

Diverse political women in Canada and online attacks: Experiences, perspectives, and insights

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Chapter 1: Introduction	5
Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature	8
Diverse Women in Politics: Reasons, Strategies, and Implications for Canada	8
Violence Against Diverse Political Women	11
Online Harassment or Abuse and Intersectionality	14
Gaps in Contemporary Research	18
Chapter 3: Design and Methods.....	18
Methodology	18
Research Design and Participant Selection.....	20
Data Analysis	23
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion	25
Findings.....	25
Social media: “A complex relationship”	27
Limited the reach of their voices	27
Empowerment and speaking out.....	29
Effects of intersecting identities.....	30
Each platform has unique challenges.....	33
Consequences for life offline	35

Interlock of offline and online harassment	35
Exposes unexpected vulnerabilities	36
Extra emotional labour.....	37
Fear.....	39
Resiliency and strategies.....	41
Hope.....	41
Resistance.	42
External support and allies.....	43
Potential strategies for change.	44
Problematizing these strategies.....	46
Discussion	47
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	52
References.....	55
Appendix A	61
Appendix B	64
Appendix C	66
Appendix D.....	68

Abstract

Multiple academic disciplines agree upon the importance of women having diverse representation in politics because their unique perspectives are strongly thought to have positive implications on policies that affect the health and well-being of all people (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018). Yet, abuse or harassment levied at these women both online and offline likely diminishes their voices or desires to remain politically engaged. Using hermeneutic phenomenology and intersectional feminism, I explored the experiences of a diverse group of political women in Canada with online attacks to gain their insights on potential implications and strategies for change. The findings analyze the participants' complex relationships with social media, the unique challenges of each platform, the interlock of online and offline harassment, the women's resiliencies and strategies to cope with online attacks, and their ideas for potential resolutions. The implications for critical social work practice are identified as: insight on the continued need to challenge Eurocentric heteropatriarchal colonial institutions, online and offline; the importance for Canadian social workers to (re)imagine their roles in online spaces; and, the need to develop methods with interdisciplinary teams to combat ideological radicalization on online echo chambers. Regarding future research, there exists much potential. One focus I recommend is that an interdisciplinary team of people, representing various socio-political positionalities, study how to perform community building projects on online echo chambers.

Keywords: women politicians, intersectionality, intersectional feminism, feminism, diverse women, diverse political women, social media, online attacks, online harassment, online abuse, hermeneutic phenomenology, echo chambers.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Canadian and international news articles and research literature have documented the sexualized, gendered, racialized, and homophobic harassment of diverse women politicians. This harassment may take place on the streets when they are campaigning, at social and political functions, in their offices, on the floor of the lower House, and online. It is almost inescapable for diverse political women to have a career free from this abuse, which is markedly different from that faced by their cis-gendered male peers due to the intersectional gendered or sexualized nature of the abuse (Krook, 2017). This harassment also usually aims to communicate to diverse women that their interactions in the political sphere are unwelcome, thus, it reinforces the gender hierarchy (Jane, 2016). In this research, I studied the phenomenon of the online abuse of diverse political women in Canada. I chose to use the term *diverse political women* as an umbrella term to account for the multiple intersecting marginalized identities of women, transgender, or non-binary people who had either run for office and were or were not elected at the municipal, provincial, or federal level; this includes the variety of socio-political positionalities in gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability. The discourse of “diversity”, however, is not without flaws. The word “diverse” is problematic as it centers the white, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gender person as the norm. It is my intention to use this word in an inclusive sense because “diversity” captures all of these research participants’ positionalities and identity intersections while highlighting a need to normalize a diverse representation of women in Canadian politics.

I became interested in this social issue because of my personal experience with online harassment, my identity as a social worker, and my interests in the political achievements of all women. In late 2017 I took a public stance against the acceptance of funds from a contentious donor by the university I was attending at the time. This donor’s values did not align with social

work and they attempted to force their money onto the social work department. Consequently, I contacted faculty to check in on their resistance work, wrote a public opinion piece in the local newspaper, and worked with local communities to petition the university to reject the funds. Shortly after my opinion piece was published, my classmates reached out to forewarn me about the online comments section and reported to me the abusive comments, thinking it best if I did not read them. This experience changed how I interact on social media as rarely now do I comment on political matters regarding subjects I am educated on and interested in because of my concerns with the replies and their permanent nature. With my unique name, it is possible that harassing comments could have negative implications for my career if future employers search me online. Relating to critical social work, it appears that the profession is becoming increasingly involved in the macro levels of practice, such as systemic advocacy, community engagement, or policy analysis, and many social workers are already employed in all levels of government. Thus, the findings could affect future opportunities for many social workers as they become more engaged in more political roles with higher public profiles that may subject them to online harassment or abuse. Additionally, the profession, which is inherently political, has a responsibility to add to the discussion because, not only do the comments continue to oppress or marginalize diverse women, their involvement in politics has probable positive implications for the funding of social initiatives and institutions (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018; Driedger, 2013; Enns-Jedenastik, 2017). These reasons for my interest in this topic, personal and professional, also provide insight into my potential biases during this research process.

This qualitative research adds to the limited literature on political women in Canada and seeks to answer my central research question of “what are the experiences, perspectives, and insights of diverse political women in Canada with online harassment, abuse, or attacks targeted

at them?” Shaw (2014) indicated that diverse women’s experiences with harassment online is an under-researched area because researchers typically first grapple with studying new technologies, usually through the lens of white cis-gendered males, and later perceive the same media through a white feminist perspective and then intersectional feminism. Previous literature has shown gaps in studying the phenomenon of online harassment or abuse of diverse women politicians using an intersectional lens, as well as a lack of peer-reviewed literature on this demographic and online harassment in Canada. This exploratory study uses intersectional feminism as it challenges the categorization of identities in examining how people experience the world and begins from the standpoint that womanhood is not a homogenous identity. Also, it is more ethical to use this approach when analyzing the complexities of social issues (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008; Nash, 2017). The diverse women participants are empowered and have access to power because of their identity as politicians. Accordingly, it is conceivable that they have unique vantage points for insight on potential resolutions to online harassment or abuse. Identities are not solely a source of oppression but are also a site of liberation and empowerment (Crenshaw, 1991). These diverse women “are more likely to translate their [intersectional identities] into progressive legislation” (Simien, 2007, pp. 266-267) or alternative solutions to social issues.

The following chapters begin with a critical analysis of existing literature that amplifies the importance and timeliness of this exploratory study, particularly within the current national and global socio-political and technological climates. The third chapter covers the design and methods used to answer the research objective of inquiring about diverse Canadian political women’s experiences, perspectives, and insights with online harassment and abuse. Next, the fourth chapter reviews the four major themes that arose from my hermeneutic phenomenological

inductive interpretation of the participants' unique stories and data. Finally, the fifth chapter reviews the implications for critical social work practice, social policy, and future research.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

Diverse Women in Politics: Reasons, Strategies, and Implications for Canada

The transformation that diverse women make to social policy while holding seats in an elected or appointed political position and the importance of their representation has scarcely been researched, particularly using an intersectional lens. There has been more research on the importance of diverse women's representation in the private sector, which could be used to draw connections to changes they may make in public office. I bring in this subtopic as validation for the significance of exploring this social issue. Most contemporary academic literature appeared to narrow down to one central concept for diverse women's representation: it is just(ice) to have equal representation for all diverse identities in politics, there exists no equal relevant argument that could win out against this basic reason. Lovenduski (2002), in her own terms, explained it well when saying that "women do not have to make a difference to merit inclusion" (p. 217). This should be expanded to include diverse women.

Women and men, noting this narrow binary depiction, are typically socialized differently and, therefore, their political goals may differ in relation to one another (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018). Consequently, across the political spectrum, women politicians are likely to have different ways of perceiving social issues from men and the potential resolutions for them and their input should make public policies more applicable or effective for a wider range of people (Campbell, Childs, & Lovenduski, 2010; Collier & Raney, 2018b). Diverse and intersectional representation in politics is important for all historically marginalized or excluded groups to be a part of the political reform that benefits their communities (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018). It is anticipated

that as the demographics of elected office changes in Canada the outcomes would be positive for social policy. For example, recent feminist quantitative studies have found that when women politicians are elected, public fiscal initiatives rise for social services, including in the areas of health, childcare, family services, domestic violence protections, parental leave, maternal care, education, and the care of older adults (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018; Driedger, 2013; Enns-Jedenastik, 2017). Increasing the social responsibility performance of public institutions would likely improve the autonomy and equity of women (Lovenduski, 2002) and benefit the health and development of all people (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018). In the United Kingdom, a political system similar to Canada's, qualitative research has shown that women want more done to increase their representation in elected politics (Campbell et al., 2010), possibly because of the potential positive implications for the general public's gender relations:

As an increasing number of female politicians cater to the demands of an increasing number of working women by delivering social policies that reduce the double burden, a new and self-sustaining equilibrium of gender relations in the political and social realm may arise. (Enns-Jedenastik, 2017, p. 578)

Research in the private sector found that diverse teams create more heterogeneous, inclusive, and holistic thought processes (Bourke, 2016). These diverse teams, compared to more homogenous teams, develop better thought-out and comprehensive projects that require fewer modifications from management before final approval (Cloverpop, 2017). Heterogenous teams made quicker and more accurate decisions with effective strategies and their more effective project planning could save resources, time and money (Bourke, 2016; Cloverpop, 2017).

Previous research in politics has also uncovered ways to achieve gender parity. Campbell et al. (2010) proposed that this is possible by targeting the rhetoric (working to change people's

beliefs and attitudes about gender equality), promotion (training and campaign support for diverse women candidates), and guarantees (gender quotas) of equality in politics. Having gender-quotas, which is positive discrimination, and “descriptive representation” (Lovenduski, 2002, p. 210) (when elected political representation is reflective of a country’s demographics) is important in politics to ensure that the priorities of all genders are accounted for in debates and action (Campbell et al., 2010; Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018; Lovenduski, 2002). Some research suggested that just having these quotas, even if they are not filled, start to shift the priorities in politics, possibly because gender issues come to the forefront of politicians’ minds; however, the quotas need to be filled for long-term sustainable changes to happen (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018). While this tokenizes the first few that enter politics through the quota, they pave the way for the next cohort to be deemed “the norm” (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018). Without these quotas, it is possible that equal representation reflective of Canadian demographics may not happen.

