹ middle-class, and cisgender; its singular focus on “women’s” issues often elides race, class, sexuality, belief systems like religions, and other dynamics. Fourth, ANT is useful for tracing circulation within rhetorical ecologies (that is, within complex systems of discourse). Lagesen (2012), for example, said, “A main tenet of [ANT] is that society is an achievement of people engaging in producing a variety of associations of human and non-human elements” (p. 442). I argue that political rhetorics also involve the creation of associations, human and non-human; hence, ANT is useful for this study.

¹ In 2020, the Associated Press said that capitalizing Black but not “white” is standard journalistic practice, because the former has a “shared culture,” whereas “white people in general have much less shared history and culture, and don’t have the experience of being discriminated against because of skin color” (Bauder). The Washington Post, however, capitalizes both Black and White (WashPostPR, 2020). APA citation style also recommends this style. My preference is not simply stylistic but rhetorical: I choose to follow the praxis of scholars like Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd and Julia S. Jordan-Zachery (2018), who capitalize both descriptors and use the all-cap acronyms WOC (women of color) and BIPOC (Black and/or Indigenous People of Color).

However, like the journalistic practices I followed for many years, ANT tends to surface the most visible actants in the network, and mainstream feminism may miss or dismiss the intersections and intra-action of such dynamics as race. These issues challenge this study, because the most visible actants tend to be the most powerful and influential (i.e., White and male). Mathematically speaking, intersections denote those points on a graph where X and Y meet; they co-exist on that singular spot. By intra-action, I mean a dynamic, fluid intersection. I draw here on Laurie Gries (2013) and Karen Barad (2007) to explain the entanglement of seemingly discrete elements in evolving rhetorical situations. Womanism, fortunately, can help remediate both ANT and mainstream feminism. Womanism posits an inclusive feminism—one closely related to Black feminist activism and scholarship. A womanist ANT, therefore, shifts the perspective; it recenters our attention on intersectional dynamics, such as the lived experiences of women of color. With regard to this study, therefore, a womanist ANT acknowledges the masculinist, White rhetorics of United States politics but foregrounds the rhetorical strategies of those who do not fit neatly into the U.S. political patriarchy.

Author-activist Alice Walker introduced the womanist concept in the late 1970s, but in this study, I draw on gender-studies scholar Layli Phillips (Maparyam; 2006). She explained that a womanist—based on Walker’s definitions as well as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi’s (1985) and Clenora Hudson-Weems’s (2001)—can be “anybody and everybody, assuming they begin with the identification of their individual standpoints and move toward the harmonization and coordination of everyone’s standpoints” (p. xxxvi). As noted, I am a White, queer woman who has identified with feminism for many years; however, I seek a more just and equitable space as I create my academic identity, engage in scholarly conversations, and teach. Womanist more accurately reflects this acknowledgement and this desire. Womanism, as I understand it, calls for

transparency, acknowledged positionality, shifted perspectives, dialogue, and allyship.

Therefore, by weaving womanism with ANT, I seek an ethical, productive methodology for tracing the circulation of nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to Harris, a woman of color.

ANT helps trace these dynamic rhetorics over time because it calls for describing a landscape, its human and nonhuman inhabitants, and the activity witnessed therein. Early-childhood education scholar Emilie Moberg (2018) said that ANT helps the researcher “explore the potential of many things going on at the same time” (p. 31) in any given landscape or situation. Nasty-woman rhetorics, for example, circulate in United States political and popular culture, refreshed not just by Donald J. Trump calling Hillary Rodham Clinton a “nasty woman” in 2016 (CNN, 2016) and Harris the same in 2019 and 2020, but also by repetition across news and social. Much of this “many things” activity occurs almost simultaneously, flowing from and linking one event to the next. ANT also helps surface the interconnectedness and dynamic relation of human and nonhuman actants within this networked flow. For example, when Harris gave interviews in which she was asked about Trump’s nasty-woman insult, at minimum she acted in combination with television media, the interviewer, and the infrastructure that distributed the interview. She became part of an actant—an assemblage of human and nonhuman agents that intra-act across a large field of social activity like public discourse. This visual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and gestural assemblage circulated, distributed initially by various media platforms (themselves actants in the system); thus, this assemblage can be traced over time.

However, as stated earlier, both feminism and ANT orient implicitly toward White, cisgender, masculine perspectives. They both miss/dismiss non-hegemonic rhetorics. Kristen R. Moore (2018) addressed a similar implicit/complicit bias in the technical-communication field; she remarked, “[F]eminism has long represented the inequities, concerns, and lives of middle-

class women while ignoring those of women of color” (p. 186). By focusing on women and, more rhetorically, the meme or idea of “woman” sans race or class or sexuality, feminism omits a host of dynamics (as well as individuals and groups) from the equation. In the process, feminism privileges alphacentric, masculine discourse. ANT, likewise, “do[es] not account for women, people of color, and other marginalized groups” (Bay, 2017, p. 443). In a dynamic network characterized by distributed agency, ANT thingifies human agents, in part because the system blurs individual and intersectional identities like race and gender. To trouble these tendencies, I weave ANT with a womanist framework to trace “nasty woman” as a complex ideograph and interrogate the how and why, in the hope of suggesting future strategies. This project, therefore, is an activist one that adds to digital scholarship, applies to praxis in writing classrooms, and has the potential to inform future political practices.

I begin by re-stating my positionality and acknowledging that in this (and every) case, “the personal is political” (Hanisch, 1970/2006). The personal-political is also rhetorical. White and queer, I was once a reporter and editor who covered—and determined the coverage of—the candidacies, elections, and terms of two “firsts” in a small Southern town. One woman, Leni Sitnick, was the town’s first female mayor; the second woman was the town’s first Black mayor, Terry Bellamy. I reported on these women and voted for them, yet at the time I would have said I held my personal beliefs apart from journalistic practice. That artificial separation meant that as a reporter I omitted the intersectional challenges that Terry Bellamy, a young Black woman with a working-class background, faced when she ran for office in a self-described “progressive” small town, Asheville, NC. Such hindsight inspired me to learn more about African American rhetorics and Black feminism as I traced nasty-woman rhetorics. For me, the journey began with the mestiza rhetorics of a scholar, activist, poet, and Texas native I read many years ago and revisit,

time and again: Gloria Anzaldúa (1990/2009), who reminded me, “[W]oman always means whitewoman ... [so] a woman-of-color is not just a ‘woman;’ she carries the markings of her race, she is a gendered racial being—not just a gendered being” (p. 145). In Eurocentric, Western culture, in other words, the quintessential “woman” is White; from the start, non-White women are Other; they are racially marked. Though feminism has come a long way from the days when suffragettes excluded Black women in their efforts to get women the right to vote, as theory and practice it still leans White, middle-class, and cisgender. This truth shifts me to uneasy but productive ground.

For example, my own history gives witness. Not long after Bellamy became mayor of Asheville, a fellow journalist asked her how she would juggle being a mom and handling “the job” of mayor. She raised her eyebrows and asked, “If I was a man, would you ask me that question?” (Hardwig, 2008). A few years later, during a conversation I had with Bellamy after her failed bid for Congress, we laughed and agreed that the answer was and still is, *of course not*. What we never talked about, unfortunately, was how White female candidates—from Asheville’s first woman mayor to Bellamy’s opponent in the Congressional primary—were rarely if ever asked such double-bind, mom-mayor questions. Bellamy’s Blackness was politely unspoken; it was omitted. In my conversations with Bellamy, I failed to surface and perhaps even see the multidimensional binds she confronted during her political career. My readers, I would have said then, were educated progressives for whom race was not “an issue.” That is, like many of my Asheville readers, I had an intellectual awareness of the racism, if only because I grew up in the Deep South, but I could not truly see it because I had not lived it. Equally problematic, journalism’s attachment to objectivity deracializes, degenders, declasses; it erects a wall between the personal and the political. Hence, Bellamy was *always* going to be asked by a

reporter how she would handle motherhood and mayoral work—as if motherhood were not work, Black women cannot possibly do both, and in any case Black women lack the silent privilege White women carry when running for, and serving in, public office. By failing to acknowledge this conundrum, I made Bellamy’s lived experience invisible.

Therefore, I remediate my own feminism by aligning with womanist perspectives to create an ethical, socially just, productive study. Womanism draws on Black feminism, with which it shares a key tenet: intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) explained the concept by speaking of “crosscurrents of racism and sexism” that can flow in multiple directions (p. 155). She said that Black women “often ... experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149). In other words, Black women—and all women of color—experience an intersectional, multilayered, multidimensional discrimination; they can experience sexism, classism, racism, or other “isms” singularly, in combination, or all at the same time. Julia S. Jordan-Zachery (2018) added that intersectionality, informed and created by “U.S. Black feminists and women of color’s articulations ... allows for an interrogation of the stereotypes and images used to define Black womanhood” (Chapter 2, p. 101). The Jezebel stereotype, for instance, references the ancient queen of Israel who promoted the worship of false gods and destroyed her enemies, according to the Bible. But by the 1800s in the US, “Jezebel” was used to label Black women as hypersexualized, “fiendish,” exotic females who are “simultaneously lucrative, imperfect, advantageous, grotesque, enticing, and ... quintessentially deviant” (Lomax, 2018, Chapter 1). That is, Black women are the Other, aberrant, yet beguiling and valuable (as slaves and whores). Intersectionality lays bare the prevalence of such stereotypes; it surfaces the crosscurrents

outlined by Crenshaw. And it helps explain why White reporters like me tended to describe Bellamy's political ambitions as suspect because of her "urban" background and connections.

Riffing on Crenshaw and Jordan-Zachery, I see intersectionality and Black feminism as ways to push against implicitly White feminist thought, question my own privileged position, align my perspective with marginalized individuals and groups, and interrogate nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to Kamala Harris, a woman of color.² Because I am not Black, however, my perspective as a researcher is ethically described as womanist. I align with Roxane Gay (2014), who called (and still calls) herself a "bad feminist," imperfect but striving (p. x). A womanist perspective, to summarize Phillip's introductory discussion in *The Womanist Reader*, surfaces intersectionalities but also brings everyone to the table. In such a space, everyone's voice can and should be heard.

In that respect, I see womanism as a sister methodology to cultural rhetorics, which Del Hierro et al. (2016) related to a "call ... to think and communicate explicitly about how we will orient to each other's differences and affinities. ... Allyship is not a state to be achieved, but a community-based process of making" (para. 3). Allyship is work, practice, and process. More like womanism than not, cultural rhetorics calls for scholars, teachers, and activists to come to the table for dialogue—and keep coming to the table for ongoing exchange and productive dialogue. In mestiza rhetorics, for instance, Anzaldúa (1990/2009) said, "Alliance work is the attempt to shift positions, change positions, reposition ourselves regarding our individual and collective identities" (p. 143). Alliance is work. As Del Hierro et al. (2016) also explained,

² "Women of color," like "people of color," is a problematic label on many levels. However, it was the term often used in public discussions about Biden's pick for a running mate in 2020.

alliance is an active process; it goes beyond listening; we must carry it forward through ongoing action, theory/frameworks development, and praxis.

In the spirit of allyship, therefore, in upcoming sections I make several rhetorical moves. First, I introduce the guiding questions for studying nasty-woman rhetorics. Second, I explain what I mean by nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to Harris. Third, I situate ANT and this project within the wider realm of circulation studies and in terms of rhetorical ecologies. Finally, I introduce the structure for this dissertation, by which I aim to disrupt, ever so slightly, the genre's masculinist, normative patterns; I began this chapter, for example, with an epigraph and the screenshot of a tweet by Dannie D. (2022) (see Figure 1). With this approach, I foreground the voices that ANT and (White) feminism, on their own, might miss. Neither (White) feminist perspectives or ANT praxis attend to the intersections of race and gender in the Twitter-circulated image of an acclaimed Black actress portraying a former first lady in the middle of posing for a portrait destined for the National Gallery; I discuss this image further in the final chapter. In this opening chapter and subsequent ones, my weaving of ANT with womanist perspectives and foregrounding of often marginalized voices are key moves. These moves highlight my contribution to the field of rhetorics: a womanist, ANT-related methodology useful for surfacing gendered, racialized rhetorics and, from there, suggesting future actions.

The Questions Guiding This Study

For this project I sought evidence of movement and change in the nasty-woman rhetorical ecology, and most importantly, I hoped to suggest what we can actually do with the knowledge gained by tracing the rhetorical (non)circulation surfaced in relation to Harris. I asked:

- 1) What nasty-woman rhetorics circulated during the fall 2020 election season?

2) What strategies, events, and related rhetorics influenced the circulation of nasty-woman within the rhetorical ecology?

I sought answers initially by tracing major events during the full study period but also by seeking the counter-moves that push against nasty-woman rhetorics, disrupt their flow, or chart new discourses altogether. These counter-rhetorics consist of such actions as a letter sent by 100 prominent Black women to mainstream news-media (TIME'S UP Now, 2020b);³ a similar letter sent by prominent Black men (Solender, 2020a); Harris's first interview after selection as running mate; Harris and Biden's first joint interview; and Harris's gestural mocking of Pence during the October 2020 vice-presidential debate. In that debate, as Pence responded to a question, Harris tilted her head, raised her eyebrows, and looked sideways at him. As a singular event, this performance seems like a minor moment; but it demonstrates the intra-action of actants in the nasty-woman ecology and Harris's adaptive, multimodal strategies as she navigated the fall 2020 election season. This event, when examined as multimodal communication taking place in a rhetorical ecology, also suggests future strategies.

ANT helps reveal such moments, but a womanist framework recenters our perspective on the participatory, highly mediated ecology that situates Harris at the dynamic intersection(s) of gender, race, and politics/power. This perspective is critical for two reasons: First, as Alexander-Floyd and Jordan-Zachery (2018) remarked in their introductory chapter, "politics operates in

³ By "news-media," I refer to media platforms and publications—including print newspapers and magazines, broadcast and/or cable TV companies, and online-only outlets—whose primary focus is current news and events. The media lines are blurred, of course, but generally I refer to such organizations as The New York Times, CNN, and Fox News Network. Furthermore, APA citation styles suggest italicizing journal, magazine, and publication titles; however, most news-media cited function as media conglomerates—companies controlling multiple broadcast companies and publications. That is, there is a great deal of overlap in company ownership (if not outright consolidation), high levels of content sharing (a kind of circulation, if you will), and crossover between "print" and "online" distribution (The New York Times, for example, has both). Therefore, I do not italicize individual news-media (e.g., CNN, The Washington Post, Breitbart).

myriad, often overlapping, or constitutive domains” (p. xxii). They referred to such domains as institutions, state regimes, media, middle-class values, stereotypes, and tropes related to women of color, and so forth—all of which tend to be viewed as separate when in fact they are entangled at deep, almost quantum levels. They not only overlap; they intra-act. To untangle Harris from the dynamic play of these political domains is to diminish her rhetorical work and ignore the role of racism and sexism in politics. Second, as mentioned earlier, circulation studies, in which I situate ANT, has been prone to deracialization and degendering (Bay, 2017; Bradshaw, 2018); it also tends to be apolitical (Wajcman, 2000). Theory progenitor Bruno Latour himself commented that ANT flattens a studied network and its actants, remarking, “... there are many other ways [in sociology] of retrieving gender, race, and class [than via ANT]” (Walsh, 2017, p. 421). Latour’s dismissal aside, on the one hand ANT reveals complexity, flux, and the messiness of social activities. However, like looking into the box for Schrödinger’s cat,⁴ the act of looking privileges the observer and freezes everything in place, with only the most visible—and usually the most influential or powerful—actants, agents, and assemblages caught in the light.

As stated in the prelude, this study’s blended methodology addresses those problems by creating an ethical, productive framework. It uses ANT for the drone-level view but a womanist framework at ground level prevents flattening the complexities and intersections at play. This weaving has precedent, albeit most often in the social sciences more than rhetorical studies. Moberg (2018), mentioned earlier, blended ANT with feminist new materialism to study

⁴ In a clever thought experiment posed by physicist Erwin Schrödinger in the 1930s, “a cat is trapped in a box with poison that will be released if a radioactive atom decays. Radioactivity is a quantum process, so before the box is opened, the story goes, the atom has both decayed and not decayed, leaving the unfortunate cat in limbo—a so-called superposition between life and death” (Merali, 2020). Schrödinger questioned the absurdity of suggesting the cat was both alive and dead *until* the observer peeked inside.

“everyday life” in a Swedish preschool while accounting for the researcher’s embodied participation (and position) in that networked environment. Andrea Quinlan (2012) suggested a similar methodological alliance, infusing ANT with feminist standpoint theory for a study of DNA-collection practices for rape cases. Quinlan (2012) pointed out past criticisms of ANT, such as Susan Leigh Star’s (1990) complaint that it focuses on “the most powerful actors in the network,” Judy Wacjman’s (2000) exposition about its male-hero perspective, and Latour’s (2010) assessment that in major social systems like law and science, “there are only powerful men and their tools and texts” (Quinlan, 2012, p. 4). With standpoint theory, however, marginalized people and groups provide the “privileged vantage point” because they are living it (Quinlan, 2012, p. 4). Here, Quinlan enacted Star’s (1990) suggestion that shifting perspectives to the marginalized means that “entirely different network” can be seen (2012, p. 4)—a point made years earlier by writing-studies scholars Patricia Sullivan and John Porter (1997). They explained that your perspective at a basketball game (and, by extension, any rhetorical situation) determines what you see and how you experience the game. For my rhetorical analysis, I draw on these precedents, but I am also inspired by Anzaldúa, who called for alliances between White women and women of color, between straight women and queer women. In the next section, I offer an abbreviated history of nasty-woman rhetorics and expand on the definition provided earlier in this chapter.

Why Nasty-Woman Rhetorics Matter

The backdrop for this study reflects the personal and the political. That is, as a feminist, I have long hoped to witness the election of the first woman president of the United States. Unfortunately, Western, Eurocentric cultures have a history of negative portrayals of mythical as well as real women, and these portrayals have accrued rhetorical force that blocks women from

such leadership positions. From Medusa and Eve to Mrs. Satan (aka Victoria Woodhull, who ran for U.S. president in 1872 [Nast, 1872]), from “Caribou Barbie” Sarah Palin in 2008 to “Crooked Hillary” Clinton⁵ in 2016, women in public spaces have been linked to the sinful and monstrous. For the nonfiction women in this short list, their opponents have labeled them evil, flighty, ambitious, or worse. Suffragist, brief stockbroker, spiritualist, and free-love advocate Victoria Woodhull ran for U.S. president as a third-party candidate (Horne, 2016). Her motto? “Progress! Free thought! Untrammelled lives!” An editorial cartoon in Harper’s Weekly, a popular periodical at that time, portrayed her with bat wings and labeled her “Mrs. Satan” (Nast, 1872). One hundred years later, Geraldine Ferraro became the vice-presidential nominee for the Democratic party; Barbara Bush, wife of Republican’s vice-presidential nominee George H.W. Bush (and future U.S. president), said of Ferraro, “I can’t say [the word I’d call her], but it rhymes with ‘rich’” (Anderson, 1999, p. 603). In 2008, both Palin, the Republican vice-presidential nominee, and Clinton, who ran to become the Democrat’s presidential nominee, were “pornified” by media coverage, Karin V. Anderson argued (2011). These brief, historical examples exhibit the underlying, persistent rhetorics that Trump tapped into when he called Clinton and Harris “nasty.”

After the 2016 election, Anderson (2017) concluded that the fundamental issue was not “that [Hillary] Clinton was the wrong woman for the presidency in 2016, but that *every* woman is the wrong woman—and will be until cultural understanding of the presidency changes” (p. 132). Under existing cultural, political, rhetorical conditions, in other words, no woman can be

⁵ For simplicity from this point forward, references to “Clinton” refer to Hillary Clinton. Any references to former president Bill Clinton will be clearly stated.

president of the United States, primarily because the presidency, as a rhetorical construction, is very masculine. Female candidates, Anderson explained, are trapped in constraining, defeating paradoxes, such as Clinton's electability making her unelectable. In other words, demonstrated competency made Clinton electable; but for the female candidate, the more competent or confident she is, the more she threatens the White, patriarchal hegemony. This response extends to conservative White women: Kathleen Gingrich, for example, told TV host Connie Chung that her husband, then-speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, had said that Clinton is "a bitch" (Anderson, 1999, p. 599). Additional proof for Anderson's ongoing arguments comes from a fact that does not surprise Black feminists: In 2016, most White women voted for Trump (Gillespie & Brown, 2019; Jaffe, 2018). In short, Anderson's every-woman argument remains accurate and relevant to this study. However, I suspect Anderson would agree that nasty-woman rhetorics work differently for female candidates of color. In fact, there is historical precedent.

In the early 1970s, Rep. Shirley Chisholm earned grassroots, multiracial support for a bid to become the Democrat's nominee for president, but both Black male leaders and White feminists at the national level blocked her path; they also expected her to support their own candidates and return gracefully to her proper place—on the sidelines as support crew (Chisholm & dell, 1974). Feminism failed Chisholm. However, my intervention is not to rehash the past but to ask why such every-woman paradoxes persist. My concern is with what rhetorical strategies might spark change, particularly for "this monster," as Trump called Harris shortly before her October 2020 debate with then Vice President Mike Pence. The racialized, hypersexualized subtext is the primary text for nonwhite female candidates, especially in national elections. After all, Trump called Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer "that woman" (Solari, 2020) and has called many women "nasty," but "monster" does double-time as a racist dog-whistle. So does "nasty"

when applied to Harris and other women of color. Both labels epitomize the most negative side of nasty-woman rhetorics.

Of course, before calling Harris or Clinton “nasty,” Trump had labeled several women this way, including foreign leaders like Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen (Blake, 2019). Though he has also applied it to men, Trump makes very explicit the special nastiness of women, like his comment that Fox host Megyn Kelly had “blood coming out her wherever” (Chavez et al., 2016). Notably, this remark came after Kelly pointed out that he had “called women you don’t like fat pigs, dogs, slobs and disgusting animals” (Chavez et al., 2016). Trump’s misogynistic history aside, Kelly brushed off the ensuing feud as a “tweet storm,” one that former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich later reignited, earning praise from Trump (Haberman, 2016). The whole feud was, of course, well-covered by news-media and on social media. In short, this brand of nasty-woman rhetorics circulated in the public discourse well beyond the initial utterance and, in the process, became closely associated with Trump’s female adversaries more than the male ones. Conditions were set for him to call Harris nasty.

Trump most notably applied this label during the 2016 presidential debate with Hillary Clinton. She briefly criticized him while answering a question about social security. Trump, displayed on a split-screen that was broadcast live, simultaneously, on several TV networks, shook his head, turned his eyes toward the audience/camera, and said, “Such a nasty woman” (CNN, 2016; Diaz, 2016). Clinton kept talking and maintained a steady gaze toward the moderator and TV audience. As a visual-gestural mode, her performance communicated stoic reason to some viewers, elitist weakness to others. Her allies, in any case, remediated the insult into a feminist rallying cry, from Nina Donovan’s slam poem (“I Am a Nasty Woman”) to T-shirts to lively exchanges on the #nastywoman Twitter feed. Trump, nonetheless, won the

election, in part because negative labels had followed “Crooked Hillary” for decades, Clinton’s standardized response played as muted and ineffective, and counter-rhetorics like the #nastywoman phenomenon failed to dislodge public perceptions about women in politics.

Four years later, Trump cast Kamala Harris as “nasty” within minutes of Joe Biden picking her to be his running mate (Bennett, 2020; Rogers, 2020; Solender, 2020b). News and social media amplified the attack as they had in 2016, reporting it widely and repeatedly: a Google “news” search for “Trump calls Harris nasty” returns more than 40,000 results. Responses also circulated on Twitter via #nastywoman, a thread that has remained active since the Trump-Clinton debate. The wealth and breadth of these activities, and their entanglements, suggest that Trump and many others tapped into a rhetorical ecology in which, to draw on Anderson, every woman is the wrong woman for president, or CEO, or almost any other leadership position in the United States. Nasty-woman rhetorics, subsequently, were automatically at play for Harris when in 2019 she ran to become the first Black, the first Indian-American, and the first female presidential nominee for the Democratic party and when, a year later, Biden selected her to be his running mate.

However, Harris’s case is further complicated because of the multidimensional bind Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd (2007) described as the “Black Cultural Pathology Paradigm” (BCPP), “a set of assumptions about Black family breakdown and cultural deviance” (p. 3). In the BCPP’s broad rhetorical constructions, Black men are brutes; Black women are whores; both are angry. Black women as well as women of color confront persistent cultural tropes like the welfare queen (a lazy woman who births children to increase her government benefits), the mammy (an obese, strong mother figure who emasculates men), Sapphire (the angry Black woman), and the Jezebel (a sexually voracious, wicked woman). By the logic of the BCPP, a

nasty White woman is mean; a nasty woman of color is evil and/or subhuman. Ever quick with lightly cloaked, racist dog whistles in his rhetorical repertoire, Trump was always going to call the multiracial, “Blindian” Harris nasty, a label that, for her, draws most directly on the Jezebel trope.

But this project is not about Trump. This study focuses on circulation within the nasty-woman rhetorical ecology, in relation to Kamala Harris, and particularly as seen in a sampling of headlines and tweets in August 2020. For example, Trump alone does not explain why two Texas pastors called Harris a “Jezebel” from their respective pulpits, one of them tweeting it as well (Wingfield, 2021). Reporting on the incidents, Bibi Adams (2021) remarked, “since the age of American slavery, Jezebel came to be understood as an overly sexual Black woman, a stereotype depicted in film and fiction.” Jezebels use men for pleasure and profit. As Adams (2021) recounted, Harris had previously been criticized for dating an older man in the 1990s—former San Francisco mayor Willie Brown, who had been separated from his wife for a decade at the time. Harris was single (Reuters, 2021; Wright, 2019). Nonetheless, critics on Twitter took to calling her #HeelsUp Harris. In short, this version of the nasty-woman trope is largely reserved for women of color. It is also not the first classic stereotype applied to Harris: A week after Biden named her as his running mate, a Virginia mayor faced calls to resign after tweeting that the vice-presidential nominee was an “Aunt Jemima,” which parallels the “mammy” trope (Griffith, 2020). These examples provide a snapshot of nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to Harris. Next, I situate ANT in relation to circulation studies and rhetorical ecologies.

Circulation, Ecologies, and ANT(s)

Circulation Studies and ANT

Laurie Gries (2018) located ANT within circulation studies, which she defined as dealing with “rhetorical concerns [involving] bodies, access, and power; ecological concerns with affect, publics, and writing; and digital concerns with infrastructure, distribution, and global economics” (p. 7). These concerns are broad, but in Gries’s (2018) configuration they all relate to transformation and movement. Communication, writing, and rhetoric scholars, she explained, have taken up circulation studies to explore discourse as always-already in motion and situated in such intra-active dynamics as cultures and politics. Gries (2018) also argued that circulation studies are a “threshold” concept that “generate epistemological understandings critical to” these and other disciplines” (p. 7-8). In other words, circulation is rhetorical; it creates as well as codifies meaning in cultures; circulation is rhetoric on the move. Therefore, circulation studies provide a portal, or a way in, to exploring complex, dynamic networks where rhetoric happens.

In this study, rhetorical circulation refers to the dynamic movement of broadly defined “texts” within a complex system of discourse (i.e., within a rhetorical ecology). Katherine B. Yancey (2015) defined circulation this way: “the distribution of texts and ... [dynamic] relationships among composer, texts, and audiences” (para. 2). Texts, broadly defined to include but also exceed the alphacentric, get passed around, distributed, excerpted, remixed, and so forth across time, from audience to audience, from situation to situation. Texts, furthermore, are more than things. Royster and Kirsch (2012), for example, emphasized the social circulation of beliefs, practices, and rhetorics “carried on or modified from one generation to the next” (p. 660). Rural women in Nebraska, in their example, wrote books about their town and families, ran the public

library, and organized local events, all of which built a sense of community, circulated materially and rhetorically, and in the process passed along their values.

Similarly, Catherine Chaput (2010) likened rhetorical circulation to a “current” in which “[the] everyday practices, affects, and uncertainties ... [of] rhetoric [burst] through ... site-specific bounds” (p. 6-7). That is, the rhetorical situation is far from static, á la Lloyd Bitzer (1968). Rhetoric moves. Situations change. Or as Jenny Edbauer (Rice) famously said, “*The elements of the rhetorical situation simply bleed*” (2005, p. 9). Elements such as author, text, exigence, kairos, audience, and context overlap from one rhetorical situation to another, permeate new situations, and evolve over time. Edbauer’s example involved transformations that Latour might have called the “wild innovations” of the “Keep Austin Weird” bumper sticker as it was picked up, remixed, and circulated from neighborhood to neighborhood, city to city. Created to comment on and counteract issues like gentrification, the sticker and campaign evolved over time and took on a life of their own, appearing in new situations and for new audiences.

Rhetorical Ecologies

Edbauer (2005) also turned our focus to rhetorical ecologies, a metaphor for the “temporal, historical, and lived fluxes” in which rhetoric circulates, passes on meaning, and takes on new meanings (p. 9). The “Keep Austin Weird” stickers, initiated as a counter-rhetoric to urban renewal, took on a life of their own, appearing across the city in other situations and being adopted in other communities across the US. In Asheville, NC, where I lived for many years, “Keep Asheville Weird” stickers remain popular. I ground my work in rhetorical ecologies, which I define as dynamic, semi-bounded networks of discourse. I say semi-bounded because, while ecologies can be very large, they are not infinite; their boundaries fluctuate and are permeable. An ecological perspective, I add, disrupts the objective, positivist, almost mechanical

understanding of “network.” Clay Spinuzzi (2008), drawing on ANT theorist and sociologist John Law (2004), said the term “provid[es] the illusion that complexity can be managed and simplified” (p. 5). That is, we tend to think of networks as bounded, enclosed, discrete systems. But networked, social phenomena are messy, fragmented, in flux, and not always discrete. However, “ecology” as metaphor more aptly embraces this dynamic nature.⁶

Rhetorical ecologies also feature disruptions, counter-moves, and ongoing, evolving circulation. For example, as this study shows, U.S. political discourse contributes to and gives life to nasty-woman rhetorics by repeatedly, continually passing it onward, often via the power of mass media and social media. In each instance, Trumpian labels circulated because news media, pundits, poets, and Twitter users repeated them, commented on them, amplified them, countered them; these actions transformed Trump’s insults beyond initial utterances. Since the initial 2016 event with Clinton, “nasty woman” has appeared on T-shirts, inspired a protest poem by Nina Donovan (2016), got hashtagged on Twitter (#nastywoman), earned a retort from prominent people like film director Ava Duvernay (Moran, 2020), and became an oft-asked, go-to question for news hosts seeking a reaction from the latest labeled woman.

Related to the classic double bind (Jamieson, 1995), nasty-woman rhetorics persist as the context reflected through all these activities. To put this persistence in other terms, “nasty woman” became a meme, which Ben Weatherbee (2015) described as “fleeting bits of discourse ... [that are] born and evolve” (p. 3). Memes function as nodes on the move; in the ecological sense, they are contact zones where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt, 1991, p. 34). Memes create, and are,

⁶ These points aside, in this study I will often exchange “ecology” for “network.”

spaces *and* things where rhetorics happen. Weatherbee noted that Richard Dawkins (1976), an evolutionary biologist, defined “meme” as “a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*” (p. 2). Memes do rhetorical work, in other words. As such, they become traceable.

