"She Looks Like She'd Be a Filthy Pig in Bed": Online Misogyny and Denigration of Women Politicians

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Abstract
This article summarizes the main results of a study about the disparagement of women politicians in Spain. The thematic analysis of 1,245 comments spontaneously posted on the Burbuja.info forum reveals that the commenters feel entitled to humiliate and disparage the eight female politicians embattled by the hate speech posts. While the main targets of this form of harassment have been women representatives of left-wing parties, the focus of the disparaging attacks has been the female body. This explains why those who were overweight were the most vilified, even during periods when they had a lower profile in the media.

The 21st-century explosion in the collective obsession with celebrities has resulted in a well-established participatory media system "in which 'regular' internet users can produce their own media and build influence among others on social platforms" (Lewis, 2019, p. 205). With new outlets being incessantly created and discourses on fame constantly circulating (Marwick & Boyd, 2011), celebrities have constructed solid fan bases and attracted millions of followers, as well as an equally large number of haters (Murumaa-Mengel & Siibak, 2020).

Along with the expansive presence of traditionally famous people (writers, artists, movie and sports stars, etc.) in the media, there is now a whole plethora of reality show contestants, TV entertainers, and so-called influencers who have joined a vast catalog of microcelebrities and are both applauded and penalized for their entrepreneurial careers (Droz-dit-Busset, 2022; Marwick, 2015). In line with the steady development of this fast-moving celebrity culture, aimed at satisfying the voracity of a public more and more "skilled in the art of celeb-making and celeb-breaking" (Cashmore, 2006, p. 4), the tabloidization of hard news has brought other previously underknown social groups (politicians, journalists, educators, scientists, and technologists) into the limelight of popularity (Krook, 2020; Miller & Lewis, 2022).

The multiplication of celebrities in turn fuels hate speech against famous women in the Manosphere: a loose confederacy of antifeminist and male-supremacist men's rights interest groups, often imbued with misogyny (Ging, 2019; Park et al., 2023). Although many online users merely lurk and do not directly participate, their sense of community identity and endorsement (particularly regarding misogynous discourses) contribute to effects that could pose a serious threat to democracy, public debate, and inclusive governance (Fuchs & Schäfer, 2020; Ging, 2023; Schmid et al., 2022).

The factors driving online hate speech against female celebrities include a persistent, long-standing misogynistic prejudice which involves seeing the relationship between women and celebrity as problematic because "women's agency in seeking fame has historically been met with disapproval" (Taylor, 2016, p. 43). This also explains why the abuse of women who seek or have received public attention is often perceived as reasonable and even a fair price for fame (Gay, 2014; Ouvrein et al., 2017). However, while the literature on online violence against

most social groups has offered a relatively broad range of thematic and disciplinary perspectives (Miller & Lewis, 2022; Thompson, 2023), the concept of violence against women in politics has remained hidden for a long time and has only recently been revealed to the world stage, despite the fact that the experiences it describes are not new (Krook, 2020). Quite to the contrary, as noted by Tileagă (2019), misogyny is a form of prejudice that has deep historical roots and "harms the dignity of women by calling into question women's (human) rights to participation in public life, freedom of expression, and personal safety" (p. 5).

The rise of hatred toward women who are active in public life in the Internet age (Tileagă, 2019) and the increasing prominence of misogyny in far-right discourse (Pettersson et al., 2023) underscore the need to combat hate speech against women by conducting academic research focused on how it is produced and reproduced in the virtual sphere. This article aims to meet this need and augment the literature on the perceptions held of females who take an active role in traditionally maledomains. To do so, it analyzes the insults and sexist disparaging remarks hurled at Spanish female politicians on *Burbuja.info*,[1] an online economic forum labeled as neo- liberal by the media in Spain (*El País*, 2020). Remarks about women's physical appearance (as targeted by hostile sexism) are the focus of the study.[2]

Based on findings from other studies on online misogyny, the assumptions under- pinning this research are as follows:

1. Online misogyny represents an indirect form of *gendertrolling*, aimed at offending and humiliating women, and undermining their reputation (Langos, 2012; Mantilla, 2013).
1. The attacks reproduce stereotypes of femininity historically used to subjugate women (Ghaffari, 2022; Park et al., 2023).
2. The cultural association of women with nature and the body is one of the reasons historically given to justify their subjugation and a determining factor in their dehumanization (Salmen & Kristof, 2021).
3. *Gendertrolling* of women politicians is not specifically characterized by having a given motivation but a particular target, as what draws the attacker's attention is a woman's role as a public official (Krook, 2020).

Despite the usual differentiation between *fame* (the status of being glorified) and *celeb- rity* (the process of media exposure), we agree with Rockwell and Giles (2009) that they overlap in contemporary culture. Therefore, the two terms will be used synony- mously here.

Hating Famous (Female) Politicians

The consumption of celebrities through the media over the last 30 years and its evolu- tion from merely playing a role in product endorsement to engaging in global political and international diplomacy are phenomena unparalleled in the past (Choi & Berger, 2020; Hyde, 2009).

