

Sex, Lies, and Stereotypes: How Disinformation Undermines Women's Rights

BONNIE STABLE, PHD,
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, GENDER AND POLICY (GAP) CENTER
SCHAR SCHOOL OF POLICY AND GOVERNMENT
GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

Stabile Red, Wine and Blue August 14, 2025

Sex, Lies and Stereotypes

Agenda and Aspirations: See it Coming,

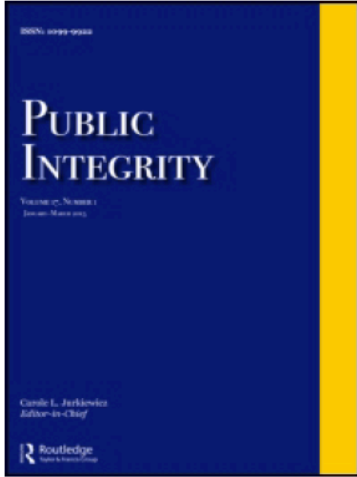
Call it out, Take the Wheel

Examples and Explanations

- ▶ Examples
 - ▶ #KamalaHitAndRun
 - ▶ #HillaryCoughing
 - ▶ #PizzaGate
- ▶ Explanations
 - ▶ Testimonial Injustice and “Himpathy”
 - ▶ Power Imbalance
 - ▶ Maintaining Status Quo of Power

Tactics and Implications

- ▶ Tactics
 - ▶ Trivialize/Demonize/Sexualize
 - ▶ Spreading Disinformation/Misinformation
 - ▶ Claiming Witch hunts
 - ▶ Discrediting
 - ▶ Distracting
- ▶ Implications
 - ▶ Reduced representation/halting of progress
 - ▶ Silencing and Loss of Autonomy
 - ▶ Worse overall outcomes for all



Public Integrity

ISSN: 1099-9922 (Print) 1558-0989 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/mpin20>

Sex, Lies, and Stereotypes: Gendered Implications of Fake News for Women in Politics

Bonnie Stabile, Aubrey Grant, Hemant Purohit & Kelsey Harris

To cite this article: Bonnie Stabile, Aubrey Grant, Hemant Purohit & Kelsey Harris (2019): Sex, Lies, and Stereotypes: Gendered Implications of Fake News for Women in Politics, Public Integrity, DOI: [10.1080/10999922.2019.1626695](https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2019.1626695)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2019.1626695>

Stereotypes drive efforts to sideline women candidates for those who don't want to see women "at the wheel"

Russia propaganda group behind fake Kamala Harris hit-and-run story, says Microsoft

Microsoft researchers found that the group created a video, paid an actor to appear as the alleged victim, and spread the claim through a fake website



Microsoft researchers accused Russia of being behind a viral fake news story that claimed Kamala Harris has been involved in a hit and run incident in 2011. Photograph: Jim Watson/AFB/Getty Images

#KamalaHitAndRun - Viewed over 2.7 million times



“She doesn’t have the **stamina**. To be President of this country, you need tremendous stamina.”

Donald Trump,

first Presidential debate, September 2016

Hillary Health Scare

#HillaryCoughing

<https://apnews.com/events-united-states-presidential-election-2c8dbf3a7ed44e40be52fade3cfe2900>

Stabile Red, Wine and Blue August 14, 2025

2016 ELECTION

2016 ELECTION

Hillary Clinton's Health Scare: 9 Unanswered Questions

A photograph of Hillary Clinton, wearing a blue blazer and sunglasses, walking out of the back of a black SUV. A man in a dark suit and red tie is standing next to her, looking towards the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing a crowd of people.

The NBC News logo, featuring the peacock icon and the words "NBC NEWS" in white on a dark blue background.

Sept. 12, 2016, 4:53 AM EDT / Updated Sept. 12, 2016, 7:50 AM EDT

By Alex Seitz-Wald, Monica Alba, Andrea Mitchell, Kristen Welker and Kasie



AP

WORLD U.S. POLITICS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS SCIENCE FACT CHECK ODDITIES MORE

LIVE: Trump administration CoreWeave stock Alaska glacier Tom Dundon 'New Heights' podcast

Video proves Clinton suffering seizures? Not so, I was there

BY LISA LERER

Published 7:12 PM EDT, August 12, 2016

Share

WASHINGTON (AP) — I've never been part of a conspiracy theory. Now, video of my surprised facial expression has become Exhibit A in the latest unfounded speculation about Hillary Clinton

'PizzaGate' Conspiracy Theory Thrives Anew in the TikTok Era

The false theory targeting Democrats, now fueled by QAnon and teenagers on TikTok, is entangling new targets like Justin Bieber.



- ▶ The fake news story included fantastical tales of a **child sex ring**, hidden tunnels, **cannibalism**, and **Satanism**.
- ▶ From October until December 4, 2016, when armed vigilante Welch walked into the pizza restaurant, **#Pizzagate** and related **hashtags were shared about 1.4 million times by more than 250,000 accounts**

Stabile Red, Wine and Blue August 14, 2025

npr

WAMU 88.5
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY RADIO

SHOP

DONATE

NEWS ARTS & LIFE MUSIC SHOWS & PODCASTS SEARCH SIGN IN

The Two-Way

AMERICA

'Pizzagate' Gunman Sentenced To 4 Years In Prison

June 22, 2017 · 2:13 PM ET

MERRIT KENNEDY



Edgar Maddison Welch of Salisbury, N.C., surrenders to police in December in Washington, D.C.
Sathi Soma/AP

Female candidates are **trivialized** until they are seen as competitive, and then they are **villainized**.