For example, material objects like posters and bumper stickers distribute and carry mimetic as well as rhetorical weight. Weatherbee noted how “Obama’s monosyllabic slogan ‘Hope’ gives way to his detractors’ ‘Nope’” (p. 3). New materialist Gries (2013), of course, extensively tracked how the initial bit of discourse, spoken by Obama, was cast into the rhetorical ecology via a photograph by Mannie Garcia that Sherman Fairey remixed into a poster. In this study, however, I am not tracking a poster or a “Keep Austin Weird” bumper sticker (Edbauer, 2005). I trace the ebb and flow of Trump’s insult during the fall 2020 election season, focusing on the most active weeks in August 2020, for detailed analysis.

I am particularly interested in the potential of counter-rhetorics to disrupt and, ultimately, change the ecology. For example, I have examined political chalking on a rural Southern campus (M. Williams, 2018) with close attention to its human and nonhuman participants and, overall, the phenomenon’s visual, cultural, and digital rhetorics (the most controversial chalking, notably, was sparked by the Trump campaign’s Twitter-inspired #TheChalkening). For that study, I blended ANT with ethnography as a messy yet productive method for tracing actants in the rhetorical ecology on a rural college campus while simultaneously considering the human perspectives. I tracked and traced chalking messages *in situ* over the course of one semester; used chalking as a multimodal exercise in a first-year composition course; and interviewed four participants in the ecology (two students who chalked, a professor who guided students in a chalking protest, and the campus diversity officer). Students at the university, I explained, “use

playground chalk for ‘writing’ (or drawing) messages—everything from art to insults, event notices to poetry, political messages to love notes” (p. 1). These “chalkings” communicated meaning on campus; they carried rhetorical weight as students composed and “edited” messages over time and across the campus’s sidewalk network. What interested me most was the intra-action of human and nonhuman actants with exigencies such as #blacklivesmatter and the 2016 election. As a result of blended methods and methodologies, I argued that if not for the kairotic confluence of current events and spontaneous, fleeting assemblages, campus chalking from 2016 into 2017 would not have been as vibrant or active.

ANT and Nasty-Woman Rhetorics

In this study, I draw on ANT again but weave it with womanist frameworks to more fully examine nasty-woman rhetorics in a highly mediated, digital landscape. ANT, as Liza Potts (2009) argued, allows “researchers ... to look across the mediascape of technologies and people to identify and understand the traces of movements ... [and the] work of ... participants” (p. 285). ANT provides a drone-level view of the rhetorical ecology, in other words, and reveals the pathways traced by its individual and collective actants. Naomi Clark (2018), who used ANT to examine the emergence of religious right networks in the 1970s, said that circulation studies in general have “practical usefulness ... for gaining greater insight into the investments, spread, and persistence of given arguments” (p. 153). By tracing the movement of rhetoric in a complex system, we can learn more about the rhetorics and agents involved. Furthermore, networks—especially when viewed as dynamic ecologies involving the lived experiences of human agents—are constantly in flux, with multiple actants at play. Methods like ANT can help trace the flux and actants over time. For example, in the chalking study referenced above, I cataloged chalkings for several months and across a sidewalk network; that longitudinal, spatial practice

helped reveal how the rhetorical ecology functioned and what actants as well as exigencies influenced activity within it.

For this study, I center Kamala Harris as participant and subject, but also in combination with others (human and nonhuman); as such, she is an actant in the nasty-woman rhetorical ecology. Using ANT, I define *actant* as a working assemblage of human and nonhuman elements. Gries (2012) for example, described “woman-pen” as the actant in her musing essay about tumbleweeds and new materialism (p. 59). Decades earlier, cultural ecologist Gregory Bateson (1972/2000) had pondered the relationship between a blind man and his cane, arguing that it was difficult if not impossible to separate the two (p. 465). Gries (2012) extended the argument, saying, “rhetoric is always produced from the dance of various actants engaged in intra-actions” (p. 59). Rhetorical actions, in other words, do not happen in a vacuum or without entangled relationships like woman-pen and man-cane. Who is “doing” the writing or the tapping? At this moment, for example, I type letters on a portable keyboard wirelessly linked to a laptop that is itself linked to an external monitor; I read my words on a large screen; together these material devices and technologies form an actant (Margaret + technology) who works to build the framework of a rhetorical study. The “Harris” actant in this study, therefore, is not solely Kamala Harris the individual human, but Harris entangled at times or joined with such nonhuman elements as television monitors, broadcast companies, digital infrastructures, and social-media networks.

This approach, however, risks diminishing Harris’s multiracial identity and individual agency, which are problems in circulation studies in general and ANT in particular; but, rhetorically speaking, we cannot separate Harris, a woman of color, from “the fact of video footage ... still photographs, or the verbal or written descriptions of writers and television

anchors” (Banks, 2004, p. 198). I call on African American scholar Adam Banks here because he explained the power of televised news and Black people’s unequal and uneasy relationship to that (White) power structure. We often experience public figures like Harris through the mediation of television, social media, and other screens; we, as well as Harris, rely on that mediation but often do not examine its role closely. Banks said, “Rhetorical analysis [should] take into account questions of how the technology of the medium and issues of access to it can shape the rhetorical situation in ways that a communicator must reckon with in order to be effective” (2004, p. 199). Arguably, Harris and Biden both gave interviews to “friendly” media like CNN instead of the conservative Fox, and Harris’s husband has been a lawyer for powerful people and companies in the entertainment industry. Harris’s relationship with the media, power structure, and so forth are complicated, in short. Nonetheless, Banks was right. We cannot ignore Harris’s unequal relationship, as a woman of color, with the technology and networked, multi-media of news coverage during the U.S. election season. In other words, in this study I need to attend not just to Harris but to nonhuman agents that join with her, intersect her path/identity, intra-act within a rhetorical ecology.

For example, Kamala Harris applied a variety of communication modes and strategies during the 2020 U.S. presidential race, particularly in televised interviews for which she gave reasoned, alphacentric responses at times or made communicative but nonlinguistic gestures at other times. Were these rhetorical intra-actions as effective for Harris as televised interviews were for Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X? I argue they were not as effective, due to the intra-action of sexism and racism in how news-media work. Banks, for example, pointed out that “writers, directors, producers, and television executives” make the decisions about what to include or exclude, what to ask the interviewee, which excerpts to broadcast or not, and so on

(2004, p. 199). Harris's individual agency was thus limited in these situations. However, I argue that her visual-gestural responses were more effective than careful, linguistic-aural strategies. Banks remarked, "African American rhetoric has always been multimedia, has always been about body and voice and image, even when they only set the stage for language" (2004, p. 196). Where Banks said "multimedia," however, I understand him to also infer multimodal communication, extended by technologies like television and social media. That is, communication is not just about the media carrying the message between audience and rhetor; it is also about the range and combination of modes used, from the aural to the spatial. Furthermore, identifying Harris with African American rhetoric is not meant to omit her Indian heritage; Harris in one interview said that her mother raised her and her sister as Black women (Seitz, 2020). Also, news media and pundits in the US tended to highlight Harris's Black identity.

Additionally, for this study, my analysis must also account for how other actants worked in the nasty-woman rhetorical ecology. For example, before Biden picked Harris, a group of more than 100 prominent Black women wrote open letters aimed at news-media; some news-media reported the letter, which put it in circulation; and allies, critics, and pundits alike posted social-media messages about it. As a collective strategy, and what Gries (2013) might call a "thing-event" (p. 338), the letter and its circulation disrupted the nasty-woman narrative by demanding fair treatment of whichever woman Biden selected. By tracing this thing-event and the activity around it, I use ANT to "follow the actors themselves," the better to catch their "wild innovations" (Latour, 2005, p. 12). Putting aside Latour's blurring of actor/actant in this poetic description (he argued for the latter term in part to avoid privileging humans in the network), ANT as a research practice meant that I needed to survey the nasty-woman ecology from a

drone-level perspective; identify moments and sites of activity like the letter and Harris's interview performances; follow actants at play in the ecology; but center the study perspective in a womanist way that accounts for the intersections of gender and race. In this process of attempting these moves, my attention turned to headlines and tweets where nasty-woman rhetorics were most active. Meanwhile, I conclude this introduction by explaining and previewing the structure of this dissertation.

Epilogue: Parentheticals and Other Interruptions

This project makes a queer-feminist move by disrupting the traditional, normative format common in dissertations, introducing epigraphs and visual samples at the start of each chapter; within chapters, I frequently use parentheticals (like this one). I make these moves not simply to introduce informality, highlight a thought, or break the academic third-wall between reader and writer. I also use them to introduce both/and interpretations, such as (non) circulation, a phrasing/formatting that calls attention to the both/and, entangled, intra-actions. With these rhetorical moves, I resist a prescribed, "scientific-like structure" (Weatherall, 2018, p. 1), which moves from introductory chapter, literature review, methods, and case studies to concluding discussion.

At arguably one of the premier institutions offering a PhD in rhetoric, Collin Gifford Brooke (n.d.) wrote in Syracuse University's 2006-2009 online guidelines, "Typically, dissertations in [the discipline] have been 5-6 chapters and around 225-250 pages, including works cited" (para. 2). Dissertations are expected to have chapters and be substantive in length; the guidelines say so, down to prescribed forms for titles, subtitles, tables of content, and so on. Such genre expectations provide structure and direction for doctoral students crafting their scholarly identities; thus, doctoral students are steered toward this structure, explicitly at times

but always implicitly. However, these conventions also constrain and, for this project, the normative structure risks obscuring the feminist-ecological circulation sought for study and diminishing the experience of exploration.

That is, well-established genre conventions degender and deracialize the process of writing a dissertation; they discourage the reflexivity of feminist frameworks and the social-justice drive of mestiza rhetorics, Black feminism, and womanism. Weatherall (2018) explained, “Writing in a conventional way can uphold the hegemonic masculine conventions ... which marginalize alternative ways of writing, researching, and being” (p. 104). A dissertation, in other words, blocks any attempt at Hélène Cixous’s (1976) *l’écriture féminine* (women’s writing), which “makes trouble” (p. 876) and expresses lived, often messy, experiences.

In the Oxford English Dictionary, the first definition of chapter is a division or section of a book; it privileges linguistic, alphabetic modes and, to me, seems static and bounded. Episode, on the other hand, commonly references installments in an ongoing television, radio, or podcast series. In Old Greek, ἐπεισόδιον (episode) meant “the interlocutory parts between two choric songs” (OED). Episodes are the dialogues between grand, choral performances. To me, episode also suggests in-between, in-process moments that are more fleeting and less proscribed than the chapter. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, an intermission, similarly, infers a break in time, a pause of action, or “the interval between the parts of a play, film, concert.” Where “intermission” suggests a pause in action, “episodes” comment on grand themes. For example, I have peppered this introduction with figures that visually disrupt the chapter and highlight key points that I was thinking about as I wrote.

In short, I can do something different and meaningful at the beginning of each chapter and within the chapters themselves. In the spirit of ἐπεισόδιον and with a dash of the theatric, I

interrupt texts with asides, figures, tables, parentheticals (like this one), and (other) stuff. That approach aligns me with Weatherall (2018), who viewed the dissertation “as research, rather than just the output of the process” (p. 4). Writing and researching are active processes, not static products. Weatherall said, “Doctoral writing can be understood ... as a formative learning process” (2018, p. 4). Writing and researching are active modes of thinking our way through a topic or problem; we are moving through the act of forming our ideas as we try to communicate them. Writing entangles with thinking; and thinking intra-acts with writing.

For this project, therefore, I treat required elements in each chapter but disrupt the flow. In this introduction, for instance, I have dutifully outlined a blended methodology, posed research questions, and described the problem being studied. However, I interrupted the linear flow with epigraphs, such as Michelle Obama’s 2018 comment about a well-known CEO’s “lean in” philosophy (and book of the same name), followed on the next page with a screenshot of Dannie D.’s (2022) tweet, in which he remixed a photo of actress Viola Davis in the act of portraying Obama for a TV show. I use this approach with each chapter as an episodic interruption that I hope will shift readers’ perspectives and encourage them to reflect as they explore this dissertation. With these interruptions, I also hope to communicate the research process as I experienced it. I seek to de-center the normative, masculinist structure and practice of dissertations, albeit in a modest way; my twin goal is to do the work of foregrounding the voices that ANT and (White) feminism, on their own, might miss. This approach better reflects the process of this project; it better represents the ebb and flow of exploration.

Furthermore, like Weatherall, I believe that “orthodox ... chapters imply succession whereas [episodes] operate as different parts of a whole” (2018, p. 103). Rhetorical ecologies are inherently, stubbornly messy; one way “in” to the ecology is to comprehend its elements as parts

of a whole, not as isolated elements. Circulation is also more visible when the relevant system can be viewed as a whole. Since this project focuses on communications set in a large rhetorical field, a visual metaphor may be useful here: This project evolved from experiencing the nasty-woman rhetorical ecology in panoramic mode, panning out for the full scene to situate the close-up shots (the case studies, in standard dissertation language). In short, why deliver research findings in a way that divorces the lived experience of scholarship from the end-product? I cannot dispense completely with the genre conventions, but perhaps I can bend them. Furthermore, my scholarly identity tangles with my past as a journalist who first observed and explored a “beat”⁷ before telling short to medium-length stories that, comprehended as a whole, tell a tale through time. These chapters and episodes are as follows:

Chapter I: Nasty-woman Rhetorics

Chapter II: A Literature Review

Chapter III: Methods and Data Sets

Chapter IV: Moments of Absence, Presence, and Outrage

Chapter V: “Madame Vice President” and Beyond

References

⁷ According to the Poynter Institute, a “beat” is a topic, subject, or area covered by a reporter (Krueger, 2017, para. 1). Beats can be general (political reporting), more specific (the “crime” beat), or geographical (county news).

CHAPTER II

A LITERATURE REVIEW

We're all in this together, juntas, ... the ground of our being is a common ground, la Tierra, and ... at all times we must stand together.

—Gloria Anzaldúa, 1990/2009

Prelude

To borrow a metaphor from Gloria Anzaldúa (1990/2009), this chapter bridges between the blended methodology outlined in Chapter I and the methods used to complete this study. “Being a bridge,” she said, “means being mediator between yourself and your community” (Anzaldúa, 1990/2009, p. 147). Bridging is an apt description for a literature review, which must summarize scholarly conversations, place them in relation to each other, and connect them to a new project. Like Anzaldúa’s bridge, a literature review notes alliances as well as disagreements, common themes as well as departures, and useful links as well tangential ones. It creates new ground for this study’s womanist, ecological approach to nasty-woman rhetorics.

However, like Anzaldúa, I prefer a “less man-made and steel-like” metaphor: sandbars, which are “submerged or partly exposed ridge[s] of sand built by waves offshore from a beach” (Anzaldúa, 1990/2009, p. 148). Fluid and ephemeral, said Anzaldúa, sandbars allow “more flexibility and more freedom” than bridges (1990/2009, p. 148). Where I grew up, sandbars changed with the seasons and storms of the Gulf of Mexico; sandbars move and change almost constantly; they are not stable ground; but they sometimes become ecologically diverse islands. That is, they become stable ground over time. Metaphorically and rhetorically, therefore, sandbars are useful for alliance work and literature reviews because they can be bridges or islands but, more importantly, they represent the in-between spaces, like *mestiza* and *queerish*

rhetorics that temporarily stitch or weave together what may seem like disparate parts. In that sense, sandbars also resemble the Western European notion of bricolage—a making-do with what is at hand (Brooke, 2009; de Certeau, 1984; Levi-Strauss, 1966; Reed, 2020). Like bricolage, sandbar also conveys “everyday, ephemeral, and mundane rhetorical actions” (McHendry et al., 2014). Literature reviews are commonplace in academia. But where methodology shows the scope and perspective of your thinking, reviews show how you got there with your topic, like a mathematician demonstrating each step in solving an equation. This chapter, in other words, shows my exploration of several themes in relation to women of color in political spheres: intersecting (feminist) identities; women and (vice) presidential politics; media rhetorics; (Black) herstory; and a case relevant to this study (Hillary Rodham Clinton’s relationship to “the” media). This work prepares me to discuss the rhetorics of LaToya Morgan’s 2020 tweet of Rep. Shirley Chisolm and Vice President Kamala Harris (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Shirley Chisolm and Kamala Harris



Note. (Morgan, 2020)

Intersecting (Feminist) Identities

While it exceeds the scope of this chapter to review the depth and breadth of Black and mainstream (White) feminist scholarship, this study posits a rhetorical ecology in which gender *and* race *and* class matter significantly in U.S. politics (not to mention able-bodiedness, belief systems, sexuality, and so forth). In that ecology, nasty-woman rhetorics circulate and evolve, but not in the same ways for all women. That is, as legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) has argued, a woman of color's experiences are simply different from a White woman's (Astor, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersecting or multidimensional identities change and *compound* sexism, racism, and other isms. Yet, much mainstream feminism focuses so intently on sexism and male/female binaries that women of color—as well as differently abled, queer, non-Western, and transgender people, just to name a few—are marginalized or erased altogether. In this section, I stitch them together, albeit not in perfect fashion, as this project is ongoing, with the end far ahead.

Crenshaw, who coined the term “intersectionality” (1989), provides an example of mainstream feminism's “single-axis” focus: In programs and shelters aimed at helping battered women, for example, “intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help to women who because of race and class face different obstacles” (p. 1246). Crenshaw (1989) explained that immigrant women may face cultural pressures that differ from White women, such as living in an extended family situation, encountering language barriers, or fearing deportation—all of which make it difficult for them to access shelter services. Extending this perspective to my study, a “nasty” Kamala Harris is simply different from a “nasty” Hillary Clinton, because for Harris the BCPP, as Alexander-Floyd (2007) labeled it, compounds the insult. That is, the BCPP—a set of tropes

that include as the sexually voracious Jezebel and the emasculating Mammy—intersects, compounds, and complicates for Harris and other women of color.

Unfortunately, mainstream feminism still neglects this identity/experience difference, even if the neglect seems benign or unintentional. For instance, Kathleen Jamieson (1995), who outlined the still-prevalent “double bind” concept that women face in politics, dealt very little with race-and-gender discrimination. For instance, she described Rep. Maxine Waters’s assertive strategy for getting into a meeting called by Pres. George Bush after the riots in her district (Los Angeles) as merely dealing with “a different playing field” (Jamieson, 1995, p. 207). Waters, a Black woman, was like a Biblical “Eve,” in Jamieson’s tale. Waters stormed the men-only discussions to claim her chair at the table; any race discrimination was just “different.” Race issues, in other words, are elided by way of one simple phrase, when in fact racism compounded Waters’s experience. Part of the issue, from an ecological perspective as well as via queer frameworks, is that Jamieson constructs a steadfastly binary structure of such binds as silence/shame and femininity/competence. However, as useful as such binaries can be, at least on the surface, decades after the Civil Rights movement, a Black/White split is not explored by Jamieson. Thus, she missed an opportunity to point out the racism Waters surely faced, including descriptions of the congresswoman by the media at the time.

Part of the problem, as suggested Chapter I, is that neither “woman” or “feminist” or “Black feminist” are monolithic ideographs or identity markers; our very human, categorizing tendencies mean that we nonetheless essentialize each other by relying on such identity shortcuts. Where Michelle Ballif (2001) mused on the complex, rhetorical-cultural construct called “Woman,” for example, Alexander-Floyd and Jordan-Zachery (2018) would say that the whole construct is White (not to mention, cisgender and able-bodied). They pointed out, for

example, “There is no one Black women’s political identity” (p. xv). Black women, as well as “women of color,” often get lumped together as if they are a singular identity—an Other or a similar, non-White essentialization, in other words. Alexander-Floyd and Jordan-Zachery (2018) addressed this conundrum by opening an inclusive space for “Diasporic Black women” whose identities, concerns, and politics are complex, heterogeneous, and intersectional. Such a scope accounts for women like Kamala Harris, whose mother was from India and whose father is Jamaican; such a scope also looks beyond the political, cultural, “American” borders of the United States.

As for political identities, Alexander-Floyd and Jordan-Zachery (2018) remarked, with nods to oft-cited scholars, “Political Man (Lipset 1960) and Political Woman (Kirkpatrick 1974) are still seen as White, and in the study of Black politics, ... the focus is often on Black men” (p. xv). That is, with this statement they linked implicitly to Crenshaw and a host of Black feminist scholarship (such as the Combahee River Collective, 1982; and hooks, 2013; and Lourde, 1984), and they emphasized the racializing, gendering status quo of politics in much (if not all) of the world. Antiracist strategies, furthermore, tend to be based on Black men’s experiences and concerns, not Black women’s, while antisexist strategies tend to be based solely on White women’s experiences and concerns (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, Black men won the right to vote in 1870, but Black women did not effectively have their voting rights guaranteed until 1965, almost 50 years after (White) women won the right to vote. With either antiracism or antisexist strategies, non-White women are de facto excluded; they are erased from the sphere, often in ways that reinforce problems within the group, such as racial misogyny.

Historian Barbara Winslow (2018) countered these erasures by exploring intersectional, identity-related complexities in the case of Rep. Shirley Chisolm, who was “white-ed out” of

U.S. political history, according to one supporter (p. 108). Chisholm, a Barbadian-American born in New York City, was the first Black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, but she was regularly reminded by Black male civil-rights leaders of her “proper” place—as a supporting player, not as a party leader (Winslow, 2018, p. 107). Nonetheless, in the early 1970s, she ran for the Democrat’s presidential nomination—long before Clinton ran against Barack Obama for the party’s 2008 nomination. Winslow said that Chisholm, who built a grassroots, woman-run coalition of supporters, was “ignored, mocked, and slandered, not only by whites but by some African Americans, mainly men” (Winslow, 2018, p. 107). For example, Jesse Jackson—a Civil Rights leader and congressman who has run for the presidential nomination on several occasions—refused to let Chisolm campaign at local Democratic headquarter (Winslow, 2018, p. 115).

Winslow (2018) also highlighted the persistent tensions between White and non-White feminist identities: When Clinton ran against Trump in 2016, scores of White women placed their “I Voted” stickers on the gravestone of White suffragette Susan B. Anthony, but they ignored the contributions of Chisolm and many other women of color, such as Francis Harper, a 19th-century abolitionist and suffragette. Winslow (2018) cited tweets by feminist writer Roxane Gay as well as journalist Everette Dionne (p. 107). Dionne (tweeting as @freeBlackgirl), for example, pleaded, “Please put stickers on Shirley Chisholm’s grave” (2016). Four years later, shortly after the November 2020 election made Harris vice-president elect, writer/producer LaToya Morgan (2020) tweeted paired images of Chisolm and Harris, adding the words, “How it started. How it’s going” (see Figure 2). In short, Gay, Dionne, Morgan, and many others called

out White feminists and mainstream news-media, who had failed to even name Chisolm in headlines announcing her as the newest New York representative to Congress. Furthermore, mainstream news-media had given Chisolm minimal coverage during her bid to become the Democrat's political nominee. Activists like Dionne (2017) led a chorus calling for White feminists and news-media to recognize the contributions that women like Chisolm have made for voting rights, in political representation, and for social justice.

Winslow's (2018) attention to Chisolm is also noteworthy for recovering the history of and names of Black women in politics; her work, therefore, takes a step toward fulfilling Alexander-Floyd and Jordan-Zachery's (2018) call for women scholars to expose the "operation of power" at play in multidimensional gender-race traps. By acknowledging identity difference(s) rather than eliding them, scholars can place "a priority on justice as the goal of [their] academic inquiry ... not merely aimed at describing phenomena and outlining political happenings ... but ... challeng[ing] and transform[ing] existing inequitable relationships and conditions" (Alexander-Floyd & Jordan-Zachery, 2018, p. xxxiii). In other words, analysis cannot be simply for the sake of analysis; it should serve a productive, useful purpose—one aimed at enacting diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Arguably, this social-justice goal is shared by Black and mainstream feminism.

However, Alexander-Floyd and Jordan-Zachery (2018) also argued that these issues are at the heart of intersectionality, a theory and practice that "has always been aimed at assessing and challenging those forces that impeded full expression of political participation and facilitating personal, social, and communal well-being" (xviii). Reconnected with its Black

feminist roots, in other words, intersectionality is a social-justice project. In their edited collection, *Black Women in Politics* (2018), Alexander-Floyd and Jordan-Zachery carved out scholarly space (a “garret”) that features women of color as productive scholars, writers, and agentic subjects. While all of the collection’s scholars use intersectionality specifically and/or Black feminism more generally, two of them most closely relate to my examination of identity and nasty-woman rhetorics in U.S. politics: Maziki Thame’s (2018) interrogation of gender, race, and class in the rise and fall of Jamaica’s first female prime minister; and Grace E. Howard’s (2018) examination of former first lady Michelle Obama’s anti-obesity campaign.

Focused on a Black woman’s (non) place in politics, Thame (2018) documented how Jamaica’s first female prime minister, Portia Simpson-Miller (aka “Mama P.”), rose to power in a middle-class, masculinist political system from the 1970s through 2016. While similar in many ways to the issues faced by women of color running for public office in the US, and certainly one of the few past or current examples of a woman of color serving in her country’s highest office, Simpson-Miller’s case is particular to Jamaican culture and socioeconomics. Thame (2018) explained, for example, that Jamaica models the British parliamentary system but with power established and maintained by an uneasy partnership of middle-class elites and a non-White, “Brown” ruling class. In such a system, Black women rise to power primarily in relation to men and in terms of a “respectability” culture that rewards those who espouse Christian values, lighter skin color, and “proper” English speech (Thame, 2018, p. 147). Simpson-Miller, however, came from Jamaica’s working class and was “an embarrassment” when she spoke in her own and her community’s vernacular. She was thus “embattled from the start” of her political career by classism, sexism, and anti-Black sentiment; in other words, she was too Black

and too common (Thame, 2018, p. 148). Thame (2018) argued that these are “intersectional oppressions” (p. 143) that concern the cumulative, interacting dynamics (and constraints) of gender, race, and class. Thame (2018) suggested heteronormative constraints, too, explaining how Simpson-Miller “made space for herself as both nurturing mother and disciplinarian” but ultimately failed to “shift the context of gender power” in Jamaica (p. 155). In other words, Simpson-Miller’s rise to power was largely symbolic; it did little to shift the constraints on Black and female identity politics in Jamaica.

Howard (2018) also applied a Black feminist, intersectional lens to a prominent woman of color, though not an elected one—former First Lady Michelle Obama. Using discourse analysis, Howard examined Obama’s⁸ Let’s Move! campaign by exploring the intersections of Black stereotypes, media representations, masculinized political arenas, and the (quite White) cultural constraints of being a First Lady. For example, Howard (2018) considered gendered, racialized characterizations of the First Lady in news-media, such as “Obama’s ‘Baby Mama’” (p. 221). Obama herself was keenly aware of the problem: In a 2015 interview cited by Howard, the First Lady remarked that she “was subject to a different set of questions than typical prospective first ladies because of her race ... [and thus often asked herself]: ‘Was I too loud, or too angry, or too emasculating?’” (Howard, 2018, p. 221). The First Lady responded to tropes of Black women as ill-tempered but mothering women who strip men of power. Obama also reported “derogatory media statements, including one that said she exhibited ‘a little bit of uppity-ism’” (Howard, 2018, p. 221). In citing these passages, Howard (2018) argued that the

⁸ Hereafter, “Obama” refers to Michelle Obama unless otherwise noted.

First Lady was far from a “passive victim of racialized patriarchy” (p. 221); Obama was aware of these rhetorics and actively countered them.

Of course, these characterizations stem from the set of long-standing tropes Alexander-Floyd (2007) referred to as the BCPP. These tropes are routinely, sometimes invisibly, applied to all Black women, including Michelle Obama: “the obese Mammy ... [or] the sexually voracious Jezebel ... [or] the Welfare Queen” (Howard, 2018, p. 224). Howard argued that Obama deracializes and thus distances herself from such tropes, thereby establishing her own space (self-actualization). Obama nonetheless reifies White, elitist, masculine hierarchies. Howard (2018) also pointed out that first ladies’ roles are limited in U.S. culture to “pregnancy and birth, the reproduction of national boundaries, and the reproduction and transmission of ideology and culture” (p. 219). Obama dropped her successful legal career and told the press she was focused on raising her kids; she dubbed herself “mom in chief,” thus creating a hip version of respectable motherhood that signaled a “nonthreatening ‘pro-woman’ stance without substantive engagement in controversial gender issues while simultaneously distancing herself, and the rest of the Obama family, from racialized and gendered stereotypes about Black families” (Howard, 2018, p. 218). In other words, Obama’s deracialization strategy set her apart and created a positive image, feminine and mothering but not emasculating or angry. Ultimately, however, she reinforced White cultural norms for first ladies.

Michelle Obama remains so popular, nonetheless, that many suggested she run to become the Democratic party’s presidential candidate in the 2020 election; but Karrin V. Anderson (2017a) said the key issue for female candidates is that, in the US at least, “*every* woman is the wrong woman” for such elected offices (p. 132). Writing not long after Donald J. Trump defeated Hillary R. Clinton in the electoral college in 2016, Anderson (2017a) focused on deeply

embedded sexism in U.S. politics, saying that the “president” is persistently viewed as masculine; therefore, no woman can surmount that obstacle. Worse for Clinton, said Anderson, was the “‘female presidentiality paradox,’ in which any electable woman presidential candidate is simultaneously unelectable in a ‘change’ campaign” (2017a, p. 132). Anderson acknowledged other contributing factors in Clinton’s loss (many years in the public eye, with real as well as manufactured scandals, “underwhelming presence on the stump,” problems with media relations, and of course Trump’s own unorthodox campaign). However, Anderson (2017a) said it is more important to change the *beliefs* of voters than adjust candidates’ strategies.

Anderson’s (2017a) commentary is prescient: A 2019 Pew Research study published online (Horowitz et al., 2019) outlined some of those underlying, cultural beliefs. Most women in the study said that female candidates “have to do more to prove themselves” and that gender discrimination is a “major obstacle” for their candidacies and their time in office. Conversely, many women and men said they would be willing to vote for women and would like to see more of them in office. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, one of six women who ran unsuccessfully to become the Democratic party’s 2020 nominee, captured this paradox: “We’ll know that we can have a woman in the White House when we finally elect a woman to the White House” (Maddow, 2020). Warren spoke the uncomfortable, persistent truth that Democrats voted more often for White male candidates in the 2019-2020 primaries.

Anderson (2017a) couched the problem as the classic double bind morphed into “a full-blown paradox ... [in which] the factors that cast Clinton as a credible candidate simultaneously disqualified her Her electability made her unelectable” (p. 133). That is, the more credible,

competent, and capable Clinton was, the fewer votes she earned. Anderson also said that this conundrum does not seem gendered, at first glance, but, actually, “the dynamic is unique to women candidates” (2017a, p. 133). Clinton, for example, had to amass a wealth of experience (first lady, senator, secretary of state) as well as financial and political support to even have a chance at running (to be fair, at the time of Anderson’s writing no other female, White or non-White, had cleared these hurdles); Barack Obama, on the other hand, was a community organizer with barely 2 years in Congress. Therefore, Anderson was not wrong. However, she inadvertently demonstrated Black feminists’ argument that mainstream feminism has a blind spot when it comes to race-plus-gender, subsuming all issues into the single-axis male-female trap.

Andrea Gillespie and Nadia E. Brown (2019), on the other hand, dove right into intersectional complexities. First, they systematically dismantled the assumption that Black women are saving democracy (or at least the Democratic party). This idea was circulated via Twitter (#BlackGirlMagic) but also well circulated by news- and social-media. A New Yorker headline, for example, proclaimed, “How the Alabama Senate election sanctified Black women” (St. Felix, 2017) while a USA Today headline said, “Twitter thanks #BlackWomen for voting for Democrat Doug Jones in Alabama Senate election” (Bowerman, 2017). Gillespie and Brown (2019) began with such news headlines declaring that high turnout and support from Black women propelled White candidate Doug Jones to victory in the election. They argued that such headlines reinforce the myth of #BlackGirlMagic through repetition and amplification; in other words, news-media circulate and co-construct the myth. Gillespie and Brown (2019) complicated the story, however, using decades of voter analysis to undo popular narratives about the gender gap, Black voters, and Black candidates.