Most aggressions toward online celebrities are usually considered to be relatively minor forms of harassment, although they may therefore be as damaging to women's democratic representation as major abuse (Harmer & Southern, 2021). However, far from being trivial acts, this kind of violence contributes to harming, coercing, and subjugating women by using words, images and, in some cases, corporal language (Krook, 2022). Its expansion has run parallel to an emergent form of geek and normative masculinity, "characterized by technical

expertise, interest in genre enter- tainment, and a political commitment to free speech and libertarianism" (Marwick, 2017, p. 189). This has happened to such an extent that the processes of degradation, desecration, and "decelebrification" have become an integral part of the complex phe- nomenon of celebrity culture (Andò & Redmond, 2020).

The drive for branding expands the concept of celebrity and leads professionals such as journalists—but also politicians—to engage in continually publicizing their work by incessantly creating content that often goes beyond their professionalsphere to include their private lives as well. Unfortunately, the visibility of personal branding heightens the risk of hostility, abuse, harassment, and aggression, and often causes celebrities to perceive interacting with their audiences as being less valu- able (Lewis et al., 2020). Rainer Fisher-Quann coined the term "Woman'd" to describe the processes of denigration whereby a female celebrity ceases to be adored by the public and comes to be questioned in all aspects of her personal and professional life, especially on the inter- net.[3] In general, these kinds of harassment processes of female celebrities are usually motivated by an express desire to harm, to the point of becoming true "celebrity- bashing" (Ouvrein et al., 2018). As an ongoing form of gender and class-based derision of ordinary individual female characteristics, celebrity-bashing represents a real back- lash to overt class prejudice. Moreover, sexist treatment of women celebrities "is more than a hint of class prejudice and this, too, is a significant trend in contemporary celebrity culture" (Williamson, 2010, p. 119).

The intensity of hate aimed at women in politics increases in relation to the volume of mentions of any other event or situation to which they are related (Agarwal et al., 2021); to the extent that harassment appears to be a part of their job (Chen et al., 2018, p. 14). Highly visible women in politics, especially left-leaning ones, are at the receiving end of greater rates of uncivil, abusive, and problematic comments on social media than other hate speech targets, including their male counterparts (Amnesty International, 2018; Rheault et al., 2019; Solovev & Pröllochs, 2022; Southern & Harmer, 2019). These forms of online aggression are an extremely trou- bling phenomenon, which is likely to become a gendered barrier to political participation (both online and offline) and make them less competitive (Collignon & Rüdig, 2021; Wagner, 2020).

Denigrating Women Politicians Because of Their Physical Appearance

The journalistic approach to women, who are frequently identified with their bodies, "necessitates that coverage of politics and the qualifications of female political candi- dates share the stage with less relevant information" (Funk & Coker, 2016, p. 468). This is a growing practice derived from the social scrutiny of celebrities, which shifts attention from important to trivial issues and encourages the systematic disparagement of female politicians targeted by sexist discourses, focused almost exclusively on physical features, age, attire, and family life (D'Heer et al., 2022; Fernández-Rovira & Giraldo-Luque, 2021; Hall & Donaghue, 2013; Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020).

However, while media coverage of female politicians tends to be more negative than that of their male counterparts, sexism is even more pronounced in the online blogosphere (Conroy et al., 2015). Insults frequently focus on their sexual anatomy and are aimed at objectifying them to satisfy male sexual desire (Cividanes-Álvarez & Martínez-Rolán, 2023). It is therefore not surprising that "while men are typically cast in positions of power, female candidates tend to be humiliated, violated, and

abused" (Krook, 2022, p. 387).

Online misogyny takes multiple discursive forms that generally include dehumanization (Tileagă, 2007), a radical form of humans' dignity deprivation. Objectivation— one of the recurrent strategies of dehumanization—encompasses all the ways in which a person's humanity is diminished by their being treated as an object (Nussbaum, 1995). Morris et al. (2018) used the theoretical model developed by Haslam (2006) to demonstrate that those who are reified in terms of their sexual characteristics or functions (sexual reification) are perceived as lacking uniquely human attributes (animalistic dehumanization). In contrast, reification based on their beauty or physical appearance presents them as lacking human nature, as if they were objects or automatons (mechanistic dehumanization).

Objectifying women politicians by reducing them to their body parts and depicting their worth partially or exclusively in terms of their sexual attractiveness is related to a traditional form of "semiotic exclusion" aimed to publicly delegitimize them through humiliation (Krook, 2022, p. 387). As Kopytowska (2021, p. 93) noted in her study about the insults on Twitter aimed at Angela Merkel and Eva Kopacz (German ex-chancellor and Polish former prime minister, respectively), by appropriating these women's bodies and sexuality, this discourse "imposes its norms and expectations on them, transforming women into either vulnerable objects of care and protection or, if norms are not adhered to, objects of humiliation and contempt." That is why women's bodies are used against them to rob them of their dignity and therefore, of their legitimacy.