In Canada, women remain underrepresented in elected political positions and their progress has recently plateaued and, consequentially, these institutions continue as masculine and heteropatriarchal spaces (Driedger, 2013; O’Neill & Stewart, 2009). As of mid-2018, Canada ranked 60 out of 193 countries for equality of elected women in the lower House with a representation of 27% women (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU], 2018). While this statistic only illuminates an intersectionally blind binary gendered representation, it is known that racialized and Indigenous women continue to remain underrepresented but fare better in their representation among elected women politicians than men (Lore, 2017). In addition to having diminished representation, women “continue to be less likely to be an elected parliamentarian and very much less likely to serve as a head of government” (O’Neill & Stewart, 2009). “At the current pace, it will be more than 90 years before women are represented in equal numbers as

men in the House of Commons” (Lore, 2017, p. 15), and presumably even longer for equal representation for racialized, non-binary, or LGBTQ2S+ woman. Excluding harassment, many obstacles endure for diverse political women to overcome to become an elected official. This includes access to campaign resources, gendered wage differences, intersectional gender stereotypes, time due to double-burdens, and masculinity or heteropatriarchy in institutions and party ideologies (Lovenduski, 2002; O’Neill & Stewart, 2009).

Violence Against Diverse Political Women

Lovenduski (2002) warned that women politicians “who do come forward will have to tolerate unfair discrimination against them, possibly sexual harassment, [and] be prepared for considerable emotional and financial expense” (p. 220). Globally, there are a growing number of reports of violence against women who enter politics as voters, activists, and hopeful or elected politicians (Krook, 2017). Political violence against women can be traced back to, at least, the first-wave feminists’ suffrage movement when the suffragettes were “attacked by angry mobs” (Krook & Restrepo, 2016, p. 467). Although employing different tactics, those attacks show similarities to contemporary diverse political women’s experiences with online mob-like attacks targeting their morality, abilities, and character. From recent media reporting and exposes, as well as online-feminist movements like #MeToo and #TimesUp, it is clear that Lovenduski’s warning was founded. In fact, four out of five diverse women politicians are likely to experience psychological violence during their career or witness acts against other women politicians (IPU, 2016). In early 2018, Canadian Press released a survey they conducted with 28 women Members of Parliament (MP) and found that approximately 50% of the respondents had been harassed, abused, or subjected to violence while in politics, online and off, including by MPs from their own or oppositional parties (Smith, 2018). The IPU (2016) calls this violence against diverse

political women “a phenomenon that is hindering women’s progress towards equality and undermining the foundations of democracy” (p. 1). Due to violence, many women around the world have removed themselves from politics (Bardall, 2013; IPU, 2016; Krook & Restrepo, 2016) to protect their family and friends and their overall well-being or lives.

This harassment or abuse discourages diverse women from getting involved in politics in all capacities, such as voting, political debates, working for political parties, or running for office and threatens their perceived legitimacy as leaders (Cardy, 2018; IPU, 2016; Krook, 2017; Krook & Restrepo, 2016). Cardy (2018) argued that the harassment is cyclical, it weakens women’s legitimacy which contributes to further harassment. Its purpose is to maintain the gender norms with masculinity dominating the ruling of public spheres of life and femininity relegated to the private spheres of care-taking (Bardall, 2013; Cardy, 2018; Collier & Raney, 2018b; Krook & Restrepo, 2016; Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). Online and offline attacks levied at diverse political women occurs over an extended period and may include threats of rape and death towards them or their family, attacks on their character and morality, or sexually explicit messages (Bardall, 2013; IPU, 2016; Krook, 2017; Krook & Restrepo, 2016). Research found that it is unequivocally different from attacks on male politicians because of the focus on gender with the result of intimidating women from entering politics or making their ability to fulfill their mandates difficult (IPU, 2016; Krook, 2017; Krook & Restrepo, 2016).

The key difference is communicating to women “*as women*” (Krook, 2017, p. 82, emphasis in original) that their gender is not welcome in politics. This ideology is reflected in institutional norms that govern politicians’ professional lives (Collier & Raney, 2018b). For example, the style of “adversarial political debates” (Collier & Raney, 2018b, p. 437) in the lower House, as protected by freedom of speech on the floor, reflects masculine norms of

communication and behaviour which historically has included language devaluing feminine characteristics. The use of this language on the floor, although conceivably not targeted at a specific woman, harms all diverse women through the reinforcement of their genders as second-class. In addition, accusations of sexual misconduct or harassment were brought to light by two women New Democratic Party MPs in 2014, which uncovered the pervasive issue of sexual harassment in public institutions and a lack of due process for investigating allegations in Canada's Parliament (Collier & Raney, 2018a). Consequently, in 2015, "the House of Commons adopted a new Code of Conduct on Sexual Harassment governing non-criminal sexual harassment claims between MPs" (Collier & Raney, 2018a, p. 2). Collier and Raney (2018a) argued that this weak and ineffectual policy does not combat gender-based harassment in the lower House but may instead reinforce gender norms because it did not change the structure of the patriarchal institution itself. This highlights that legislation can fail to protect diverse political women and alternative solutions should be developed. Even more problematic is that this harassment is compounded by intersecting factors, such as age, race, abilities, sexuality, and class (IPU, 2016), whose effects in the House are unknown in research to date. This harassment threatens political climates that aim to work from the perspective of human rights to achieve a healthy democracy and equity of all diverse peoples (Krook & Restrepo, 2016).

Just as there are global examples of violence, abuse, and harassment against diverse political women, there are also global examples of communities of women working to devise solutions. Krook & Restrepo (2016) stated that the strategies must be "holistic and comprehensive" (p. 478) and, for concrete and long-lasting results, should include input from the public, activists, community organizations, and politicians or lawmakers to transform the social and political cultures. Collier & Raney (2018b) argue that Canada's culture must also change in

how it thinks about and acts upon diverse women's values and abilities, as well political institutions must be named as spaces requiring cultural shifts because the current designs privilege white-heterosexual-masculinity. Women politicians in Canada have recently begun speaking out against this social issue, such as Premier Rachel Notley, MP Michelle Rempel, Member of the Legislative Assembly Sandra Jansen (Anderson, 2016; Idella & Lara, 2017) and MP Sherry Romanado (Smith, 2018). This individualized strategy, however, places the burden of cultural change onto the women politicians because they risk their job security, future election possibilities, holistic well-being, and professional or personal relationships when speaking out. Other solutions could include measuring the reach of intersectional harassment of diverse women politicians, increasing the public's awareness of it, developing public or workplace policies to dissuade or punish these actions, and punishing those who cause harm by enforcing laws (Krook, 2017; Krook & Restrepo, 2016). Krook (2017) and Krook and Restrepo (2016) argue that defining this social issue is important so that the diverse women may see their experiences and identities reflected in it and so the dominant group may comprehend their wrongdoings.

Online Harassment or Abuse and Intersectionality

The internet provided a new space for people to harass diverse political women and a majority of research on this subject was conducted using a white-feminist lens. Intersectional feminists, like Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) who founded this term, Blackwell et al. (2017), Hackworth (2018), and Shaw (2014), disagreed with employing only white-feminism to study this phenomenon due to its homogenization of the experiences of diverse women and assumptions of gender as the sole target. The authors explained that race, gender, sexual preferences, and abilities could not be studied separately because they were all pieces of a person's identity which constructed them as targetable for online misogynists, racists,

homophobes, or ableists (Blackwell et al., 2017; Crenshaw, 1991; Hackworth, 2018; Shaw, 2014). Researchers had various terms to define this phenomenon and used sexual harassment (Megarry, 2014), online harassment (Blackwell et al., 2017; Hackworth, 2018; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Rodríguez-Darias & Aguilera-Avila, 2018; Veletsianos, Houlden, Hodson, & Gosse, 2018), online violence (Strid, 2018), or “e-bile” (Jane, 2018, p. 284). Differences also occurred between researchers on explanations for the pervasiveness of online gendered harassment; e.g. men’s rights activism (Marwick & Caplan, 2018), its normalization (Vitak, Chadha, Steiner, & Ashktorab, 2017), the patriarchy (Megarry, 2014), or the commentators’ anonymity and “toxic disinhibition” (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016, p. 83). For this review, research on cyberbullying was excluded because the target is usually one individual.

Women have had less access to power in patriarchal spaces to voice their thoughts, opinions, and ideas without retaliation and the internet, which transcends the public and private divide, proved to be no different (Megarry, 2014). In fact, online men’s rights activists have formed websites or groups on the internet since the late 1980s (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). These men’s rights activists view active, vocal, and opinionated women as a threat. Therefore, when women resist gender norms and gender-related systems of oppression, as diverse political women do, online attacks are used to reinforce relations of inequality and power (Jane, 2016; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Strid, 2018). Shaw (2014) indicated that “misogyny, racism, [and] homophobia . . . were not invented by the internet, but they are enabled by technology and the cultural norms of internet communication in which this behavior is supported, defended, and even valued” (p. 275).

Strid (2018) revealed that women are “27 times more likely than [cis]men to be harassed online” (p. 58) and a 2016 study, by the Angus Reid Institute, found that one-in-four Canadians

reported an experience of online harassment. Both statistics should be expected to be higher for the racialized, non-binary, or LGBTQ2S+ body. As well, there are

three forms of opposition to gender equality: preventing (inactive opposition), inhibiting (indirect opposition), and obstructing (direct opposition) . . . inactivity is the most prevalent form of opposition [using] co-optation of gender-equality initiatives, withdrawn resources, and questioning the legitimacy of gender equality. (Strid, 2018, pp. 59-60)

Inactivity includes not criminalizing the online harassment of diverse women. Vitak et al. (2017) found that the most concerning aspect of online gendered harassment was the normalization and tolerance of it, which caused some women to react by disengaging from the online world. In comparison to offline, the online harassment of diverse women has unique features like its “anonymity, virility, or amplification and permanence” (Rodríguez-Darias & Aguilera-Avila, 2018, p. 64) and this leads to online commentators’ disinhibition to say or write things they would otherwise not in the offline world. Online forums amplify the harassment of diverse women and provide heightened visibility to oppressive and dominant ways of thinking (Rodríguez-Darias & Aguilera-Avila, 2018). The comments are usually about femininity, female behaviours, feminists, and women’s bodies (Megarry, 2014) and it may present in the form of name-calling, threats, sexualized harassment, stalking, doxxing (publishing their home or work address), creating fake profiles in their names, and death threats (Blackwell et al., 2017; Megarry, 2014). The abuse is likely more vitriolic for the racialized, non-binary, LGBTQ2S+, or [dis]able bodied woman (Blackwell et al., 2017; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Vitak et al., 2017) (the prefix “dis” is placed in brackets to emphasize the social construct of an able body), and is more complex to research because of its refusal to be categorized (Hackworth, 2018).