Most relevant to this study, like Winslow, Gillespie and Brown (2019) acknowledged Chisolm's place in history and importance to these discussions. A co-founder of the still-influential National Organization for Women, Chisolm gained some White-feminist support when she ran for the nomination in 1972, but she also "took on the leadership of the Congressional Black Caucus [which she helped create]—Black men—who believed that the first Black person to run for office should be a man" (Gillespie & Brown, 2019, p. 46). Gillespie and Brown's echoed Winslow's historical account but they probed more deeply the "intersecting disadvantaged identities" faced by candidates like Chisolm (2019, p. 49). They showed that women of color are disadvantaged not just by mainstream, White, male hierarchies, but also by their own communities or in-groups. For Chisolm, in other words, her gender disadvantaged her within the Black (male) political community as well as in the (White) feminist community. An intersection of double binds intra-acted, co-creating a multidimensional knot.

One final mention in this section concerns the case of two scholars whose work in African American rhetorics focused on race at the expense of women's issues: Keith Gilyard and Adam J. Banks (2018). Light on their attention to Black feminism (a section of one chapter in the book), they provided a useful definition⁹ for African American rhetoric: "the art of persuasion fused with African-American ways of knowing in attempts to achieve in public realms personhood, dignity, and respect" (Gilyard & Banks, 2018, p. 3). Later in their introduction, Gilyard and Banks (2018) said that, in their anthology of scholarly works, they "trace[d] the arc

⁹ Their functional definition is drawn from Deborah Atwater's 2009 *African American Women's Rhetoric*, which is largely a work of historical recovery and, as such, offered a sweeping overview of key figures and themes.

of strategic language use by African Americans in [such] rhetorical forms ... [as] slave narratives, the spirituals, poetry, fiction, folklore, speeches, music, film, and memes” (p. 6). They acknowledged that the field is large but nonetheless offered a sampling as varied as the integrationist-separatist debates of the early 20th century, the 21st century’s Black Twitter, and college-writing instruction. Unfortunately, this “sampling” approach shortchanges Black women’s rhetoric, as Gilyard and Banks (2018) rushed through such topics as hip-hop feminism and Moya Bailey’s 2010 coining of the term “misogynoir” (“acts of contempt or prejudice directed specifically at Black women” [p. 69]). Curiously, Gilyard and Banks (2018) did not mention Crenshaw at all, instead highlighting the “triple exploitation” of Black women “as women, as workers, and as Negroes,” a concept introduced/practiced by “two female black radicals [in the 1930s] Louise Thompson Patterson and Claudia Jones” (p. 67). As a former news editor, I question their characterization of these women as “radicals”—a term just as charged as “liberal” and “conservative” these days. Gilyard and Banks (2018) reclaimed Patterson and Jones’s significance but in a somewhat negative way, and at Crenshaw’s expense. Perhaps unintentionally, Gilyard and Banks exhibited nasty-woman rhetorics. Saving this thought for future reflection, I next move from the broad outlines of Black/White feminism to (vice) presidential politics and women in the US.

Women and (Vice) Presidential Politics

Where Black feminist, intersectional analyses foreground the complexities of women’s experiences, much of the scholarship and commentary about women and (vice) presidential politics focuses almost exclusively on sexism; that is, much of it reflects mainstream feminism’s

race/class blind spots. Nonetheless, these scholars raise issues that are at play for all female candidates and politicians; therefore, their work informs my study. Notably, many of the sources in this section can be traced back or related to Jamieson's (1995) foundational outline of double binds, "rhetorical construct[s] that [posit] two and only two alternatives, one or both penalizing the person being offered them" (p. 13-14). Applying this concept, then, Hillary Clinton could not be both feminine and competent, for to be female is to be weak, emotional, illogical; whereas competency calls upon masculine traits such as strength, confidence, and so forth. Clinton is forever caught in a catch-22. However, race and class complicate this conundrum for female candidates in (vice) presidential politics.

In fact, a common theme centers on competency in masculine-feminine terms (Anderson, 2017a; Anderson, 2017b; Schneider et al., 2010; Smirnova, 2018). Anderson (2017a), for instance, argued that male candidates do not have to overcome the same level of challenges faced by female candidates, if at all (Barack Obama, for example, was a community organizer and lawyer who had served less than a full term as a senator; and Trump had zero political experience to complement his businessman persona). Anderson also said scholars and political strategists alike must acknowledge this state of affairs "and seek to understand its rhetorical dynamics" (2017a, p. 134). For example, competence alone is not enough of a factor for women in U.S. politics. In fact, as Anderson (2017a) argued, competence "appears to breed contempt" (p. 134). My takeaway here is that gender politics create a plethora of paradoxes for women in U.S. politics. Anderson (2017a) implied there is little that female candidates can do with these paradoxes, saying, "The problem lies with the culture rather than the candidates" (p. 135). U.S.

political culture (i.e., its constructed rhetorics) is steadfastly male and punishes women who try to take part in it.

This sentiment was captured by U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren. In the 2019-2020 election cycle, she came closer than any other woman to winning a major party's presidential nomination but, nonetheless, dropped out of the race in early March 2020 after failing to win key primaries. Afterward, Warren gave a living-room interview with MSNBC host Rachel Maddow, who asked, "I would like to ask you about the elephant in the room, ... Is it just that it can't be any woman [for U.S. president] ever ... in our lifetimes?" (Maddow, 2020). In the 2020 cycle, a record number of women ran alongside Warren to become the party's nominee, including Harris, but none of them came closer to succeeding (Warren garnered a distant third in the primaries after Biden and Sen. Bernie Sanders). During the Maddow interview, Warren noted all the women who had supported her candidacy and all the little girls she had given "pinky promises" to. She told Maddow, "If you say, 'yeah, there was sexism in this race,' everyone says 'whiner,' ... And if you say, 'no, there was no sexism,' about a bazillion women think, 'what planet do you live on?'" (Maddow, 2020). MSNBC and its parent network circulated clips of the interview and other media circulated her comments, which included Warren's assessment that "gender ... is the trap question for every woman" (Elsesser, 2020). Warren implied that female candidates should never mention gender and should certainly never complain about it. What she did not say (and was not asked) is that neither race or class should ever be mentioned or complained about.

However, Black feminist scholarship increasingly surfaces gender, race, and class issues in U.S. politics. Gillespie and Brown (2019), for instance, refigured the almost mythicized

“gender [voting] gap” to include race and, in the process, also dismantled the “less capable” conundrum (i.e., Jamieson’s [1995] competency binary, in which men are competent but women are not—unless they take on masculine traits, in which case, they are un-electable; or they cloak their competency in feminine terms like motherhood, which often makes them un-electable as well). In short, the gender gap in voting patterns exists (women tend to vote for Democrats), but well-accepted expressions of this gap fail to explore why 52% of White women voted for Trump (Jaffe, 2018; Junn & Masuoka, 2020; Tien, 2017). Gillespie and Brown (2019) broke down this racial-gender gap and traced its existence back to at least the 1950s.

Most relevant to my study and the subtheme of masculine-feminine competency, Gillespie and Brown (2019) claimed, “Black women are more often than not associated with more masculine traits,” which means voters see them “as agentic leaders” (p. 50). That is, while White women often get trapped in masculine-feminine, competent-incompetent binds, which Anderson (2017a) said “breeds contempt” (p. 135), the commonplace about capable Black women may sometimes work in their favor as candidates.¹⁰ Citing several studies, Gillespie and Brown (2019) remarked, “Voters appreciate this quality in Black women” (p. 50). They disrupted the myth, therefore, that gender alone is why no woman has become president as of this writing. Gillespie and Brown (2019) also countered the myth that women cannot be seen as strong leaders.

Of course, women have to be likeable, but the more likeable they are (again) the less electable they are, according to Jamieson’s (1995) well-established list of quandaries. For

¹⁰ Capable and/or assertive White women like Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, get assigned the b-word that “rhymes with rich” (Anderson, 1999).

example, when Hillary Clinton ran for president in 2008 and in 2016, she had to prove she was pleasant, friendly, and likeable, not just qualified or competent. Clinton had, after all, earned high approval rates during her time as secretary of state. Nonetheless, even then-candidate Barack Obama, during a 2008 debate in New Hampshire, said “Hillary” was “likable enough” (Politico, 2013). As he spoke, his facial expression communicated reluctance to say the words, making his response seem sarcastic and/or pained. In any case, the “likability question,” as the 2008 debate moderators themselves called it that night, is deeply embedded in Western culture. Researching the respective 2008 candidacies of Hillary Clinton (Democrat) and Sarah Palin (Republican), Schneider et al. (2010) noted the persistent

double bind [for professional or political women] between being perceived as competent or as likeable. Both qualities are imperative for success but the incongruity of normative female roles (warm, nurturing) with characteristics perceived necessary for professional success (independence, assertiveness) means that women are either seen as likeable, but incompetent, or as competent, but unlikeable. (p. 363)

In other words, women get caught in this paradox. Annamarie Forestiere (2020) captured this problem in the title of her article: “‘I’d vote for a woman, just not that woman’: Barriers faced by women in politics.” Similarly, in a study published April 2020 in *The Economics Journal*, researchers Leonie Gerhards and Michael Kosfield reported a game-playing experiment for which they concluded that likeability matters for women in nearly every single workplace interaction they studied (p. 716). For men, however, “likeability” factors only in their interactions with women. In short, the “likeability” problem and other aspects of sexism remain prevalent in U.S. presidential politics.

Another subtheme, however, has particular relevance for this study, because the tone changes significantly (and for the worse) when linked to women of color: the infiltration of “pornographic metaphors, images, and narratives” (Anderson, 2011, p. 327). Significant media coverage in the 2008 presidential election, Anderson (2011) explained, was focused on vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin’s beauty-pageant, “hot governor” looks (p. 338) while Clinton was called a c-word that “rhymes with blunt” (p. 341). Both labels sexualize these female candidates; both labels pornify them. Palin, for instance, was personable, folksy, and feminine; for example, she joked about hockey moms being like pit bulls who wore lipstick. However, she was frequently described as ditzy and incompetent, as if femininity overrode competency; the two representations could not go together except in insults (e.g., “caribou Barbie”). Clinton, on the other hand, was described as competent and accomplished but highly suspect—a “militant feminist” who wore pant suits, rejected the cookie-baking persona of first ladies, and was labeled unlikeable even by supposed allies in the Democratic party (Barack Obama said she was “likable enough” [Politico, 2013]). Focused on these two White female candidates, Anderson (2011) did not examine that, for women of color, the likeability problem intra-acts with this pornification to elicit the Jezebel trope. That is, women of color are desirable rather than likeable; but the more desirable or attractive they are, the more they are pornified as the scheming but alluring and lucrative Jezebel.

In general, however, Anderson (2011) said it is “no surprise” that female candidates were then and are still portrayed negatively in terms of sexual activity and proclivities: “[M]etaphors of pornography construct women candidates in ways that reveal the persistence of cultural stereotypes about women political leaders, despite the progress evidenced by Clintons and Palins candidacies” (p. 329). That is, Palin and Hillary’s respective runs for vice-president and

president showed some small progress in America's male-dominated political milieu. Nonetheless, Palin was commonly portrayed in ways that played negatively on her (feminine) attractiveness: a meme in which her face was photoshopped onto the image of a "woman clad in a U.S. flag bikini [and] holding a rifle ... [as well as] a *Saturday Night Live* skit that touted her as a 'MILF,' with the acronym standing for 'Mom I'd Like to Fuck'" (Anderson, 2011, p. 338). On the other hand, Clinton was described this way in a comment posted to a story in *The Washington Post*: "Hillary is a conniving ... well, never mind ... it rhymes with blunt" (Anderson, 2011, p. 341). Such portrayals, Anderson argued, have become more prevalent as women have come closer to running for (and being elected) president; such attacks also demonstrate the backlash against feminism in general and women's rise in U.S. politics (2011, p. 329).

In relation to my research, Anderson's "pornification" is similar to misogynoir for women of color in U.S. politics. Kamala Harris, for example, dated a former San Francisco mayor 20 years ago, while he was still married (but separated); it is no surprise that this relationship sparked critics and political opponents to label Harris a gold-digger and describe her in terms associated with prostitutes, such as #HeelsUpHarris, a Jezebelian label. This portrayal has persisted for Harris, particularly during her bid to win the Democratic party's presidential nomination. A January 29, 2019, story in *Harper's Bazaar*, published during the Democratic party's primary season, cited a history of such portrayals, like a January 27, 2019, tweet by once-upon-a-time 007/Bond girl and (at the time of post) "Reverend" Robbin Young: "Kamala doesn't care if Willie was good...women who prostitute themselves only care about money and prestige." The BCPP is clear in this labeling of Harris as the penultimate Jezebel. Notably, this tweet is one of the more safe-for-the-office versions of Jezebelian portrayals of Harris.

Two more scholars warrant mention in this section on women and (vice) presidential rhetorics: Denise Bostdorff (1991) and Michelle Lockhart (2013). Bostdorff is still cited today for applying Kenneth Burke’s dramatics to U.S. vice-presidential rhetoric. She argued that this rhetoric is inherently comedic and feminine; outlines four dramatic acts of vice-presidential rhetoric (celebration, confrontation, vindication/resignation, and submission); and frames Geraldine Ferraro’s stint as the vice-presidential nominee as a “deviation” that complicated the comedic/feminine in somewhat positive ways but, overall, negatively affected her candidacy. Bostdorff (1991) first explained how the vice-presidential role is traditionally subservient in U.S. politics, requiring “self-erasure,” “sublimation,” and, ultimately, a political marriage in which vice presidents assume an “old-world wifely” role that limits them to largely behind-the-scenes and cheerleader roles “completely subordinate to the more powerful man [the president or presidential candidate]” (p. 2). Vice presidents become stay-at-home wives and/or sidekicks.

Table 1

U.S. Female (Vice) Presidential Candidates

Candidate/Party	Year
Victoria Woodhull/third-party	1872
Shirley Chisolm/Democrats	1972
Geraldine Ferraro/Democrats	1984
Sarah Palin/Republicans	2008
Hillary Clinton/Democrats	2008 and 2016
Kamala Harris/Democrats	2020

Bostdorff (1991) also commented that, the more vice-presidential candidates assume a feminized and/or sidekick role, the less visible and distinct they become in public discourse. As evidence, Bostdorff reported on her survey of 1952-1980 *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* stories on vice-presidential nominees: Stories about the vice president or candidate were 10% of the number of those about the president (or presidential candidate). With charts and graphs about media coverage of the time, Bostdorff supported her case.

A more recent work on vice-presidential rhetorics comes from Michelle Lockhart (2013). She examined the texts of two very different acceptance speeches by female candidates for the office: Geraldine Ferraro's (Democrat) and Sarah Palin's (Republican). Lockhart (2013) set a broad context of vice-presidential rhetorics, with emphasis on the linguistic differences of men and women; and she uses public-discourse analysis of their respective acceptance speeches, albeit a *textual* analysis of transcripts rather than the televised performances. That is, Lockhart's analysis was alphacentric and excluded multimodal or intertextual aspects as the speeches were delivered. Nonetheless, Lockhart's work demonstrated an attempt to position women as research subjects as well as agentic political operators. First, she disagreed with the still-common adage that "vice-presidential running mates [matter] only marginally" to a party ticket's success (Lockhart, 2013, p. 81). Both individuals on a party ticket make a difference, said Lockhart, in no small part because the vice president can potentially become president (see Table 1). Notably, in a post-election concession speech, Ferraro looked to the future, saying that only when the next woman runs for the highest office(s) "will we know if she, too, is going to be judged by a standard different from that used for her male opponents" (Lockhart, 2013, p. 95). Ferraro is both optimistic and cautious in this look ahead. Unfortunately, different standards remain in place. In

the next section, I discuss sources that bring media framing into the fray, including a return to Bostdorff's comments about Ferraro.

News-Media Rhetorics

A Primer

The final theme comprises the intersections of rhetorics, news media, and women in politics. For example, in the previous section, I summarized Bostdorff's (1991) description of vice-presidential roles, but a few additional points pertain to this section: In the celebratory stage of a five-part comedic drama, vice-presidential candidates must demonstrate masculinized confidence; they must perform (or be shown to have) the capacity to be president. Performance includes both verbal and nonverbal communications; it exceeds the alphabetic. These performances are most often represented in visuals (still or moving images, with or without alphabetic text), sometimes also relayed as "soundbites" (aural/oral but also transcribed alphabetically), and often relayed via linguistic representations that are shorthand for, and may evoke, visuals. Bostdorff (1991) argued that news-media coverage that included visuals and soundbites of Ferraro focused so extensively on her (weak, feminine) gender that she had to "take more masculine postures," such as standing beside Mondale on the stage instead of embracing him. An embrace would have signaled a male-female couple, Bostdorff noted. She said:

Other candidates had begun their campaigns with public images as traditionally independent men and then gradually had submerged their identities in the persona of the presidential nominee. ... [But Ferraro], perceived as a stereotypical woman and the very paragon of submission from the start ... had to distinguish herself as an individual

(masculine/tragic) prior to submitting as Mondale's sidekick (feminine/comedic).

(Bostdorff, 1991, p. 19)

Note here the visual, gestural, and spatial aspects of these actions; they are multimodal and rhetorical yet are often elided in alphacentric reports or over-emphasized in visuals (e.g., video clips or still images) that are shared, distributed, and circulated by news outlets, campaigns, and others. As described by Bostdorff, in short, these rhetorical activities exhibit multimodal communication. In any case, Ferraro did not become the first female vice president of the United States. To improve the chances of a different outcome in the future, Bostdorff (1991) argued that more women need to run for—and win—public office at all levels. No doubt many feminists would agree, and more women have indeed been running and winning than ever before, though results remain mixed (Boschma, 2017; Conroy & Rakich, 2020; Gray, 2018). A record number of women, in any case, serve in the 117th U.S. Congress (Blazina & Desilver, 2021).

However, as I read Bostdorff and the other sources mentioned in this chapter, I thought of Abigail Lambke (2019). She opened her scholarly podcast (the latter still a genre discounted in academia) with an epigraph from Book 12 of Quintilian's first-century text, *Instituio oratoria*: “[T]he first thing to be considered is what sort of voice we have, and the next, how we use it” (Quintilian, 2015). Quintilian referred to the oral traditions of his day, which included performative aspects that were spatial and gestural rhetorics as well as linguistic ones. Delivery, to Quintilian and Cicero, meant *pronuntiatio* and *actio*, that is, the right tone, volume, and enunciation, inflected with gestures and body language, your toga hung just so, and all presented in the most fitting public space and to the right people at the right time. These features comprise key aspects of oral delivery, embodied and enacted. In this chapter's first identified theme, for example, I cited Howard (2018), who in turn cited Michelle Obama expressing that she was very

well aware of presenting herself as too uppity or angry or in any other stereotypical “Black” way exceeding or complementing linguistic communications. Lambke (2019), for her part, argued for recognizing the rhetoricity not just of aural modes like voice and music but the arrangement and delivery of these modes as well (e.g., cutting clips, rearranging the soundbite sequence, etc.). Lambke (2019) was not wrong: significant scholarship attends to visual rhetorics, while aural, spatial, and gestural modalities are less often analyzed. With that concern in mind, two notable sources for my study are Helmers and Hill (2008) and Seiter and Weger Jr. (2020).

Helmers and Hill (2008) resisted defining visual rhetoric, instead inviting several scholars to provide working definitions of the ways that images (still, moving, and interactive) influence audiences in meaningful and meaning-making ways, and providing useful terms for other scholars studying visual rhetorics. For instance, “paragonal” deals with the tension between words and images. “Intertextual” concerns the relationships between texts, somewhat as “signifyin” in African American rhetorics rely on layers of meaning. And “interpretant” refers to the mental image that words and signs evoke in audiences.

Helmers and Hill’s (2008) prime example is Thomas E. Franklin’s Ground Zero photograph of New York firefighters straightening a fallen flag in the rubble of the World Trade Center one day after the tragic events of 9/11. The image reminded many viewers of Joe Rosenthal’s infamous photo of U.S. Marines erecting the American flag on Iwo Jima during World War II. Rosenthal’s photo is so well known and so widely circulated that even the words “Iwo Jima” evoke its image (as an interpretant) in 21st-century students with no first-hand knowledge of that war or the photo’s original publication. An image is not needed; words invoke an image in audiences’ minds. I also note that Helmers and Hill reject the separation of image

from text and vice versa, partly because written texts are always-already visual, images (still or moving) have a strong impact on viewers and readers, and “the visual and the verbal bleed over into each other’s territory” (2008, p. 20). For example, the headlines I sample in the next chapter correlate to visuals, whether an image accompanies the text or not.

Another significant influence on this study has been Seiter and Weger Jr.’s (2020) overview of nonverbal communication in political debates. They defined nonverbal communication as “messages sent using nonlinguistic means” (Ch. 2). Subsets include vocalics (e.g., tone, regional or local accents, pitch, rate), eye contact, kinesics (body movement), gestures, proxemics, and haptics (e.g., touch, which they posit as a subset of proxemics). By “message” they mean “behaviors or elements ... that are typically ... intended as meaningful and have generally agreed upon meanings with a speech community” (Seiter & Weger Jr., 2020, Ch. 2). That is, nonverbal messages carry meaning; they are rhetorical. In a 2016 town-hall debate, Trump moved around as Clinton spoke; journalists as well as Clinton campaign staff said he seemed to be stalking her by way of nonverbal, kinesics, and proxemic communications; camera angles enhanced the effect. In this example, Seiter and Weger Jr. cited Jamieson’s double-bind theory. They commented on double binds frequently, in fact, exploring how these binary paradoxes “undoubtedly influence perceptions of female candidates’ verbal and nonverbal behaviors” (Seiter & Weger Jr., 2020, Ch. 10). These perceptions are typically negative for women. Like Shawn Parry-Giles (2000), Seiter and Weger Jr. (2020) also noted the news-media’s complicity in strapping female candidates into double binds: Clinton was often criticized for her laughter and smile, while Trump’s own “presidential look” was not. News-media

headlines and social-media posts often comment on these multimodal dynamics. In the next section, I outline the role of news-media in framing public discourse. This practice is referred to as “media framing,” but I prefer media rhetorics.

Media Framing as Rhetorics

First, I remind readers that common usage of the terms *media* and *modes* often blur the two. “The” media, for instance, is often used by academics and non-academics alike as a stand-in term for mainstream news-and-entertainment companies and platforms, from CNN to The Hill to Paramount. As mentioned previously, I use news-media to distinguish news-oriented platforms or companies from media (the interfaces, such as a computer or television screen).¹¹ By mode, I mean the form of communication (aural, visual, linguistic, spatial, gestural) delivered through various media by individuals, companies, and/or platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. Where individual scholars blur these terms, I distinguish between their definitions and mine, or their lack of definition(s). These distinctions in mind, I turn in this section to the relationship of news-media to various modes of communication in political discourse.

A brief look at Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) *Manufactured Consent* is useful here. They defined mainstream mass media “as a system for communicating messages and symbols,” a system that “requires systematic propaganda” in order to fulfill the role of “inculcate[ing] individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the

¹¹ Of course, “news” media increasingly blurs with entertainment media; indeed, mega-media companies like Time Warner own a vast number of platforms, infrastructure, broadcast channels, entertainment companies, and so forth. Furthermore, by “news” I mean fact-based reporting, but this line, too, has been blurred by the 24-hour news cycle, which includes commentary, live or “breaking news,” hosted shows, analysis, and more—all with considerable attention to entertainment value.

institutional structures of the larger society” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 1). As I understand their point, the nature of propaganda is that it propagates; it circulates; this circulation, which involves repetition and amplification, is epideictic rhetoric in motion. That is, it creates meaning. Extending Herman and Chomsky further, epideictic rhetoric constantly, continually constructs the present in terms of societal, cultural, and political belief systems.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) also argued that “money and power” drive the system, with four “filters” that determine the news we (the masses) receive. The first filter is the “size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation” of mass media (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 2): In 1987, the authors reported, 50 companies controlled 90% of America’s media companies. By 2012, Business Insider magazine calculated that just six corporations controlled that 90%. Gannett, which owns *USA Today*, is one of those companies, owning one out of every six newspapers in the United States (Edmonds, 2019). Herman and Chomsky (1988) established that such corporations are driven by profit, controlled by wealthy owners/shareholders, and supported by banks, other major corporations, and the wealthy elites who run all of them. Together, these elites determine “the news agenda and [supply] much of the national and international news to the lower tiers ... and for the general public” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p. 4-5). Such power “affects news choices” and is inherently propagandistic.

Shawn Parry-Giles (2000), for example, explored news-media’s role in selecting, distributing, and circulating visual rhetorics for women in politics. Though not couching her work as an intersectional study, she examined the overlap of television news practices with image-making. The latter occurs linguistically as well as visually. As Parry-Giles (2000) explained, news-media rely on short-cut characterizations (descriptive phrases, for example) and visuals (e.g., selected images as stereotypes). Furthermore, she said, audiences often mistake

performed, heard, and/or seen “live” events as if they were witnessing them firsthand instead of through a complex infrastructure that comprises the economics-driven “medium” that “the” media uses to deliver these messages.

For example, over Hillary Clinton’s career (Parry-Giles referred to her as HRC, as many news-media and pundits did at the time), major broadcast networks “promulgate[d] the stereotype that powerful women are to be feared” (2000, p. 207). In a 1996 broadcast by CNN, host Bernard Shaw led with a pithy comment about “modern” first ladies, saying: “They don’t bake cookies anymore” (Parry-Giles, 2000, p. 207). Parry-Giles emphasized that Shaw’s words were accompanied by images that portrayed HRC negatively, employing “cultural” clichés about a woman’s proper place (in the kitchen or “behind” a powerful man). That is, news-media implied, through the combination of visuals and wry words, that a non-cookie-baking woman like Clinton was suspect at best. Then and now, such media framing reinforces but also co-constructs double binds by using gendered language and images; for example, Elizabeth Dole “is high heels above the rest,” a short-cut description that evokes an image of high-heel shoes and, thus, signals “feminine” (Parry-Giles, 2000, p. 206). Media framing is rhetorical.

Most relevant to my study, Parry-Giles (2000) outlined how news broadcasts routinely exceed the alphabetic through such tools as selective (and ultimately rhetorical) camera angles, proxemics, and editing. Most influential in terms of selectivity, she said, are “the *visual* choices made by television news organizations” (emphasis added, 2000, p. 210). Parry-Giles noted extensive use and re-use of images of HRC giving her Wellesley commencement address, compared to an almost total absence of images showing her career achievements or other

“positive attributes” (p. 211), and—on the other hand—a plethora of negative images, such as a silent Bill Clinton juxtaposed with HRC (2000, p. 211). Parry-Giles (2000) also pointed out that “live” footage is quickly archived, available for use by future journalists, but typically used out of context “for a new story” (p. 212). She called this re-use “visual recontextualization” (2000, p. 213).¹² Without historical and situational contexts, in other words, images tell a story chosen by others and mediated through the news-media ecology. What Parry-Giles did not as successfully emphasize is that this male-owned, male-controlled “media” is also White. This point is even more true today: As of 2019 Pew Research calculates that there are 100 Black newspapers in the United States; only one of them has a circulation greater than 50,000, and its reach is not national (Atske et al., 2019).

(Black) Herstory and News-Media

To counter the absence of Black news-media on the U.S. national stage, I considered historical-recovery projects that recenter the perspective on women of color and their relationship to audiences who have been predominantly White. I begin with Shirley Wilson Logan (2004). She explored the effect of the “white gaze” on Black bodies, particularly the 19th century activist and public speaker Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Like Parry-Giles, Logan was concerned with the mediation of a woman’s performances, but Logan emphasized more explicitly who is watching and who is in power: White people’s reports of Harper’s speeches focused on the Black woman’s tone, demeanor, and delivery rather than her message; these White audiences were “fascinated with the articulate Black body” (2004, p. 25). In other words,

¹² Two decades after Parry-Giles’ work, internet-distributed memes extend this process as “remix.”

Harper's contemporary critics maintained a White "gaze" that was overly focused on visual and aural modes rather than how those modalities harmonized with linguistic communication; this focus on the visual-aural was divorced from rhetorical substance.

Logan also remarked, "Nineteenth-century audiences generally had difficulty separating how women spoke from what they had to say" (2004, p. 30). This problem was exacerbated in Harper's case because she was Black and thus subject to stereotypes of the time, such as the mothering but emasculating Mammy. To counter these stereotypes, Logan said, "The prevailing view was that Black women had to project an ethos of respectability when addressing members of the alleged cult of true womanhood" (2004, p. 32). "Respectability" was code for "proper" English, heterosexual norms, and demonstrably middle-class values. Yet when Black women projected this ethos, they were (and still are, Logan said) accused of "acting White." Thus, their alphacentric message was effectively silenced in the public/political sphere.

Logan also connected 19th-century reporting with 21st-century commentary of women in politics, such as longtime The New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd saying "[Hillary Clinton's] laugh is the sexiest thing about her" (2004, p. 30). Here, Dowd used an aural-visual reference to imply that Clinton is decidedly not sexy (i.e., she is not feminine, with her oft-lampooned laugh representing the closest she gets). Logan's observation confirmed Anderson's (2011) argument about the "pornification" of women running for (and holding) public office (aka "MILF" Sarah Palin). Logan also dealt, albeit by implication, with the distribution and circulation of reports about Harper, including the activist's own privately circulated letters about those public reports. Logan implicitly assumed that rhetorical circulation, in this case, contributed to the White-gaze representations of Harper.

A century later, the White gaze still matters. For example, Tammy L. Brown (2008) also explored image-making and multiple communication modes, in relation to Rep. Shirley Chisholm. Although Brown's essay is more biography than analysis, she reflected on how Chisholm (not unlike Michelle Obama, as detailed by Howard [2018]) was well aware of how different audiences viewed her in the 1970s. Chisholm herself, in an infamous 1971 speech, had commented that Black men were "sensitive about female domination ... [and were often] running [her] down as a bossy female, a would-be matriarch" (Winslow, 2018, p. 1018). Winslow (2018) argued that Chisholm was well aware, in short, of the Mammy stereotype and the degree to which its common use highlighted misogyny within African American communities. In fact, to become the first Black woman in the House of Representatives, Chisholm defeated a Black Republican (James Farmer) who ran, in her own words, on a "'Black Power' masculine iconography ... [with] sound trucks manned by young dudes with Afros, beating tom-toms: the big, black, male image" (Winslow, 2018, p. 1018). What interests me, in these examples, is the interplay of words and visuals, as well as the self-awareness that women like Chisholm possessed with regard to these blended, intra-active modes.¹³ Brown (2008) also noted that news-media covered Farmer's campaign far more extensively than hers and that he was significantly better funded. Pulling from Herman and Chomsky (1988), I surmise that part of the issue is news-media's money game; that is, news-media cover the events and people most likely to help

¹³ Gilyard and Banks (2018), incidentally, say that a key feature of Black feminism is "the self-conscious verbal assertion of requisite Black female presence" (p. 61). "Self-aware" may have been a more neutral choice of terms for this description.

their organizations make money, and the best-funded campaigns have the resources to be(come) more visible to news-media.