The relationship of negative animal metaphors ("seal" [foca], "whale" [ballena], "vixen" [zorra], etc.[4]) with attitudes and expressions of hatred toward women confirms the use of traditional misogynistic zoomorphism to dehumanize them (Lacalle et al., 2024). Insults related to being overweight—more commonly aimed at women than at men—highlight the fact that nonsexualized dehumanization is a core process in the perception of obesity (Bernard et al., 2014), one of the most common forms of women's animalization along with prominent facial features.

In recent years, there has been abundant research into the propagation of gender stereotypes in politics that has analyzed misogynist discourse in different virtual communities (Caldevilla-Domínguez et al., 2022; Krendel et al., 2022; Massanari & Chess, 2018) and social media platforms (Frenda et al., 2019; Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016; Hopton & Langer, 2022; Lee, 2019). However, while misogynistic online discourse focused on female politicians has been barely explored there have been a few significant contributions, such as Sakki and Martikainen's (2022) work on Sanna Marin and "the jacket scandal." Our study aims to fill the existing gap in Spain by examining misogynistic comments which targeted the most prominent female politicians in Spain at the time of sample collection.

Method

The sample for analysis consisted of remarks about eight women politicians that were published on Burbuja.info, between May 29 and November 30, 2023. This forum was chosen mainly for its impact, as it is one of the most popular in the Spanish Manosphere; but also for its accessibility since, unlike other masculinist forums, all its content is publicly available. The period selected stands out in Spanish politics, as it was marked by the call for an early election following the decline experienced by the PSOE (Spanish socialist party) in the regional elections and the investiture of the socialist Pedro Sánchez after intense negotiations with Catalan and Basque nationalist

parties.

The corpus was delimited based on two criteria. Firstly, the women politicians were selected because they were at the forefront of Spanish politics and had been mentioned more frequently than the others in the media during the reference period. Secondly, those with the highest number of mentions in the online forum, who had been identified in a previous study on misogyny and animalization, were included (Lacalle et al., 2024). The 5,552 messages identified according to both parameters were downloaded by a web scraping process using the Python language, mainly using the Beautiful Soup library. The resulting Excel table contained the following variables: posted message, author, date of publication, number of the message posted within each thread and URL for each message. Table 1 shows the distribution of comments in relation to the women politicians mentioned.

The 5,552 messages resulting from the collection process were analyzed in two stages. The first consisted of an exhaustive review to identify comments that sought to discredit or disparage the eight female politicians referred to above. As our objective was to study online misogynistic discourse, we focused exclusively on negative posts. During the review process of the 1,245 disparaging messages identified (22.42%), a greater number of comments were detected that contained insults relating to the body and/or physical appearance than to other topics, which was a clear indication of the misogynistic nature of the messages. To further corroborate this trend, the content of these comments was subjected to a quantitative content analysis, structured around three categories: (a) references to physical appearance, (b) sexual allusions, and (c) use of zoomorphic language. The inclusion of categories 2 and 3 was decided based on the data collected in the first review, in line with previous literature linking physical appearance to the sexual objectification and animalization of women.

Table 1. Distribution of Comments on Women Politicians.

Number of comments	Name	Political office	Political party
1,470	Isabel Díaz Ayuso	President of the Autonomous Region of Madrid	Partido Popular (PP)
1,281	Irene Montero	Minister of Equity	Unidas Podemos (UP)
919	Yolanda Díaz	Minister of Employment and Social Affairs	Unidas Podemos (UP)
746	Ione Belarra	Minister of Social Rights and Agenda 2030	Unidas Podemos (UP)
413	ÁngelaRodríguez "Pam"	Secretary of Equity and Against Gender Violence	Unidas Podemos (UP)
325	Ada Colau	Mayor of Barcelona	En Comú Podem
256	Francina Armengol	President of Parliament	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)
142	Margarita Robles	Minister of Defense	Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)

A thematic analysis was then carried out (Braun & Clarke, 2022) by categorizing the qualitative data through a process that sought to identify the insults targeted at Spanish female politicians that referred to their bodies and physical characteristics. This analysis consisted of three stages:

1. All the comments were exhaustively read to identify differences and similarities among them and reach a consensus on the coding system after the literature review (Saldaña, 2016).
1. The corpus was coded in order to uncover thematic patterns and subthemes (Table 2) based on the literature on the Manosphere and online misogyny. It was then reformulated and successively expanded in light of the data collected. To minimize the intersubjective bias of the coding system resulting from both deductive and inductive creation, the researchers worked together, comparing and contrasting their coding on the same text.
2. The themes were analyzed, developed, and reviewed. Special attention was paid during the process to the discursive construction of the physical characteristics of the female politicians according to their ideology and to the ideology of the commenters, including both negative opinions and/or insults and emotions. While the analysis did not focus on a single thread but on all those that included comments on these eight politicians in the selected period, the building of con- sensus among the authors of posts was also taken into account.

Table 2. Codebook of Thematic Patterns and Sub-Themes.