HELDMAN ET AL., *SEX AND GENDER IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION*, 2018, P. 66).



OPINION

Los Angeles Times

Column: Critics say Kamala Harris is a giddy lightweight. The proof? She likes to dance and laugh

Trivialized



tb to when republicans
tried to attack aoc for
dancing in college



550.7K



7149



18.7K



7884

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

“She Lied”: Social construction, rape myth prevalence in social media, and sexual assault policy[†]

Bonnie Stabile✉, Aubrey Grant, Hemant Purohit, Mohammad Rama

Villainized

First published: 21 December 2019 | <https://doi.org/10.1002/sgp2.12011> | Citations: 1

- ▶ In this study – for which we collected more than 5 million tweets for analysis- we inadvertently discovered that **Hillary Clinton's name was associated with deception and sexual assault more than twice as often as Trump's**—in 12,000 versus 5,000 tweets in the election cycle when Trump's notorious Access Hollywood tape was revealed (fall 2016).

Sexualized

Misogynoir in Today's America: Exploring the History of the Racist, Sexist Attacks on Kamala Harris

In what ways are sexist and racist tropes being used by the Trump campaign to characterize Harris in the presidential election?

Post by Jacob Ware

October 29, 2024 4:11 pm (EST)

COUNCIL *on*
FOREIGN
RELATIONS

Stabile Red, Wine and Blue August 14, 2025

“Funny how blowjobs impacted both their careers differently...” Truth Social post shared by DJT referring to Clinton and Harris

“Her and her pimp handlers will destroy our country.”

≡> **Newsweek**

“Joe and the Hoe Gotta Go.”

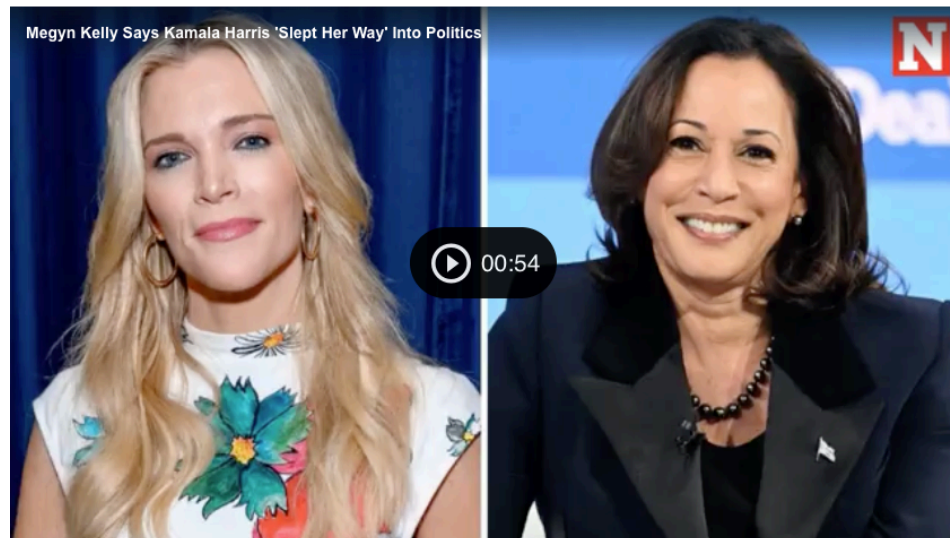
SUBSCRIBE

Login

Megyn Kelly Says Kamala Harris 'Slept Her Way' Into Politics

Published Jul 23, 2024 at 7:40 AM EDT

Updated Jul 23, 2024 at 9:15 AM EDT



By [Billie Schwab Dunn](#)

Pop Culture and Entertainment Reporter

Disinformation* or Misinformation**

teenVOGUE



Sexual Health + Identity

Betsy DeVos Said She Doesn't Know Whether False Rape Allegations Outnumber Real Ones

Statistics show a pretty clear picture, though.



BY BRITTNEY MCNAMARA

MARCH 12, 2018

Disinformation is **false information deliberately ... spread** (as by the planting of rumors) in order to influence public opinion or obscure the truth

****Misinformation**** is incorrect or **misleading** information The difference is degree and intent

Claiming “Witch Hunt” is a Tell

Those crying “witch hunt” are often the guilty parties **claiming the mantle of aggrieved victim** when they are actually power players in privileged social, political and policy positions.

“Between 1400 and 1780, an estimated **100,000 people—mostly women**—were prosecuted for witchcraft in Europe. **About half that number were executed**, killings **motivated by** a constellation of **beliefs about women**, truth, evil and magic.”