When Chisolm bid to become the Democratic party's nominee for president, Brown (2008) said, these kinds of gendered-racist, sexist-racialized problems persisted. CBS anchor Walter Cronkite, for example, reported that Chisholm just "became the first black person to run for 'the highest office in the land'" by "throwing her 'hat, rather bonnet' into the presidential race" (Brown, 2008, p. 1014). Cronkite's tongue-in-cheek language is gendered and seems raceless on the surface, Brown said. However, it does have a racial hint. First, Chisolm herself was strategic about the different elements of her identity, linguistically and visually. That is, Chisolm emphasized "femaleness" with women, "blackness" with African Americans, and her second-generation-immigrant status with immigrants. Chisolm's signature wigs, for example, "evoked images of Motown music industry 'girl group' glamour—like the elaborate wigs worn by Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, Florence Ballard, and later members of the Supremes" (Brown, 2008, p. 1021). Brown noted that television characters of the day wore similar wigs or hairstyles, from Louise (aka "Weezy") in *The Jeffersons* (1975) to Willona on *Good Times* (1974). (Both these mother/wife characters were almost always the most sensible and good-natured adults in the household; on the more negative side, they were quintessential but modern Mammys, per the BCPP.) Hence, Cronkite's "bonnet" reference suggested these fictional, Black mothers. Brown also said that when Chisolm ran to become the Democratic party's presidential nominee, "her self-presentation characterized her as part of a slightly older generation's approach to black

consciousness and feminism at the time” (2008, p. 1023). In other words, Chisolm created an image of respectability.

Expanding the historical scope but dealing more explicitly with images, politics, and circulation, Ana Stevenson (2018) combined historical recovery with rhetorical analysis in her study of 19th- and early 20th-century, women’s suffrage postcards. Both suffrage supporters and opponents used postcards—the internet memes of the day, said Stevenson—to circulate images and messages about the people and ideas involved in the movement. Unfortunately for supporters, she said, the negative postcards that countered them were well-funded by suffrage opponents and newspapers of the day (the latter also distributed editorial cartoons that were overwhelmingly negative). The anti-suffrage cards were “commercially profitable” and well-designed, whereas those that cast such suffragettes as Cady Stanton in positive ways were often lackluster, high handed, and stuffy. For example, negative portrayals tended to use suffragette’s first or married names, a feminizing but ultimately subordinating practice still seen today in references to “Hillary” when Trump has been more commonly referred to by his last name (Stevenson, 2018, p. 161).

Similar to themes addressed in this study and by other scholars, Stevenson (2018) also pointed out a key sign of a historical, “rhetorical rift central to the history of American feminism”—the almost total absence of people of color in pro-suffragette postcards, despite the contributions of women of color like Harper or Ida B. Wells (p. 160). The persistence of this rift, said Stevenson, can be seen in Clinton memes that highlight her connection with such suffragettes as Susan B. Anthony but fail to mention Mary Church Terrell, Nannie Ellen

Burroughs, and many other women of color who pushed for women's right to vote. Nonetheless, the most extensive scholarship concerning women in U.S. politics has focused on Hillary Rodham Clinton, or HRC.

HRC and “The” Media

The sources reviewed in this section examine, briefly, the nexus of Hillary Rodham Clinton (HRC) and news-media. Looking for perspectives with little to no influence by news media, political strategists, pundits, or the candidates themselves, for example, Brent J. Hale and Maria Elizabeth Grabe (2018) examined visual rhetorics about Clinton and Trump's respective 2016 presidential campaigns as they appeared and were discussed on Reddit. This online forum is driven, arranged, and controlled by users and their interests rather than news-media and mega-media conglomerates like Fox or CNN. In particular, Hale and Grabe (2018) tracked and analyzed headlines and visuals used on separate Trump and Clinton subreddits (individual discussion forums). I discuss their methods in more detail in the next chapter. The key point here is that Hale and Grabe pointed out the well-documented genderization of U.S. political parties (Republicans as masculine, Democrats as feminine); a general neglect of scholarship on the affect of images on audiences or voters; and news-media's “culling and framing” of events (2018, p. 449). That is, similar to Parry-Giles, Hale and Grabe explained that “on any given day, journalists select a small number of occurrences from a nearly infinite number of possibilities and call it news” (2018, p. 452). This selective process is a key part of media rhetorics, which construct United States presidents as White and male. However, independent of news-media, subreddit users—predominantly White men with some college education—portrayed Clinton

largely in masculine or gender-neutral terms (p. 465). Even her supporters, said Hale and Grabe, created headlines or shared images that portrayed Clinton as “a unidimensional masculine leader” and “suboptimal” candidate in the 2016 election (2018, p. 465).

Mary Anne Taylor and Danee Pye (2019) analyzed the 1992-2016 evolution of Hillary Clinton’s image on 30 covers of *Time Magazine*. At the time of their study, this publication was the most circulated weekly in the world, with 3 million copies distributed every week (propagation and profit-driven indications, per Herman and Chomsky [1988]). Taylor and Pye used political and visual rhetorics as their primary lens, arguing that Clinton’s “mediated image is perpetuated as a threat to political hegemony” (2019, p. 807). That is, over time, various images of Clinton—from first lady to diplomat to senator to presidential candidate—move from positive to negative visual rhetorics, demonstrating how inherently gendered (i.e., sexist) media coverage shapes a female candidate’s image. By “the media,” Taylor and Pye (2019) meant the companies, reporters, editors, and infrastructure involved in the production of news and entertainment. “The media,” they argued, citing Kathleen Jamieson’s (1995) work on double-binds, “ultimately reinforces normative and status quo discourse, which inherently privileges political men” (Taylor & Pye, 2019, p. 808). Taylor and Pye (2019) also cited several sources in visual rhetorics, notably Cara Finnegan’s (2008) notion of “image vernaculars,” that is, “an audience’s rules, codes, and strict prescriptions for interpretation ... guided by an ideological and hegemonic framework governed by shared iconic images” (p. 810). An image of a pair of high heels, for instance, is “seen” or “read” as female. In Helmers and Hill’s (2008) schematic, “heels” function as an image-evoking interpretant.

Like the previous sources, Ben Wasike (2019) scrutinized a site of political activity (Donald J. Trump and Hillary R. Clinton’s 2016 town-hall debate), with a focus on performance as multimodal messaging. Wasike used content analysis, coding for such variables as facial expressions, eye contact, and spatial distance. The latter is particularly relevant for town-hall debates, which allow candidates to move around the stage rather than remain behind a podium. Wasike (2019) also pointed out that gender bias with regard to clothes, facial expressions, and other cues is well-established in scholarship. For example, “People who smile elicit from audiences, perceptions of competency, friendliness, approachability, and altruism ... [they] are more persuasive when they smile” (Wasike, 2019, p. 253). Notice that Wasike referred to “people” who smile; female candidates—who are often told to smile—encounter Anderson’s likability paradox; increased likability makes them less electable.¹⁴ Wasike (2019) nonetheless argued that Clinton’s performance generally “adhered” to gender norms but in some cases “transcended” them. That is, an “expansive posture” (taking up more space or extending the limbs by raising the arms or gesturing away from the body) demonstrates confidence and dominance; such poses are male-centric (p. 258). Clinton used such postures far more often than Trump, defying gender norms. Wasike’s work relates closely to Seiter and Weger Jr.’s (2020), providing useful definitions and explanations of nonverbal communications.

Epilogue: Common Ground(s)

I have covered much ground in this chapter, introducing scholars, concepts, methods, and definitions that figure in subsequent chapters. Black feminism, for example, challenges the perspective of mainstream feminism, which often focuses on sexism while ignoring race and

¹⁴ See Anderson (2020) for a more recent discussion of persistent, related paradoxes for female candidates/politicians.

class. Women and (vice) presidential rhetorics pose similar challenges in 20th- and 21st-century political rhetorics, but—informed by Black feminism—can be seen as compounding such paradoxes as female candidates’ “likeability” and “competence.” Both these areas of my literature review surface the persistent rift between Black and mainstream feminism. News-media rhetorics (a term I prefer to media framing) explores how common practices and circulating reports co-create paradoxes and reinforce a political culture that (to date) has made it almost impossible for a woman to become president in the US. With these tensions in mind, I explored a general lack of but increased attention to modes and media in politics, the role of news-media in the US. political ecology as well as gender-race issues, and the importance of acknowledging the different experiences of women of color in public forums (Astor, 2020). In the next chapter, I turn to the methods used for gathering data and determining the case studies that I interrogated.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND DATA SETS

Prelude

My research questions concerned the circulation of nasty-woman rhetorics during the study period, and my methodology weaves womanist/Black feminist perspectives with ANT. Therefore, I sought signs of movement, exchange, and transformation in the rhetorical ecology, which Gries (2013) called “discourse in motion” (p. 333); I also sought signs of counter-movements, particularly at the intersections of gender, race, and (vice) presidential rhetorics. My research questions were:

- 1) What nasty-woman rhetorics circulated during the fall 2020 election season?
- 2) What strategies, events, and related rhetorics influenced the circulation of nasty-woman within the rhetorical ecology?

I sought answers initially by tracing major events and themes during the study period but also by seeking the countermoves that push against nasty-woman rhetorics, disrupt their flow, or chart new discourses altogether. Using a variety of tools, I designed the study to move from macro to micro, from a birds-eye view to on-the-ground perspectives for closer inspection. I collected an initially large data set, for example, but in a sequence of steps I narrowed my focus first to key rhetorical moments (i.e., meaningful high-activity themes and events during the time period), then to a few weeks that were most active during the full study. In this chapter, I outline those steps, identify key rhetorical moments, preview initial results, and relate the process to the womanist-ANT framework described in the first chapter.

I began my study by observing and annotating news activity as it was happening during the final months of the U.S. presidential election cycle: August 1, 2020 through February 1,

2021. ANT is useful in seeking such a perspective because it calls for “following the actors,” which in this case include events like the joint Biden-Harris interviews; news-media that report or comment on events and individuals; social-media feeds (primarily #nastywoman); and human agents such as Harris and Trump. A womanist framework, however, questions what surfaces, where, how, and why—especially in terms of gender and race. With this blended method/methodology in mind, I began observing approximately 2 weeks leading up to Biden announcing Harris as his pick for vice president. My goal was to identify sites, activities, themes, and actants relating specifically to nasty-woman rhetorics and Kamala Harris. This goal reflects ANT’s “following” practice, but it also captures “rhetorical exchanges ... in real time” (McHendry et al., 2014, p. 294). For example, I watched Biden’s August 11, 2020, announced selection of Harris as his running mate on television and tracked responses that occurred that day. This journalistic, real-time practice was paramount, given the possibility that tweets might be deleted, news-media often revise or correct initial reports, and my study hinged on capturing rhetorics in action, as they moved (or did not).

Therefore, like a journalist covering a “beat,” I used a mix of tools to observe, annotate, cross-reference, sort, and verify. This approach situates the researcher in the field, not just as an observer but (in this case) as a consumer of news while news-media, political pundits/strategists, and many others actively covered what was happening or being talked about. In other words, I scanned and gathered a bricolage of broadly defined texts, looking for signs that nasty-woman rhetorics were circulating in the ecology during a specific time period. In a way, I also played the role of news junkie. This approach, in other words, embraced the research as remix, that is, as the process of “sampling, borrowing, and creatively re-assembling units of cultural information in order to create something” (Markham, 2013, p. 7). The researcher/remix-artist undertakes this

process to make sense of what is being studied, then to share this finding (this remixed knowledge) with others. For this chapter, I describe the observing and collecting steps I undertook; comment on key moments in the activity flow (i.e., the initial data sets); and discuss early analysis that led to the closer inspection that I perform in the next chapter.

As I planned this work, I anticipated one of the common difficulties in circulation studies: Rhetorical ecologies, which Collin G. Brooke (2009) described as “vast, hybrid systems of intertwined elements” (p. 28), are by definition large and complex systems within which agency and activities are distributed and disbursed; therefore, they can be difficult to track. For example, in a study first presented at the 2018 Carolina Rhetoric Conference, researcher Tharaa Bayazid reported that she had identified 12 key activists advocating for Saudi Arabian women’s right to drive; for *one* of those activists, Bayazid (2018) tracked almost 40,000 tweets and retweets in a 2-week period in 2017. Not restricted to the vastness of Twitter, however, my study crossed media and modes as I tracked events involving Harris and/or nasty-woman rhetorics from August 2020 through February 2021. I anticipated, therefore, that my initial data sets would likely be large and, as such, difficult to analyze. For comparison, Michelle Lockhart (2013) limited her primary texts to two vice-presidential acceptance speeches from 1984 and 2008, respectively: Geraldine Ferraro’s and Sarah Palin’s. While Harris gave such a speech during the Democratic party’s virtual national convention, my task involved tracking the responses, redistribution, and remixes of multiple texts at key moments of discourse, from media headlines to tweets to YouTube clips, during a months-long election season. Tracking was the first stage of the project; the second phase involved narrowing my focus to the key activities identified in the first stage; the final stage was analyzing those key activities. Therefore, in practical terms, I knew from the start that I would need to narrow my focus after the full study period ended.

Despite the potentially large initial data set, I decided not to constrain the study during the fieldwork stage; that is, although I had a journalist's hunch about who/what/where the key assemblages were or would be, and what events or activities were likely to spark rhetorical activity, I wanted to avoid prejudging or pre-determining those assemblages and activities. An ANT-like, initial wide-lens perspective mitigates this concern (Gries, 2013; Markham, 2013). Likewise, as Gries also explained, "A big data set is necessary so researchers can identify patterns and trends in an image's shifting form, medium, genre, location, collective engagement, and consequentiality" (2013, p. 339). For example, Anderson (2011) assembled a bricolage of texts as case studies for her study of pornification in the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign; she noted that this assembled collection was a way to access and assess the field of discourse, what she might describe as the context of the rhetorical situation.

Furthermore, I view rhetorical situations as fluid, with elements less discrete; thus, I accepted a high level of ecological "messiness" while gathering a large data set that included tweets and headlines, televised debates and op-eds, left-, center-, and right-leaning news-media. Fleckenstein et al. (2008) cited sociologist and devil's-advocate to ANT, John Law (2004), when they commented,

if researchers wish to understand a world (or an activity in the world) that is complex and messy, 'then we're going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practice, to relate, and to know in new ways'" ([Law, p.] 2), in ways that are complex and messy. (p. 391)

In addition to large data sets, in other words, I deduce from Fleckenstein et al., researchers need to think in ecological, relational terms without pre-categorizing the subject under study. The first step is observation and description.

There were several positive results achieved by taking this ecological approach during the study period:

- 1) I gained a sense of the range of rhetorical activity happening during the study period, particularly with regard to nasty-woman rhetorics;
- 2) I observed a decline in nasty-woman rhetorics over time, as well as a surprising absence at some sites; and
- 3) I identified themes and points of increased activity during the study period.

For example, points of heightened activity centered around these events in 2020: Biden announcing Harris as his choice (August 11), Harris giving her first post-announcement interview (August 12), the two candidates giving their first joint interviews (August 21), Harris and Pence debating each other (October 2020), and Biden-Harris performing their respective inauguration speeches (January 20, 2021). Initially, I used Trump's labels as working themes to gauge activity around them, primarily "nasty" and "monster." In the following subsections, I outline specific methods that led to the identification of these moments in the timeline.

Stage 1: Collecting Data

Headlines

Early in the study period, I became interested in headlines—the titles of content produced, published, and distributed by media companies/platforms. I interpreted these headlines as sites (locations) of rhetorical activity, signs of activity, and activity drivers. Therefore, I manually checked the websites of individual news-media¹⁵ at least once per week. The primary

¹⁵ As noted in Chapter I, rather than use the problematic terms "media" or "mainstream media," I use "news-media" to refer to print newspapers and magazines, broadcast and/or cable companies, and online-only platforms. Also, I do not italicize individual news-media, which are typically just one public-facing aspect of large, complex companies.

sites visited were chosen for their national or international prominence in U.S. political discourse during the study period, and in alphabetical order:

- 1) ABC News (broadcast news, rated “Middle or Balanced Bias,” “Reliable for news, but high in analysis/opinion content” in Ad Fontes Media’s *Interactive Media Bias Chart* (n.d.)
- 2) Breitbart (online news, rated “Skews right,” “Some reliability issues and/or extremism” by Ad Fontes.
- 3) CNN (television broadcast channel and online news site, rated “Skews left,” “Most reliable for news” by Ad Fontes.
- 4) Fox News Network (television broadcast channel and online news site, rated “Skews right,” “Some reliability issues and/or extremism.”
- 5) The Hill (online news, rated “Middle or Balanced Bias,” “Most reliable for news.”
- 6) NBC (television broadcast channel and online news site, rated “Middle or Balanced Bias,” and “Most reliable for news.”
- 7) The Guardian (U.K.-based online newspaper, with a U.S. site, rated “Skews Left,” “Most reliable for news.”
- 8) The New York Times (U.S.-based online and print newspaper, rated “Skews left,” “Most reliable for news.”
- 9) The Washington Post (U.S.-based online and print newspaper, rated “Skews left,” “Reliable for news, but high in analysis/opinion content.”
- 10) USA Today (U.S.-based online and print newspaper, rated “Middle or Balanced Bias,” and “Most reliable for news.”

Less commonly, I also visited other news-media whose reports showed up in periodic Google searches (see below), such as The Christian Science Monitor, BuzzFeed News, MSNBC, The Indian Express (a publishing company based in India), and The St. Louis American (based in Missouri, it is the largest African American newspaper in the US). I copied headlines and links into a Word document in which I manually cataloged individual articles I might wish to return to later. For each article, I included citation information (author, if any; publication or other source; date; URL); I also added a brief annotation that summarized the article, noted its relevance to my study, and/or excerpted a brief passage. For example, shortly after the election, The Christian Science Monitor reported via the Associated Press, “Harris to make history as a Black, South Asian, female vice president” (Ronayne, 2020); I added a comment, in brackets to distinguish it from content cited in the article: “one of the few publications to cite her full identity in headline.” After the study period ended, I migrated these headlines, citation information, and comments to an Excel spreadsheet for coding, sorting, and annotating.

Google Searches

To extend my observations beyond manual scouting of headlines and articles, I used Google during the study period. As Annette Markham (2013) explained, this powerful, ubiquitous search engine “selectively presents us with results based on a complex (and often hidden) set of algorithms” (p. 7). Google distills the innumerable online content that relates to the parameters of a search; however, its black-boxed algorithms remix the content, ostensibly returning the most popular and/or the most search engine-optimized (SEO) findings. Subsequently, popularity and “gaming” of SEOs skew search results. Therefore, Google is not an unbiased source (Hillis et al., 2013; Noble, 2018; Segev, 2010). Nonetheless, it is useful for gaining an overview of popular topics circulating in public discourse at any given time.

Google searches are also never the same from one search to the next, even when identical search terms are used. Markham (2013) said that Google searches are, in ANT terms, “temporary assemblages” (p. 7), that is, an ephemeral collection of activity, humans, and nonhumans. These inherent conditions and qualities make Google both valuable and problematic for scholarly research. Two Google searches done on two different dates and/or different times for “nasty woman,” for example, would return similar but far from identical results; the assemblages would be different. Researchers looking for consistent, repeatable, absolute results would be disappointed; but researchers looking for contextualized results would be rewarded with a useful snapshot of internet activity taking place at the time of the search, or the change over time.

With these aspects in mind, during the full study period, I ran periodic, manual, Google searches for “nasty woman AND Kamala Harris,” “nasty woman,” “Kamala Harris,” and “Kamala Harris: nasty woman.” I also ran less frequent searches for topics that arose during the study period, such as “Kamala Harris: monster.” I also set Google alerts, which report search results automatically on the schedule set by the user (e.g., daily or weekly). With both manual and automated searches, I had the following goals in mind:

- 1) To capture popular, recent, and otherwise prominent content related to nasty-woman rhetorics and Kamala Harris.
- 2) To capture similar content that I may have missed during manual searches or scans of specific news-media sites and/or headlines.
- 3) To gain an overall sense of trends, themes, and tropes.

For example, a Google search I performed on September 2, 2020, for “kamala harris [sic]: nasty woman” returned 1.6 million results, but I was most interested in the top listings, which included such headlines as The Washington Post’s “Trump hurls his ‘nasty’ insult as a new target in

Kamala Harris” and, from The Indian Express, “‘Nasty’, ‘Mad Woman’: A look at what Trump has said about [Harris].” Knowing that searches done later would produce different results, I took screenshots of first-page listings. An August 12, 2020, screenshot, for example, displayed the top Google search results for “kamala harris: nasty woman,” yielding such headlines as “Trump hurls his ‘nasty’ insult at a new target in Kamala Harris.”

Live Events

During the study period, I also watched live, broadcasted events related to Kamala Harris, including, but not limited to:

- 1) Individual interviews broadcast by various networks
- 2) Joint interviews with Joe Biden, broadcast by various networks
- 3) The Democratic party national convention, broadcast by various networks August 17-20, 2020, with a focus on Harris and Biden’s respective acceptance speeches
- 4) The October 7, 2020, Harris-Pence vice-presidential debate, broadcast by news-media
- 5) The Biden-Harris inauguration, televised live by multiple networks on January 21, 2021

During each of these live or broadcasted events, I took notes that closely resemble those I had taken as a reporter. For example, during the Biden-Harris interview with Muir (2020), I jotted about “Qs [from the interviewer] about Biden’s age,” remarking, “he laughs, big smile—[says it’s] appropriate to ask anyone over 70 about [their] ability (mental) to serve [as president].”

Knowing that later I could access a transcript of the broadcasted interview, in my notes I focused on my initial reactions to multimodal aspects that are often excluded from such texts, such as Harris’s facial expressions when responding to questions.

For interviews, debates, and inauguration speeches, I supplemented this work by gathering transcripts. News-media typically make them available within 48 hours of the broadcast, and the texts are reasonably accurate. For example, USA Today published the vice-presidential debate on October 8, 2020, one day after the event took place. My primary purpose in gathering transcripts was not to analyze the linguistic aspects of Biden or Harris's performance but to ensure accuracy if I needed to later quote them or match spoken words to nonverbal gestures, postures, and/or vocalics.

Tweets

Social-media platforms like Twitter provide users and observers with a window into discursive, dynamic systems via hashtags. Ephemeral in nature, tweets show multiple conversations in action; by tracking them, I enjoined a key goal of ANT: “the potential of [observing] many things going on at the same time” (Moberg, 2018, p. 31). Twitter—at once a medium, interface, and network—offers this perspective in real time as events happen. Furthermore, Edwards and Lang (2018) suggested that hashtags are “vibrant, circulating, and affective topoi: on-the-move places to be tapped into, appropriated, and spread further, gaining resonance or not by virtue of a complex entanglement of many temporal and material forces” (p. 123). That is, hashtags categorize and gather ideas, people, and events; they function as nodes in a wider discursive network; but they also gain rhetorical consequences and affects over time.

Hashtags also are/become assemblages by which participants group topics, interact with each other, and make/exchange meaning. Edwards and Lang (2018), for instance, spoke of the #YesAllWomen hashtag that started after Elliot Rodgers killed six people in 2014 in a misogyny-fueled rampage in Isla Vista, California. The #YesAllWomen thread, they argued, became an “activist hashtag assemblage made up of many lively actors” (Edwards & Lang, 2018, p. 119).

The hashtag created/became a rich site for discourse, in other words. So, too, are the #nastywoman hashtag and threads like #monster or #BidenVP. Discourse in the latter hashtag, for example, showed comments made before and shortly after the mid-August 2020 announcement of Harris as his running mate. I had several goals in this tracking:

- 1) follow hashtags, people, and events I had identified early in, or during, the study as sites of, but also drivers of, circulation in the nasty-woman ecology;
- 2) identify moments of heightened activity related to news, commentary, or events related to Harris; and
- 3) track discourse that was largely outside the influence of news-media.

Each goal entailed a set of assumptions and procedures. For Goal 1, for instance, I had identified the #nastywoman hashtag as a site of activity and an assemblage, as defined by Edwards and Lang (2018). That is, long after introducing #nastywoman in 2016 in response to Trump calling Hillary Clinton by that label, Twitter users were still using the hashtag in 2020, albeit not at the peak levels of 2016. In relation to my research questions, I hypothesized that this feed would be reinvigorated after Trump called Harris nasty and that, if so, it would likely show rhetorical circulation in relation to the nasty-woman ecologies; that is, by tracking Twitter activity, I fulfilled Goal 2. More particularly, I wanted to see if #nastywoman activity increased, decreased, or remained static in relation to inflection points such as Biden's initial announcement and Harris's debate with Pence. I discuss my findings more fully in the next chapter. As for Goal 3, I took a cue from Hale and Grabe (2018), who tracked and coded Reddit topics related to Trump and Clinton during the 2016 presidential election. Reddit, they argued, provides a "unique opportunity" to observe groups "relatively isolated from supporters of the opposing candidate, and unobstructed by campaign handlers or media professionals (e.g., journalists and editors)"

(Hale & Grabe, 2018, p. 450). Reddit, in other words, is an independent, user-generated platform. The Twitter platform, likewise, provided an opportunity to track movement less influenced by news-media (though not entirely, since most if not all news-media reporters and pundits post tweets).

I also considered that hashtagged feeds form their own, often large, ecologies. To assist with managing potentially large sets of tweets, therefore, I used the Twitter platform to monitor live feeds and identify related hashtags and key agents; and I gathered hashtagged feeds via Twitonomy, a web-based analytics tool that I had used for previous research into Trump's "fake news" rhetorics. For this study, I found Twitonomy easy to use and an inexpensive, practical way to download tweets and export them to searchable, sortable spreadsheets. Another reason for using Twitonomy was that NVivo's tweet-gathering tool, NCapture, was not fully functional on Mac computers, which I used. Furthermore, I did not intend to use these analytics for a detailed, quantitative study of individual hashtags; I used them to gain an overview of the movement of nasty-woman rhetorics in public discourse during the study period.

On Twitter, I focused on Trump as an activity nexus in the system, Harris as both subject and agent, and hashtags such as #nastywoman as activity sites. I used Twitonomy to assist with this process. Twitonomy also highlights what Bayazid (2018) described as "network density and centrality" (para. 2). Until Twitter disabled his feed, for example, Trump reached millions of followers, and millions more by tweet and retweet, exponentially. Agents like Harris are also close to the nodes or centers of activity. Twitonomy provided real-time analytics on agents' reach and centrality, which helped me visualize the flow and volume of activity within a hashtag feed and in relation to an individual like Harris. In Figure 3, for example, Twitonomy analytics (Twitonomy, 2020) showed a decline in #nastywoman tweets in early September 2020. While I

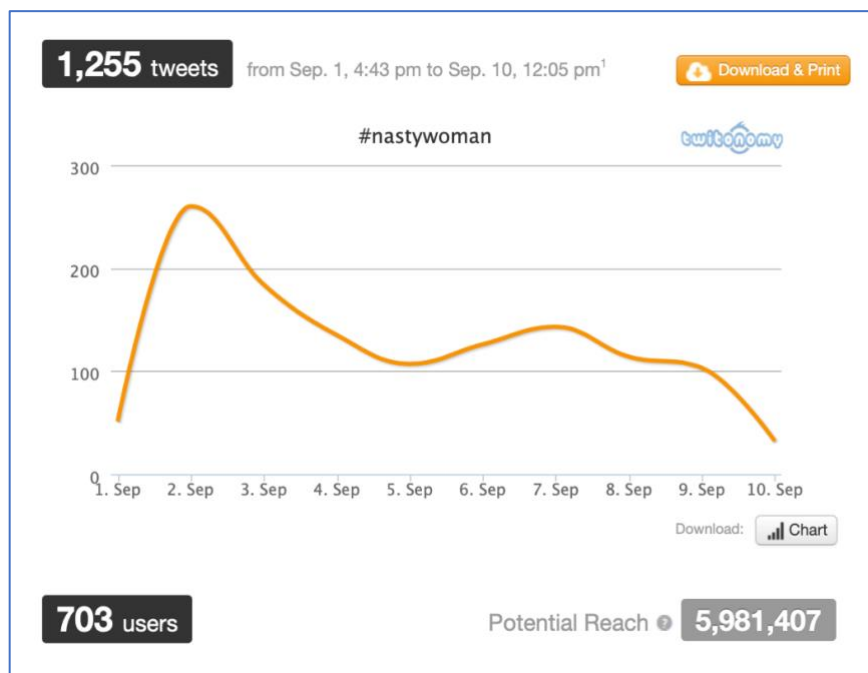
exported feeds via Twitonomy biweekly during the study period, I used Twitter to follow hashtags, people, and events more frequently, setting activity alerts that allowed me to note changes in the flow of Harris-related discourse on this social-media platform. In short, I tracked Twitter feeds in order to gain a sense of the discursive ebb and flow in relation to individual hashtags but particularly #nastywoman as they correlated to key people (e.g., Kamala Harris) and/or events (e.g., a joint interview in which the candidates were asked about Trump’s nasty-woman comments).

Note. (Twitonomy, 2020)

Stage 2: Initial Coding and Sorting

Figure 3

Declining Traffic for #nastywoman, September 1-10, 2020



First Phase Coding

As explained by Miles et al. (2014), first-phase coding can be as simple as a single word or a phrase that describes a data set. The goal is to identify or classify the text(s) being coded (Miles et al., 2014). For example, as I gathered headlines, screenshots, and Twitter data, I sorted and categorized these sets as a first step toward identifying rhetorical moments.

- Level 1: creating descriptive folder names, such as “Kamala announcement” or “Kamala monster”
- Level 2: categorizing folders a step further to identify the source or type of data (events, themes, activity sites/nodes)

As the study period unrolled, this sorting made clear that some themes, events, and activity sites/nodes were denser than others. In the next chapter, I unpack these findings.

In this set of processes, I applied multiple coding and/or sorting phases. First Phase coding can be as simple as a single word or a phrase that describes a data set. For example, as Gries (2013) sorted Obama Hope iterations into data folders, she tagged them in several ways, such as “parody,” “commodification,” “location,” “genre,” “media,” and so forth (p. 340). Such tags, as a type of coding, classify the texts being collected (Miles et al., 2014). As I gathered screenshots, Google-search results, and tweets, for instance, I sorted them into folders that I named descriptively in relation to events or themes, such as “monster,” “interviews,” “acceptance,” and “nasty.”

Second Phase Coding

In Second Phase coding, researchers revisit, reconsider, and otherwise refine the process. This phase leads to more-detailed categorizations, adjustments in data-gathering methods, the identification of themes and patterns, and (for this study) a closer look at short time periods

within the six-month window initially studied. I considered coding styles such as *in vivo* (which uses the participant's or source's own words), process (which considers action, interaction, and consequences), and values (which considers attitudes, values, and/or beliefs). Most of my initial coding followed *in vivo* patterns, beginning with coding for “nasty,” “communist,” and “monster,” which were labels used by agents like Trump in the rhetorical ecology and echoed by reporters, talk show hosts, and many others. In terms of coding processes, I made initial, summarizing passes through what I was collecting (open coding), considered the relationships between those initial codes (axial coding), then considered core variables (selective coding). After reviewing initial folders and naming conventions, for instance, I subdivided them into new categories: events (e.g., the Democratic party convention), labels (e.g., “nasty”), and sites (e.g., Breitbart). Once I had identified key rhetorical moments during the study period, I made a first pass at another level of coding, based on Ridolfo and DeVoss (2009): identifying texts as positive, neutral, or negative. I also began to consider where/how these themes and events intersected with race, gender, and (vice) presidential rhetorics.