Object of study	Analysis categories	Function		
Disparaging messages/Sexist comments	Reasons for disparagement	Ideology and performance		Bringing into disrepute, discrediting, and denigrating
		Physical traits	Physical appearance (N = 369)	Condemnation, delegitimization
			Sexual connotations (N = 209)	Humiliation, sexual objectification, mechanical dehumanization
			Zoomorphic metaphors (N = 154)	Contempt, depersonalization, animalistic dehumanization

The analysis was carried out by the four authors of the article. Two of them engaged in the preliminary analysis of the 5,552 original messages, whereas the other two undertook the subsequent quantitative and qualitative analyses of the 1,245 comments that made up the final corpus. Although the analysis was aimed at capturing the idiomatic nuances in Spanish, the extracts illustrating the themes identified were translated into English and localized to convey the specific meaning of the original expressions, preserving their essence as far as possible and including the necessary clarifications.

Results

Of the 1,245 disparaging messages, 29.63% (369 comments) criticized the physical appearance of the politicians included in the analysis sample, whereas 16.78% (209 comments) contained explicit sexual references (sexual objectification) and 12.36% (154) used zoomorphic metaphors to denigrate these individuals (animalization). It should be noted that the same comment could be included in more than one subcategory.

The three women who were mentioned in the highest number of sexist comments were Isabel Díaz Ayuso (21.12% and 263 comments), Irene Montero (18.95% and 236 comments), and Ángela Rodríguez "Pam" (18.31% and 228 comments). Díaz Ayuso and Montero were the target of the greatest number of negative comments, which was consistent with the fact that they were also the two politicians who were at the receiving end of the highest volume of disparaging remarks in total. The case of Ángela Rodríguez "Pam," on the other hand, can be explained by the large number of insults related to her being overweight, which resulted in her being the politician who was the object of the highest number of remarks related to physical appearance (36.58% and 135 comments). She was followed by Yolanda Díaz (29.53% and 109 comments) and Isabel Díaz Ayuso (15.98% and 59 comments). However, the latter was the only woman in the sample who received benevolent sexist comments, in line with the neoliberal character of the forum under analysis.

Díaz Ayuso was also the subject of the highest number of messages with sexual connotations (33.01% and 69 comments) and the only woman in the sample whom some users considered "desirable." Ángela Rodríguez "Pam" rated second in terms of the number of sex-related remarks (26.79% and 56 comments); but she was the target of multiple and systematic foul, and even violent, remarks. Irene Montero (24.40% and 51 comments) was also the object of all kinds of obscene comments, mainly in connec- tion with her relationship with Pablo Iglesias (her ex-partner and former secretary general of UP).

Yolanda Díaz, on the other hand, was the preferred target of zoomorphic language related to the arched bridge of her nose (60.38% and 93 comments), followed by derogatory comparisons with large animals aimed at Ángela Rodríguez "Pam" (18.18% and 28 comments) and by allusions to Irene Montero's sexuality (9.09% and 14 messages).

Disparaging Comments and Gendertrolling

The denigrating remarks hurled at these women politicians covered a wide range of issues. Firstly, the eight politicians in the sample were criticized for the simple fact that they were women: "In a normal country, she wouldn't get any further than working as a nursing assistant" (Francina Armengol); "You take away Ayuso's earpiece (with the bearded guy telling what to say) and she'd just be babbling nonsense. That's what a woman is good for"; "Cheerleader fashion comes to the Spanish Army. With THE (LA—feminine 'the') minister (Margarita Robles) importing all the Yankee crap."

At other times, insults were motivated by political affiliation: "A republican pro-independence dude shouldn't be there, but that's what we have" (Francina Armengol); "This communist looks like a SECTARIAN" (Ione Belarra); "And your reasoning is typical of leftists like Belarra and the ViceToucan, who have rotten brains" (Yolanda Díaz). In the case of Irene Montero, the nickname frequently used by users to designate her was "The Marquise of Galapagar" (La Marquesa de

Galapagar), in reference to her antimonarchist discourse and the representation of the working class wielded in the protests of the *Indignados* citizens' movement, the embryo of her party, UP.[5] Commitment to feminism was another excuse for these politicians being denigrated: "Just stop laying out the red carpet for the civil outrage of the communists and obese radical feminists. Send Irene Montero to the firing squad"; "Feminism is totalitarianism, it's feminazism, it's Irene Montero, Pam, and Carmen alopecic.[6] There is no other kind of feminism."

A significant number of comments supported sexism in the controversial aspects of management: "Well … the 8,000 old folk that Ayuso left to die without help in their nursing homes in Madrid were the only really innocent … That slut has killed 10 times more people than ETA…,"[7] "The weighty one did an impressive job with housing in Barcelona … if she does the same at the national level, Airbnb and vulture funds must be rubbing their hands in glee" (Ada Colau); "Irene Montero is useless and it is ridiculous that she has not been charged or at least sanctioned big time after having been ultimately responsible for having left hundreds of rapists on the street." However, far from debating or criticizing their political performance in a reasoned and respectful manner, users resorted to the mistakes that these politicians had made to insult them. In the process of denigrating these women politicians, some remarks included false information, which their authors defended as true despite all the evidence to the contrary. For example, there were offensive messages accusing a man who had been photographed with Ángela Rodríguez "Pam" during the latter's summer holi- days of engaging in prostitution; and there was a post that criticized Yolanda Díaz for wearing a pair of sandals that allegedly cost 900 euros. Like many other misog- ynistic comments on *Burbuja.info*, both claims lacked any kind of evidence on the internet.