Jane (2016) calls for multiple collective strategies like the second-wave feminists used, cautioning that engaging only online for this wave of feminism may mean that the voices of the older, and presumably, less tech-savvy generations could be left out or that micro-politics is insufficient to create meaningful change. The micro-political strategy of naming and shaming, however, could also be thought of as a way that diverse women are reclaiming their power as online attacks can lead to trauma responses, hyper-vigilance, fear, distrust of people, paranoia, or installing security systems (Jane, 2016; Strid, 2018; Vitak et al., 2017). Regarding diverse political women, Bardall (2013) suggests that social media can both empower them through using these platforms for the dissemination of their messages and disempower them due to the harm they would likely face from hateful messages directed to or about them on the same mediums. “Social media have become the number one place in which psychological violence . . . is perpetrated against women parliamentarians” (IPU, 2016, p. 6). Veletsianos et al. (2018) research on women scholars’ coping mechanisms with online harassment found that “the most common coping strategies were reactive in nature, [such as] self-protection, resistance, acceptance and self-blame” (p. 9), this includes women disengaging from using social media to protect themselves. Having diverse women disengage from social media, either short- or long-term, is not a solution as some require an online profile for their professional lives and this strategy may have negative economic impacts for them (Jane, 2016; Megarry, 2014; Vitak et al., 2017). This also undermines diverse political women’s abilities to contribute their thoughts and opinions online (Veletsianos et al., 2018) while promoting their mandates or engaging in meaningful debates and political conversations (IPU, 2016). Resolutions, much like the issue itself, need to be developed from an interdisciplinary lens (Rodríguez-Darias & Aguilera-Avila, 2018) and should be driven by a bottom-up approach informed by centering the experiences and

needs of diverse women (Blackwell et al., 2017; Veletsianos et al., 2018). While social media has many benefits, diverse women are more vulnerable to the negative effects that a global communication media has (Vitak et al., 2017), and diverse political women are more vulnerable online than political cis-men.

Gaps in Contemporary Research

Through critically analyzing previous research or literature on women politicians it became clear that it remains unknown how this demographic, diverse political women, experience online harassment. The research has used discourse analyses or case studies to understand the phenomenon but has not yet centered the voices of diverse women. Blackwell et al. (2017) and Veletsianos et al. (2018) suggested that future research center their voices and gain these politicians' insight on potential solutions. Furthermore, when compiling the literature, a search on the York University library returned only 60 hits with books that mentioned women politicians. Not only should more literature be developed on women politicians to understand their worlds, but there also exists a deficit in research on diverse political women in Canada using intersectional perspectives, including with their experiences of online harassment or abuse in Canada. Thus, this exploratory research adds to the literature on diverse political women, Canadian politicians, and how they experience online harassment or abuse.

Chapter 3: Design and Methods

Methodology

Previous literature on online harassment or abuse or violence against diverse women politicians used phenomenology and not hermeneutic phenomenology. This was potentially due to the larger quantities of data that were studied in these case studies or discourse analyses or to more positivist research conducted on diverse women politicians than interpretive or

constructive. Thus, I found myself curious about the potential benefits of working from a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and what this may bring to the study and findings to answer my research question of what the experiences of diverse political Canadian women were with online attacks. With the exploratory nature of this study, its localized context, and smaller participant group, this research may be considered an appropriate one to test this paradigm. Regarding this social issue, hermeneutics became intriguing in its methodology because of its proposed continuous engagement with the participants in developing the findings or themes. Hermeneutic phenomenology situates the participant as the central knowledge holder and urges inclusivity with them during the development of the findings (Hoffmann, 2003). Consequently, this theoretical framework complemented my intersectional feminist perspective as the voices of the diverse women were amplified through their involvement during the analysis of the data. The application of hermeneutics, however, was not quite so straightforward. From reading the literature, it became clear that this inductive approach was both fascinating and complex. A few researchers, Armour, Rivaux, and Bell (2009), found it beneficial to utilize hermeneutic phenomenological experts to enrich the rigor of their data analysis strategies and improve their alignment with the frameworks of this paradigm. To supplement this approach, I engaged with my research course peers and professor to check in with my understandings of hermeneutics and received guidance for further points to consider. A specific complexity was that the literature on hermeneutics indicated that this paradigm lacks precise steps for its methodology or methods and that there were, instead, attitudes required for its use; such as, an “openness or making oneself available to the phenomenon of interest as it presents itself, understanding meaning, thinking in paradox and integrating opposites” (Armour et al., 2009, p. 106). Thus, hermeneutics holds the researcher accountable for making their biases or preconceptions explicit, regarding their

experiences with the phenomenon (Armour et al., 2009), and urges articulation of how they intersected with the interpretation of the data in a reflective journal (Laverty, 2003). The reflective journal, similar to an audit trail but with more focus on how the themes were drawn from the data, could be considered an effort in increasing the dependability of the study.

Member checking was used to balance the power differentials in the thematic development with the participants. The participants' feedback on the findings were centered and utilized to alter the themes by fusing their perceptions with my own (Kafle, 2011). This approach is thought to strengthen the credibility of the research findings. Hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity and positionality in developing the findings (Hoffmann, 2003; Kafle, 2011), as well as the context in which the lived experiences and interpretations took place (Bynum & Varpio, 2018). Regarding the findings, hermeneutics produces subjective meanings that are contextual in their constructions; therefore, the findings are not definitive in nature and remain open to other possible interpretations (Hoffmann, 2003; Spence, 2017). In other words, they are provisional thematic conclusions primarily applicable to the participants and researcher who developed them but possess potential applications to other contexts or people. Thematic construction of the phenomenon took place through the process of the hermeneutic circle and reflective journaling (Armour et al., 2009; Spence, 2017). The data analysis section provides a review of the process of the hermeneutic circle used in this research.

Research Design and Participant Selection

My intention was to conduct an exploratory study with four to eight diverse women politician participants to gain their subjective experiences and insights with online harassment and abuse. I aimed to diversify the positionalities of the participants to expand the perspectives or horizons of understanding and gain richer data in alignment with intersectional feminism; e.g.

racialized or white, LGBTQ2S+ or heterosexual, from a wide range of ages, able-bodied in a variety of ways, and physically located across Canada. In an attempt to capture more evidence that face-to-face interviews provide, my invitations to participate began locally in Toronto, Ontario. Regarding the subject position of being an elected politician, with the short turnaround of this project and the sensitive research focus, I found myself revisiting who would be invited to participate in the study and the type of communication tool I would use to connect with them. Consequently, and being conscious of which bodies face greater challenges during the lead up to elections, the participants grew to include *diverse political women*. The only exclusion criteria were cis-male politicians because of the focus on diverse women's experiences. If resources were not a factor for this project, I would have taken more time (i.e. weeks to months) to schedule interviews face-to-face with the participants, traveled to have met them, and possibly may have captured differing perspectives (for example, from politicians located in the Territories). At this stage, I gave primary consideration to working with potential participants' schedules via an audio communication method that worked predominantly better for them.

Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to connect with potential participants due to the intentional inclusion of rich diversity in subject positions. I began by disseminating my participant invite email to my contacts in academia who then reached out to these diverse women on my behalf. This strategy turned up approximately five potential contacts, with one who became a participant. After discussions with my advising professor on the ethics of connecting with these prospective participants directly and who my demographic was, we both ascertained that it would be ethically viable for me to reach out directly to them. We arrived at this conclusion after discussing power differentials, with the participants holding greater socioeconomic and political power than I, and the likelihood that this demographic would not

feel pressured to participate due to their professional standings and experiences. With this new strategy settled upon, I communicated with possible participants directly through social media, their webpages, or their work email addresses. This search turned up the final seven participants. There were also two racialized participants who were scheduled to interview but withdrew their involvement the day of the interview. Due to the professional social locations of these diverse women, honorariums were not offered for their participation.

Pertaining to how the interviews were conducted, from the theoretical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology, interviews are typically designed using minimal open-ended questions (Kafle, 2011; Spence, 2017) to let the participants' stories or experiences develop more naturally. Therefore, I designed three main questions with each possessing additional guiding questions or points if the participant required further direction during the interview. After the first interview, I discovered that one of the guiding questions would need to become another main question due to the participant's response when answering it. The first three main questions were, "What were your experiences like with online commentary that was directed towards you?" "What do you think the implications of this social issue are for diverse women in politics now and in the future?" "As more women come up into these positions, what do you think could be done to support them?" The fourth question added was: "How did the negative comments affect you personally in your day, your work, or your relationships?" During the recruitment phase and at the beginning and end of the interviews, the participants were reminded that their ongoing involvement with the data analysis would be an option. They were also informed how this may proceed and how it aligned with the perspectives of intersectional feminist theory and hermeneutic phenomenology. The interviews ranged from 45- to 90-minutes in length and,

considering the participants' locations across Canada and the demanding schedules of diverse political women, they took place in-person, by a video-conferencing application, or by telephone.

The recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word dictation. First, I turned off iCloud for Apple iMovie (to not compromise the security of the data when it is uploaded to the cloud and subjected to complicated data security policies). Then, I air-dropped the audio-recordings to the iMovie application on my iPhone. I utilized this application's technology to slow down the recording, played it back with headphones on, and dictated it to Word. I ran through the audio-recording four times; first, to dictate the words, second, to fix mistakes in dictation, record emphases, or capture punctuation, and, third, to complete and reaffirm the punctuation. In my fourth run-through of the transcriptions, I used my subjective interpretation of the importance of filler words and deleted any that I found detracted from the participants' stories. The original copies with all the filler words were stored separately. These dictations ranged in ease, the phone call interviews were timelier to transcribe due to the removal of body language as an option to prompt the participants. As well, using video-conferencing applications proved to be a challenge for transcribing, although less so than phone calls, because of a lack of access for some to secure and stable internet connections; thus, occasionally, albeit minimally so, the participants' words were difficult to discern.

Data Analysis

The hermeneutic circle was used as my methodological and analytical tool to study the transcriptions of the participants' subjective lived realities (Armour et al., 2009; Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Kafle, 2011; Laverty, 2003; Spence, 2017). This investigative process, the hermeneutic circle, involved analyzing the data by studying the finer details of the participants' stories and their narratives of the phenomenon as a whole, including its fit with the stories the

other participants provided (Armour et al., 2009; Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Lavery, 2003). This process, the circle, was repeated back and forth, from the finer details to the whole, until I became confident that my interpretation of the phenomenon into its phenomenological themes “reached a place of sensible meaning, free of inner contradictions, for the moment” (Lavery, 2003, p. 25). The process of the circle did not happen in isolation and was accompanied by three other key tools for hermeneutic data analysis. These concomitant tools were engaging with mine and the participants’ horizons of understanding, doing reflective journaling, and conducting member checks. I engaged in reflective journaling to keep track of my preunderstandings, biases, or prejudices on how they influenced my interpretations of the data (Armour et al., 2009; Hoffmann, 2003; Spence, 2017). Therefore, the reflective journaling provided a purposive space to make notes on my emerging or changing thoughts about the research, participants’ data, or process. These reflections were used to track my subjective intellectual process for how I came to understand the experiences of the participants through a fusion of my horizon (my pre-understandings from my subject positions, knowledge from the literature, intersectional feminist perspective for understanding the world, and historical or cultural knowledge) with that of the participants’ own horizons as told through the interviews and clarified in member checking (Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Hoffmann, 2003; Kafle, 2011; Lavery, 2003; Spence, 2017).