All phases, but particularly the second phase, included reflective coding, such as jottings (similar to marginalia) and analytic memoranda (“narrative[s] that documents the researcher's ... thinking processes about the data” [Miles et al., 2014, p. 95]). Memos, for example, can be particularly useful for coding “first thoughts,” that is, my initial responses to observed video, photos, audio, and performances like debates or speeches. Approximately twice per month during the study period and in the months following the study period, I wrote memos and what I called “Research Reflections.”

These jottings produced different yet productive results. My memos, for example, typically provided project updates, notes about challenges encountered, or annotations of recent

readings or events; reflections were less formal and included early hypotheses. On September 3, 2020, I reported the folder-making process referenced earlier in this section, commenting,

As expected, Twitter and media coverage are greatest during major news events, such as Biden's mid-August selection of Harris, their first joint interview, Harris's 'pre-buttl' speech during the Republican's national convention, and so forth.

My reflections were typically less formal: I commented on events or trends I had observed, hypothesized about the early results of the study, posed questions to pursue, suggested additional readings, and so forth. On October 1, 2020, I wrote,

[A]t least two phenomena are at work here: a) The v.p. [sic] never gets the kind of attention the presidential candidate does. (See scholarship on the "role" of the v.p. candidate). [And] b) Trump's [actions] continue to dominate the 'air' waves.

In this passage, I was considering why news-media coverage of Harris's activities was at best nominal in October 2020; and I suggested additional reading, which led me to revisit Bostdorff's (1991) essay on the comedic drama that vice presidents play a role in.

As Miles et al. (2014) explained, all "[c]oding is analysis" (p. 72). Analysis is also an act of coding. Johnny Saldaña (2021), a co-author for Miles et al. (2014), later remarked, "Coding is not a precise science; it's primarily an interpretive act" (p. 7). Coding, however, is a first and often recursive step toward analysis. Memoing and reflective coding, in particular, support the goal of moving beyond sorting and toward exploring the data as completely as possible. Coding also adds transparency to the research process, which is critical for feminist-based methodologies but also a productive way to discover what underlying, evolving tropes circulate within a rhetorical ecology, how they circulate, in what direction, and with how much speed (i.e., their rhetorical velocity, per Ridolfo and DeVoss [2009]).

Stage 3: Advanced Coding and Sorting

Nexis Uni

While Google searches and manual headline scanning were useful during the study period (August 2020-February 2021), I needed a more robust tool once I had identified ebbs and peaks in rhetorical activity. I turned to Nexis Uni, an academic database that boasts access to “17,000 news, business, and legal sources” (LexisNexis, n.d.). This database, which was initially launched as an online source of legal documents and cases, allows users to narrow searches by date ranges and individual publications; also, searches can be saved as part of the user’s “history.” Nexis Uni also allows users to download results, albeit with limits. For example, a December 5, 2021, raw¹⁶ search for “Kamala Harris AND nasty” returned 3,546 results; a more general search for “nasty woman” returned more than 10,000 results. In either case, Nexis Uni allows downloading up to 100 full articles or 1,000 listed results (metadata only, such as headline, publication date, and source). As with Google, users can search using natural language or Boolean formats, but the ability to narrow results, save them as spreadsheets, and get a visualization of results was helpful. For example, each search revealed a clear and downward trend in “nasty” in connection with Harris.

To overcome the download limits, reduce the data sets to more manageable sizes, and identify the case studies I would analyze most closely, for each search I narrowed the date ranges and introduced exclusion/inclusion parameters. I narrowed the dates based on observations, first phase coding, Google searches made during the study period, and initial (but broad) Nexis Uni

¹⁶ By “raw,” I mean that the time frame was open to all dates and duplicates were not grouped (i.e., the number of results included duplicate items, such as a copy of an article shared within a news-media network).

searches. For example, my first Nexis Uni search revealed that there had been little news-media coverage of Harris in the weeks leading up to Biden announcing her as his running mate, but there was a steep rise afterward. Nexis Uni allowed me to narrow the search to a 2-week period (1 week prior to announcement and 1 week after). By exclusion/inclusion parameters, I mean that Nexis Uni allows users to exclude or include individual people, publications, geographic locations, and so forth. When searching for “Biden’s pick for vice president,” for example, I got more than 10,000 results from Nexis Uni. I scanned the drop-down list under “people” for these results, chose “Kamala Harris,” and thus narrowed the results to 916.¹⁷

ProQuest: News and Newspapers

In a process similar to the Nexis Uni searches, I used ProQuest’s database of news and newspapers to acquire credible, stable results that would confirm (or not) my sense of the trends and themes in nasty-woman rhetorics during the study period. As with Google and Nexis Uni, I began with general searches then drilled down into targeted searches. For example, a general search for “Kamala Harris” as the subject, in ProQuest terms, returned more than 4,500 results when expanded beyond news/newspaper subscriptions supported by my current institution. A narrower search for “Kamala Harris AND nasty,” but with no specified date range, returned over 1,200 results, with the greatest activity in August 2020. Narrowed further to the date range of August 1, 2020-February 1, 2021, a new search returned half that number of results (in ProQuest grammar, this search was [(su(Kamala Harris) AND nasty) AND pd(20200801-20200201)]). All searches showed “nasty woman” references declining over time. Using *in vivo* terms (those used

¹⁷ I also selected the option to remove duplicates from the “Kamala Harris” sublist; this option made a difference of almost 100 results, from 1,012 to 916.

by news-media, Trump, politicians, pundits, strategists, allies, critics, etc.) I ran similar searches for Harris and “mad woman,” “communist,” “liberal,” “socialist,” “Black,” “multiracial,” “African-American,” “Indian,” and “historic.” I discuss the results and their implications in subsequent chapters.

NVivo

I mention here a powerful qualitative tool that I decided against using for this study: NVivo. This tool relies on processes very similar to those explained above for Nexis Uni and ProQuest, such as using search terms to “capture” a Google page. NVivo, however, provides robust tools for assembling a collection of data, coding it, and analyzing it. It also enables the researcher to import Word and Excel files directly from Microsoft Office. This file-integration tool allowed me to import some spreadsheets and documents I had created during the study period, such as spreadsheets created via Nexis Uni. However, one of its most powerful functions, NCapture, was, and remains, incompatible with Apple Mac computers, which I used. NCapture can perform a screenshot of a Google search page, for example, and add such data to a project. As mentioned earlier, I took screenshots of Google searches throughout the study; in retrospect, I wish I had used NVivo from the start, for cataloguing, filing, and early coding. I also exported tweets via Twitonomy but discovered later that those spreadsheets are somewhat incompatible with a work-around for NCapture’s incompatibility with Macs. On the other hand, after setting up an add-in that integrates Microsoft Office files with NVivo, I was able to upload a Nexis Uni-generated spreadsheet for a search. Unfortunately, the NVivo interface or view of this file proved hard to read; in my opinion, it was not as useful as the Excel spreadsheet itself. When I also considered the constraint of having to do much of my NVivo work on campus, I decided not to use this tool.

Stage 4: Themes, Trends, and Time Periods

As this study progressed, I reminded myself of the research questions with which I opened this chapter: These questions concerned the circulation of nasty-woman rhetorics over time, across multiple sites, and in relation to multiple themes. For example, I was curious about how far, where, and how long Trump's August 2020, "nasty" comment traveled (the vectors of its rhetorical velocity); beyond the initial utterance, "nasty" echoed in headlines and tweets, with the most active periods centered around events such as candidate interviews but tapering off after a few days. I had assumed the presence of nasty-woman rhetorics, but I questioned how active these rhetorics were in political discourse from August 2020-February 2021, where they were most active (or not), and what implications I could draw from tracking them.

Rather than focus on individual events, speeches, headlines, or tweets as individual texts to be analyzed, I attended to rhetorical moments that occurred during the study period—a specific sequence of events, speeches, headlines, and tweets, or these activities in relation to one another. An event or speech may be a nexus or generator of reports and responses, for example, but is not a case study in the sense, say, that Lockhart (2013) analyzed two distinct speeches (the acceptance speeches of Ferraro and Palin). My "case studies" are better thought of as temporary assemblages in which meaning is concentrated for a period of time, in a certain place (e.g., a point in history or a digital space like Twitter), and in relation to particular culture(s) (the intersection of gender and race with U.S. politics). As seen in the next chapter, for example, I narrowed my focus to approximately 1 month of the time period: July 31, 2020-August 28, 2020. This time period was the most active during the final 6 months of the U.S. presidential election season. Within that shorter period, I identified three distinct types of events and rhetorical activity: pre-announcement (July 31-August 11, 2020), announcement (August 11-18, 2020), and

post-announcement (August 19-31, 2020). These time periods center on Biden's August 11, 2020, announcement that Harris was his pick for vice president. I saw various types of rhetorical activity linked to this event, from pre-announcement depictions of Biden's selection process in horse-race terms to counter-rhetorics that pushed against Trump's "nasty" comments. The next chapter explores such themes, trends, and time periods.

CHAPTER IV

MOMENTS OF ABSENCE, PRESENCE, AND OUTRAGE

In comparison with other gendered and/or raced groups, Black women tend to go both unnoticed and unheard.

—Julia S. Jordan-Zachery, 2018

Prelude

As noted in the first chapter of this project, from August 2020-February 2021, nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to Kamala Devi Harris ebbed and flowed as they circulated in public discourse, but ultimately these rhetorics declined over time and, in some news-media and social-media ecologies, were absent. For example, repetition of and response to Trump calling Harris nasty in August 2020 was prevalent and circulating on left-leaning news-media sites but minimal and sometimes absent on centrist sites like USA Today and right-leaning sites like Breitbart. On the other hand, in social-media feeds, support for Harris was often muted by outrage at Trump's racialized labels; Harris was made absent by the overwhelming presence of this outrage, which circulated nasty-woman rhetorics in ways that right-leaning and centrist news-media sources did not. Meanwhile, counter-rhetorics somewhat diffused racist/sexist Trumpisms like "nasty" or "mad woman" but ultimately did not circulate in the rhetorical ecology. To rearrange the claim made at the start of this chapter: Entangled with racial and gendered tropes, nasty-woman rhetorics persisted, moving from presence to absence, and/or from absence to presence during the study period. An approximately 1-month period in this study's time frame supports my claim.

Discussion 1: Absence and Presence

First, consider these notions of absence and presence. Absence, whatever the visible cause, is rhetorical in its epideictic function; that is, it may describe the limited presence of

women of color in national politics, but it also re-inscribes their absence as a cultural norm and a political constraint. When White suffragettes made Black women go to the back of the march, they made them absent from the larger argument, both physically and rhetorically. Also, by focusing on women's right to vote, White suffragettes absented Black women and all women of color, because the unspoken but present conclusion was that by women they meant (and their audiences understood) White women. Furthermore, absence differs from silence, and absence is a kind of presence. In the next few pages, I unpack these notions but also complicate them.

A good place to begin is with Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969/2006). They explained "presence" as an "essential element in argumentation" (p. 117); it is necessary data selection or sifting of facts and ideas that benefit the argument at hand. That is,

the preoccupation of the [rhetor] is to make present, by verbal magic alone, what is actually absent but what [they consider] important to [their] argument, or, by making them more present [through selection or emphasis], to enhance the value of some of the elements of which [the audience] has actually made conscious. (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969/2006, p. 117)

In other words, rhetors explicitly name examples, people, places, events, words, and images to make the not-present (i.e., absent) element(s) present to their audience. The subtlety of that last phrase ("has actually made conscious") refers to the audience completing the presence in their own minds. Furthermore, what is present is "overstated," said Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969/2006); that is, what is present, rhetorically, becomes more than what is absent.

Their example is a Chinese story about a sacrificial ox, in which the king takes pity on the ox (which he sees before him) and commands that a sheep (which he does not see before him) be substituted. In the story, the sheep is absent (not seen) but still very much part of the

argument. That is, the sheep's absence is itself a presence. The king's logic seems to be that what is absent (the sheep) is less important than what is present (the ox). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969/2006) added that what is present is, in this process, "overestimated" (p. 117); it is made more present, thus more important. On the other hand, if I am following their Zen-like argument, if the king had remained silent while watching the ox, he would be making an act of rhetorical admission, that is, conceding the ox's fate. Rhetorical silence, then, is a kind of absence, too; it is an intentional absence, not a simple or accidental absence. Alan G. Gross (2005) tried to untangle these notions of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969/2006), describing presence as a "rhetorical effect, the ways speakers and writers focus the attention of their audiences on those aspects of their subject that are most likely to promote the case they want to make" (p. 5). To create presence, Gross (2005) explained, rhetors can also focus attention through verbal magic or introduce a real object that is the thing or represents the thing.

Pulling these ideas forward, absence/presence relates to (non) circulation—the play of movement and no movement. Circulation is a kind of presence; non-circulation is an absence. Of course, Chris Mays (2015) pointed out that even when there appears to be no movement in a rhetorical ecology, there is. Rhetorical effects that he called "stubbornness," "stability," "blockage," and "feedback loops" may seem static in terms of circulation but they actually function, actively, to sustain the system; they do (rhetorical) work; they move in order to stabilize the system (paras. 6-7). Circulation is seemingly absent but is actually present. Catherine Chaput (2010) used a more complex argument but arrived at a similar point, using the "transhistorical and trans-situational exchanges" of rhetorical meaning-making that contribute to the persistent resonance of the U.S. Confederate flag (p. 14). In other words, meanings circulate and evolve across situations and through history. Another way to think of absence comes from

Grant Cos and Kelly Norris Martin (2013). They argued “that what is absent from a rhetorical statement provides more meaning, in some instances, than what is stated and present in the situation” (Cos & Martin, 2013, p. 1699). The absent elements come to carry more weight in many arguments, and—most importantly—these elements carry forward to new arguments. They circulate.

To support this point, Cos and Martin (2013) discussed multiple instances occurring in 2012 of an empty chair, hung from a tree, symbolizing (Black) President Barack Obama as simultaneously absent/present and lynched. Absence in these displays, Cos and Martin explained, became the “verbally unspoken” argument (2013, p. 1692). In other words, audiences filled the absence in an enthymemic sequence or logic (e.g., Obama is Black; bad people like Blacks get hanged/lynched; Obama should be hanged). Furthermore, as Cos and Martin (2013) made clear, the empty hanging chair also references actor-director Clint Eastwood’s monologue featuring an unoccupied chair at the 2008 Republican National Convention; Obama’s presence was assumed, perhaps by the power of Eastwood’s acting ability but more likely from verbal magic, such as references to Obama and gestural communications. In any case, the subsequent visual of an empty chair hanging from a tree built on Eastwood’s unstated premise that Obama was an “insubstantial” and “inconsequential” leader (ideas that play on his physical absence from the chair), and—key to the hanging/lynching premise—the absent Obama is a Black man. The chair was a proxy for his presence. According to Cos and Martin (2013), the lack of a stated, circulating argument or key element becomes the argument.

However, this becoming creates a sort of paradox. The rhetors who staged the displays could (and did) claim that race had no part in why they hung an empty chair from a tree; they said they were not actually hanging Obama (or urging others to do so). Meanwhile, left-leaning

audiences could (and did) interpret the dangling chairs in no other way than racist. Douglas Burger and Kathryn Maxwell, for example, both claimed they hung an empty chair from a tree in their respective yards so that no one would steal them; no “racial overtones” were intended, they insisted, though Burger’s chair included a “Nobama” sign (Cos and Martin, 2013, p. 1689). On the other hand, *Texas Monthly* writer Sonia Smith (2012) cited Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center,¹⁸ who said, “To me, this [hanging empty chair in Austin, Texas] is just one more manifestation of racially-based hatred against our first black president. ... I don’t see how you can dismiss the racial message of lynching a symbol of the first African-American president.” Different audiences responded very differently to the displays, and so did news-media reporting on the events. In this chapter, these thoughts and examples inform my examination of similar paradoxes of absence and presence involving racialized, gendered labels for Harris. In some of these paradoxes, outrage played a role in absenting Harris from the argument.

Discussion 2: Remixing Rhetorical Moments

Putting absence and presence aside for a moment, however, rhetorical ecologies can be vast and their circulating texts difficult to trace. This project’s collected, available data sets were thus very large, even for 1- and 2-week time frames explored within the six-month study period. Therefore, I narrowed my focus to a few early weeks in that time frame, sampling data subsets that are neither exhaustive nor definitive but nonetheless provide a clear picture of nasty-woman

¹⁸ The SPLC is a nonprofit organization that specializes in civil rights and public-interest laws, policies, and litigation. SPLC also tracks hate-groups in the United States.

rhetorics. The act of sampling is a remix (or what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca [1969/2006] might call an intentional selection of data; that intentional selection makes the data present).

In the next sections I explore this data in relation to rhetorical moments of absence/presence and (non)circulation of nasty-woman rhetorics. In my samples, I focused on news-media headlines, accompanied by Twitter activity. Through this sampling, I paid closest attention to August 2020, which was the most active month during the study period. At the end of this chapter, I zoom out, discussing my findings but also setting the stage for the final chapter. In particular, I examine data subsets that circulate unspoken yet present arguments. In the final chapter, I discuss the implications and note opportunities for future exploration.

First, samples helped surface rhetorical moments in which race and gender in U.S. (vice) presidential politics intersect and intra-act. By rhetorical moments, I mean points of heightened, meaningful activity during the study period. By intersection and intra-action, I refer to layered, dynamic rhetorical effects for which the elements are often not discrete as they meet, combine, overlap, and depart (similar to Jenny Edbauer's [2005] assertion that elements of any rhetorical situation "bleed" into one another, or Rachel C. Jackson's [2021] "transrhetoricity ... [defined as] ... the changing dynamics of the rhetorical process across networked sites" [p. 79]). Such effects and moments center around connected events, from Biden announcing Harris as his choice in mid-August 2020 to a sequence of individual and joint interviews that were broadcast about a week later.

To better track circulation over time, I grouped events chronologically into pre-announcement, announcement, and post-announcement periods. Pre-announcement activities included the media buzz leading up to Biden's announcement (i.e., what news-media and Twitter users called "the veepstakes"). Announcement activities included news- and social-media

coverage of Biden's publicized selection of Harris, Biden and Harris's respective statements, and Trump's "nasty-woman" utterance. Post-announcement activities included coverage of such events as individual and joint interviews with the candidate, the Harris-Pence debate, and the election itself. Rather than examine all these events individually in this chapter, I sampled the week prior to announcement and the following 2 weeks, which proved the ripest with rhetorical moments and rhetorical circulation during the entire study period.

Data from these active weeks highlighted three aspects of nasty-woman rhetorics that were in play during the election:

- 1) talk of race was muted when not omitted;
- 2) Black women's responses were all but ignored in mainstream as well as right-leaning news-media; and
- 3) Harris and related counter-rhetorics were made absent by such factors as outrage aimed at Trump, the subsumption of the vice president in relation to the presidential candidate, and declining media coverage of Harris-related events.

For example, on August 6, 2020, a "We Have Her Back" letter (TIME'S Up Now,¹⁹ 2020b) and video (TIME'S UP Now, 2020a) called on reporters, editors, and publishers to refrain from racist and sexist language in reporting on election events and people, but neither counter-rhetoric was well reported. In fact, it was largely absent in news-media coverage during the pre-announcement period. This absence foreshadowed similar rhetorical activities observed later in the study period. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969/2006) might call this phenomenon a

¹⁹ Founded in 2018 in response to the #MeToo movement, TIME'S UP Now addresses gender discrimination, including domestic and sexual violence.

“negative ... aspect” of presence, though I suggest this absencing does not have to be “intentional suppression,” as they define the concept (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 118). Omission, whether accidental, incidental, or intentional on the part of news-media, becomes absence.

Also, when considered as a whole within the ecology, themes, trends, and events comprised a single case study viewed over a 6-month period; separately, they manifested nasty-women rhetorics at particularly active points in time and in relation to Harris. As mentioned earlier, Rachel C. Jackson’s (2021) transrhetoricity is useful here, for the notion of “multiple lines” intersecting and “pluriversal rhetorics” (p. 79). That is, rhetorics occur simultaneously at multiple, layered, complex sites. Jackson (2021) used this perspective to analyze Oklahoma’s first state flag—a red one that reflected a complex history of usage involving indigenous rhetorics in Indian Territory, tenant farmers, Black freedmen, White progressives, and socialism. But, as Jackson explains, the flag “is actually confederate ... represent[ing] the way in which white supremacy, like a virus, lurks in even our best intentions to disrupt and eradicate it” (2021, p. 81). Relating the flag’s transrhetoricity to this study, we might say it circulated as an image and a meme (which both distributed and accumulated meaning); at each point, its meaning changed, the deeper meaning there but almost forgotten—absent at times, but always present. Nasty-woman rhetorics moved in similar ways, often cloaked but almost always present.

Discussion 3: (Trans) Rhetorics on the Move

For this study, the trans-rhetorical thread is the evolving simultaneity of Harris and “nasty” across sites and over time. Each event, theme, or trend featured Harris in a central way, even when she was absent from the conversation. Nasty-woman rhetorics traveled with her, at least from one perspective. Therefore, like rhizomes connected by an underground root system,

these rhetorics helped trace discourse over time and distance at varying velocities. For each event, therefore, in this chapter I outline the terrain from which they emerged or did not emerge (that is, not static contexts but ongoing discussions of the time) and the aftermath (that is, the direction and content of circulating discussions after an event, if any). The first criterium for each event was Harris's involvement; the second was the activity level (i.e., the rhetorical circulation). For example, before and after each major event, I considered whether Harris was mentioned and, if so, how she was described. I also used Trump's labels as *in vivo* codes to gauge activity around each event, primarily "nasty" but also "monster" and "mad woman."

Such labels intra-act with racist tropes that are often unspoken (absent, but nonetheless very present to audiences on the left and right). By intra-act, I draw most directly on Laurie Gries (2013), who explains the entanglement of seemingly discrete elements in evolving rhetorical situations. For Gries (2013), this transformation explains never-ending iterations of the Obama Hope poster. For me, this entangled becoming helped explain the fluidity and dynamism of nasty-woman rhetorics during the study period. The entanglement begins in enthymematic fashion: Black women are not simply depicted as nasty but also as savage, brutal, Others; they are especially nasty; they are monstrous. "Nasty" and "monster" in relation to Harris, in short, hinged on audiences' implicit knowledge of the BCPP of deviance and monstrosity that Alexander-Floyd (2007) outlined.

To explore this undercurrent, I traced signs and repetitions of nasty-woman rhetorics over time and at a variety of sites, primarily online at news-media platforms and on the social-media platform Twitter. This ANT-like process surfaced movement, exchange, and/or transformation over time. In other words, this tracing surfaced rhetorical circulation, which illuminated not just absence/presence but a similar concept that Michael Calvin McGee (1990) called an "'invisible

text’ which is never quite finished but constantly in front of us” (p. 287). That is, texts are not singular distillations but evolving discourses finished by audiences (or not finished). Nasty-woman rhetorics often move under the surface, finished by Trump, amplified by news-media, and moderated by counter-rhetors like the “We Have Her Back” advocates. Nasty-woman rhetorics are continually remixed. As mentioned earlier, this TIME’S UP message was distributed but not well reported during the pre-announcement period, which I discuss in the next section. In subsequent sections, I explore such texts in the context of three key time periods: pre-announcement, announcement, and post-announcement.

Analysis 1: The “Veepstakes” (Pre-Announcement)

Overview

Earlier in this project, I outlined a short history of nasty-woman rhetorics, particularly in relation to female (vice) presidential candidates in the U.S., but in this section, I explore the days between Kamala Harris’s July 31 speech to the Black Girls Lead 2020 Leaders Conference and Aug. 10, 2020 (the day prior to Biden’s announcement that she would be his running mate). Those days are characterized by speculation that news-media and social-media alike called “the veepstakes.” I focused primarily on news-media headlines and Twitter activity that followed the conference but preceded the announcement; this activity included key aspects of the “veepstakes” speculation in general and Harris more specifically. In other words, I sampled activities that contextualize but also foreshadow several trends that continued to circulate during the full study period.

First, a review of the months leading up to this period provides useful context. Speculation began as early as March 2020, for example, when Biden won major primaries that all but sealed his nomination as the Democratic party candidate for president. After winning big

in the South Carolina primaries in late February, Biden declared during a March 2020, CNN-Univision Democratic party debate that his “administration [would] look like the country, and [he would] ... pick a woman to be vice president” (Sullivan, 2020). Biden’s announcement was sparked, in part, by the changing dynamics of the primary season and recognition of women’s key role(s) in the Democratic party.

At the time of the March debate, however, five of the record six women running for the Democratic presidential ticket had already dropped out; and shortly after the debate, Rep. Tulsi Gabbard dropped out as well (Rakich, 2020). Harris, notably, had suspended her campaign much earlier, dropping out in early December 2019 (Wilson & Easley, 2019), which was, incidentally, 6 months after the first time Trump called her “nasty” (Kelly, 2019). By June 5, 2020, news-media were proclaiming that Joe Biden had “clinched” his party’s nomination for presidential candidate well ahead of the party’s national convention, to be held in August that same year, and women in the party were increasingly calling on him to keep his promise (Khalid, 2020). By the end of July 2020, speculation had intensified and included demands that Biden pick a woman of color (Graham, 2020). On July 31, 2020, the oft-described “top contender” Kamala Harris gave a speech to the Black Girls Lead 2020 conference.

Artifact 1(a): Present and Absent Headlines

One data set epitomized the veepstakes period: a Nexis Uni search for “Biden AND running mate” (July 31, 2020-August 10, 2020).²⁰ I will refer to this as NU Search 1 or NU 1. The last day of July 2020 was a good starting point for this search because, on that day, Harris

²⁰ A larger data set, based on an open-dated Nexis Uni search for “Biden’s pick for vice president,” returned more than nearly 5,000 news articles, opinion pieces, and blogs. I ran similar search terms for the study period but settled on NU 1 because of how well it represented data I saw in the larger searches.

spoke at the Black Girls Lead conference. In her speech, Harris—considered a frontrunner for running mate—addressed publicized criticism from high-ranking Democrats that she was “too ambitious” to be a good fit for the job. An all-too-common description of women in politics, “too ambitious” was frequently attached to Black female candidates in 2020, especially Harris and fellow “veep” candidate, Stacey Abrams, who had run unsuccessfully for governor of Georgia. In words that were posted via Twitter but not well-reported in news-media, Harris said, “There will be a resistance to your ambition, there will be people who say to you, ‘you are out of your lane’” (Wright, 2020; Moreno, 2020). I interpreted her speech as counter-rhetorics and questioned its circulation during the pre-announcement veepstakes period, hence the inclusion of July 31, 2020, in the search parameters.

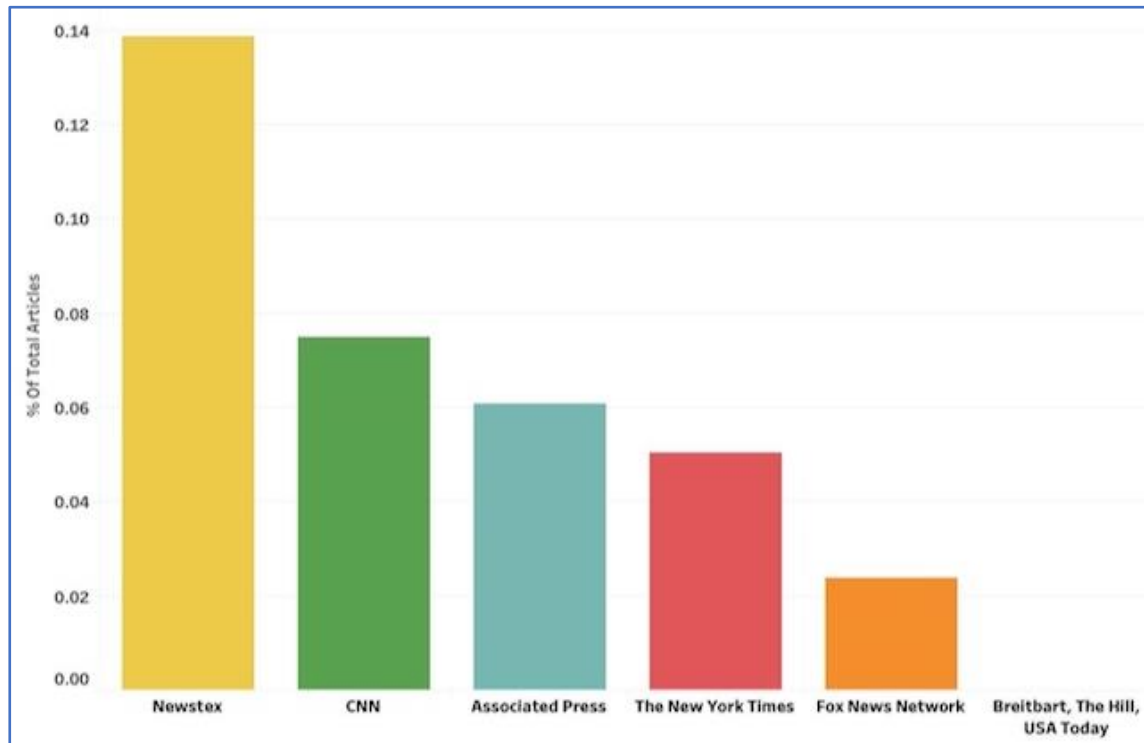
NU Search 1 yielded 1,132 results from news-media and news-blogs²¹ from around the world, but none of them referenced Harris’s July 31, 2020, public appearance and statement. The focus was, instead, on Biden. The Associated Press led the results when sorted chronologically, such as these July 31, 2020, headlines: “Joe Biden’s search for a running mate enters final stretch.” Second on the list, blogger Jake Lahut (2020) contended, “Kamala Harris is reportedly losing favorite status in the tumultuous Biden veepstakes. Here’s why.” These examples epitomized much of the Biden-centered reporting, which clearly linked to his March 2020 promise to pick a woman as a running mate (891 of the articles referenced Biden). Much of the Harris-centered reporting (n=309), on the other hand, portrayed her as the “frontrunner” or “favourite to be his No 2 in the White House” (Allen, 2020). Both threads portray the selection

²¹ Nexis Uni includes Newstex “blogs” in its news-media database. Newstex is a syndication service that curates and aggregates blogs and news posts that have been vetted. For example, small news-media platforms like Axios publish short reports that often surface via the Newstex service, but so do individual bloggers like “Doktor Zoom.”

process in horse-race terms (e.g., “final stretch,” “veepstakes”), but a less apparent trend is the absence of Harris-related coverage (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

News-Media Distribution in NU 1



Note. In this representation of Nexis Uni Search 1 data, the conglomerate category for multiple sources (Newstex) exceeded Harris-related coverage by major news-media such as CNN and Fox News Network. However, major news-media coverage was dominated by left-leaning platforms (CNN, Associated Press, and The New York Times). Right-leaning Fox News Network produced a significantly smaller subset of Harris-related coverage, while Breitbart, The Hill, and the centrist USA Today produced none. Adapted from Nexis Uni search yields

For example, within NU 1, no reporting that matched the search parameters (i.e., including Harris *and* “running mate” in the headline or text of the article) came from far-right news-media Breitbart, right-leaning The Hill, or the centrist USA Today (owned by Gannett, one of the largest media companies in the US). Meanwhile, right-leaning Fox News Network²² produced a mere 27 of the 1,132 stories. In fact, Fox reported less than 10% of the top-four news-media listings surfaced in NU 1, about half the reporting done by left-leaning The New York Times (n=51), about one-quarter the reporting produced by left-centrist source, CNN (n=113),²³ and slightly more than The Associated Press (AP), a centrist source (see Figure 4).