Stabile Red, Wine and Blue August 14, 2025

MFP VOICES

Opinion | Yesterday’s Witch Hunts and Today’s Misinformation Crisis Have Much in Common

by Julie Walsh
August 13, 2025



An illustration from “The History of Witches and Wizards,” published in 1720, depicting witches offering wax dolls to the devil. Wellcome Collection/Wikimedia Commons

Bad information leads to bad policy: Unjust, Ineffective, Expensive

- Because it **targets the wrong problem** – it is a **misdiagnosis**
- In the campus context:
 - evidence shows that **the incidence of sexual assault is at least 50 times greater than the incidence of false reporting**
 - **80 percent of rapes and sexual assaults are not reported** to law enforcement at all
 - and **few accused perpetrators are ever held accountable.**

WOMEN, POWER, AND RAPE CULTURE

The Politics and Policy
of Underrepresentation

Bonnie Stabile and Aubrey Leigh Grant

Why/How do **Stereotypes** and **Disinformation** work*?

- They rely upon **age-old tropes** about women's **trustworthiness** and **competence** (such as that they are hormonal, hysterical, bad at math, etc.)
- and are explained by concepts like "**Testimonial Injustice**" and "**Himpathy**"- (shout out to philosopher Kate Manne - see especially her book *Down Girl*)
- **to maintain the status quo of power** (by suggesting that they shouldn't be leaders and need protection; and obtw making them continue to staff the care economy for free)

*suppressing women's representation and power in the public sphere, by influencing the balance of policy benefits and burdens

Discrediting Characterizations

from analysis of Trump Twitter archive, in the “Bully Pulpit” chapter of Stabile and Grant, *Women, Power and Rape Culture*, 2022

Table 2.1 Categories of Descriptors: The SILENT Treatment

Stature and Stamina		Intelligence		Looks and Loathsomeness		Emotional State		Necessary Qualifications		Trustworthiness	
Descriptor	Number of Tweets	Descriptor	Number of Tweets	Descriptor	Number of Tweets	Descriptor	Number of Tweets	Descriptor	Number of Tweets	Descriptor	Number of tweets
sad	343	stupid	192	disgusting	80	crazy	306	disaster	319	fake	1,217
little	281	dumb	142	nasty	66	angry	158	failed	268	crooked	450
sleepy	247	clue (as in “no clue” or “dumb as a clue”)	98	ugly	50	vicious*	55	failing	260	corrupt	363
weak	240	dumb	142							hoax	301
loser	158	dope	118							fraud	285
joke	126	fool	110							phony	235
pathetic	126	dumb	118							dishonest	208
sick	118	dope	110							lies	206
lightweight	110	more	100							false	191
strength	100	clue	98							criminal	138
(as in no, none or zero)											
short	99	idiot	19	stupid	2	wacky	20	goofy	27	lied	104

Stature
Intelligence
Looks
Emotional State
Necessary Qualifications (Competence)
Trustworthiness

Distracting Tactics



- “Administration will defend women’s rights”
- Claims there is an “**attack on women** ...depriving them of their **dignity, safety, and well-being**” due to trans women having “access to intimate single-sex spaces and activities designed for women, from women’s domestic abuse shelters to women’s workplace showers”
- And defend a purported “**immutable biological reality of sex**”



Trump's definition of 'male,' 'female' criticized by medical and legal experts

President Trump issued an executive order limiting gender definitions on Monday.



By [Kiara Alfonseca](#)

January 23, 2025, 12:54 PM



Who needs protection from whom?

JUSTICE & LAW, NATIONAL, POLITICS, VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT

'Daddy's Home': Republican Paternalism Towards Women Exemplifies Punishment, Not Protection

PUBLISHED 2/12/2025 by **BONNIE STABILE**

Ms.
MORE THAN A MAGAZINE. A MOVEMENT

The Trump administration's latest wave of paternalistic policies claims to protect women. In reality, it strips them of rights, autonomy and safety.



Stabile Red, Wine and Blue August 14, 2025

In the US, "as many as one in four women **experience domestic violence** and more than three women **are killed by husbands or boyfriends every day.**"

U.S.

©CBS NEWS

Murders of trans people nearly doubled over past 4 years, and Black trans women are most at risk, report finds

By C Mandler

Updated on: October 13, 2022 / 9:46 PM EDT / CBS News



No link between trans-inclusive policies and bathroom safety, study finds

 **NBC NEWS**

There is no evidence that letting transgender people use public facilities that align with their gender identity increases safety risks, a UCLA study finds.

Fake News: Forewarned is Forearmed

- We hope to help thwart the disinformation disadvantage for women by revealing its playbook.
- **Greater Women's Representation in all sectors is the best possible protection for Women's Rights, Lives and Livelihoods.**

Questions?

REACH OUT:

BSTABILE@GMU.EDU

FOR MORE ON THESE TOPICS:

CHECK ME OUT AT **MS. MAGAZINE**

READ **WOMEN, POWER AND RAPE CULTURE: THE POLITICS
AND POLICY OF UNDERREPRESENTATION**

STAY TUNED FOR:

**WOMEN, POWER AND POLICY: INNOVATIONS
ADVANCING REPRESENTATION IN THE USA,**

FROM PALGRAVE MACMILLAN 2026