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the circle may be combined with the best practice of conducting member checks in qualitative research. Therefore, nearer the end of this process, I conducted member checks with the participants to gain their perspectives and insights on whether my understandings from my vantage point captured their meanings as viewed from their horizon of understanding (Kafle, 2011). Checking in with the participants for clarification and engaging them in ranking the themes, derived from their experiences and horizons of

understanding, assisted with my thoroughness of the interpretation of the data. It brought forward how each participant and the researcher understood their subjective accuracy or importance of the themes as viewed through the commonalities or differences in their pre-understandings of the phenomenon and provided space to collaborate on the findings. Thus, the hermeneutic circle was a cyclical methodological tool that I used through a reflective and collaborative process with the participants for my qualitative phenomenological data analysis. Making my biases or prejudices explicit and using reflective journaling to hold myself accountable for noting additional ones that arose and their interactions with my understandings of the data, fusing those understandings or horizons with the participants', keeping a written account of this, coupled with the member checking and discussions I had with my peers and professors, added to the rigorousness of this research using the hermeneutic paradigm.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Findings

To ground the participants' data, the findings open with an overview of their demographics and an introduction of how each became aware of their online attacks. With three participants wanting to remain anonymous, the socio-political positionalities of the participants are provided categorically to protect their identities. The seven participants were either elected or ran for seats at the municipal, provincial, or federal level of government and were located in various provinces. None of the participants were in the territories. All identified as women, three were LGBTQ2S+ and four were heterosexual. Two participants were racialized and five were white, their ages ranged from the mid-30s to early-60s, and five of the participants were parents while running for office or elected. Three disclosed hidden [dis]abilities, such as mental illnesses or voice challenges. In addition, two participants indicated that their body image or weight was

an aspect of their experience with online attacks. Last, the professional social media accounts the participants had while politically active were Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Morgane Oger, an activist and advocate, she worked with the transgender community for years and was a strong voice for gender equality. Due to this role, Oger had been subjected to attacks online and offline for a considerable length of time and did not name a beginning to the online attacks when discussing her story. Hon. Peggy Nash, similar to Oger, did not identify a specific activation point of the online harassment, but rather alluded to it being a continuous issue while she was in office. While both she and Oger expressed gratitude to their staff for the years of work they did to protect them from the worst of the online commentary, Hon. Nash was one of the only participants who may not have directly engaged with the cruelest of the attacks. Similar to these two, Hon. Celina Caesar-Chavannes also did not define a fixed beginning to the online abuse saying, instead, that the worst of it ebbed and flowed as her actions became highlighted in the media or through hashtags. The remaining four participants, in contrast, remembered precisely when or how the abuse online began. Hon. Joanne Bernard recalled the incident that ignited the online attacks directed at her and it started after she received an anonymous homophobic letter in the mail in 2013. In response, Hon. Joanne Bernard tweeted to this person that this letter would not stop her from representing all of her constituents equally. After the media reported on that tweet and her being the first openly gay member of the legislature, the online abuse began. Laura, at the time of this research, was new to politics and was growing her online profile to assist in her campaign. She reported that the abuse online began very soon after she started electioneering and believed that it had not yet reached its peak of aggressiveness. Laura was also the most recent to have received social media training from a political organization. Nancy remembers that the worst of the online abuse started during a tough

fiscal year, mainly after the provincial budget was announced. The bulk of the online attacks lasted for approximately eight months until she spoke out about what she was being subjected to. Alice's experiences with attacks online started with someone airing a historic comment she made which fueled social media users' vilification of her. She also recalled that misogynist or ageist comments had plagued her since the beginning of her political career.

Social media: "A complex relationship". This major theme, and its three subthemes, reveals how these diverse women were silenced or disempowered by the attacks online or, in contrast, were empowered with a desire to speak out, and how intersecting positionalities likely affected the comments. The title, "a complex relationship", was how Oger described her connection with social media and related to how each of these diverse political women engaged with online platforms. Social media was useful for them to weigh in on socio-political conversations as part of modern-day democracy, equivalent to town halls, and there was shared eagerness to engage in debates online concerning their work and policy decisions or decisions their party made. Thus, the complex relationship was the need to utilize social media to disseminate their politics and the harm which transpired through these mediums.

Limited the reach of their voices. The online attacks appeared to have limited the reach or strength of these diverse political women's voices in a variety of ways. They reported that the more abusive or harassing comments shut down potential for debate, took them away from their work to manage it, and caused one participant to temporarily delete her social media applications. The messages responsible for shifting how they engaged online ranged from name-calling to threats of withholding votes for dates, to sexually suggestive images (one may have involved a young child), to death threats. Beyond direct threats of physical harm or death, examples of the words and phrases used to harass these diverse women online were "cunt",

“retarded cunt”, “predator”, “child abuser”, “dumb blonde”, “bimbo”, misgendering, and body or weight shaming. For the participant who was ideologically centrist, she suspected the comments directed at her came from people on the left and attacked her values and integrity as a diverse woman not running for a leftist party, a sentiment shared by another racialized participant. The tools used by these women to deal with their online harassment and abuse also contributed to their silencing; which were blocking or muting online users, temporarily withdrawing from social media, switching their use of social media to a one-way communication tool, or employing staff and volunteers to screen the messages. At one point, Oger mass blocked approximately 21,000 social media accounts due to the abusive nature of the comments, Alice quit stating her position on current affairs online as it was not a “safe place to have those conversations”, and Hon. Caesar-Chavannes said the online attacks “dampened what [she] would put on Twitter”.

Laura also alluded to online harassment having a dulling effect on her voice online throughout the interview, such as when she talked about being “incredibly disciplined” online and only commenting on topics that were within her area of expertise. As there were contradictions in her story about feeling silenced online, I asked for clarification. Laura said that she did not think attacks online had an effect on the strength of her voice and she attributed this to having access to spaces offline for more effective conversations. Nancy, on the other hand, was at a United Nations roundtable discussing this social issue when another woman politico became enraged that social media users were taking her voice away. Nancy said,

I think that the impact of unchecked, irresponsible, and unaccountable social media companies is impacting the ability for women to participate in public policy. . . . I pulled back from social media and I became very careful about what I posted, almost in a way

that I wouldn't be provocative in policy. I was very moderate, I was choosing not to have difficult conversations on social media. It wasn't going to happen.

Participants also reported that when the comments section was hijacked by trolls or angry social media users their message topics were derailed and their central point was lost. This silenced the ability for all users to have reasonable debates on the original topic or for the politico to remain consistent on her messaging. These women identified four categories of social media users. First, those who were interested in socio-political conversations and debating the topic. Second, people who were "performative" supporters. Third, the political operatives, such as staff, volunteers, or major ideological supporters, that had a high investment in the success of another political party. Fourth, the trolls, those who stepped out of the echo chambers to attack the diverse woman on some aspect of her identity. The "echo chamber" was defined as a single-topic site on the internet where people of similar perspectives congregate and have their views reinforced or strengthened. These echo chambers have the potential to radicalize people on a single issue; for example, white supremacist or anti-transgender streams on Reddit or 4Chan.

Empowerment and speaking out. Each of the participants either spoke directly on this subtopic or engaged with it indirectly by contributing their voices to this study. It appears that while the intersectional attacks online were meant to disempower these diverse women, it had the opposite effect and made them stronger, encouraging some to take further control of their interactions on social media. For two participants, Alice and Oger, the empowerment came in the form of making police statements, taking steps to improve their safety, and maintaining their determination to stay on their political career path informed by their values and goals. Alice also used online attacks as encouragement to engage more with her constituents offline and support others subjected to online attacks. She also took control of her story in the media and changed it

to one of resiliency, not wanting to be pigeonholed as a cautionary tale for the next generation.

Laura said that the online comments or the white-supremacist echo chambers were sources of motivation for her to run for office and change the narrative of racialized people in her province.

When Hon. Joanne Bernard received a tweet calling her a “retarded cunt” and an apology email the next day from the man, she wrote the man back detailing the personal consequences from his tweet. After months of online attacks, Hon. Joanne Bernard had enough and decided to hold more people accountable:

At the end of my tenure, I just started screenshotting shit, posting it and shaming them. I

was like, fuck it, if you’re stupid enough to do something with your name attached to it,

I’m going to put it out there and that’s what I started doing. I started fighting back.

When asked for thematic feedback, Hon. Joanne Bernard disagreed with the trolls limiting her voice and said, “If anything, I made a point of making my social media presence larger to get back some of my power”. While she was moved to use the micro-political tactic of naming and shaming, Nancy addressed the media. She drew on her personal lessons of vulnerability to empower herself to share her story with female-only reporters, exposing months of online attacks. Nancy stated,

People needed to know that, yes, I had a tough job to do, yes, I had difficult decisions to make and our cabinet had made difficult decisions. But that didn’t give anybody the right to threaten me over social media streams and over email . . . I felt that it was important to expose because, whether it was purposeful by individuals or was purposefully organized by lobby groups or whatever, I wanted it to stop. And it did after I exposed it.

Effects of intersecting identities. Oger explained intersectional positionalities and its implications for online attacks as follows,

When you're intersectional, the more intersections you have and the louder you are about these things, the more vulnerable you are because you have a bigger exposure to the risks. . . . Each intersection brings in its own vulnerabilities, its own misunderstandings, its own weaknesses when it comes to someone who is not part of that community.

Consequently, it is likely that the positionalities of the participants tainted how graphic, explicit, or pervasive the online comments were or the nature of them. Oger also shared her concerns of the complexities in reaching a critical mass of complaints to demand change as an intersectional person. The more intersections people have in their identities, the smaller the population size to contribute to the needed mass to warrant serious action to be taken by either the social media companies, policymakers, or the police.

As microaggressions occur online, too, the abuse did not have to be malicious for one participant to endure its consequences. With Hon. Caesar-Chavannes's online defense taking form in muting replies to her posts, she managed to block the worst of it. One online microaggression she did succumb to was delivered via her colleagues, in her party and other parties, in the form of mis-tagging her as another Black woman in politics. It was made more wearisome for Hon. Caesar-Chavannes because she worked with these people face-to-face very often and said, "*I sit right across from you, dammit*". Reflecting on the combination of how she was treated online and offline during her time in office, Hon. Caesar-Chavannes said, "I only felt like a woman and a Black person and as a Black woman, so three different identities, when I got into politics. I have never felt that like in my entire life". This new identity for her, a Black woman, made explicit by her role in office, highlighted how her intersecting positionalities were used to sexualize her in a way that she had not experienced before, through exploiting her Black

womanhood. These microaggressions and developed consciousness of her third identity were a reminder of the glass ceiling for Hon. Caesar-Chavannes.