While it exceeds the scope of this study to determine the cause of NU 1’s absent or zero results, I offer a few initial thoughts. First, as all news-media do, The Hill, Breitbart, and USA Today all respond to money and audience. That is, Herman and Chomsky (1969/2006) established that media corporations are driven by profit, controlled by wealthy owners/shareholders, and supported by banks, other major corporations, and the wealthy elites who run all of them. In the case of The Hill, Fox, and especially Breitbart, their owners and their target audiences are conservative White men. Not surprisingly, watchdog organization Ad Fontes Media thus rates Breitbart as significantly biased and unreliable; The Hill as reliable but right-leaning; and Fox as somewhat reliable but also right-leaning. During the 2020 election season, these news-media’s attention and perspective were not focused on Biden (a Democrat) or the women he might pick as a running mate. Their attention was on Trump, the Republican party,

²² Ratings are drawn from Ad Fontes Media’s (n.d.) *Interactive Media Bias Chart*.

²³ While Nexis Uni listed “CNN.com,” “CNN wire,” and “CNN transcriptions” as separate sources, I combined them into one. I also combined “The Associated Press” with “Associated Press International” and “The Associated Press State & Local Wire.”

and Trump's many public events. To further complicate this tendency, women are far less cited or reported on by all news-media, by a ratio of almost 3 to 1 (Stenbom, 2020). However, White masculinized partisanship and male-dominated reporting does not fully explain absent/limited coverage (i.e., limited or non-circulation) of nasty-woman rhetorics on USA Today or the AP. Perhaps both of these centrist platforms were cautious about repeating Trump's nasty-woman rhetorics; but by avoiding the nastiness, they amplified the already persistent absence of reporting about women in politics.

Discussion 1(a)

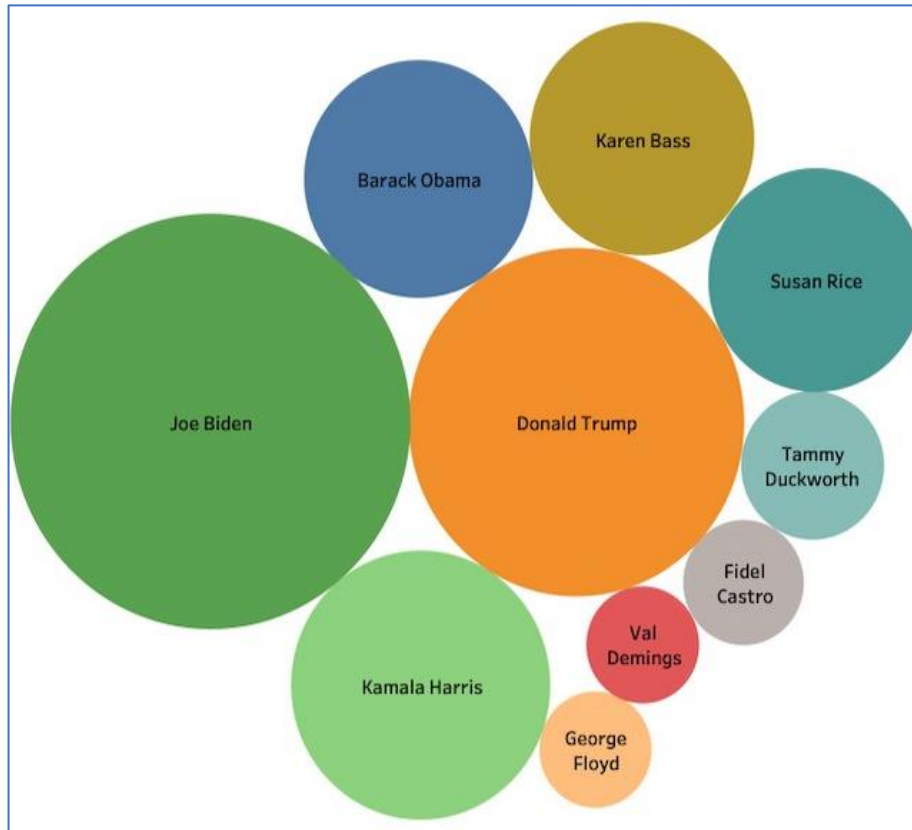
A Male-Tilted Field

To turn this thread back to NU 1, USA Today's lack of Harris-related coverage, whatever the underlying intentions and editorial choices informing that move, carried significant influence in the 2020 news ecology—much more so than Breitbart. Therefore, in terms of the paucity of veepstakes coverage by USA Today, the size and power of this Gannett-owned publication and its sister publications, which all share content, meant that what the company did not report mattered as much as what it did report. I also add that editorial attempts to be or appear to be unbiased and nonpartisan often result in diminished coverage by news-media such as USA Today and AP (rather than show bias, many news-media choose not to report). That said, a Google search for “USA Today: Kamala Harris” and the date range August 1, 2020-February 1, 2021, showed that this Gannett-owned news-media outlet did cover Harris during the study period, albeit without linking her with such descriptions as “running mate,” nor was their coverage extensive. A scan of top articles suggests that most of USA Today's Harris-related coverage occurred after the election and after inauguration, and that few if any headlines included “nasty” in reference to Harris. In one sense, USA Today's coverage was positive rather

than negative or “nasty.” On another level, the paucity of coverage confirms male bias in the news-media (LaFrance, 2016; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020).

Figure 5

Male-Oriented Distribution of "People" in NU 1



Note. NU 1 data indicated a strong bias toward male-centered coverage during the veepstakes, rather than on the women considered to be top contenders for vice president on the Democratic party ticket. Sourced from Nexi Uni search yields

In any case, that circulatory, the epideictic process begins with initial reporting, such as coverage of Biden’s possible choices. From July 31, 2020, through August 10, 2020, the NU 1

results were somewhat evenly divided among those news-media that were indeed reporting the possibilities: More than a third of total reports mention Harris (315), followed by Karen Bass (242) and Susan Rice (214). Direct mention of Biden, on the other hand, was 799, a number supporting Bostdorff's (1991) argument that vice presidents become less and less visible in U.S. presidential elections; vice presidents become subsumed into the (White, masculine) presidency. Even former presidents and deceased foreign leaders will do, in terms of subsumption: Barack Obama was mentioned almost as often as Bass or Harris, and Fidel Castro popped into the mix, ostensibly because Bass had once visited Cuba (see Figure 5).

As noted earlier in this section, NU 1 also captures news-media's tendency to treat political topics in competitive, horse-race terms, which Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) describe as "focusing more strongly on the question of whether a woman candidate will stay in the race and what her chances are of winning the elections" (p. 118). Their meta-analysis of multiple studies led them to conclude, among other findings, that horse-race terms and metaphors are not unique to female candidates; however, women are assessed differently in the process—usually negatively, and almost always in ways that favor male candidates (Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020, p. 134). Similarly, Anderson (2017b) mentioned that competitive, sporting metaphors often morph into "war" or battle ones, a turn that rarely if ever benefits female candidates (p. 530). As Anderson (1999) has argued, for female candidates, battle metaphors help drive a tendency to portray them not as strong, potentially capable commanders in those battles (and the ones to come) but with words like the one that "rhymes with rich" or worse, if they seem competent at all (pp. 611-612).

Similar metaphoric turns show up in Twitter activity concurrent with NU 1, such as a retweeted response by political commentator Charles M. Blow (2020), who posted on July 31,

“Am I the only one sick and tired of the Biden VP guessing game? They’re all amazing. Pick one.” Blow (2020) was commenting on the intense speculation related to pressure on Biden to pick a Black woman as his running mate. That speculation sparked coverage of the top “contenders” in competitive terms, in effect “pitting women against one another” (Linskey, 2020). In a same-day retweet (see Figure 6), Trump Thoughts (2020) copied the common labeling for this adversarialization, calling it “the horserace.” In an example of this type of portrayal, as well as how fast and how far speculation traveled in a shared news-media ecology, a report by Reuters wire service named Harris as the “top contender” as of June 11, 2020 (Oliphant et al., 2020). France24, which self-describes as “an international news channel,” repeated Oliphant et al.’s Reuters report verbatim. Other horse-race coverage also portrayed the process as competitive yet behind-the-scenes, seen in such headlines as The New York Times’s “As Biden narrows list, the lobbying [by allies and contenders themselves] intensifies” (Martin et al., 2020).

Figure 6

Charles M. Blow Responds to the Veepstakes



Note. (Trump Thoughts, 2020)

(Back to) the Ambition Question

Another trend added a racialized element to horse-race coverage even when race is not explicitly mentioned, such as the pre-announcement focus on Harris as “too ambitious.” A ProQuest “News & Newspapers” search for “Biden’s running mate AND ambition” (August 1, 2020-August 10, 2020) yielded 43 results, most of them connected to reports that a top Biden advisor and top Democratic donor had referred to Harris as too ambitious. Kenetia Grant (2020), an associate professor of political science at Harris’s al mater, Howard University, pointed out in an opinion piece that such discussions were not being applied to White female contenders for vice president, such as Sen. Elizabeth Warren or Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. The differences, as I interpret Grant, were race and gender—compounded, intersected, and intra-acting. Grant argued that, contrary to the “too ambitious” attack, Harris and other women of color

would just be following a long tradition of White men who have preceded them in American politics. For example, in the lead-up to the 1956 election, John F. Kennedy campaigned harder and more explicitly than Stacey Abrams has this year to be named the vice presidential candidate on the Democratic Party ticket alongside Adlai Stevenson. (2020, para. 5)

Former vice presidents—all White men—had campaigned to become running mates and were open about their desire to be president one day (usually sooner rather than later); in fact, they were expected to be ambitious. But, as Grant (2020) also made clear, Abrams had publicly campaigned for the job, and Harris had been described as a rising star in the party and a top contender for the post. Both women were criticized for openly displaying ambition, and they were criticized in ways that White female “veep” candidates were not. The unstated, absent-

present argument is that, like Chisolm before them, Black women should stay in their place—supporting roles on the sidelines of the action and power.

Artifact 1(b): “We Have Her Back”

This too-ambitious, veepstakes type of coverage likely played a role in sparking a counter-rhetoric that was not well reported or circulated by news-media during pre-announcement: an open letter organized by a nonpartisan women’s organization (TIME’S Up Now, 2020b), which launched “We Have Her Back,” a campaign to support Black female candidates. A Nexis Uni search for the campaign (NU 2), using the date range applied for NU 1 (July 31, 2020-August 10, 2020), returned a mere seven results, only two of which reference the memorandum-style letter.²⁴ One listing, in fact, referenced a similar, but later, letter signed by 100 prominent Black men (Solender, 2020a). The men’s letter received more coverage and thus more circulation during the pre-announcement period.

On the other hand, the two listings that do not invisibilize women of color include a CNN podcast and a Newstex blog initially published by Axios, a small, online-only news outlet.²⁵ On August 9, 2020, for example, CNN *Reliable Sources* podcasters Brian Stelter, Hilary Rosen, and Jeffrey Toobin discussed the TIME’S UP Now letter (2020b) in terms of “mistakes” and “stereotypes” used by news-media when reporting on female candidates like Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin in 2008 but made more problematic in 2020 by racial stereotypes applied to the Black women that Biden was vetting for vice president. Stelter et al. (2020) also mentioned such

²⁴ A broader search for “TIME’S UP” or “We Have Her Back” (7/31/20-8/10/20) elicited 91 results, but most of the articles were off-topic, such as “Protesters to Israel PM: Your Time’s Up.”

²⁵ Axios is an online news outlet founded by former *Politico* reporters in 2017. Ad Fontes Media rates Axios as fairly balanced in terms of bias and fairly reliable—similar in fact, to USA Today. For comparison, Ad Fontes rates NPR News Now as very balanced and reliable, more so than the centrist AP, Reuters, USA Today, or Axios.

examples as a Facebook post that displayed Susan E. Rice's photo over a box of Uncle Ben's rice, accompanied by the words, "Uncle Bama's Dirty Rice ... Subversively Delicious, Every Time!" (Linskey & Stanley-Becker, 2020). The second article returned in NU 1 was written by Mike Allen of Axios (2020), who reported, "Media warned to watch stereotypes when covering Biden's female running mate." In what was possibly the first news-media reporting about the letter, Allen briefly summarized the letter, connected it with the "We Have Her Back" campaign²⁶, and provided a link as well as an embedded copy. I should note here that categorizing the letter as a "warning" cast a negative affect that suggests strong but emasculating women, which is a key feature of the "Mammy" trope in the BCPP.

The memo-style letter itself was published and distributed on August 6, 2020; it was addressed to "News Division Heads, Editors in Chief, Bureau Directors, Editors, Producers, Reporters, and Anchors" (TIME'S UP, 2020a). The more than 100 co-signers called on them, "the most powerful people in media, [to] stop and think about your role in perpetuating inequality and the opportunity you had to promote equality and simple justice with your reporting of the news" (TIME'S Up, 2020a). Not unlike Emma Gonzalez, a senior at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School who called "B.S." on news-media, government leaders, and the NRA after 17 fellow students were killed, the "We Have Her Back" signers called out news-media's "huge part in perpetuating sexist and racist tropes about the ambition, likeability, looks, or attitude of women candidates across parties, especially women of color" (TIMES UP, 2020a). The letter and video (TIME'S UP, 2020b) identified news-media as a source of and contributor to sexist and racist coverage of women candidates. However, news-media were slow

²⁶ Allen describes "We Have Her Back" as "a watchdog on coverage of the running mate."

to report the letter or video, or circulate either one by reporting on them, although another nonprofit organization, The Action Network, published a supportive and assertive letter online (2020) and tweeted about the call-out on August 10, 2020 (#WinWithBlackWomen²⁷). Action Network's (2020) open letter voiced support for "We Have Her Back," but expanded the audience beyond news-media and addressed the stereotyping problem directly:

Regardless of your political affiliation, whether it's the media, members of the vice presidential vetting committee, a former Governor, a top political donor, or a small town mayor: We are not your Aunt Jemimas. The use of the racist myth of a happy, Black servant portrayed as a happy domestic worker loyal to her White employer is not lost on us. While some of the relentless attacks on Black women and our leadership abilities have been more suggestive than others, make no mistake—we are qualified and ambitious without remorse. (para. 4)

This Action Network (2020) letter circulated as an online petition, but neither it nor the TIME'S UP letter (2020a) and video (2020b) circulated in mainstream news-media until after Biden announced Harris as his choice. In the next section, I address this subsequent activity as well as new rhetorical moments.

Analysis 2: "Historic" or "Nasty" (Announcement Week)

Overview

In this section, I discuss headlines and tweets that accompanied or quickly followed twin rhetorical moments that occurred on August 11, 2020: Biden's announcement that Harris would be his running mate and Donald Trump's "nasty" insult. This day, and the following week, were

²⁷ The @WinWithBlackWomen handle self-describes the authors as "a collective of intergenerational, intersectional Black women leaders throughout the nation making a difference!"

the most active in terms of nasty-woman rhetorics during the entire study period. To manage the potential for very large and unwieldy data sets, I sampled Twitter activity for one day (August 11, 2020), and I ran both ProQuest and Nexis Uni searches that started with broad parameters (e.g., “Kamala Harris,” with open-ended date ranges) but moved towards small yet meaningful data sets (Harris plus “nasty” in one-week and one-month date ranges).

Table 2

A List of Nexis Uni Searches

Search Name	Search Terms	Yield (in articles)
Nexis Uni Search 1 (NU 1)	“Biden AND running mate,” July 31-August 10, 2020	1,132
Nexis Uni Search 2 (NU 2)	“Kamala Harris,” August 1, 2020-February 1, 2021, (“People” restricted to Harris)	78,603
Nexis Uni Search 3 (NU 3)	“Kamala Harris AND nasty,” May 1, 2019-February 1, 2021	2,247
Nexis Uni Search 4 (NU 4)	“Kamala Harris AND nasty,” August 1, 2020-February 1, 2021	1,763
Nexis Uni Search 5 (NU 5)	“Kamala Harris AND nasty,” August 11-18, 2020	1,114
Nexis Uni Search 6 (NU 6)	“Kamala Harris AND nasty,” August 19-27, 2020	315

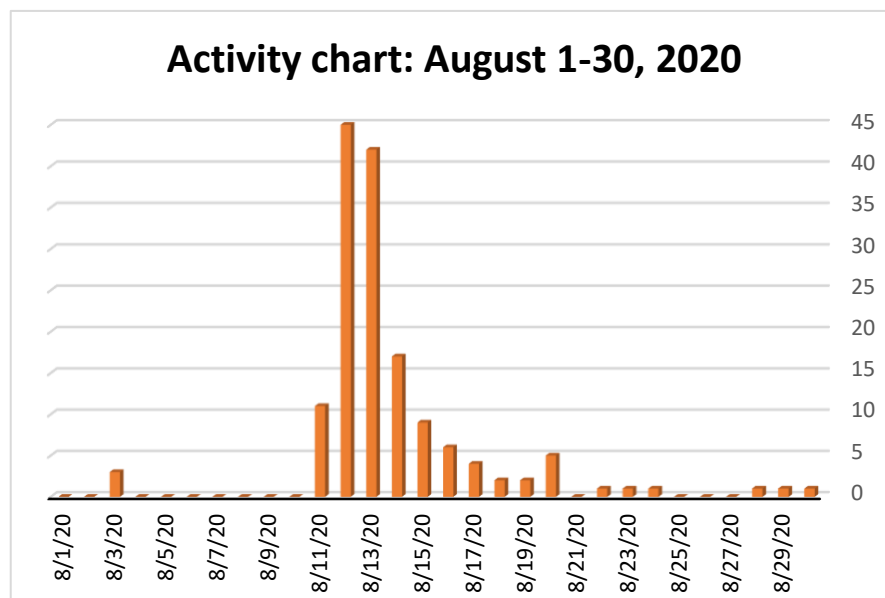
Note. Adapted from Nexis Uni search data

For example, a very broad Nexis Uni search (NU 2) for “Kamala Harris” for the full study period returned thousands of headlines and articles but exceeded the application’s download limits for full-content and list-only results. A narrower search for “Kamala Harris

AND nasty” (NU 3) dated May 1, 2019-February 1, 2021 (from Trump’s first “nasty” Harris comment to the end of the study period) elicited 2,247 results. Limiting this search to the project’s 6-month study period, I received 1,763 results (NU 4). All three sets exceeded download limits for full analysis (the limit for full texts is 100 articles and for headline-only listings 1,000); the results would have been unwieldy for manual coding. However, a Nexis Uni feature called “Timeline” displayed a rudimentary graph for each search, giving a useful visualization. In all three auto-generated graphs, the number of articles declined over time within the search parameters. That is, these searches support my claim that nasty-woman rhetorics declined during the study period.

Figure 7

"Nasty" Harris Activity in PQ1, August 2020



Note. Adapted from PQ 1 results

With similar search criteria, ProQuest provided a more detailed but limited view of these changes in circulation. For example, a search for Kamala Harris in the full study period yielded close to 4,000 results. Narrowing the search by adding “nasty,” I yielded 193 articles from newspapers, wire feeds, magazines, blogs, podcasts, and websites. Zooming in on August alone and using ProQuest’s timeline feature, I surfaced a steep decline after August 13, 2020 (see Figure 7).

However, ProQuest’s “News & Newspapers” database drew only on publications my current institution subscribes to; the top of that list is The New York Times, which Ad Fontes Media (n.d.) rated as left-leaning but reliable; therefore, results are somewhat skewed and non-definitive. However, a Nexis Uni search for “Kamala Harris AND nasty” for August 11-18, 2020, yielded 1,114 articles (NU 5), while an identical search for the following week (August 19-27, 2020) yielded only 315 (NU 6). A decline in news-media’s coverage of nasty-woman rhetorics was as clear in the more inclusive Nexis Uni searches (see Table 3) as it was via ProQuest.

Artifact 2(a): One Minute on Twitter



This study surfaces no definitive explanation for these spikes, other than their connection to key events, such as Biden’s August 11, 2020, announcement. However, it is possible that, behind the scenes at many news-media, the “We Have Her Back” campaign (TIME’S UP, 2020a; TIME’S UP, 2020b) may have slowly influenced news-media coverage. In headlines at least, pairing Harris’s name with the word “nasty” declined over time. Also, the lightning speed of the 24-hour news cycle means that coverage on any topic at any time is short-lived—an economic consideration that Herman and Chomsky (1969/2006) outlined. But Twitter sample (T1), which captured 1 minute of tweets found by searching for “nasty Kamala” on August 11,

2020, suggested other intra-acting agents influencing the coverage that did occur. These agents circulated or blocked circulation of nasty-woman rhetorics. That day, Trump spoke at a daily White House press briefing; Trump referred to Harris as “nasty” at least four times (Rogers, 2020; Solender, 2020b). Twitter activity in the #nastywoman feed, which had remained active since Trump called Hillary Clinton “nasty” in 2016 but flat in the months preceding Biden’s selection of Harris, spiked within hours of Trump’s insult. The 1-minute sample of 100 tweets epitomized thousands of social-media posts I glimpsed that day.

First, after downloading the set from Twitonomy into an Excel spreadsheet, I adjusted columns for readability and consistency. Next, I added coding columns. On a first pass, I focused on each tweet’s relationship to Harris (positive, neutral, negative). This coding proved inconclusive, however. Most of the tweets eluded classification in relation to Harris, though she was mentioned in each one. However, I noticed an emotional or affective aspect to the tweets: few of the tweets focused on Harris; rather, tweets expressed disbelief, ire, frustration, and outrage about Trump’s words and actions. Therefore, I made a second coding pass, rating the tweets in relation to him.

This second pass illustrated that two-thirds of the tweets (74 of 100) were negative toward Trump. Many of these are retweets rather than original posts. One original post came from @LadySusoeff (Sassenach, 2020), who posted, “Why did he make a disrespectful racist remark about Kamala being nasty like Pocahontas?? No president should say thing [sic] like that!!!!!!” Sassenach (2020) included a link to a Twitter feed that featured similar posts, all of which expressed levels of outrage toward Trump. Notably, Sassenach (2020) referred to Trump’s “nasty” label as “racist” and thus on par with “Pocahontas,” an insult Trump had applied to U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren after she claimed Native American ancestry. However, Twitonomy data

indicated that Sassenach's tweet did not circulate; it was not retweeted or liked. The most circulated post was a negative retweet of a news-media headline.

Conversely, only six tweets could be rated positive toward Harris. That is, only six supported her beyond simply mentioning her name. For example, @BeansResister (aka Crazy Beaner Tweets  ) tweeted (2020),

I stand behind the “nasty” woman as VP pick. If being as strong, intelligent, courageous, fierce, and independent makes Kamala Harris a nasty woman, I’m proud to stand behind her. In fact we need more ‘nasty’ women like her to stand up to the likes of Trump.

#NastyWomenUnite.

Most of the positive tweets, however, were problematic; they were supportive but focused on Trump at Harris's expense, such as this much-retweeted August 11, 2020, post by Andrew Rose Gregory: “There is nothing that could get me more amped for Kamala Harris as VP than Trump reminding me that she was ‘extraordinari[ly nasty]’” I coded such tweets as Trump-negative.

Harris-neutral tweets, on the other hand, were primarily those that repeated news-media headlines without adding commentary, such as @Stillost (Polwrek, 2020) retweeting, “Within two hours of Kamala Harris becoming the first woman of color on a party ticket²⁸, Trump calls her ‘nasty.’” Another neutral tweet simply posted a link to Andrew Solender's (2020b) article, “Trump repeatedly calls Harris ‘nasty’ and ‘horrible’ in White House briefing.” Most of the Harris-negative tweets, on the other hand, were retweets of this comment: “Kamala WAS nasty to the owned judge Kavanaugh. Please remember that.” In short, the Harris-neutral and Harris-negative tweets substantially outnumbered the positive/supportive ones, and Trump-related

²⁸ The majority of reports identified Harris as Black or African American; few referenced her Indian heritage.

outrage, anger, and disgust outweighed all Harris-focused tweets. Furthermore, only two of the 100 tweets mentioned race explicitly (i.e., pertaining to her identity as African American or Black or Indian). Nonetheless, the affective quality defined the announcement period or, to say this another way, outrage at Trump was a key factor in much news-media coverage as well as social-media activity the day of Biden’s announcement and in the days that followed. Both factors reduced the circulation of Harris-positive reports and comments.

Artifact 2(b): “Nasty” but Also “Historic”

This finding is mirrored on news-media sites, as seen in a Nexis Uni search (NU 5) for August 11-18, 2020, articles linking Harris and Trump’s “nasty” label. NU 5 yielded 800 results. As in the first Nexis Uni search (NU 1), no reports by such centrist news-media as USA Today or right-leaning news-media like Breitbart surfaced in the listings. As in NU 1, the majority of coverage by individual news-media came from CNN and The New York Times, both of which Ad Fontes Media rates as reliable but left-leaning. MSNBC—left-leaning, mostly reliable, but more analytical (i.e., opinionated but fact-based)—tallied 17 articles, while right-leaning, mostly reliable Fox News Network published 16. More than 100 articles linking Harris and “nasty” were captured via the Newstex feed, which included articles by such sources as the Huffington Post. The latter included Carla Herreria Russo’s August 12, 2020, report, “Trump on Biden Veep Pick Kamala Harris: ‘She’s Very, Very, Nasty.’” Such headlines report factual information but nonetheless registered negatively in relation to Harris; and such headlines centered on Trump, not Harris, thus invisibilizing her. She was made absent by reports like these, which focused on Trump’s nasty-woman rhetorics rather than Harris’s counter-rhetorics, qualifications, positions, and so forth.

However, there are at least two caveats to mention with regard to this search. One, Newstex sources included reliable, fact-based reports like Russo's (2020) as well as opinion and satirical posts, including several by blogger "Doktor Zoom" (2020), who published "OMG Kamala Harris Is An Antifa Socialist Cop From Wall Street!" (2020). Another caveat, but a more telling one, was that the listings grouped by Nexis Uni under "CNN Transcripts" referred to the transcripts of live broadcasts via television or podcasting; that is, they referenced news-oriented but highly analytical, often opinion-laden, programs that typically featured a host or hosts speaking with a panel of experts, many of whom are former political operatives; such programs are built around discussions of news rather than straightforward reporting.

These caveats aside, the lack of coverage by such news-media as USA Today or Breitbart supports my conclusion that left-leaning news-media were the ones most likely to report on the "nasty" Harris event. That is, left-leaning news-media circulated nasty-woman rhetorics while centrist and right-leaning news-media were not. Herman and Chomsky (1969/2009) would likely connect such coverage with audiences with economics (appeasing the audience results in a better bottom-line). Taking this thought a step further, I suggest left-leaning news-media were driven by Trump-driven outrage almost as much as the social-media discourse was.

However, as noted earlier, I also ran ProQuest searches. A broad search for "Kamala Harris" as subject²⁹ (August 1, 2020-February 1, 2021) returned 4,576 results; a search for "Kamala Harris" as a "person"³⁰ yielded comparable but slightly reduced results (3,739 articles). Basing subsequent searches on the "person" parameter, I narrowed the search to include

²⁹ su(Kamala Harris) AND pd(2020801-20210201) in ProQuest's formula

³⁰ per(Kamala Harris) pd(2020801-20210201) in ProQuest's formula

“nasty”³¹ for the same date range, returning 193 results (PQ1). Of the 3,739 results, 5% concerned Harris and “nasty” rhetorics. Using searches with the same date range but pairing Harris with other *in vivo* labels in circulation at the time, from “mad woman” to “historic,” I compiled a set of results from ProQuest and Nexis Uni (see Table 4). For both databases, the least-circulated label was “mad woman” and the most-circulated was “historic.” Circulating “nasty” labels rank fifth in ProQuest and fourth in Nexis Uni—in both cases, significantly higher than “mad woman” or “monster” but below “liberal.” As with PQ 1, three of these searches showed activity peaks in August: “liberal,” “nasty woman,” and “historic.”

Table 3

ProQuest & Nexis Uni Results From "Mad Woman" to "Historic"

Label	Number of ProQuest articles	Number of Nexis Uni articles
mad woman	69	135
monster	57	1,601
communist	71	2,922
nasty	193	5,256
socialist	129	5,302
liberal	492	8,900
historic	749	36,601

Note. Adapted from ProQuest and Nexis Uni search data

³¹ per(Kamala Harris) AND nasty) AND pd(20200801-02210201)

To contextualize these results, I point out that on August 13, 2020, Trump referred to Harris as a “mad woman,” by which he meant how angry she had seemed (to him) when questioning then-Attorney General Bill Barr at the latter’s Senate confirmation hearing. The label was a Trumpism for the “angry Black woman/man” trope; while it does not mention race, it relied on both right- and left-leaning audiences interpreting it that way, not unlike the empty/hanging chair rhetorics. Labels like “communist,” “socialist,” and “liberal,” on the other hand, are long-standing descriptions used by Republicans for their Democratic party rivals; these labels are not gender- or race-specific; but uttered by Trump, they take on that rhetorical affect.

However, to restate a key premise of this project, nasty-woman rhetorics entail the persistent, deeply embedded practice of containing, silencing, and demonizing women in public spheres by labeling or stereotyping them. With that definition in mind, I grouped the negative labels (mad woman, communist, socialist, liberal, monster, nasty) into one larger set. In that grouping, 57 percent of the total ProQuest results for “Kamala Harris” are negative, while 40 percent of the Nexis Uni results are negative. In both searches, the positive “historic” label was prominent. However, in the Nexis Uni searches, “historic” rhetorics exceeded, by a large margin, all negative labels, whereas that was not the case with the ProQuest searches. The ProQuest database draws primarily on such left-leaning sources as The New York Times. Therefore, a cautious conclusion is that left-leaning sources were likely to report on (and thus circulate) nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to Kamala Harris. In Nexis Uni’s more extensive and inclusive sourcing, on the other hand, the positive label “historic” outweighed the negative by a large margin. Nasty-woman rhetorics were not predominant.

Artifact 2(c): “We [Still] Have Her Back”

While examining this data, I questioned whether counter-rhetorics disrupted negative trends and influenced the decline in nasty-woman rhetorics during announcement week. I speak again of the TIME’S Up (2020a; 2020b) “We Have Her Back” campaign that attracted little notice before Biden picked Harris but resurfaced afterward. Renewed interest in this counter-campaign may have been sparked by a spike in racially charged rhetoric related to Harris within hours of announcement: a Virginia pastor tweeting that “Biden just announced Aunt Jemima as hi VP pick” (Griffith, 2020; Hall, 2020; Simpson, 2020), Trump’s son Eric liking an August 13, 2020, tweet that referred to Harris as a “whorendous” choice (Sollenburger, 2020), and an increase in #HeelsUp activity on Twitter that referenced a relationship Harris had with a former Los Angeles mayor who was married at the time (as noted earlier in this project, #HeelsUp is a negative portrayal relying on tropes of Black women as sexually voracious Jezebels). On the other hand, several news-media picked up TIME’S UP Now’s “We Have Her Back” campaign (2020a; 2020b) in the week following Harris’s selection. In effect, news-media recirculated the counter-rhetorics to nasty-woman discourse and re-centered coverage on Harris.

For example, a Nexis Uni search for “Harris AND We Have Her Back” yielded 60 articles for the full study period and 27 for the announcement week (August 11-18, 2020), compared to only two for the pre-announcement week. One of those results referred to Black male celebrities’ August 10, 2020, letter (Solender, August 10, 2020). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, news-media coverage of the Black men’s open letter outnumbered coverage of the Black women’s letter and video during the pre-announcement period. Nonetheless, an uptick in reporting on the “We Have Her Back” campaign correlated with 1) increased attention on Harris

specifically and news-media coverage generally; and 2) declining, nasty-woman rhetorics during announcement week.