In other cases, the users did not even provide an excuse or use rhetorical trickery to support their hate speech: "Irene Montero is subhuman garbage"; "I recently bought a dehumidifier on Wallapop for a third of its value, practically brand new. There were cheaper ones, but they were older than Yolanda Díaz's pussy. The one I bought I'll use for the couple of months I'll need it and then I'll sell it at cost price." Nevertheless, as noted above, the largest group of defamatory comments referred to these women's physical appearance (29.63% and 369 comments). The high number of these kinds of posts not only showed the obsession these users had with objectifying the female body, but also reflected that women politicians are subject to constant public scrutiny and how the media concentrate on their private life (physical features, sartorial elegance, family life, etc.).

Sexualization

The analysis shows that the Manosphere's debate on celebrity women politicians also went beyond gender-specific frameworks (centrality of physical appearance and celebration of traditional roles) to reinforce their discursive construction as public figures who are "outside the norm." The inevitable consequence of this type of strategy is the trivialization of discussions about women in the political arena, which hinders their dis- cursive construction as professionals and representatives of a particular political ideology, as well as preventing the evaluation of their suitability in terms of their education, previous experience, performance, and professionalism.

Numerous comments classified the women in the sample according to different degrees of "desirability" according to the users, especially in conversations structured around the thematic driver "sexuality": "You may need to have two new hips replaced after riding her" (Isabel Díaz Ayuso) or "Belarra with a bag over her head would give

you a good time" (Ione Belarra). This is a clear example of "lascivious contempt" (Jane, 2014, p. 562), which combines desire and disgust, while placing the woman in a humiliating and oppressive position. Isabel Díaz Ayuso was the only woman in the sample that divided the users' opinion on the matter, with numerous vulgar comments that celebrate her attractiveness by appealing to the most rancid machismo ("It's annoying how hot Ayuso is") or dehumanizing her by reducing her to a mere object of sexual desire: "which of these two would you prefer to screw" (in reference to Isabel

Díaz Ayuso and another woman politician from the Popular Party).

This latter type of dehumanization takes different forms, including literal objectification (Goldenberg, 2013; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014), the tendency to perceive the individual solely or primarily according to their physical features, thus transforming them into mere objects for the use and consumption of misogynists (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Hence the abundance of comments that objectify the female body and reduce women to mere instruments of sexual subjugation, as in "I would screw that other one without mercy too" (Isabel Díaz Ayuso); and/or to mere receptacles for penises and semen: "she's going to give me a tremendous *cumshot* with a boob job" (Irene Montero); "And let her go about marking her nipples, you'll see how happy young criminal immigrants are gonna be, they'll plug all her holes" (Ione

Belarra).

The sexual objectification of men does not always have a derogatory effect, as male sexuality is traditionally associated with dominance and pride, whereas female sexuality is linked to submission and regarded as a source of shame (Bareket & Shnabel, 2020). Therefore, the sexual objectification of women tends to reinforce their traditional role as sexual objects (Kahalon et al., 2018) and reminds them of their (inferior) place in the gender hierarchy. In fact, many of the disparaging remarks identified reveal a desire to exclude women politicians from the public sphere and confine them to the domestic sphere, thereby reestablishing the patriarchal values that define far-right and right-wing populist parties (Norocel et al., 2020; Pettersson, 2017) and the Manosphere: "I, as a good extreme right-wing fanatic, would give the beautiful Isabel Díaz Ayuso a dozen children, but politically I would send her home to do the mopping and change diapers."

The desire to keep women in the domestic environment also explains why these users target those who advocate for their rights; to such an extent that many users insisted on the fact that they do not hate them all, but only those who refuse to accept their worldview and express their sexual freedom in a way that many of them perceived as a threat and/or a source of deep frustration. Hence, the simple gesture of not wearing a bra at a public event sparked dozens of comments on the forum: "Better known as Ione Pezone (Ione Belarra)"[8]; "Say hello to Belarra for me if you see her around and tell her that Amaral has already shown her tits, so her nipple stuff is no big deal; either she shows her butt crack or she's out of date"; "Those nipples scratch glass" (Ione Belarra).

Thus, the alleged promiscuity attributed to some women politicians in order to discredit them is evidence of the forum users' rejection of female sexual freedom: "Her name is Irene Montero and she has a hand in penitentiary institutions, she can find you a room with some reliable Senegalese boys. The kind she likes"; "That big butt Ayuso is a textbook young migrant fucker"; "Pam wants Black men in Spain because she knows the weakness niggers have for round White women." The degree of aggressive insults against women politicians holding positions of power in gender-related matters made Irene Montero (Minister of Equality, January 2020–

November 2023) and Ángela Rodríguez "Pam" (Secretary of State for Equality, October 2021–November 2023) the target of the most extreme or even violent hate speech: "if he puts PAM and montera in the toilet with their mouths open to piss and shit on them, I'll go"; "Then you have those filthy transsexuals, Ireno Montero, ignore Belarro, or Pam, I'd kill them with my bare hands." In line with previous research, these comments confirm that concern over gender policies can have a negative effect on women in leadership positions, as they are often crit- icized for "playing the gender card." This is a political strategy that is perceived as self-serving and misleading, on the premise that it gives them an unfair advantage (Sorrentino & Augoustinos, 2016).