After her experiences with online harassment or abuse and her time in elected office, Hon. Joanne Bernard understood why politicians who were LGBTQ2S+ decided not to be out with their sexual orientation in public life because of the added layer of abuse it could open them and their family up to. In addition to social media users attacking her online for her weight, Hon. Joanne Bernard's gender and sexual orientation were also targets for the online abusers. She said,

I never identified myself as a gay candidate, I just happened to be a candidate who was gay. And the media just took that and said, 'Nova Scotia's first openly gay member of legislature' . . . Very shortly after [I was elected] I was getting both homophobic and misogynistic comments online . . . Nobody is attacked for being straight and married.

To clarify how intense the online attacks were, Hon. Joanne Bernard said,

There were points in my tenure that I just thought, thank god my dad's not alive to see this. . . . I was so happy that neither my parents were here to witness [the online attacks]. And, that's *hard* for me to say because I miss them every day. So, for me to say, 'I'm glad they weren't here to witness that', that's how *profound* it was in my life.

Alice indicated that when she first entered politics her younger age was a target for online harassment. She recalled receiving comments that were noticeably different from her younger male colleague's, such as when people used age to undermine her intellect and not his. Laura had a different take on her positionalities and online harassment or abuse.

This is just speculation on my part, but if the [right-wing] fellow that I'm running against were to make a *single* comment about my race, gender, or sexual orientation I have no doubt that *every* other party, including my own, would erupt.

Laura suspected her intersecting positionalities protected her from the more aggressive online attacks in her province's current political climate and that the harassment may differ according to which party the diverse woman aligns herself with; i.e. women on the right may get attacked for purportedly betraying their gender.

Each platform has unique challenges. The participants had varied experiences with each social media platform and thought the discourse of the harassment may differ by platform. They did report the mainstream platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and the subculture or echo chamber platforms of 4Chan, Reddit, and Kiwifarms to be the more problematic sites for harassment. No participants reported issues with LinkedIn or SnapChat; there was a deficit of professional accounts for the latter two. Further, due to rare occurrences, Hon. Caesar-Chavannes said that receiving negative comments on Instagram was shocking. Oger indicated that the more mainstream sites had more multifaceted and reasonable comments and the subculture sites contained more "hyperpolarized" comments without true counter opinions. She explained,

That's the problem with specialized social media, they have become polarized echo chambers . . . they are radicalization mediums. You can spend your entire online experience in a radicalized space.

Oger also noted that the attacks on one platform were difficult to extract from the harassing or abusive posts that occurred on another platform, such as someone's blog, because of cross-posting. As they left comments up for a lengthy period of time, Hon. Joanne Bernard introduced the issue of online news sources and their role in perpetuating abuse online.

Hon. Nash, Hon. Caesar-Chavannes, and Alice discussed both Facebook and Twitter throughout their interviews as sites of online attacks. While Hon. Nash did not point to one as being worse than the other, Alice and Hon. Caesar-Chavannes stated that Twitter was worse than

Facebook. When she talked about the incident that sparked her online attacks, Alice said, “It was a tsunami of criticism, *especially* online and *especially* on Twitter”. Hon. Joanne Bernard also found Twitter was “*clearly* the main engine” of online attacks because of its anonymity and how quickly or easily the hateful messages could be spread or amplified with re-Tweets and likes. On the contrary, Nancy found more protectionism on Twitter, with her “influencers” shifting the conversations away from personal attacks, and that it was easier to manage as conversations could be muted. Laura saw Twitter as a site where she engaged with media or where people went for “juicy” news or interactions.

With Nancy’s online attacks, she thought Facebook to be “much more *angry*, visceral, and dark . . . [and that] the direct messages were *by far* the worst”. She went on to say,

It was everything from death threats to threats of rape, to all kinds of graphic pictures that were sent, and sent directly, which was even more concerning. If somebody’s commenting on the stream or on the main page, there’s a lot of people seeing it and it’s almost like a public criticism. But when somebody sends you a private message and it’s a bit intimate, that was really disturbing . . . nobody knew but me what I was getting.

Hon. Joanne Bernard thought Facebook was not as aggressive because people mostly had their names and pictures attached to their profiles. This made it easier for her to hold the commenters accountable when she screenshotted their abusive words accompanied by their personal information. Alice also indicated that Facebook was more personal in its interactions because people posted more identifying information on their profiles. Overall, for almost half of the participants it could be deduced that regardless of which website was better or worse at mitigating online harassment, abuse, or attacks, it was their perceptions of the inescapability from social media and the harassment that worsened their experiences.

Consequences for life offline. The online intersectional attacks of these diverse political women had ripple effects on the participants' offline lives. In addition, the conversations in the echo chambers online likely increased the toxicity or the degree of harassing and abusive behaviours directed at these participants in their offline lives. Further, the frequency, relentlessness, or repetitiveness of the online attacks may have made it difficult for these diverse women to uphold their resiliency and coping skills for self or community.

Interlock of offline and online harassment. All participants interwove occurrences of offline harassment into their narratives of online abuse, conceivably due to the incidents occurring simultaneously. Online attacks were not siloed events. One concrete example of this was an event that began offline and moved online for one participant. A man walked around Hon. Joanne Bernard's place of work, the legislative building, recording the space while discussing his perceptions of her sexual life. He posted this video to YouTube. Another complexity is that it is likely people's views or values shared online have real-life implications (e.g. the radicalization conversations in the echo chambers) and may negatively influence the perspectives and behaviours of people in these diverse women's locale, increasing the real potential for offline abuse. Hon. Joanne Bernard, Oger, Alice, and Nancy all discussed moments of offline threats of death, physical assault, or rape, moments of verbal assault, or cases of stalking. "He pointed a finger in my face and said, 'I know who you are and I own you'". "I did have a death threat where the person came to my office". "I had a stalker". "Out of the blue I received an email, and in the email there was a death threat". "He [online abuser] emailed my mother". "Because of [my] portfolio . . . I started getting death threats". "I'm afraid of being murdered".

Laura shared her concerns about attending political events in the community, such as debates or public forums. She said, "With the resurgence of white supremacists and those sorts of

characters becoming *a lot* more comfortable showing up . . . there are some political events that *I just won't* go to. It's not safe for me". For two participants, the emotional or mental effects of the threats were compounded by news of international diverse political women being harmed or killed due to their political role; e.g. MP Joanne Cox in the UK or Rep. Gabrielle Giffords in the US. Cooccurring with the online attacks, these offline threats or attacks happened at the participant's homes, over the phone, from passing by vehicles, via email or mail, at their workplaces, and in the community while running errands or canvassing. As the participants spoke about emails separately from online harassment, and their being the contemporary format of postal mail, emails were grouped with offline harassment. Hon. Caesar-Chavannes experiences with face-to-face microaggressions were worse for her than online attacks as the online comments had no hidden meanings. The lack of support from her party, both with online attacks and offline incidents, as well as, from her experience, the party's emphasis on commitment to diversity and not also to inclusion, contributed to her decision not to run again.

Exposes unexpected vulnerabilities. During their involvement in politics and experiences with attacks online, it became apparent that these diverse political women's whole being was a target for harassment or abuse. Social media likely reminded these women of their vulnerabilities or exposed ones they were previously unaware of. For these participants, it was their intellect, values, integrity, bodies (including weight or height), gender expression, racialization, sexual orientation, voice (tone or speech patterns), or abilities. As Hon. Joanne Bernard said,

It was just about everything that you can degrade a woman as a person, make it personal.

It had *nothing* to do with my policies, it had *nothing* to do with my politics . . . it [had] everything to do with the fact that I was a gay woman.

Hon. Joanne Bernard did not originally think that her positionality as a woman politician who was gay would be such fodder for online trolls and the comments about her weight also triggered her historic struggles with an eating disorder. Alice expressed similar thoughts about the nature of her online attacks; i.e. they were mostly gendered and had very little to do with her politics. Nancy thought that because her appearances were outside of the typical sexualized body that she would not be sexually harassed, yet the online trolls exposed the fallacy of this preconceived notion. For Alice, the online attacks also made obvious the tenuous nature of self-confidence as it took her a year to regain her confidence after the worst of the attacks was over. Hon. Caesar-Chavannes also discussed how the comments exacerbated her depression or anxiety and, when they became particularly nasty, caused her to clear her schedule and take time to recuperate.

For three of the participants, noting the difference in the tones of the online attacks that they received versus their cis-gender male counterparts appeared to have magnified society's devaluation of their intellectual capabilities due to their positionalities as diverse women. An additional outcome of the online attacks was the realization of the seemingly never-ending nature of the attacks and the ongoing vulnerability of having the comments remain online, as they may encourage social media users to continue to taunt them even after their political career is over. Another exposed vulnerability would be reminders of the fragility of life. Laura, in her training to prepare her for politics, was warned that "you're going to have people sending you weird messages about wanting to rape and kill you . . . you should *expect* it at some point". When anonymous or non-anonymous people made threats, it made space for genuine fear or concern about death or physical harm because it was "hard to judge if someone is a real threat or not".

Extra emotional labour. Attacks on social media can have, as Oger said, a "profound negative effect" on their days, relationships, and work. The participants talked in-depth about

having to extend ongoing or intensive support to their family, extended family, friends, colleagues, community, social media users, and self as a result of the online abuse or harassment. For the community, Nancy, Hon. Caesar-Chavannes, Hon. Joanne Bernard, Hon. Nash, and Alice all spoke about a feeling of responsibility or the actions they took to support younger generations with online harassment because of their own experiences. For family, immediate and extended, Oger, Nancy, and Hon. Joanne Bernard discussed the caregiving work they had to perform after specific attacks to tend to their children's or partners' fears, reassure their children they were safe, discuss safety plans (such as not being in pictures or deleting online accounts), or have the police over to talk about safety with the children. Alice had her family and friends disconnect from her on social media, hoping this would protect them from online attacks. Regarding colleagues, there was emotional labour extended towards supporting other diverse political women with online attacks or engaging in conversations with each other about this social issue. They also expended intellectual and emotional energy or time to finding resolutions. In addition, three of these women took time to support their male colleagues in coming to understand this social issue and comprehend the gendered and intersectional differences in online attacks. Alice, Nancy, and Hon. Joanne Bernard tended to the social media users who harassed them. As well, there was considerable emotional labour that these diverse political women had to take up for themselves. They worked to reestablish their confidence, safety, and self-worth while gathering their supports so they could carry on with life or the work of a diverse political woman. There was also the shame or embarrassment they expressed knowing that other people in their social circle, the community, and elsewhere were reading these comments. Thus, some had to take care of any resulting anxiety, depression, or suicidal ideations. Online attacks stole from these diverse women their time and emotional energy.