In the next samples, I questioned whether increased awareness and increased circulation of counter-nasty-woman rhetorics changed during post-announcement coverage as it circulated in public discourse. While the data did not return a definitive answer to this question, two Nexis Uni searches for (Kamala Harris AND nasty) yielded very different results for announcement week and post-announcement week: a steep decline (from 1,114 results to 315). Also, a set of Twitter data highlighted darkening moods concerning the election and other events happening in the United States that week. In the next section, I discuss these searches after briefly outlining the events and discourse that intra-acted with nasty-woman rhetorics.

Analysis 3: Still “Nasty” (Post-Announcement)

Overview

Several concurrent or overlapping events—and the public discourse accompanying them—bled into nasty-woman rhetorics during the post-announcement week (August 18-27, 2020). Trump, for example, declared the first day of the mostly virtual Democratic Party National Convention as “a Hollywood produced info-mercial” (Singman, 2020), reminding his audience that he viewed the Democratic party as elitist and phony. Meanwhile, the nonprofit, nonpartisan organization Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project reported, “Between 24 May and 22 August, [we] record[ed] more than 10,600 demonstration events across the country” (2020). Most of the overwhelmingly nonviolent protests, as listed in ACLED’s “U.S. Crisis Monitor,” were connected to either the Black Lives Matter movement in the months after George Floyd’s May 25, 2020, death and/or after the increasingly deadly COVID-19 pandemic. Several of the protests, however, had morphed into multilayered discourses, especially in Portland,

Oregon, where rightwing groups like the Proud Boys clashed with Antifa and Black Live Matter groups, looters bashed storefronts, and law enforcement struggled to keep up (Haas et al., 2020). Back in the election bubble, meanwhile, Harris's first post-announcement interviews were broadcast, the Democratic Party National Convention continued, and nasty-woman rhetorics had declined but taken on darker tones, especially on Twitter. In this section, I explore this dynamic rhetorical ecology, beginning with a Twitter sample.

Artifact 3(a): Twitter Sample 2

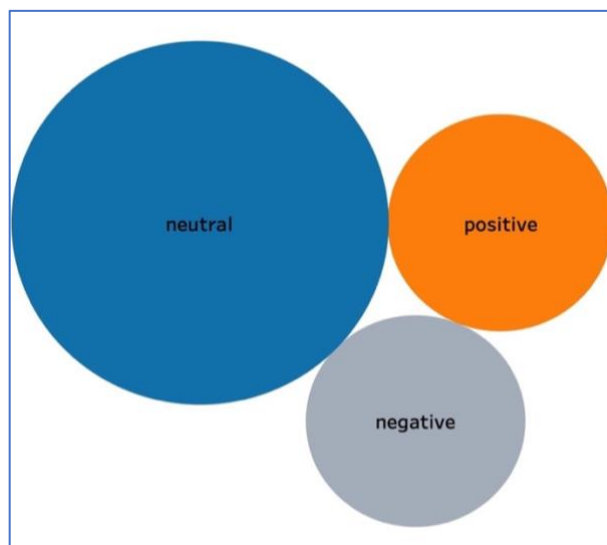
My second Twitter sample (T2) was collected on August 28, 2020. In T2, I used the same search terms as T1: "nasty kamala," which yielded tweets including both terms. One sign of declining circulation is that T1 search captured a mere minute; T2 covered most of an entire day in order to yield the same number of tweets (n=100). That is, circulation was declining on social media. As with T1, I ran multiple coding passes for T2, first in relation to Harris, next for the same parameters regarding Trump, and finally for *in vivo* terms relevant to this project (e.g., "Black," "sexist," or "racist"). The results, listed in Table 4 and visualized in Figures 8 and 9, indicated a shift in both tone and quantity.

Where T1 showed overwhelming negativity toward Trump, the T2 results were flipped, with the majority of negative tweets targeting Harris instead (see Figure 8). Of these 49 negative tweets, only two mentioned race ("Black" or "race"), but the absence of racialized rhetoric did not mean they were not present, a point I discuss further in the next chapter. Three tweets had direct or indirect sexual overtones (e.g., Harris is a "whore"), and a dozen riffed on "bitch" and its corollaries (e.g., "cocky, mean, and nasty," "nasty lady," "nasty smiling b****," "alley cat cruella de ville kamala" [sic], "patronizing, condescending, nasty, [Harris]" and "nasty b!") Many of the negative tweets questioned Harris and Biden's interview responses to ongoing protests.

Several negative tweets also contained racial and/or undertones. For example, the list included the aforementioned “alley cat” tweet or as well as the emasculating-Mammy hint about Harris “taking the reins.” Tweets with compounded tropes of race and sex included (again) the “alley cat” one, which linked audiences to a meme in which a White, smiling, cartoon-blue-haired woman slapped a man and said, “It’s Mrs. Harris, if you’re nasty.” It is difficult to see this tweet as anything but sexist and racist. But, like the claims made by those who hung empty chairs from trees in their yard, an absented presence is revealed: Several Trump-positive tweets insisted his “nasty” comments were not racist or sexist, merely expressing an opinion about Harris. For example, Chocomama29 (2020) tweeted, “Simply because you don't agree with a specific person doesn't mean you hate their entire race. ... [Trump] just has the opinion that [Harris] is nasty.” There were two of these defensive tweets in the results.

Figure 8

The Weighted Affect of Harris Tweets in T1, August 11, 2020



Note. Adapted from Twitter data compiled by Twitonomy

Table 4*A Breakdown of Coded Findings in T2*

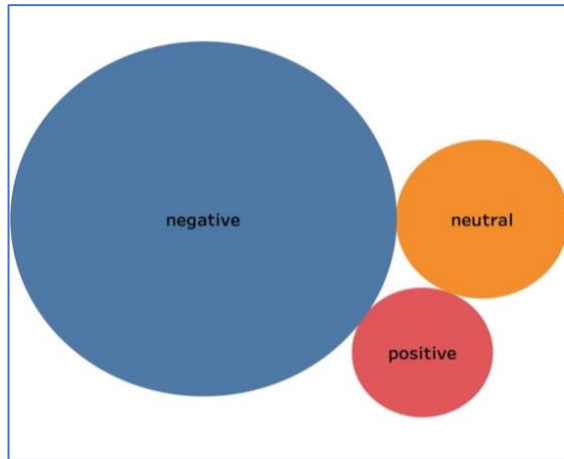
Name/Affect	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Harris	20	21	59
Trump	10	15	75

Note. In T2, negative Harris tweets were more than double the combined positive and neutral ones, while negative Trump tweets were more than triple the positive and negative ones. Adapted from Twitter data compiled by Twitonomy

On the other hand, almost 25% of the tweets in T2 were neutral toward Harris, and almost 25% were positive. Many of the neutral tweets expressed no opinion of her; they were negative because Harris was absent. That is, many of these tweets were, instead, focused on Trump in a negative, outraged way, as in T1 (see Figure 8). For example, Social*Fly (@socflyny) posted that a Trump speech had “entered into the vindictive, petty grievance stage ... How long before he calls Kamala Harris nasty?” Several tweets exhibited this anticipatory, horse-race kind of approach. In the other direction, many of the positive tweets reclaimed “nasty,” such as carbar (2020) posting, “Kamala can bring the shade real smooth aka nice-nasty ... I’m here for it! ... Keep it up Mrs. V.P.” This tweet references Harris’s post-announcement interviews—a sole performance and a joint interview with Biden. In both interviews, the host asked about Trump’s “nasty” Harris comments; each time, Harris laughed and tilted her head (in African American rhetorics, she cast “shade” on Trump, his remark, and possibly the host asking the question).

Figure 9

The Weighted Affect of Trump Tweets in T2, August 28, 2020



Note. Adapted from Twitter data compiled by Twitonomy

I draw two key conclusions from T2. First, in less than two weeks, social-media discourse had flipped from Trump-focused to Harris-focused postings. In fact, the pre-announcement-week outrage toward Trump made Harris invisible, rhetorically. By flipped, I mean that strong feelings during announcement week recentered the discourse away from Trump and toward Harris—but negatively. For example, many Harris-negative tweets exhibited racialized, sexualized undertones (often explicitly). Second, this shift supports my observation that counter-rhetorics were not affecting the discourse substantially, at least on social media. For example, even positive tweets that reclaimed “nasty” as a rallying cry were Trump-focused, such as TheBoom (2020) commenting that Harris would stand up to Trump the “bully” far better than Hillary Clinton did, because “nasty women rule.” Such positive tweets accounted for a fraction of the sample; Harris-negative tweets dominated social media during post-announcement week.

Artifact 3: Declining but Persistent Nastiness

I turn next to a sequence of Nexis Uni searches that contextualize but complicate these findings. I ran seven searches for (Kamala Harris AND nasty), which together showed a definite and steep decline in nasty-woman rhetorics during the study period (see Table 5). The first range shows the total yield for the entire study period, followed by monthly ranges and yields. These results show a clear activity spike in August 2020, followed by declining yields up to and shortly following Harris's Jan. 21, 2021, inauguration as the first female vice president of the United States. Slight increases in October and November correlate to Harris's debate with Mike Pence (October 8, 2020), the election itself (November 2, 2020), and inauguration (January 21, 2021).

Table 5

Declining Circulation of Nasty-Woman Rhetorics

Date range	Yield
Aug. 1, 2020-Feb. 1, 2021	2,384
Aug. 1-Sept. 1, 2020	1,495
Sept. 1-Oct. 1, 2020	139
Oct. 1-Nov. 1, 2020	284
Nov. 1-Dec. 1, 2020	167
Dec. 1, 2020-Jan. 1, 2021	67
Jan. 1-Feb. 1, 2021	130

Note. Adapted from Nexis Uni and ProQuest yields

As mentioned earlier, for a more granular analysis I also ran searches for announcement week (NU 5: August 11-18, 2020) and post-announcement week (NU 6: August 18-27, 2020). Announcement week yielded 1,114 results for (Kamala Harris AND nasty), while post-announcement week yielded about one-third that number (315 articles). In news-media coverage, I concluded, the steepest decline in nasty-woman rhetorics happened within a week of Harris's selection as Biden's running mate. Despite the increased negativity shown on social-media in T1 and T2, those headline results represented a clear shift in the circulation of nasty-woman rhetorics. I concluded that news-media coverage changed during post-announcement week.

Furthermore, the stories rated "most relevant" by Nexis Uni changed dramatically from announcement to post-announcement week. The top announcement-week article in NU 6 came via Newstex Blogs (2020), as published by International Business Times News: "Trump Slams Kamala Harris as Joe Biden's VP Pick: 'She Was Extraordinarily Nasty'" (2020). In NU 6, however, the top post-announcement story is another Newstex-sourced one by Rashaan Ayesh (2020): "Kamala Harris says Trump calls her 'nasty' to distract from his 'neglect' of Americans." Both stories had a Trump focus, but the perspective shifted. That is, the post-announcement article centered the discourse on Harris ("she" says, rather than "Trump slams ... Harris). Not only was Harris more present, post-announcement, she was more agential.

To see if this change carried through the results, I looked more closely at the top that Nexis Uni qualified as most "relevant" in each data set. Most of the announcement-week's top-30 stories were Trump centered and Harris-neutral (headlines "A" in Table 6). Meanwhile, even the Harris-positive articles—about one-third of the top 30—were focused on Trump (headlines "B"). Finally, announcement week also includes articles that are Trump-centric but mocking (Headlines "C").

Table 6*Sample Headlines Yielded in NU 6*

Affective description	Headline
Neutral Headline (A)	“Donald calls Kamala Harris nasty,” “Trump repeatedly calls Kamala Harris nasty and horrible”
Neutral Headline (A)	“New York Post Editorial Board Mildly Condemns Trump for “Nasty Words” about Kamala Harris”
Neutral Headline (A)	“Trump Unloads on ... Harris”
Positive Headline (B)	“Amy Klobuchar Fires Back at Trump Calling ... Harris ‘nasty’”
Positive Headline (B)	“[Film director] Ava DuVernay Flips ... Trump’s Insult ... Back on Him”
Trump-centric Headline (C)	“‘You’re Stuck in 2016’: [comedian] Stephen Colbert [said]”
Trump-centric Headline (C)	“[Satirist] Randy Rainbow ... Parodies ‘Camelot’ in Honor of ‘Kamala.’”

Note. Compiled from Nexis Uni results

Top post-announcement stories, on the other hand, were less delineated and more variable, making it more difficult to draw conclusions. Eight of the top-30³² centered on Harris as agential (e.g., “Kamala Harris Dismisses Trump Insults”), two were otherwise directly supportive of Harris (e.g., “She’s Someone Like Me”), two focused on Trump and were negative about Harris (“Kamala Chameleon: VP Hopeful harris is a ‘Phony,’ Trump Says”), four were

³² At least five of the top-30 results are repeats of, or portions of, a transcript from a BBC News broadcast. Although NexisUni has a sorting feature that removes duplicate articles, this repetition remained in the post-announcement data set.

Harris-supportive e.g., but nonetheless Trump-centric (“Late-night Hosts Reflect on Attacks on Kamala Harris’s Blackness,” “Smear Campaign Begins”), and two were Harris-neutral but leaned positive (“Kamala Harris Delivers an Optimistic Speech at the DNC as She Makes History”). This variability meant that the post-announcement stories were inconclusive. Notably, two of the top-30 post-announcement articles were positive commentaries discussing Harris’s race. One of those was written by Jo Rose (2020), who wrote, “Watching ... Harris on stage with Joe Biden, as his nominee for vice president, I got that feeling ... at last, there’s someone running for vice president who looks like me, and who might understand what my life is like” (para. 7).

Despite the variability in the post-announcement set, clear shifts were evident. One, by post-announcement week, Harris was more present in the headlines and articles, even when that presence was negative. Two, Trump’s role in the discourse was increasingly diminished (but still driving a significant portion of the coverage, such as a “latest sexist attack” in which he called MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” co-host Mika Brzezinski a “ditzy airhead”). Three, in post-announcement coverage, mocking of Trump had almost disappeared from mainstream discourse. However, one finding was consistent: centrist news-media like USA Today and right-leaning media like Breitbart continued to remain either absent in their coverage or not captured by Nexis Uni searches for “nasty,” “monster,” and other labels. However, because Nexis Uni’s search algorithms, like Google’s, are black-boxed, this absence cannot be totally explained.

Nonetheless, a modest change in news-media sources did occur from announcement to post-announcement week: Coverage increasingly came from international and ethnic/minority sources, not just U.S.-based media like CNN or The New York Times. NU 6 (announcement week) yielded 52 of 1,114 articles from international news media such as The Guardian

(London) and CE Noticias (a Spanish financial-news publication); this number represented almost 5% of the total. NU 7 (post-announcement) yielded 24 international news sources—almost 8% of the total. The post-announcement search also yielded an even more statistically significant increase in reporting by ethnic/minority publications: from zero in NU 5 (announcement period) to 14 for NU 6 (post-announcement). That is, reporting by publications NexisUni described as ethnic/minority, such as the News India-Times, had a visible role in post-announcement news coverage, such as an anonymous August 21, 2020, article titled “Kamala Harris and the Rise of Indian-Origin Politicians in the West.” Such articles may have surfaced because U.S.-based coverage had declined, meaning that other sources had space to become more visible; or, more likely, the change came from a combination of decreased U.S.-based coverage and an increase in non-U.S. and non-mainstream coverage.

Epilogue: Transformation

I have presented data in this chapter that supports my claim that nasty-woman rhetorics circulated during the study period. Rhetorical circulation, however, is not simply movement but transformation. Nasty-woman rhetorics did move during the study period, but nasty-woman rhetorics also changed. First, activity declined over time. Per results yielded in a sequence of Nexis Uni searches (see Table 3), the highest activity occurred in August 2020. The following month, nasty-woman rhetorics dropped 10% of that activity. A slight increase occurred in October 2020, which I link to the Harris-Pence debate month; but this increase amounted to less than 20% of the August activity. By inauguration month (January 2021), nasty-woman rhetorics had dropped to less than 10% of the August figures.

Several other points remain clear. One, the most significant transformations occurred in the post-announcement period (August 19-27, 2020). For example, Twitter activity declined over

the full 6-month period as well as during the weeks discussed in this chapter, but that activity flipped from Trump-negative during announcement week to Harris-negative in the post-announcement period. The affect of the circulation reversed. Two, news-media coverage of nasty-woman rhetorics also declined but exhibited a shift paralleled on Twitter: Trump remained highly visible but less so, over time, while Harris became more present in the post-announcement period than in the preceding periods. She was also increasingly described in agential terms. Finally, centrist publications like USA Today and right-leaning outlets like Breitbart continued a pattern of absence regarding “nasty” Harris. While USA Today did cover Harris, that coverage was modest and seemed limited to announcements of her selection and “fact checks” that countered reports about her. USA Today’s coverage, to use the coding applied throughout this chapter, was neutral. Breitbart maintained almost total radio-silence on Harris, reminiscent of the empty-chair rhetoric aimed at “Nobama.” However, Nexis Uni’s black-boxed search algorithms call for caution in drawing definitive conclusions with regard to this absent coverage. More robust search and analytic tools would help clarify this (non) circulation, but that work exceeds this project.

More importantly, the samples explored in this chapter help us understand the ebb and flow across different parts of our media landscape, but where they fall short is helping us understand how counter-rhetorics changed that circulation. Nasty-woman rhetorics may have declined during the study period, but they persisted. That is, nasty-woman rhetorics shifted in tone and quantity but remained present in public discourse. Several weeks after the “We Have Her Back” letter (TIME’S UP, 2020a), for example, Harris-negative tweets outnumbered the positive ones. She had been invisibilized by the Trump-focused pre-announcement and announcement activities; she was hypervisibilized in post-announcement on social media.

However, a troubling but not surprising conclusion has to do with left-leaning news-media like The New York Times. These media seemed more likely to repeat and amplify (i.e., to circulate) nasty-woman rhetorics. Given the propaganda effect described by Herman and Chomsky (1988), such news-media did more to sustain nasty-woman rhetorics than centrist news-media like USA Today. The latter publication, however, enacted a version of Jordan-Zachery's (2018) "omission project" by the paucity of their coverage overall.

However, the absence problem is multifold. Talk of race was muted when not omitted, but it was nonetheless present, as seen in such tweets as the "alley cat" post and those tweets that claimed race was not a factor (essentially confirming that it was). Furthermore, Black women's responses were all but ignored in mainstream news-media (whether left, right, or centrist), and outrage aimed at Trump seemed to crowd the rhetorical space. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969/2006) might say Trump's presence was "overestimated." Granted, other events and rhetorics were upstaging coverage of Harris: the increased focus on the president-elect (Biden), the correlating subsumption of Harris's role as vice president, a stream of protests, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, Cos and Martin (2013) have said that absence carries meaning; often, absence is the primary meaning or intent. What is absent becomes more/most present. This argument helps explain Breitbart's nonexistent coverage of Harris as well as USA Today's muted approach. The catch-22 for the latter publication, unfortunately, is that maintaining a neutral position leads to reduced coverage of Harris; reduced coverage makes her absent; reduced coverage takes her and her message(s) out of circulation. This pattern can be seen in how little coverage and thus circulation occurred for Harris's July 31, 2020, not-too-ambitious speech at the Black Girls Lead conference. The paucity of "We Have Her Back" coverage—especially

when compared to the attention Black men’s letter received—also demonstrates this kind of erasure. To extend Grant’s (2020) argument, this erasure does not apply in the same ways to White women; *ergo*, this erasure is racialized.

This erasure continued after the weeks explored in this chapter. On October 6, 2020, a day before the Harris-Pence debate, TIME’S Up released a report (2020c) that claimed “Pervasive Sexist and Racist Bias in Media Coverage of Harris Selection as VP Pick.” The online report points to “misogynoir like the harmful ‘Angry Black Woman’ trope,” arguing that when compared to White, male vice-presidential candidates Pence in 2012 and 2016 and Tim Paine in 2016, “One quarter of coverage of Sen. Harris included racist and sexist stereotyping and tropes” (TIME’S UP, 2020c). White, male identities are the default; Harris was described more negatively; and stories about her heritage overshadowed her work as a former district attorney and a U.S. senator, according to the report. Unfortunately, TIME’S Up data for the report (2020c), done by Edelman Data & Intelligence, is not publicly available. Nonetheless, to quote Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who was asked if gender was a factor in all the women losing in the Democratic party’s presidential primaries, “If you say, 'yeah, there was sexism in this race,' everyone says 'whiner,' ... And if you say, 'no, there was no sexism,' about a bazillion women think, 'what planet do you live on?'" (Maddow, 2020). Rather than simply substituting racism for sexism and instead adding it, the answer is the same.

Nonetheless, I sound a note of optimism here. Talk of race may have been muted at times, but it was always present. It was discussed in relation to and in combination with sexism. Racial issues have been made more present, and if they are present, they can be discussed, countered, and if not erased, then at least minimized. My data may not be conclusive about the effect the “We Have Her Back” letter (TIME’S Up, 2020a) had on nasty-woman rhetorics, but it

remains possible that the rhetorical ecology was indeed shifted. Mays (2015) and Chaput (2010) have both argued that movement may not be present, but it is nonetheless there; it is happening. Jonathan Bradshaw (2017) pointed out in his concluding paragraphs, “cultural change is slow, not momentary.” Describing the success of a small, regional nonprofit in preserving cultural practices and circulating them, he suggested in the closing paragraph that “strategies ... for the long haul” will work best. In a later work, Bradshaw (2018) also talked of “rhetorical continuities (e.g., persistent transition content) ... This persistence can actually encourage further circulation and change” (p. 490). In an age when content often goes “viral” (Bradshaw, 2018, p. 481), slow circulation can change cultural rhetorics over time. Or to riff on what was said of Sen. Warren, persistence works. In the next chapter, I explore the implications of this study and the possibilities for future research.

CHAPTER V

“MADAME VICE PRESIDENT!” AND BEYOND

You know Black women are about to drag you for a whole ass 24 hours, right?

Imani Two-Kitchens Gandy, 2021

Prelude

I have never been good with conclusions, because I always revisit the beginning and mull too much. Through this project, I gained a sense of the range of rhetorical activity happening during the study period, particularly with regard to nasty-woman rhetorics; I observed a decline in nasty-woman rhetorics over time, as well as a surprising absence at some sites and at times; and I identified themes and points of increased activity during the study period. I discuss findings shortly, but first, I mull. For example, I opened this chapter with an epigraph; near the end of this opening section, I have displayed two versions of the January 2021 Vogue cover (see Figure 10), but before discussing them, I backtrack. I launched this dissertation with selected memories: telling my department chair I would never do a political project and reminiscing about Terry Bellamy, Asheville’s first Black mayor.

I almost wrote that Bellamy “happened to be female,” but “happened” says all the wrong things. To say that Bellamy was the first Black mayor of Asheville, NC, is true but erases her gender. To say that she was the city’s first Black female mayor is true, too, but Leni Sitnick was Asheville’s first female mayor, and we (reporters) did not say Sitnick was the first White female mayor, although we did say she was its first Jewish mayor. These conundrums inform the heart of this project, because Sitnick’s race is assumed and unspoken—absent in public discourse but very much present, nonetheless. In fact, her non-race is absent-present in a way that lets us (White people) forget about this aspect of identity, because Whiteness is the norm. We do not

have to talk about it. That point is our unspoken argument in the rhetorics of race (or religious identity). Carrie Crenshaw (1995) wrote, “The absence of speech about whiteness signifies that it exists in our discursive silences” (p. 260). By not mentioning race, especially our own, we (White people) can avoid the ambiguities and complexities of the issue. In this closing chapter, I set the stage for analyzing Vogue’s January 2021 cover image of Kamala Harris (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Vogue’s Tweet for the “Madame Vice President!” Issue



Note. (Vogue Magazine, 2021)

As I write these words, far-right conservatives campaign to stop all of us from talking about race and gender (among many difficult topics). According to ABC News, almost three dozen state legislatures have introduced laws banning Critical Race Theory from K-12 schools, and nearly half those laws have passed (Alfonseca, 2022). At least a dozen states have also passed legislation restricting what K-12 teachers can say about gender identity or sexual orientation—laws that opponents have nicknamed “Don’t Say ‘Gay’” restrictions. As a queer White woman deeply informed by Black feminism, *mestiza*, and cultural rhetorics, I have no kind words for these laws. We should be talking about both race and gender, along with several other big issues, like classism, homophobia, and climate change, rather than allowing politicians to divide and distract us.

Speaking of divisions, Anzaldúa (2002) has said it is not enough to build a bridge or wade onto a sandbar. In *This Bridge We Call Home*, she said, “You don’t build bridges to safe and familiar territories, you have to risk making *mundo nuevo*³³, have to risk the uncertainty of change” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 574). I spoke of building bridges and creating sandbars in a previous chapter, but Anzaldúa reminded me that establishing *mundo nuevo* is risky, especially when we are trying to make new connections and create new space(s)—or when we are ourselves the bridge. Sandbars and bridges are middle earths, what she would call *nepantla* and others might call liminal spaces. Those anti-CRT and anti-gay laws undercut attempts to create a *nepantla* for parlay; they also undercut those who inhabit middle spaces, like trans-youth. Instead, these laws gird old prejudices and give supporters an “out.” That is, those laws help

³³ As I read Anzaldúa, *mondo nuevo* means (simultaneously) “new earth, new world, new ground.” Also, in her preface to *This Bridge We Call Home*, she defined *nepantla* as “tierra entre medio,” the ground/earth in the middle (2002, p. 1).

them make the same argument claimed by the people who hung empty chairs but said their rhetoric was not racist. Those laws block discourse under the guise of “protecting” children from “indoctrination” (Migdon, 2022). Frankly, I often wish my family had been less polite, discreet, and protective; I wish they had been more open about my gay uncles when I was growing up; perhaps I would have been free(er) to come out much, much sooner than I did (my late 30s). The immediate concern, however, is what we can do with nasty-woman rhetorics, such as what measures might counteract it to what classroom applications might work for studying them. In this closing chapter, I offer a set of findings that point toward future applications and strategies based on what I have learned during this project.

Finding No. 1: Surface “The Omission Project”

This diversion of thought is what I mean about going back to beginnings and mulling them over. Just as my outrage over the “Don’t Say ‘Gay’” laws fueled the last few paragraphs, outrage has often fueled nasty-woman rhetorics on both sides. Left-leaning media and social-media obsessed over Trump’s “nasty” comment more than they supported Harris for her accomplishments and her potential to be (vice) president. As discussed in the previous chapter, that outrage made Harris absent on some social-media feeds. Left-leaning news-media fed their audiences a brand of outrage, too. Along with inspired Twitter users, they were not, ultimately, positive in the ways they circulated discourse related to Harris. On the other hand, the absence of overt nasty-woman rhetorics on such sites as USA Today and Breitbart demonstrated the presence of two very different arguments: USA Today can claim that their chair is empty: They avoided spreading Trump’s insults; they kept their reporting civil. Breitbart, meanwhile, can claim they never ran a headline about “nasty” Harris. However, Breitbart was nonetheless nasty in the conspiracy-rich ways they portrayed “liberal” Harris and in the ways they ignored her in

day-to-day coverage during the study period. Either way, from Breitbart to USA Today to outraged Twitter users, Harris was made absent.

This brand of absence comprises what Jordan-Zachery (2018) called “the omission project,” a hypervisibilized invisibility in which women of color are there by not being there, primarily by being muted (p. 29). Their absence can be overt—a “complete absence”—or covert, like citing a Black woman’s work but not critically engaging with it (Jordan-Zachery, 2018, p. 36). Jordan-Zachery explained both types as silencing or muting women of color. Outrage at Trump, as explored in the previous chapter, often muted Harris and pushed her to the side. News-media participates in the omission project, too. The AiJo Project (2020)³⁴—a collaboration between news-media, scholars, and artificial-intelligence experts—examined gender bias in the news, reporting that women were mentioned 21% of the time in a study of major news-media; men were mentioned 73% of the time. The ratio of published male/female images was likewise skewed: 77% male, 22.9% female. Furthermore, when men are quoted in an article, they average 103 words versus 87 for women (AiJo, 2020). These numbers seem fairly close, but when I calculated its effect across 100 articles, men tally 7,931 words while women get 1,992. Unfortunately, The AiJo Project (2020) did not consider race, although researchers acknowledged various limitations (Peretti, 2021). Neither did researchers for a similar study by Pew Research, which examined gender bias in images posted to Facebook and found near-identical results as AiJo (Lam et al., 2019). To put these figures in terms of absence/presence, women are routinely made absent from public view; they are routinely excluded and silenced. I suspect that women of color are even less present and more silenced.

³⁴ AiJo researcher explain their methods and findings in more detail at <https://www.aijoproject.com>.

With these many threads in mind, I situate the Vogue cover—or, rather, two covers (see Figure 10). The print edition, seen on the left of Vogue Magazine’s January 10, 2021, tweet in Figure 10, displayed Harris from head to toe, dressed casually in black jacket, black pants, white shirt, a double-string of pearls, and black Converse low-top shoes. She stood in front of a pink and green backdrop that evoked her sorority colors at Howard University; Harris smiled as if about to laugh, while laughing, or after laughing; and she clasped her hands together, somewhat casually, at her waist. Across her knees in the bottom third of the cover were these words, in all caps but her name in the largest font by far: “MADAME VICE PRESIDENT / KAMALA HARRIS / AND THE NEW AMERICA.” To Harris’s left were additional, smaller words, the first of which echoed her presidential-campaign slogan: “BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE: THE UNITED STATES OF FASHION.”

Vogue’s alternative cover, displayed on the right of the magazine’s January 10, 2021, tweet, showed Harris from the hips up against a pale-yellow backdrop; she was dressed in a light blue jacket, white shirt, pearls, and a U.S. flag pin. She smiled, one arm folded across the other at her waist. Across the bottom third of the page were the same words used for the print edition, except there were no other words on the page (other than the Vogue logo, which also appeared in the first cover, in all caps at the top quarter of the page). Harris and her camp expected the blue-blazer cover to run; Vogue ran the casual cover instead.

At the beginning of this chapter, I featured these covers, as circulated in a tweet by Vogue Magazine (2021), but first I inserted an epigraph by @AngryBlackLady’s (Imani Two Kitchens Gandy, 2021), who posted on Twitter that same day: “You know Black women are about to drag you for a whole ass 24 hours, right?” @AngryBlackLady was right about the volume and tone of responses the more casual print cover elicited on social-media, talk shows,

and news-media. On Twitter, for example, the cover was described as looking fake or amateurish “like a Polaroid,” Harris’s skin possibly lightened, the informal pose “disrespectful” of the first female vice president of the United States.

I want to talk about these dueling covers in the context of this dissertation. But I have some obligatory ground to cover first, because all of these musings are a roundabout way to say that my project is a beginning rather than an end. My work, as presented here, has prepared me to talk about the Vogue covers and various, ongoing manifestations of nasty-woman rhetorics. This beginning, for me, is an activist one that adds to current scholarship, suggests opportunities for future study, and—I hope—suggests strategies that could benefit candidates who do not fit neatly into White, masculine politics, now and in the future. In the next sections, I will attend to these topics as they relate to my findings. And I will talk further about those covers.