Feminists were also labeled as "nondesirable" women, a common antifeminist trope among misogynists, who particularly targeted Ángela Rodríguez "Pam." She was at the receiving end of the highest percentage of comments referring to physical appearance (36.58%): "Pam is nauseating"; "And that Pam, has she ever kissed a man in her life? What a sad life that woman must lead. You just have to look at her." As this last comment suggested, members of the Manosphere conceive of the feminist movement as a ploy by unattractive women to attract attention and deal with the rejection they receive, equating feminists with undesirable and frustrated women.

Some interventions went as far as to describe feminist politicians as mentally unstable: "When making an objective psychological analysis, PAM is an unbalanced, mono- thematic obsessive with very deep traumas and a lack of self and social affection. She should be in hospital under heavy medication and intensive care and not in an advisory position"; "This lady is not balanced. The way she speaks, the faces she makes, her gestures. The absurd promises she makes without blushing. The aggressiveness and the obviousness that she is used to talking to people like that and they shut up" (Yolanda Díaz). Infantilization was also a recurrent offense uttered by the forum's users: "Irene Montero is a 'big girl' with a bad temper. Because some are not harmful, and that one is." In short, the multiple accusations of promiscuity, physical unattractiveness and low intelligence made against Spanish women leaders with responsibility for gender-related or openly feminist policies render these women responsible for all the country's ills; they are somewhat "internal enemies" to the nation (Pettersson et al., 2023).

Isabel Díaz Ayuso was the only women politician in the sample that users rated as "desirable," although Yolanda Díaz and Irene Montero were accused of using their physical appearance and sexual appeal to hide their incompetence and/or to achieve their objectives. But although the "undesirable woman" and "woman who uses her physical appearance" frames seem to be at odds with each other, they were tactically employed in different situations to undermine women in public life. For example, they said of Yolanda Díaz that "She only worries about smiling at the right moment, that her hair moves here and there, and then she says things like this." This is another example of criticism for "playing the gender card" (Sorrentino & Augoustinos, 2016), which among its possible meanings also includes deliberately using femininity, that is, one's appearance and sex appeal, to divert public attention (Falk, 2013). On the other hand, the supposed instrumentalization of Irene Montero's physique was, according to users, the only reason that could explain her position as a minister: "Irene Montero is a professional in this area, before getting to be the lover of the supreme leader of the organization, she got close to him by boning other leaders of the organization." This comment, like so many others referring to the ex-minister, pointed to her aforementioned sentimental relationship with UP leader Pablo Iglesias and, in general, to her sex life, as determining factors in the process of objectification to which she is subjected ("Irene Montero, Saturn cashier,[9] given the job as minister by

her partner, the vice-president of the government and with the IQ of an amoba"). This type of comment treats the minister for equality as an object, only defined by her relationship with a man (as a mere extension of him) and therefore, lacking the necessary skills and abilities to hold her office.

Obsession With the "Perfect" Body and Animalization

The esthetic of thinness was the dominant narrative of hegemonic femininity in the era of widespread healthism, which celebrates it and labels overweight bodies as unhealthy, as byproducts of irresponsible and lax individuals, who are guilty of their own fatness. Hence, in the case of female politicians, the demonization of physical appearance particularly targeted bodies that do not conform to the ideal standards of feminine beauty in vogue today: "If you bite Angela PAM then you have to take an antacid?" or "The news is out: PAM goes from XXXL to XXXXL trousers." In fact, these women were often referred to by nicknames that alluded to their being over-weight. For example, "the disgusting fatso" or "Gordau" (a pun on the last name "Colau" and the word for fat in Spanish [gordo/a]), to refer to Ada Colau; "PamZ," "Pam Zeta," "PAMCeta," "zam Pam bollos," or "PAM-Bimbo," in reference to Ángela Rodríguez "Pam."[10] Moreover, these women are the preferred target of animal- istic insults through repeated comparison with large mammals, as will be seen below. Being overweight was sometimes even used to denigrate them on an ideological level, even to the point of claiming that it had an impact on the intellectual capacity of the targeted woman:

> They're totally delirious, this group of deranged women is a true reflection of the way women's heads are nowadays. The vast majority of women have lost the plot and believe all the bullshit put about by Montero and Pam; Pam I guess has the excuse that with her cholesterol levels she surely doesn't get enough blood irrigation to her brain.

Along with sexual objectification, animalization is another dehumanization strategy employed to denigrate and humiliate female politicians (Morris et al., 2018; Tileagă, 2007). It was used by the forum users to portray women politicians as instinctive beings lacking reason, refinement, subjectivity, and agency (Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014; Haslam & Stratemeyer, 2016). Nevertheless, 85.06% (131 comments) of the messages using zoomorphic language refers to physical appearance and more than half of the animals mentioned (10 out of a total of 19) were large mammals, used to denigrate large women or women whose bodies do not conform to the current canons of beauty.