Fear. “I never”, then Hon. Joanne Bernard sighed, “in a million years, I *never*, in a million years, did I *ever, ever, ever* think that putting my name on a ballot would bring me to a point where I was dealing with death threats and online abuse”. For the majority of the participants, the fear of being harassed offline or killed was real, not only for them but for their families and supports as well. The volume of the abusive messages or overtly threatening nature of the online attacks combined with the anonymity of the social media users and the high public profiles of these diverse political women most likely attributed to these fears. The death threats, whether obvious or alluded to, seemed to have had the same effect in the end, which was fear for life. Hon. Joanne Bernard recalled the man who called her a “retarded cunt” and said that she was in his “crosshairs”. This made her think of guns. Oger had someone post about how they were good at hunting and heading to the city where she lived to “bother” her. Due to the death threats and the offline and online harassment, Oger and Nancy had police escorts for public events and, along with Alice, required police intervention for the death threats they received. While Hon. Caesar-Chavannes did not specify that online death threats were her reality, she discussed the fear of how far online anonymous commenters will go offline when making online threats. Consequently, Hon. Caesar-Chavannes was hypervigilant of who was around her in the community, such as at the grocery store. When combined with other factors that accompany a life in politics, online abuse caused Hon. Caesar-Chavannes to change the locations of where she spent time in her community or stay home more often. She never knew who was walking towards her, if it was the person who threatened her online or not, saying that she was “*constantly* scanning” people’s faces and demeanors.

These diverse women spoke openly about the fear their children felt about their mom being the potential target for someone to harm or kill. (I decided not to link the children with the

parent or share their gender in the comments to preserve their anonymity.) Two examples were, “[my child] expressed to me that [they] had concerns about a man with a shotgun”, and, “I remember telling my [child] that the police were coming in to very gently walk-through what kind of things we need to be concerned about. I remember [them] asking me if [getting assassinated] could happen to me”. As for the fear these diverse women’s extended families may feel, Oger’s parents saw the comments on social media and warned her that,

Germany went from a hyper-inclusive place to a Nazi hellhole that killed everybody like me in three years and I should be careful not to think that it can’t happen in Canada. And that maybe I should be a little less visible because by the time I notice that it’s dangerous it will be too late.

Hon. Joanne Bernard also spoke about becoming overwhelmed with fear when out in public and needing to get home to safety, as well as losing the support of her family to re-enter politics because of fear. About half of the participants had family members who shut down their social media accounts to escape the online attacks, placed their accounts on private mode, or developed anxieties related to social media. One of the participant’s children had profound fears of being in pictures and having those posted on social media. There was also fear and anticipation for when the next big wave of the online attacks would happen. Oger, who was in the midst of social media attacks, said she and her team were putting resources into navigating internet risks and preparing for opponents or trolls to someday create slanderous or pornographic websites in her name. Laura, at the beginning of her campaign, doubted that she had been through the cruelest of the online attacks and was mentally readying herself for when the gender or racial slurs would start online. Alice, who had been through worst of her online attacks and still receives death threats, stated that she was always navigating the abuse online.

Resiliency and strategies. Throughout each participant's narratives of their experiences with attacks online, they provided insights on their resiliencies to persevere and thoughts on potential strategies to mitigate them.

Hope. Each diverse woman used the word 'hope' in their stories. They expressed hope for the next generation of politically active diverse women and, as these generations were raised in the era of social media, faith that they would be more prepared to unite and strategize about ways forward with online attacks. Hon. Nash stated, "Trust their ideas, these are not precious flowers. These are strong, confident young women who are going to make a difference in the world and no amount of harassment is going to shut them up". Laura shared her hopes that the younger generations would step into politics regardless of online harassment and abuse, a sentiment seconded by Hon. Caesar-Chavannes who hoped young women would not become cynical and continue, instead, to rise in spite of political populism. Hon. Caesar-Chavannes saw this possibility come to life when the Daughters of the Vote presented in the House,

One young lady stood up in the House and talked about Black women and their experiences, she was not afraid, apologetic, or timid about it. . . . To speak about the experience of Indigenous women or to say Tina Fontaine's name in the House. To talk about disability. They were just standing in their truth and in their power and talking.

Alice, Laura, Hon. Nash, and Hon. Joanne Bernard shared excitement about the results of the US 2018 midterm elections and believed they would see similar potential for diversity in Canada. Nancy saw hope in how the women in the US were learning from one another on how to deal with or fight back against online attacks. There was agreement that, while designed to limit diverse women's voices, the online harassment or abuse would not stop these politicians. Oger's

hopes were to “lockdown hate speech even more in Canada” and Alice’s were to remind people that what happens online does not necessarily reflect what people in the local community think.

Resistance. These diverse women developed multiple strategies to resist the attacks they were receiving or may receive online. Most took advantage of the tools currently available to deal with online harassers or trolls, or their staff did on their behalves. These were blocking or muting the more intense social media accounts that were harassing them or reporting them to the police. Hon. Caesar-Chavannes used muting as a tool to resist because she wanted the commentary to be out there, she wanted that historical record of how she was treated online and what people said to be documented and known. For those online abusers that were in their ridings, the diverse women took note to avoid them when canvassing for safety reasons. These participants were split on whether or not screenshotting the comments and reposting them was an effective way to deal with the online attacks. Nancy and Hon. Joanne Bernard found screenshotting and posting to be one way of exposing the problematic comments online and challenging the normalization of this behaviour, an act of resistance, while simultaneously disengaging from the one-on-one conversation with the original poster. This was their way to “fight back” and publicly shame people for their poor online behaviours, likely because online protection mechanisms were failing them. Nancy reflected on when she spoke out, wishing she had done it sooner. Laura’s intentions were to not “feed the trolls” and also saw her participation in politics as an act of resistance. When discussing the rise of white supremacy, the social divisions that were widening in her province, and the likelihood of facing online or offline harassment, Laura said,

I knew that’s what I was facing but that’s why I *need* to do this. We can’t cower and we can’t hide. Our democracy can only be protected and preserved if people actually come

out of hiding, stand up, are willing to be counted, put their name on the ballot, and say, 'that is *enough*'.

Additionally, three participants resisted by taking advantage of the training that was offered to them on online communication or resiliency. Two others found that the online attacks made them stronger, probably the opposite result of the social media attackers' intentions. As it seemed to open up space for building supports, acceptance was another pathway to resistance.

External support and allies. For these diverse political women who had expended their internal resources to tend to themselves and others when the online attacks were most toxic, there was a consistent extension of gratitude to the people or organizations who allied with them to get through it. Alice and Oger discussed the need to establish or identify networks of support that consist of a diverse demographic of people, inclusive of family, friends, mentors, colleagues, or political organizations, to prepare for the tough moments with online attacks instead of thinking that they would not come. The organizations that multiple participants named for support, outside of their political party, were Equal Voice and Daughters of the Vote. Laura mentioned a need for more organizations and programs like these to support the higher volumes of diverse women interested in becoming involved in politics. Oger also had a volunteer specifically assigned to managing transphobia, a role she found highly valuable to have on her team. Alice, along with two other participants, was grateful to her colleagues and mentors who called to offer support with the online attacks, and this was a role she continued to pay forward. Laura found her cis-gender male colleagues to be her allies for the online attacks, saying they would engage in calling out the online racism, misogyny, or heterosexism. She said this permitted the diverse women in the party to have more complex political identities. So, instead of being pigeonholed into discussing only women's issues, their time was freed up to represent issues applicable to

other positionalities in their ridings. In addition to their allies offline, the online influencers were another source of support for the participants because these social media users, either politico influencers, colleagues, party supports, or community members, would go and shift the conversation online when it became increasingly toxic.

Potential strategies for change. The strategies named by these participants were varied and included social media companies, the police, the government, political organizations and parties, educational institutions, and society as targetable sources for strategic interventions. A majority of the participants expressed doubts in leaving the resolutions for this social issue solely in the hands of social media companies. While they believed that alternative solutions needed to be devised in conjunction with them, they argued that social media giants should be held accountable for their responsibility to create communication platforms that were safe for all people. As these companies profit from the maltreatment of groups of people and the amplification of fear and hate, Oger and Nancy indicated that the companies should not be able to shirk their responsibilities. Thus, social media should play a more meaningful role in curbing online attacks. This included continuing to immobilize consistently belligerent online abusers through suspending their accounts while making explicit the types of content that would not be tolerated and simplifying support processes for people subjected to mass attacks. Hon. Nash recommended outlawing computerized bots, she thought this may lessen the rapid fomentation of the anger online that occasionally leads to offline violence.

For non-social media company interventions, Nancy and Hon. Nash wanted to see more non-partisan opportunities in Canada for diverse political women to unite offline, share their stories, concerns, and challenges and collectively devise strategies for moving forward with this social issue. Hon. Caesar-Chavannes noted that her party could have provided her and other

women in her party with more consistent support, both publicly and privately. She went on to offer a way that parties could improve their relations with political women, saying, “You *support* her. You don’t *believe* her with it’s convenient and *leave* her when it not”. Participants were hesitant to say that diverse political women should continue to educate themselves on how to survive and thrive through the online attacks, likely because it was too micro of an approach; yet, some believed this to be a tolerable intervention in the meantime. Three participants mentioned a possible gap in supports for diverse women at the very beginning stages of entering politics; i.e. before they have party support. As Alice suggested, this could possibly be educating the diverse women on how to manage historic comments they made on social media, coaching on whether or not to delete their accounts and start from new, developing their confidence in or strategies for navigating online attacks, or providing assurances that there would be ongoing support. Regarding the historic comments, addressing this may be increasingly important for upcoming generations and Laura expressed the need for more social media workshops for political women, like the ones offered by Equal Voice. There may be further opportunities for political parties to increase their support for diverse women with online attacks. Hon. Joanne Bernard said, “In general, political parties are ill-equipped to deal with online trolling of their female politicians and prefer to let the story die . . . [this] strategy of ignoring does not work”.

Hon. Joanne Bernard included the continued accountability for news websites to track what comments social media users make on their posts. Oger saw an enhanced role for police intervention, which included the potential for more expansive training for employees or volunteers on the implications and realities of online attacks, including how to evaluate the credibility of the online attacker. She saw this as an essential, “because if *everybody* knows [the police are] not here to help you, then people know that they can act with impunity”. Further,

there is likely space for more methodical and effective applications of Canadian hate speech laws. Education was another intervention that was offered. Oger saw opportunities for including in grade school education how to navigate the internet and social media using a critical lens, how to engage courteously in debates, and how to identify credible or vetted accounts or sources. Further, Hon. Nash believed there were opportunities to educate the public on why the families of politically active people should be off-limits. As Hon. Joanne Bernard's child said, "I didn't sign up for this . . . I don't know how to handle it". With many participants discussing the harm that came to their family via the online attacks, there is likely also a deficit of supports with online attacks for the family members of politically active diverse women.