Finding No. 2: Be a Bad Feminist

Roxane Gay has said, “I have certain ... interests and personality traits and opinions that may not fall in line with mainstream feminism, but I am still a feminist” (2014, p. xi). She is, in fact, a “bad feminist,” and that is okay. Like Gay, I am human, flawed, not as well read on feminist history as I would like to be, especially Black feminist history, theory, and practice; and I question mainstream feminism. Nonetheless, this project adds to current scholarship by weaving a womanist perspective with actor network theory for studying nasty-woman rhetorics in relation to a woman of color. This project posits these label-laden rhetorics as inherently political, as they are meant to restrain and constrain female candidates and officeholders. Indeed, they were/are meant to restrain/constrain all women living, working, and being in public spaces; they were/are meant to keep us women home, in private spaces. Ergo, they are meant to restrain/constrain all women—including transwomen. However, this universality skirts the

compounded challenges that women of color face when they run for and serve in public positions like the (vice) presidency. As this project has shown, ANT helps trace the circulation of these nasty-woman rhetorics; a womanist perspective ensures that the complexities of race and gender are not erased in the tracing; instead, a womanist perspective ensures that we question them.

For example, calling Hillary Clinton a “nasty woman” and Kamala Harris “nasty” are simply not the same. In either case a positive remix (a counter-rhetoric) of a “nasty woman” redefining her as a confident, independent female “who gets shit done” (Nasty Women Get Shit Done PDX, 2021) Nasty women stand on their own and accomplish much on their own. However, for White women the negatives are the b-word that rhymes with “rich” or the c-word that rhymes with “bunt.” A “nasty” Black woman is far worse; she is the Biblically evil Jezebel, the hypersexualized, “fiendish,” exotic female who is “simultaneously lucrative, imperfect, advantageous, grotesque, enticing, and ... quintessentially deviant” (Lomax, 2018, Ch. 1). A nasty White woman is aggressive, mean; a nasty woman of color is that, too, but she is also a slave, a whore; she is valuable but also conniving, likely evil, and/or subhuman. This persistent trope surfaced most clearly in tweets sampled for this study, such as Eric Trump’s since-deleted 2020 retweet of a post calling Harris a “whore-endous” choice for vice president. On the other hand, positive representations of Harris—especially those that referred to her nomination and subsequent victory as “historic”—outnumbered nasty-woman rhetorics in the data sets I analyzed for this project. That ratio gives me hope.

Finding No. 3: Use Better Tools and Collaborate

However, my tracing of nasty-woman rhetorics is incomplete; ample room for additional study remains. I mentioned previously that I began with a 6-month study period and approached nasty-woman rhetorics as a vast ecology. Predictably, this approach meant that I wrestled with

large and often unwieldy data sets. I solved the problem by limiting analysis to a few key weeks in the study period, sampling tweets and headlines in that shortened period, and reducing the scope of my work. Future study could deal with larger data sets, and/or shift the focus, or involve collaborative research.

For example, several data-mining tools exist for collection and analysis of large volumes of social-media posts, headlines, and full articles. Twitter offers a suite of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), but independent options include rTweet (a statistical application based on R) and TAGS (a template that uses Google Sheets). Some of the best tools, in my review, require significant computer-coding skills, pose a high cost, or require both; these are the key reasons I did not apply them in this study. Possible solutions are to partner with a coding expert and/or to seek grant funding to cover costs. With such tools and collaborations at hand, my preference for future social-media research would be to limit the project to a specific discourse community (e.g., #BlackTwitter) and/or a single hashtag (e.g., #MeToo).

Of course, data-mining tools also exist for collecting and analyzing news-media headlines and articles. Nexis Uni, for example, collects headlines and the full text of articles, but there is a significant cost for downloading large samples. If this obstacle is overcome, textual analysis can be done using sentiment analysis, topic modeling, and so forth—but again, I recommend collaborating with a coding or statistical expert. A potentially rich option, in my opinion, would be data mining headlines and articles from India-based news-media and/or Black publications like *Essence* and *The St. Louis American*. As this study progressed, I realized my attention had been focused on mainstream (i.e., White) news-media at the expense of Black voices; that realization is one reason I added epigraphs and artifacts at the beginning of each chapter. The featured images also support key points in each chapter but connote that I remain interested in

future research that considers multimodal rhetorics in public/political spheres, such as simultaneously studying the words and images used in social-media posts or news articles. The latter would better expose correlations of visuals like photos and linguistic features like headlines. After all, in 1985 Jim Corder urged, “Rhetoricians will have to learn to understand the interplay of visual image and verbal message that makes a meaning through arguments in display” (p. 164). I first read Corder’s (1985) “On the Way, Perhaps ...”³⁵ for a composition-pedagogy class a few years back; I have since become increasingly interested in the harmonies and dissonances of multimodal communication.

In this direction, I foresee projects similar to AiJo’s analysis (2020) of gender bias in images published by news-media but designed with intersectionality in mind. AiJo (2020) used Retina Face and Insightface Gender Age Model—two artificial intelligence (A.I.) tools—to examine one week’s worth of images and text sourced from eight news organizations. For textual analysis, AiJo used the Gender Gap Tracker, an automated system for Natural Language Processing. While it is not stated in their data summary, TIME’S UP (2020c) likely used a similar approach for analyzing media coverage of Harris. Done by Edelman Data & Intelligence and released online a few days before the Harris-Pence vice-presidential debate, the TIME’S UP (2020c) study found that one quarter of that coverage “included racist and sexist stereotyping and tropes [such as] ... ‘Angry Black Woman’ ... and the ... ‘birther’ conspiracy.” My data sets surfaced some of these tropes, but further, more transparent, study is warranted.

A promising approach is Adukia et al.’s 2021 working paper on gender, age, and race representations in children’s books. Adukia et al. (2021) used AI methods to study the images

³⁵ The full title of Corder’s 1985 musing is, “On the Way, Perhaps, to a New Rhetoric, but Not There Yet, and if We Do Get There, There Won’t Be There Anymore”

used in books that have won awards from the Association for Library Service to Children since 1922. Not surprisingly, they found that children are consistently represented as lighter-skinned than adults and females are more likely to be represented in images; they are less included in text. Paralleling The AiJo Project (2020), Adukia et al. (2021) concluded that White males are consistently overrepresented in relation to their share of the U.S. population (p. 38). Adukia et al. (2021) did not address rhetorical circulation per se, but the authors did point out the significance of books recognized by an influential organization; in fact, they considered how often the books were checked out (i.e., distributed and circulated). Adukia et al. (2021) also argued that wide circulation of these award-winning texts reinforced cultural norms and further marginalized children of color. Furthermore, they noted possible extensions of their work for studying similar issues in news-media. This thought returns us to those Vogue covers and strategies for undoing the systemic problems posed by nasty-woman rhetorics.

Finding No. 4: Change Perspectives

Overview

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I quoted former first lady Michelle Obama, who told an event host, “[It’s] not always enough to lean in, because that shit doesn’t work all the time” (Romano, 2018). I paired this epigraph clumsily, per APA 7 format guidelines, with the figure of a tweet a few pages later; that tweet pictured actress Viola Davis portraying the first lady sitting for Amy Sherald (2018), who painted *Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama*. I started the chapter with entangled, intra-acting levels of representation, in other words: Obama commenting on Meta Media (formerly Facebook) executive Sheryl Sandberg’s 2013 book about modern women having it all (*Lean In*); Davis playing Obama in the 2022 Showtime series *The First Lady*; and @DannieD01 countering the criticism the actress received for the role (2021).

Each representation relied on and built upon the others. That activity is not mere intertextuality. These representations intra-act, co-constructing meaning. There is an unspoken but not hidden thread in these intertextual artifacts: what works for White women does not always work for women of color. When women of color “lean in” to their ambitions, as Sandberg suggested in her book of the same title (2013), they often get worse results than White women do.

The Vogue (Covers) Problem

This point brings me to representations of “too ambitious” Kamala Harris from August 2020-February 2021, and most particularly, to the dueling Vogue covers that were published in January 2021. The story is (Givhan, 2021; Major, 2022; Okwodu, 2021), Harris posed for cover photos for the infamous fashion magazine; she and her aides thought the blue-blazer photo would run. Vogue chose instead to publish the casual image. Both photos were taken by Tyler Mitchell, the first Black photographer to shoot a Vogue cover.

Responding to immediate backlash, Vogue called the informal photo and its backdrop “a tribute to [Harris’s college] sorority days” (Okwodu, 2021). A magazine spokesperson said the image “captured [her] authentic, approachable nature” (Major, 2022). Perhaps hearing the old double-bind, likeability question in Vogue’s response, The Washington Post’s senior critic-at-large, Robin Givhan (2021) said the problem was not “what was in the frame [of the casual cover] but ... what was absent” (para. 1). Givhan argued that Harris was shown as approachable, yes, but as if someone snapped a test shot on the campaign trail rather than considered the historic moment or Harris as an authority figure—a vice president, “the second-highest-ranking federal official in the land” (para. 4).

Vogue did not honor Harris’s position, in other words. Social-media users were less kind, posting comments suggesting the new vice president’s skin tone was washed out or had been

lightened (N. Williams, 2021); and the photo was described as “disrespectful” (Nguyen, 2021, para. 2). Harris’s staff contacted Wintour, saying the vice-president elect felt “belittled” and “blindsided” (para. 8). As a result of the controversy, Vogue published the preferred (and more formal), photo online and in a limited print edition of the magazine.

This summary of events hints at the underlying nasty-woman rhetorics. Vogue’s response about presenting Harris as “approachable” makes sense to me as a former journalist. First, editors and reporters alike would have resisted promising that one image rather another would be published; they would have maintained independence from the subject being profiled. Second, photos that are less posed engage audiences in a familiar, conversational way; they can make audiences feel as if they are standing with the subject. Charles A. Hill (2008) explained that, in terms of visual rhetorics, a sense of “simultaneity” helps audiences, consumers, and newspaper readers “develop positive feelings toward the product or the candidate” (Helmets & Hill, 2008, Ch. 1). My former publisher would simply say that such engaging photos encourage readers to pick the newspaper; they increase circulation and help the publication’s bottom line.

Figure 11

White House Photograph of Former (Vice) President Gerald Ford



Note. (White House).

However, a womanist perspective asks us to shift position and question what we see and what we think. Consider the official image published by the White House for former vice president Gerald Ford (see Figure 11). In this image, he stood slightly sideways to the camera. He wore a dark-blue jacket, his arms folded across at chest level, a backdrop of U.S. flags behind him. He smiled. This photo resembled the one that Harris and her team expected to be published.

When I started this project, I did not know it would lead me to viewing Ford's official White House photo. But such a journey is one we need to take, if we (especially White women) are to shift our perspectives. As a journalist, I argue that *Vogue* broke faith with Harris and her aides; that faith is hard to reclaim or repair. As a rhetorician, I argue that we also examine previous *Vogue* covers—accessible via a Google search—featuring Michelle Obama in 2009 and Hillary Clinton in 1998 as first ladies.

Stylistic differences aside, both covers glamorized the first ladies, though Obama's is more informal because of the way she leaned across the couch, while Clinton sat upright. If I were using these covers as a warm-up for analyzing visual rhetorics in a first-year composition class or a digital-rhetorics class for graduate students, I would point out the color choices, the prominence of the *Vogue* logo, the direction of the first ladies' respective gazes, the different fonts used, the seasons during which the covers were published, and so forth. I would also hope to spark discussion about the accompanying words. Clinton was described as “extraordinary.” Obama was someone “the world's been waiting for.” To spark discussion, I would posit that these words, in relationship with the images, communicate very different rhetorics. That is, the multimodal compositions demonstrate circulating commonplaces about how first ladies are represented and how we interpret those representations one way for White women and another way for women of color. Both women are successful lawyers, but “extraordinary” speaks to

Clinton's professional accomplishments, and she posed as such, while "the world's been waiting for" Obama spoke to other, more sexual qualities, which her reclining pose heightened.

In terms of rhetorical circulation, I would also talk about each publication's initial distribution of the respective issues, then explore with students how the cover images have circulated in public discourse. For example, on October 7, 2016, @fsokentstate (Fashion Student Organization, Kent State) posted the cover, saying, "#FSOFashionFact December, 1998: Hillary Clinton becomes the first American first lady to grace Vogue's cover." I found this post by searching Twitter for "Hillary Clinton's vogue cover." By scanning other tweets in the thread, I surmise that @fsokentstate was sharing a fun fact about Clinton's appearances on Vogue, but I am not sure in relation to what event or discussion. Rhetorical circulation, and a method like ANT, could help answer that question but would require a deeper dive that exceeds the scope of this project.

Further Analysis

Tracing this thread of thought, I found an article about Clinton appearing on the December 5, 2017, cover of Teen Vogue—an issue that she guest-edited (Fitzpatrick, 2017). This cover was based on a close-up, side view of Clinton's face. The image was done collage-style, her face pieced together with overlapping images; and it was set against a flag-like background of red and white stripes, but with a lighter blue than the U.S. flag. Background words against the blue were "Stand Up," in a font that looks like freshly painted graffiti. Clinton's own words were quoted to the right of her face but strategically capitalized: "FEAR is always with U.S., but we DON'T HAVE TIME for it. NOT NOW" (Andrews-Dyer, 2017). Below her face were additional words: "nevertheless, WE RESIST / guest-edited by Hillary Rodham Clinton." This cover was a remix; it built on a photograph, added other images (a large

pansy graces the space above and to the left of Clinton's head), situated phrases on the page, and played with familiar colors (red, white, and blue). We can similarly trace discourse about the Obama Vogue covers, especially as a way to question circulating representations of women in public spheres. A Google search³⁶ leads with a host of images and multiple articles by Vogue.

In terms of this project, I suspect Anderson (2011) would agree with me that Obama's image was the more sexualized and pornified of the two first-lady photos. So was Obama's third Vogue cover, published in 2016. Like the first, it was taken by renowned photographer Annie Leibovitz. The image and words changed, but a sexualized elegance remained; Obama again reclined, this time on a green lawn and dressed in an ivory gown. This third cover included the words, "The First Lady the World Fell in Love With." Both Obama covers, and their accompanying words, invoked a sexual element, moderated in the accompanying articles by references to Obama as "mom in chief," a title she gave herself. Howard (2018) suggested that this self-labeling reinforced White middle-class myths about first ladies. By reinforcing such cultural expectations, Obama avoided some of the pitfalls of BCPP, like the Jezebel trope. Nonetheless, Obama's Vogue covers, however glamorous and stately they are, pornified her. On the other hand, both the Clinton and the Obama covers evoked levels of authority that are absent from the 2021 Harris cover.

These observations are early thoughts toward a full rhetorical analysis of the Vogue covers, similar artifacts, and their circulation in public discourse; they also suggest how to apply my research in writing classrooms. Turner and Griffin (2020), for example, explored the ways that two African American girls used multimodal compositions to "articulate their career

³⁶ Search terms: "Michelle Obama's first vogue cover"

aspirations” (p. 109). Multimodal representations of career women of color are lacking, said Turner and Griffin; their project suggested a way to address that absence. In addition to interviewing the girls, who were fraternal twins, Turner and Griffin (2020) examined “digital dream boards” the girls created; these boards included images, soundscapes, and written words. They noted that Black girls’ aspirations are often overgeneralized, subsumed into Black male experiences, and misinterpreted via White, middle-class values. Turner and Griffin (2020) disrupted those practices of omission by considering the girls’ multiliteracies and the intersections of age, race, and gender. I am interested in exploring how their work could apply to literacy narratives in first-year composition and how their approach could inform advanced study of visual/digital rhetorics about women of color in other courses. I am also interested in exploring ways that my work could inform political strategies for candidates who do not fit neatly into patriarchy; this interest informs the next section.

Finding No. 5: Adopt Many Strategies

Overview

No single, perfect strategy exists for counteracting nasty-woman rhetorics, but I begin this section with the words of U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters, who in 2017 told then-U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin that she did not have time for his stalling, although his responses included extolling her praises. Calling on congressional committee rules, “Auntie Maxine” reclaimed her time—repeatedly (Rogo, 2020; Romano, 2017). Known for her witty comebacks and outrageous statements, Waters said the phrase several times, interrupting Mnuchin as he spoke. She got her time back. News-media reported the exchange, from *The Washington Post* to *The Hill* to *Essence*; the exchange and its coverage sparked shout-outs on Twitter, a colorfully illustrated book (Andrews-Dyer & Thomas, 2020), and even a gospel song by singer/actor Mykal

Kilgore (2017). In the song, Kilgore forms a choir whose harmonized refrain is, “Reclaiming my time.” In the book, journalist Andrews-Dyer and illustrator Thomas peppered the pages with pithy sayings by Waters, illustrations by Sabrina Dorsainvil, photos from Waters’s days in Congress, and a dedication that reads, “For anyone who was told they are too much—too black, too skinny, too loud, too smart, too strong, too in-your-face. Turns out, you are just enough.” The dedication calls attention to common criticisms of Black women, all of which have been applied to Waters. She speaks out and speaks her mind. Of course, not every candidate, politician, or school-board member can emulate her style; but in this section, I explore a few strategies for countering, disrupting, or dispensing with nasty-woman rhetorics.

Action No. 1: Reclaim Our Time

Waters’s method for handling Mnuchin relied on two rhetorical ingredients: House procedural rules that require committee chairs to honor a request for “reclaiming my time” and news-media’s attention. That is, Waters used the conventions of the situation and news-media were present to record, then distribute (i.e., circulate) her actions. Waters has served in the House of Representative since 1990, after more than a dozen years in the California State Assembly; the former teacher knows the rules and uses them. In videos of the Mnuchin exchange, she asked him a question while looking down at papers on her desk; when he responded by first lauding her, she peered over reader glasses and said there was no need to waste her time and the committee’s with a history of her accomplishments. She repeated the question, and when Mnuchin again rambled, she interrupted like a metronome with “reclaiming my time.” The phrase triggered the committee chair to re-allot speaking time to her. With or without cameras recording, Waters would have been granted this courtesy, however theatrical the performance might be interpreted.

Of course, cameras were filming and news-media were broadcasting. This fact benefited Waters, who had long been in the media eye. Over the years she has become known for “mic-dropping comments, eye-rolls and, on a few occasions, dramatic exits during interviews” (V. Williams, 2017). In interviews, Waters has expressed self-awareness of the attention she receives via such actions. To some audiences, such actions are theatrics; to others, they are inspiration. But Waters’s strategies are more than style. They are rhetorical. Tamika E. Carey (2020) described “rhetorical impatience” as a way that Black women “disrupt the forms of misogynoir or disregard that lead to their respect” (p. 270). Black women make rhetorical moves like “talking back” and “calling a thing a thing” as not only counter moves but as decisive actions that make their presence and demands known (Carey, 2020, p. 270).

However, (re)claiming time and demanding action are complicated moves. Waters, for example, has perfected the art of one-liners and retorts, especially in front of the cameras and on platforms like Twitter. News-media can hardly help themselves when it comes to reporting her latest quip—a phenomenon that is not dissimilar to the news-media attention given Trump as a candidate, then as president. Trump called Waters “unhinged,” by the way, and his then-Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee said it was “unacceptable” for Waters to respond by urging her supporters to harass Trump (Singman, 2018). As entertaining and attention-grabbing as such exchanges are, however, they may not suit many candidates and political leaders; but Waters’s case brings me to the next strategy.

Action No. 2: Know (Y)our Media

One key challenge remains for all women but especially for women of color: Ownership, control, and influence of most major news-media rests with White male elites. The path for women of color to news- or social-media attention is fraught at the infrastructural, institutional

level, therefore, because no news-media equivalent of Oprah magazine exists. Furthermore, 61% of reporters in U.S. newsrooms are men; and 77% percent are White (Grieco, 2018). Most publications are also owned and run by White men or majority-White stakeholders. For example, the second-largest media company in the US is Fox, for which Rupert Murdoch owns a controlling interest (Harvard University, 2021). In short, women in general but especially women of color do not have a seat at the national/global media table. Waters overcomes the problem by being, at times, outrageous. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez similarly sidesteps mainstream media by engaging audiences on Twitter, where she can bypass media's mega-corporations. Both women strategically use the affordances of the media available to them.

However, it is difficult to say what strategy could have helped Harris avoid the Vogue cover controversy. Vogue exhibited tone-deafness in the way the cover was handled, both pre- and post-publication (N. Williams, 2021). Harris has appeared on the covers of ELLE (Moniuszko, 2020), Ebony (2018), Time (2019 and 2021), San Francisco Magazine (2020), Forbes (2021), Glamour (2018), and Seema³⁷ (2020). In most of the covers, Harris posed formally; in many, she smiled. The Seema cover featured a casual close-up of a smiling Harris. For Elle, she sat in an office chair, resting her chin in hand and smiling. For Ebony (2018), she joined Sen. Corey Booker and Atlanta mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms. While she stood, arms crossed, leaning against the wall, Booker and Bottoms sat on a dark leather couch. The key cover words were "Talking Politics & Black America." Key colors were the dark tones of the couch and Harris and Booker's respective dark suits; Bottoms wore a sleeveless red dress that matched one of the colors in the Ebony logo remixed in patriotic red, white, and blue. These covers did

³⁷ Seema is an international publication that "focuses on connecting and empowering women of Indian origin globally" (seema.com).

not spark controversy, which suggests at least two possibilities: Harris and aides had a more explicit arrangement while shooting for these covers, and/or the respective magazines considered their choice with extra care.

Action No. 3: Persist and Connect

As I write this subsection, I recognize that I can offer no easy answers here. Caroline Dadas (2016) cautioned that some methodologies risk finding no “tidy resolution” (p. 62). Social-media sites, she said, are particularly “messy” and “fraught” (Dadas, 2016, p. 62). Dadas worked from queer methodologies because, in part, they “honor the tensions, fissures, and gaps that often emerge in our research” (p. 62). I have attempted in this study to explore such liminal spaces, which often go unseen. Although I have not explicitly applied queer theory, it is present in the way I push against binaries, from Jamieson’s (1995) double-binds to the casting of the presidency as inherently (naturally) masculine. But pushing against boundaries does not unmake them.

The media problem, as sketched in the previous section, is exacerbated by a powerful binary: political polarization at all levels, including in/with news-media. For example, Trump as well as Biden picked their respective “friendly” news-media for interviews, and so did Harris. Trump could call in to conservative Fox for an impromptu rift, while Harris and Biden scheduled post-announcement interviews with the slightly left-leaning ABC News. There is, however, no news-media equivalent for people of color, not at the scale of Fox or ABC. Oprah Winfrey and her media company might be the closest, but they have only occasionally been political in topic, tone, and coverage. Fashion- and culture-oriented publications like *Essence* provide limited news coverage for political candidates and office-holders. Therefore, the paucity of national news-

oriented media for people of color means that coverage relies on relationships and trends. The latter rely on *kairos* and a certain level of opportunism on the candidate's part.

Relationships, however, can be changed. I would like to know more, for example, about whom the “We Have Her Back” campaign contacted and how (TIME’S UP, 2020a). I wonder if they did more than publish an open letter on their website and link it to a video (TIME’S UP, 2020b), which drew attention from audiences already familiar with their work. I wonder if they sent the letter or video to news-media leaders. Ridolfo and DeVoss (2009) used an old-fashioned press release as the key example of rhetorical velocity. They discussed not simply where to distribute a message, but to whom and how; and they urged considering the ways that audiences might receive, interpret, (re) use, circulate the initial texts. Rhetorical velocity is both a strategy for planning how texts will be recomposed and a theory for exploring how fast, in what direction, and how far the text travels (or does not travel). For instance, Ocasio-Cortez has approximately 13 million followers on Twitter (Trump had more than 80 million at the time he was exiled from the platform). I guarantee that a significant portion of those followers are reporters, but the remaining followers definitely amplify the “AOC” messages at a volume that simply has to be heard.

Action No. 4: Pump Up the Representation

Decades ago, Denise Bostdorff (1991) said that to elect more women to higher office (and, ultimately, the presidency), more women must run for office in the first place. If more women run, the odds are that more women will win; the representation of women in political office would logically increase. Gender scholar Judith Butler (1990) noted two kinds of representation, both of which apply to this study: a “political process” that “seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy,” and another process-practice that serves a “normative function ... said

to either reveal or distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (p. 2).

Political representation concerns increasing the number of, and presence of, women in public office; those women thus represent other women and their interests. Kaitlin M. Boyle and Chase B. Meyer (2018) pointed out, for instance, that women comprise “about half the U.S. population but about 20 percent of the members of congress” (p. 1). The numbers for women of color are even less, although that is changing. Normative representation, which Butler (1990) also called “linguistic,” is rhetorical, however; that is, it creates meaning by defining and, therefore, constraining women to predetermined roles. It defines and reinforces cultural norms. It keeps women from running and possibly from winning.

Nasty-woman rhetorics fall in the normative category, and by Bostdorff’s (1991) logic, one way to undo this constraint is to increase the number of women in office. However, 52% of White women in the US voted for Trump, so her solution is imperfect. Nonetheless, more women and more women of color are indeed running for office and winning. Two nonprofit organizations—The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) and Higher Heights Leadership Fund—released a 2021 report detailing record numbers of Black women running for office in 2020 and records numbers projected to run in 2022. While optimistic, the report also noted barriers for women of color, including lack of financing and party gatekeepers (Chisolm, for example, was blocked from using party locations for campaigning in 1972; similar challenges remain for women of color). While rhetorics alone cannot overcome financial barriers, positive support for women of color—from recruiting them to voting for them—can certainly help. The report makes clear that change is possible: The cover image features a painting of Harris.

Action No. 5: Remix It

I will end by noting a strategy that Harris and Biden used during the campaign season: calling each other by their first names. Women are often referred to by first name, like children, even when they hold authoritative positions. Successful women of color—especially in the entertainment industry—often flip this notion by making their first name (or chosen name) the only name we know them by (e.g., Oprah, Cher, Beyoncé). Hillary Clinton is still often referred to by her first name, in part, I am sure, because her husband was President Bill Clinton; but the labeling is not done simply to avoid confusion. First-name usage is often derogatory. For example, opponents from Trump to former Sen. David Purdue regularly mispronounced Harris’s first name. They pretended to stumble over it as unpronounceable, foreign, and Other. In doing so, they practiced a version of nasty-woman rhetorics.

Biden and Harris countered this nastiness by calling each other by their first names. President Biden has long gone by “Joe” as a way to reinforce his everyman persona, his Joe-from-Scranton identity. Harris almost always called him “Joe” on the campaign trail during the study period, and Biden almost always called her Kamala. Correctly. The unspoken rhetorics here are that Biden, a stutterer, could say her name correctly; those who cannot are not trying to. Their casual rhetorics poke fun at those who purposely mispronounced Harris’s first name. These naming rhetorics further countered the nastiness by emphasizing Harris as nice and likeable.

Still, being nice does not solve what Carey (2018) dubbed the “tightrope of perfection” that intellectual (i.e., “smart”) women of color have to walk when engaging in public forums. Carey spoke of “[p]rivileging counter-discourses, repurposing visual texts, signifying, and direct critique” as strategies used by political-science professor and former MSNBC host Melissa Harris-Perry in early 2016 (p. 140). Carey discussed the backlash Harris-Perry encountered after

making offhand remarks about then-presidential candidate Mitt Romney's African American grandchild. A "hostile surveillance" culture, as Carey described it, contributed to her making a public apology and, ultimately, being forced off air and her show shuttered by MSNBC (2018, p. 142). She argued that people from dominant groups—White men, for example—get a pass, almost a permission, to be imperfect, while women of color do not. In fact, women of color are increasingly at risk in today's über-polarized, death-threat culture. Bad feminists like me need to stand with them and oppose these threats.

Epilogue: Futurity and Hope

Here is what I hope: that this work will help us learn practical strategies that involve more women in public discourse and in public office. For me, that work began with shifting my perspective, reading (more) Black and queer feminists, and engaging with those readings. Even if there is no tidy resolution to the first part of this quest, the readings continue, the engagement begins anew, and the implications and applications of my work can circulate in a variety of ways. For example, the methodology outlined above can help students improve their media-literacy practices, compose their own works for distribution/circulation, strategically apply multiple modes in their compositions, and critique the circulating rhetorics of racism and misogyny. Beyond the classroom, my findings can also help female as well as non-cisgender and/or non-White candidates navigate the fraught rhetorics of American politics. This project, therefore, looks to the future.

This project also reflects a desire to become a better ally and practice a feminist "ethics of hope and care" (Royster and Kirsch, 2012, p. 141). That is, I reflectively, respectfully attend to discursive systems that are persistently sexist, classist, racist, and heteronormative. Royster and Kirsch (2012) suggested a useful approach to such work, blending circulation studies with

feminism. They remind us, “For centuries the world of rhetoric has been anchored by Western patriarchal values, an assertion that is easily documented by a review of rhetorical scholarship over time and that invariably underscores historical patterns of exclusivity” (Royster and Kirsch, 2012, p. 641). Picking up this notion, I note that students and scholars in rhetoric know Plato and Burke very well, for example, but are less familiar with the feminisms of Pan Chao, Christine de Pizan, Maria W. Stewart, Virginia Woolf, Angela Davis, Angela Haas, and bell hook, just to name a few. In an earlier collaborative work, Royster and Kirsch argued that social “connections among past, present, and future ... [are] carried on or modified from one generation to the next” (2010, p. 660). Inherently rhetorical, these connections travel and transform; they pass along meaning and practice as agents human and nonhuman distribute/circulate them. What and whom we choose to circulate and cite, I take from their point, challenges the Western, patriarchal values that gird nasty-woman rhetorics.

Royster and Kirsch (2012) recentered the social, cultural aspects of rhetorical ecologies and rhetorical circulation; they also counteract the problem of distributed agency in terms of individual, intersectional identities in rhetorical ecologies. That is, if we assume agency is distributed across the system, individual agents/actors seem to have a reduced role in the system and, hence, reduced opportunity/ability to affect the system. This ability, or opportunity, to influence the system is especially reduced if they work from outside the power structures (or are denied entry in the first place). Distributed agency, a tenet of Margaret Syverson’s (1999) outline of rhetorical ecologies, tends to elide or abstract such identity-related issues as racism and sexism within complex systems, but collaboration works in a distributed way to create a new, powerful kind of agency.

With this project, I have pondered these theories and praxes, but Michelle Obama has a point: “That shit doesn’t always work” (Romano, 2018). She was responding to a question about Sheryl Sandberg’s book and the espoused philosophy reflected therein: *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lean In*. Sandberg’s motto seemed to be that women could have it all; they just need to lean into it. Obama, I think, was responding to what bell hooks (2013) called faux feminism—a simplistic, neoliberal, privileged, and White kind of feminism. Sandberg is, after all, a White female billionaire who admitted to never calling herself a feminist (in fact, she said she often denied being one). I cannot do justice to hooks’s (2013) takedown of Sandberg here, but a point that stands out to me, in relation to my project, is hooks’s comment, “the “lean in” woman is never given a racial identity ... [Sandberg] was primarily addressing privileged white women like herself” (para. 8). This problem is what elicited mild profanity when Obama was asked about Sandberg and her book: What works for White privileged women does not always work for women of color.

While I have certainly never enjoyed the financial privileges Sandberg has, I have benefited from White privilege. Unlike Sandberg, I am listening to Obama and hooks. The latter made this point in 2013:

To women of color young and old, along with anti-racist white women, it is more than obvious that without a call to challenge and change racism as an integral part of class mobility [Sandberg] is really investing in top level success for highly educated women from privileged classes. (para. 26)

With these words, hooks made me more aware that one limitation of my project is that I have not talked about class, which is tied to wealth in most of the world. Harris has certainly been the target of racist and sexist attacks, but she is a wealthy woman. How different have U.S. Reps.

Corey Bush's or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's or Ilhan Omar's experiences been in the political arena? Nasty-woman rhetorics take on different and equally disturbing flavors for women of color who lack financial privilege, speak in their community's vernacular, or were not born in the U.S. It is my hope that White women like me do indeed pay attention, step back from our privilege, perhaps set aside the master's tools, and adjust our position. We can build bridges, but we need to venture across them, too. We need to wade out to the sandbar, the nepantla, and parlay.

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