Francina Armengol was a recurrent victim of animalizing discourse in the com-ments analyzed ("That Armengol sperm whale must be swallowing bile, let's see if she collapses"; "The best thing of all is that it worked out and all pro-independence ones voted for that donkey cow Armengol to be president of the Congress"). Ada Colau was also frequently alluded to in zoomorphic insults ("They'd better negotiate this regional transfer too, so that what that Colau whale says won't apply either in the Basque country or Catalonia"). However, Angela Rodríguez "Pam" was the woman politician in the sample who was the target of the most animalistic metaphors: "Look at the belly of the Podemos whale"[11]; "Pam the walrus has a painting and col-oring degree and master's"; "That of Pam cetacean and the marquise of the turnip are already making noise about the issue so that they (women) will go around armed up to the tits"; "A different thing is a mustachioed walrus like that Pam from *Podemos*"; "Especially when Irene Marmol and Angela Mammoth Pam hunted 17 fascist T-rex

demonstrating in front of the cave with banners saying that there were only two genders!.” Some of the insults against Ángela Rodriguez “Pam” were sophisticated to the point of alluding to animalization through a visual metaphor comparing her to roast suckling pig, a popular dish in northern and central Spain: “Or maybe he’ll put his mistress as a cashier, and PAM as the main course, with an apple in her mouth.” As noted above, such comments are evidence of the fatphobia of their authors, who regarded the mere reference to a large animal as an insult. However, the similes between the politicians in the sample and large animals did not exclusively designate overweight women, as can be seen in remarks like “Ayuso is a traitorous pig” or “Have you noticed that Montero is getting as fat as a lamb?” Both politicians were also compared to pigs, although in this case, it was not their body measurements that were mentioned, but the association with this animal, the lack of hygiene and/or their sexual behavior: “She looks like she’d be a filthy pig in bed” (Isabel Díaz Ayuso); “her pussy must smell like the smelly manager’s because of her menstruation (as if she had shat herself, I swear!) because of overuse … I can’t tell you the little things that pig must have done to her” (Irene Montero).

Mammals (“rat,” “bitch,” “she-wolf,” and “vixen”), together with seals and whales, made up the “source domain” for the animal metaphors of the “target domain” of female politicians (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), as well as other animals connoted by their dangerousness and the displeasure they produce (“big ugly bird” and “viper”). For example: “IF YOU ARE ADA COLACAU, I TELL YOU, I WOULD KILL YOU WITH MY BARE HANDS, I DON’T LIKE INFECTIOUS RATS...,” “Armengol is a radical. A she-wolf in sheep’s clothing,” “And this stupid hominid is nothing less than a minister, guys. PAY, BITCH, PAY” (Irene Montero), “So that Montero bitch doesn’t get involved in that to dismantle it”; “She’s going to have a tough opponent with this viper” (Isabel Diaz Ayuso); “Belarra the crow, Yolanda Diaz the magpie. I don’t like pigeons either, they’re heavy and there are so many of them”; “That carrion bird doing Fráudez’s dirty work” (Yolanda Díaz). The constant insults aimed at Yolanda Diaz (“the Toucan,” “the she-Toucan,” “Lady Toucan,” “vicetoucan,” etc.), replacing the cultural connotations of “aquiline” noses (intelligence, speed, elegance, etc.) with those associated with “big ugly birds,” are further proof of the eagerness to disparage underlying the characteristic denigrating discourse of sexism.

Conclusions

The results of the study confirm the four assumptions detailed at the beginning of the article. Regarding the first assumption, that online misogyny represents an indirect form of gendertrolling, aimed at offending and humiliating women, and undermining their reputation, the results show that hate speech targeted at women in politics can be defined as a set of online misogynistic strategies aimed at undermining their political role through attacks on their physical appearance and sexuality. As indicated in the first section of the analysis above, the mere fact of being a woman is wielded as a reason to criticize and denigrate them, as evidenced by the high number of sexist messages and insults directed at Isabel Díaz Ayuso. This is despite the sympathy expressed in some

comments that align with the neoliberal stance of this representative of the Partido Popular.

Secondly, the discursive strategies employed reproduce stereotypes of femininity historically used to subjugate women, as they evidence the desire of a good part of the commenters to return to the past and reestablish male dominance over women in order to confine them to the domestic sphere. Thus, the reproduction of stereotypes of femininity historically used to subjugate women frequently characterizes the mes- sages analyzed, such as the insistence on relating women to the domestic sphere. In parallel, the main forms of dehumanization identified were sexual reification and ani- malization, thus confirming that the cultural association of women with nature and the body was one of the main arguments used to justify their subjugation and a determining factor in their dehumanization (third assumption). In this regard, particularly notewor- thy are the derogatory comments about the women in the sample who do not conform to the traditional standards of normative beauty, such as Yolanda Díaz's aquiline nose or the overweight of Ángela Rodríguez "Pam."