Problematizing these strategies. Four out of the seven participants, Nancy, Hon. Caesar-Chavannes, Hon. Nash, and Oger, shared their struggles with developing strategies for change with this social issue. They identified three main concepts that problematized the development of potential tactics to resolve online attacks. First, Hon. Caesar-Chavannes wondered how changes would be developed within Canada's current party system "where the leader and the party are synonymous. . . . If you say something against the leader, you say something against the entire infrastructure". So, if the woman's online attacks originated from news about her conflict with the party leader, this system could make it challenging for colleagues to step out and publicly support the woman with online attacks. Second, were the possible intrusions on free speech. They wanted to be mindful of not restricting or stifling open discussion or debate, which, as Hon. Nash said, "are crucial for thriving democracies". There was attention paid to who gets to define "oppression" or the terms of hate speech with strong mistrust in providing sole power to social media corporations and governments to define the boundaries of free speech. Oger said,

I would *very*, very much like to see our hate speech provisions apply to organizations whose headquarters are not in our country. Then again, when I say that I'm mindful that if we make this happen then Saudi Arabia is going to want to do the same and Indonesia and Russia. We all like to think that we are the credible ones, right, but that's not the reality. The reality is that we want to manage people acting badly but we also want to cultivate dialogue and debate, and some dialogue and some debate has to be done anonymously because it's against oppressive governments. . . . People who do harm online should be held accountable. I don't know how we do that without oppressing emerging revolutionary minorities, because we always have to assume the worst.

Nancy wondered if this could be tackled by finding ways "to replicate what is considered the norms of society" through encouraging more people to overcome the bystander effect online. The participants further complicated governing free or hate speech by discussing the difficulties in going between global and multi-jurisdictional differences in laws and policies to hold people accountable for their words or actions online. Third, placing restrictions on speech could drive people with more regressive or extremist views into the depths of the internet, further hiding their perspectives from the masses. Oger and Hon. Nash pondered if this may be more dangerous in the end and if it were better to see these views on mainstream sites, resulting in more informed citizens who could use the information to devise strategies to challenge oppression.

Discussion

I used hermeneutic phenomenology's circle to analyze the data, a reflective journal to account for my biases and preconceptions, and member checks to clarify the accuracy of the themes. The themes were drawn out of the participants' stories through an interpretive process that fused their horizons with mine to link our preconceived biases. My first main biases were

that women with my shared positionalities (i.e. white, heterosexual, able-bodied) would not be subjected to as severe online attacks as the participants with multiple marginalized positionalities. Second, I interpreted this data while navigating a time in my life where there exists anger with systems that claim to help or protect people, which complicated my reporting on possibilities and hope. While there were other biases, those two are where I spent more time reflecting on to increase my confidence in the analysis. In other words, holding myself accountable to not glorifying the experiences of any particular participant and rechecking narratives for hope or possibility where I may have initially disregarded it.

Lovenduski's (2002) and Krook's (2017) research discussed the concerning and growing volume of violence directed towards politically active women. The diverse women in this study confirmed the existence of this social issue online and off in Canada from coast to coast. They brought forward the themes pertaining to the complexity of engaging with online spaces as political woman; i.e. utilizing social media to share their platforms or engage with potential voters while also being subjected to intersectional gendered attacks on those platforms. It was made obvious that people with regressive or ignorant perspectives of diverse women harnessed the internet and mainstream and sub-cultural social media platforms as mediums to attack these women. Consequently, the online attacks temporarily silenced the participants or empowered them to speak out to call attention to the issue. Research on women's responses to online harassment or abuse also corroborated with these participants' reactions to the online attacks. With their highly public profiles, other responses the women found necessary to use were police escorts and additional resources to prepare for the next wave of or change in tactics with online attacks. Their political positionality also meant they had more external support or resources, including systems or allies, and quicker access to problematize the online attacks in the media.

Additionally, similar to what these diverse political women expressed, Jane, (2016), Strid (2018), and Vitak et al. (2017) found the reactions to online attacks could be a range of trauma responses; e.g. fear, hypervigilance, or silencing. Veletsaianos et al. (2018) found “the most common coping strategies [for women scholars] were . . . self-protection, resistance, acceptance and self-blame”, all strategies similar to what these politicians shared; although, likely situational, only Alice named self-blame.

The findings here and in Veletsaianos et al.’s (2018) make it clear that women are coping with online attacks and thriving or maintaining hope despite them. As suggested by these participants, regardless of the successes of women in calling out their online attackers, of bringing attention to the media to educate people on the reality of this social issue, or in getting people prosecuted, intersectional online attacks of diverse political women, or any other group of people, should not be normalized. These women problematized normalization (Vitak et al., 2017), hetero-patriarchy (Megarry, 2014), or anonymity (Hardaker & McGlashan, 2016, p. 83) when discussing online attacks, and added the issue of echo chambers. What started as anti-feminist (Marwick & Caplan, 2018) or racist websites in the 1980s has since shifted to an infinite number of pages on mainstream and sub-cultural platforms. Online echo chambers could threaten democracy and the advancement towards equity for people with multiple marginalized positionalities. They also appear to be sites for radicalization in thought on a number of issues. If estimations were 90 years for women to achieve equal numbers in the House of Commons (Lore, 2017), it is plausible that echo chambers, which widen socio-political divisions, may further obstruct progress towards equity for diverse women in politics.

Bardall’s (2013) research also argued that social media could both hinder and advance women’s political strides. My intentions were not to uncover how social media assisted these

diverse political women in their campaigns and governance. Regardless, each of the participants made it clear that their relationships with online platforms were multidimensional. They were a source of attacks against their persons, a space to progress their political goals, and an opportunity to engage with the public when they exercised their free speech or democratic rights to question governmental or political authority. Disentangling the attacks from legitimate socio-political conversations proved to be a challenge due to their concerns of silencing voices or threatening a healthy democracy, which complicated their abilities engage in debates online. Another complexity was the reporting of considerable intertwine between the offline and online attacks, violence, harassment, or abuse these diverse women experienced, likely made worse by the online echo chambers. Online attacks of diverse political women should not be constructed as a separate phenomenon from offline attacks. The IPU (2016) reported that violence against diverse political women obstructed “women’s progress towards equality and [undermined] the foundations of democracy” (p. 1). This research confirmed Bardall’s (2013) and the IPU’s (2016) findings on intersectional attacks creating barriers for diverse women. Hon. Joanne Bernard, Hon. Caesar-Chavannes, Oger, and Alice’s experiences brought to light the likelihood that their intersecting positionalities (e.g. racialization, sexual orientation, gender expression, or age) may have further tainted how graphic, explicit, or pervasive the online comments were or the nature of them. Contradicting this, as with Laura, multiple marginalized positionalities may also be a shield against online attacks, which could depend on the socio-political climate surrounding the diverse woman. Regardless, diverse political women should expect the exposure of unexpected vulnerabilities because of online attacks; for example, the reminder of the fragility of life.

Links were also made by the participants between Canada’s government or political institutions, the online echo chambers, and the online attacks of diverse political women. It is

conceivable that the masculine norms of adversarial politics (Collier & Raney, 2018b) have influenced how political operatives (e.g. staff, volunteers, or major ideological supporters) engaged with these women online. The adversarial politics, combined with hypermasculine and patriarchal Eurocentric norms of white, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper-class superiority, may have persuaded these participants' colleagues (Smith, 2018) or their operatives to participate in the toxic online attacks against them. These cultural or institutional ideologies, obstacles for diverse women politicians to overcome (Lovenduski, 2002; O'Neill & Stewart, 2009), potentially informed the efforts of these political operatives to maintain the status quo and make attempts to diminish the voices of these women. As well, parties whose ideologies have shifted to embrace diversity or inclusion may be stuck in their progress to full inclusion of all people due to prioritizing party allegiance, which then constructs diversity as secondary or expendable. Furthermore, not only do people who work in Canadian institutions allegedly play an active role in diverse women's oppression, the institutions themselves appear to be disengaged from establishing resolutions and inactivity is opposition to gender equality (Strid, 2018). This conflicts with the participants' obvious attempts to seek out supports and resolutions for online attacks. Pertaining to tactics, as these women indicated and the previous literature stated, the strategies for change should be multifaceted, interdisciplinary, and developed inductively (IPU, 2016; Krook & Restrepo, 2016) with diverse political women. They also held on to hope that change would happen, and they were hopeful for the next generations of politically active diverse women. The participants saw these younger people as holding more knowledge with how to navigate online attacks and saw more opportunities, as an increased number of diverse women enter politics, to unite and devise strategies to resolve online attacks.

Regarding the discourse of “attack”, Krook and Restrepo (2016) indicated the importance of defining social issues. This research uncovered a suitable definition for this social issue, the *intersectional online attacks of diverse political women in Canada*, that amplifies the seriousness of this subject and its intersectional nature. This definition should, as Krook and Restrepo (2016) suggested, allow politically active diverse women in Canada to see their online experiences reflected in it, while simultaneously inviting those who post abusive, harassing, or attacking messages to comprehend their actions within this framework. From the literature, I initially thought it was important to refer to this social issue as “online harassment or abuse”. With six participants repeatedly naming it as “attacks”, I shifted the language throughout this paper to reflect their perspective. While this discourse differs from what has been offered by previous researchers, it is possible these diverse women have contextualized their online harassment or abuse as “attacks” because of their political positionalities. It could also be more fitting of a phrase due to the psychological violence (IPU, 2016) committed against these diverse women and their support systems through online attacks. The ramifications of psychological violence against politically active women, the “most pervasive” (Bardall, 2013, p. 2) aspect of violence against women, was made explicit throughout this research. Online attacks are a psychologically violent act and these women experienced the consequences of it. Lovenduski (2002) referred to this as the emotional expense that diverse political women should be prepared for during every stage of their career. Oger named it as the “extra drag” that slows them down.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research made visible social work’s responsibility in this colonial state to contribute to strategies to alleviate this social issue. Diverse political women are likely good for the overall well-being of all Canadians (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018) as they influence, inform, or write

social policies with a range of perspectives that may differ from the white heterosexual male norm. In Canada, social workers are politicians or work in non-traditional roles in political offices and the work of mainstream social workers is inherently political. Consequently, many may already be on the receiving end of online attacks. Social workers should form a non-partisan team with diverse political women from a variety of academic or professional fields to devise strategies to work towards resolving this social issue. Social workers in Canada should expand their portfolios to include protecting people from online attacks and work to discover methods to interrupt the extremist narratives created in the divisive online echo chambers. Online cultural and institutional norms, including the online bystander effect and hetero-patriarchal adversarial style politics, must be targeted sites for change. Other ideas these seven diverse political women contributed to potential resolutions were education, direct support, and political or legal action to challenge both online and offline norms.