Finally, it was also confirmed that gendertrolling against women politicians was not specifically characterized by having a given motivation but a particular target, considering the numerous reasons alleged to disparage female politicians, including the mere fact that they are women (fourth assumption). Indeed, the discursive construction of attacks on female politicians is structured around the frequently reiterated premise that women's nature is incompatible with political activity.

In general terms, it was observed that the intensity of the insults was related to the volume of media reports on these women, with some exceptions which, far from questioning the results obtained by other researchers, revalidate the importance of physical appearance in sexist messages. Even Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the only right-wing politician in the group, was the object of the users' obsession with objectification, despite her greater affinity with the dominant neoliberal ideology in *Burbuja.info*.

One of the most striking aspects of the sexism that permeated the comments analyzed is that their authors seemed to believe they have the right to criticize these female representatives, as if moral aggression were a corollary of their political performance in public office. The preferred discursive strategy used to cancel their achievements, autonomy, and individuality was to deny their intelligence, qualities, competence, and humanity. That is to say, the capacities and skills necessary to be considered true "political actors" and, consequently, to carry out the tasks involved.

The prejudiced and harmful hate speech diatribes identified were particularly directed at representatives of left-wing parties. But, above all, at women whose physical appearance did not fit the molds of what the users considered "desirable," by virtue of sexist esthetic canons that turn the physical features that are reviled into a synec- doche of their personality. As a result, the body was the preferred target of insults, which explains why the "semiotic exclusion" resulting from the denigrating language particularly affected overweight women, even during periods when they had a limited media presence.

This article is an original contribution to the object of study, and it complements the contributions on the denigration of women politicians in social media referenced in the

introduction and the theoretical framework. The results obtained through the application of a hybrid methodology combining quantitative and qualitative content analyses, adaptable to future studies, enabled us to identify recurrent disparagement strategies utilized in the comments of the forum under scrutiny, which, in turn, is representative of the Spanish Manosphere. Ageism, maternity, and the fungibility of the female body (both manifestations of sexual objectification), as well as the contrast between insults hurled at female and male politicians and other professional fields likely to have an impact on public opinion (such as journalism, celebrities, and influencers) have not been included in the research, as they exceed the scope of this study. However, they are additional manifestations of online misogyny that require further investigation and understanding to contribute to their eradication.

The ultraconservative shift of the social network X, following its acquisition by Elon Musk, and the rise of misogynistic groups in messaging applications (such as Telegram or WhatsApp) are also discursive environments that urgently need to be explored. Ideally, this exploration should be conducted from a multidisciplinary perspective to better understand the characteristics and reasons behind the spread of misogyny.

Notes
1. *Burbuja.info* was created in 2009 to discuss economics and gained notoriety when it predicted the 2009 crisis, but its extreme neoliberal perspective provides a suitable breeding ground for sexism. Sixty-one percent of its users are between 18 and 44 years old (see https://www.similarweb.com/es/website/burbuja.info/#overview, October 2023).
1. Glick and Fiske (1996) defined *benevolent sexism* as a form of sexism rooted in the weakness traditionally attributed to women and is related to positive attitudes and stereotypes, while *hostile sexism* designates prejudice against women and is related to negative atti- tudes and stereotypes.
2. See Rayne Fisher-Quann "What does it mean to get 'woman'd'"? Available at: https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/y3pv5k/what-does-it-mean-to-get-womand. She coined the term "woman'd" in a tweet published on June 23, 2022. Available at: https://twitter.com/raynefq/status/1539757942030815232

3. Definitions taken from the Historical Dictionary of the Spanish Language (https://www.rae.es/dhle): Foca [s. f. Mujer de cuerpo feo, sin cintura, de piernas cortas y andar grotesco] Feminine noun. Woman with an ugly body, no waist, short legs, and a grotesque gait. Ballena [s. m. y f. desp. Persona obesa o muy corpulenta.] Masculine and feminine noun, derogatory. An obese or a very corpulent person. Zorra [1. f. despect. malson. Prostituta.]

   1. Feminine noun, derogatory, rude. Prostitute; [2. m. y f. coloq. Persona muy taimada, astuta y solapada.]; 2. Masculine and feminine noun. Colloquial. A very sly, crafty, and devious person.

4. *Indignados* emerged from a demonstration held in Madrid against the two-party system and the interference of big business on March 15, 2011. Their leader was Pablo Iglesias.

5. "Carmen alopécico" (alopecic) refers to Carmen Calvo, president of the committee for equality of the Parliament of Spain in 2023, whose surname translates as "bald."

6. ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) was a Basque terrorist organization that was active between 1958 and 2018.

7. This remark is a pun based on the rhyme of the name of one of the women politicians (Ione) and the Spanish term for "nipple" (pezón, and from this, a capitalized derivative, Pezone).

8. "Saturn" is a German chain of electronics store where she worked for some time as a student.

9. All these terms are derogatory word compounds created on an ad hoc basis that include the name of this woman politician, known as "Pam," and references to various fatty or unhealthy foods.

10. Podemos was the name adopted in 2014 by the political party that emerged from the "Indignados" citizens' movement. In the 2019 legislative election, Podemos was led by Pablo Iglesias and headed the Unidas Podemos coalition, which was composed of several left-wing and far-left groups.

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