When the participants spoke of devising tactics to manage or lessen online attacks, it emerged that maintaining a commitment to free speech, not hate speech, to uphold the health of Canada's democracy would be a challenge but is important. With some of these online attacks likely originating with the political operatives, and with the ineffectual sexual harassment policy in Canada's House of Commons (Collier & Raney, 2018a), I am not convinced that Canada's political institutions currently have the capacity or want to create social policies that would work to alleviate the intersectional online attacks of diverse political women in Canada. Yet, as these participants indicated, hope must be maintained and institutional inactivity should be confronted. Social policies that pertain to the intersectional online attacks of diverse political women should be revisited to redefine the issue, develop ways to criminalize the behaviours, create and enforce policies and laws across the nation, and consider how to deal with international attacks.

Regarding the Canadian government, these participants would like more non-partisan opportunities for diverse political women to unite offline and devise strategies to move forward.

Through this exploratory study, I intended to fill previous gaps in the literature regarding centering the voices of diverse political women with online attacks and contribute to the literature on Canadian diverse women politicians. Although I achieved this goal, there remains much space for future directions of research. One limitation was interpreting the data through the lens of my positionalities as a white, heterosexual, cisgender woman and it could be imagined that women with positionalities differing from my own may have unique perspectives to draw on for designing and interpreting the data. There was also a lack of data from diverse women in the territories. In addition, the interpretation was from the perspective of social work and not an interdisciplinary study. I recommend that future researchers study cis-male Canadian politicians' perspectives or focus on uncovering how political operatives talk about diverse political Canadian women online. These suggestions for future research should be interdisciplinary and intersectional. As well, future social work research could study the online echo chambers where radicalization occurs to discover how to conduct community building projects on them.

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Appendix A

Consent Form



Office of Research Ethics
York University

Kaneff Tower, Fifth Floor – 4700 Keele Street,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M3J 1P3

ore@yorku.ca
research.info.yorku.ca

Informed Consent Form

Date: January 2, 2019

Study Name:

Women politicians in Canada and online harassment: Experiences, perspectives, and insights

Researcher name:

Jenna E. Skogberg (Principal Investigator)
Master's student at York University's School of Social Work program
Email: jskog@yorku.ca Cell: (403) 870-1859

Purpose of the Research:

This research aims to explore, through one-on-one interviews, the experiences of diverse Canadian women politicians and online harassment directed at them or about them. This exploratory study seeks to understand, from an intersectional feminist perspective, their experiences, perspectives, and insights and then discover themes to further explain the social issue. The researcher intends to start a conversation in Canada about the hardships diverse women politicians face online when engaging in sociopolitical conversations. Furthermore, her intention is that this research would highlight the diverse women's voices and their views or insights on ways forward to achieve social change with online harassment.

The term *diverse women* is an umbrella term to account for the multiple intersecting identities of women, transgender, or non-binary people; this includes the variety of social locations in gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability

The findings will be presented in a paper for my master's research paper, as well I may submit for peer-review to publish the research. In addition, there is a possibility of the research findings being used in presentations at conferences that are applicable to the research.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

The research will be conducted using semi-structured 60- to 120-minute interviews, meaning there will be some interview questions to guide the conversation, with the goal of making social change. You may ask to see the guided questions before the interview so that you feel more prepared. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

Two weeks after the interview, I will call to follow up with you to check in on your emotional and mental health and ask if you had any further thoughts that you wanted to provide. Lastly, an invitation will be extended for you to review the interpretation of your words and messages for research accuracy and to protect your right to confidentiality before the paper is finalized.

Overall, if you participate in each step, inclusive of reviewing your part in the paper, I estimate that this would take approximately three to five hours of your time over the course of three months.

Risks and Discomforts:

As follows, minimal risks are anticipated and steps will be taken to mitigate each one:

- 1) Risk of psychological or emotional harm due to recalling the negative comments made online.
 - After the interview, I will check in to see how you are and work with you to identify your support systems and provide you with places that provide professional supports, if necessary.
 - Two weeks after the interview I will call to follow up on your emotional health.
- 2) Security of your data.

Student Version 08.09.17



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- The information will be stored on my, the primary researcher's, personal laptop. This is password protected and encrypted. In addition, your name will not be used in the documents on my computer.
- Along with the use of pseudonyms or participant codes in place of names, your level of government, or specific geographic region, office, or term of office would not be disclosed.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:

This research has the potential to be beneficial to you, personally, as well as to other marginalized groups and society, in general. First, it provides you an opportunity to talk about your experiences with online harassment in a way that they may not have before and feel a sense of connection with other diverse women politicians who share the same struggles with online intersectional harassment. Second, I anticipate that the research will uncover insight on ways to deal with this issue. Finally, it may benefit future researchers and policy makers in Canada to work towards alleviating complex and intersectional harassment online. This research has the possibility to make public the harms of online harassment for the advancement of diverse women in political spaces. It could be used to inform the need for policies on protecting diverse women in the online world from gender-based, race-based, homophobic, or ableist harmful commentary. Additionally, it could uncover new gaps in research for Canada about diverse women in politics, women online, and sexualized, racist, gendered, homophobic, or ableist violence, abuse, or harassment.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

Confidentiality:

Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The data will be collected through audio-recorded interview and transcribed, as well some handwritten notes will be taken during the interview. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and on a password protected and encrypted computer, and only the researcher will have access to this information. Your audio-recorded interview will be deleted after transcription and the consent form will be destroyed by June 2021. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

The data collected in this research project may be used – in an anonymized form - by members of the research team in subsequent research investigations exploring similar lines of inquiry. Such projects will still undergo ethics review by the HPRC, our institutional REB. Any secondary use of anonymized data by the research team will be treated with the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as in the original research project.

Questions About the Research?

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at jskog@yorku.ca and/or (403) 870-1859 or my supervisor, Luann Good Gingrich at luanngg@yorku.ca and/or (416) 736-2100 ext. 20028. You may also contact the Program in Master of Social Work at gradsowk@yorku.ca and/or (416) 736-2100 ext. 55226.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee,



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York University

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ore@yorku.ca
research.info.yorku.ca

which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in Women politicians in Canada and online harassment: Experiences, perspectives, and insights conducted by Jenna E. Skogberg. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____
Participant

Date _____

Signature _____
Principal Investigator

Date _____

Additional consent:

1. Audio recording

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

2. Consent to waive anonymity

I, _____, consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

Signature _____
Participant Name:

Date _____

Appendix B

Recruiting Materials

Recruitment Materials:

I used purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Four to eight participants were sought and connections with them were established through my networks; for example, my current and previous professors', co-social work students', or friends' connections. With purposive and snowball sampling, I was confident in my abilities to connect with potential participants. This drafted email was used to recruit participants from my network. They and I sent it out to women-identifying politicians we know or used it as talking points if reaching out on the phone or in-person. After the first connection(s) was established, I invited those politicians to reach out to their contacts to invite them into the study.

“Dear [participant name],

My name is Jenna Skogberg and I am the primary researcher of an exploratory study looking at the experiences of diverse Canadian women politicians with harassing or abusive posts targeted at them online. I am seeking *diverse women* (a term used to account for the multitude of intersecting identities for people who identify as women, trans, or non-binary) Canadian politician participants and inquire about your interest to be a part of this study.

This research looks to explore your experiences, perspectives, and insights with online harassing or abusive posts and aims to contribute to the conversation in Canada about the hardships diverse women politicians face online when engaging in socio-political conversations. Furthermore, my intention is that this research would highlight your voice and views or insights on ways forward to achieve social change with online harassment.

I hope to harness your expertise during the research process and involve you in developing the themes. Respecting the busy schedules of politicians or politically active people, I would streamline this process for you.

This study is a part of my Master of Social Work program at York University, conducted under the supervision of a professor with intentions to publish. If you are interested in being interviewed one-on-one for this research, you may contact me by replying to this email or (403) 870-1859. I intend to complete interviews with participants before February 15th, 2019 with the research paper being submitted by April 2nd, 2019.

Thank you in advance for your interest!

Sincerely,

Jenna Skogberg

MSW Student

York University”

Appendix C

Interview Guides

To start the interview, I introduced how I came to be interested in this research topic, through my experience with online comments, community social justice movements, and opinion pieces.

- 1) What were your experiences like with online commentary that was directed towards you?
 - a. When did it cross the line for you between a comment that had a very strong opinion versus one that started to attack you personally?
 - b. How, when you saw them, how did you respond to those comments?
 - c. From your knowledge from those ones, how did each one differ on how people expressed their comments towards you?
- 2) How did the negative comments affect you personally in your day, you're work, your relationships?
 - a. Is there anything else about your experiences with comments online, directed specifically towards you, that you'd like to add, that you think is important to know?
 - b. Attacks moving offline and into real life, was that a concern of yours?
- 3) Thinking of online harassment, what do you think the implications are of that for diverse women in politics now and the next cohort of women that are going to come up after?

- 4) What do you think could be done, as more women come up into these positions, what do you think could be done to support them?
 - a. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you wish I did ask?

Appendix D

Ethics Forms

PANEL ON RESEARCH ETHICS Navigating the ethics of human research		TCPS 2: CORE	
<i>Certificate of Completion</i>			
<i>This document certifies that</i>			
Jenna Skogberg			
<i>has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)</i>			
Date of Issue:	7 October, 2018		

Form TD1: Thesis/Dissertation Research Proposal

Submit completed research proposals to your graduate program office. DO NOT submit forms directly to the Office of Research Ethics (ORE).

Student information		
Surname Skogberg	Given name(s) Jenna Elizabeth	
Student number 216060758	E-mail jeskogberg@gmail.com	Phone 403.870.1859
Program Social Work	Degree & year of study MA 1	Current status full-time
Title of Research Proposal Women politicians in Canada and online harassment: Experiences, perspectives, and insights		
☒ Thesis ☐ Dissertation ☐ Pilot Project ¹		

Type of Research	Documents to submit
Please check one:	Programs will forward the following to the Office of the Dean, Graduate Studies, 230 York Lanes
☐ A No human participants and no secondary data analysis ²	• TD1 (signed by student, supervisor, and graduate program director) • Thesis/Dissertation Proposal
☒ B Human participants, minimum risk ³	• TD1 (signed by student, supervisor, and graduate program director) • Thesis/Dissertation Proposal • TD2 (signed by student and supervisor) (original + 1 copy) • Sample informed consent and other relevant documents (original + 1 copy) • TCPS Tutorial Certificate
☐ C Secondary Data Analysis not conducted as part of a faculty research project	• TD1 (signed by student, supervisor, and graduate program director) • Thesis/Dissertation Proposal • TD2 (signed by student and supervisor) (original + 1 copy) • Informed consent and other relevant documents (original + 1 copy) if applicable • TCPS Tutorial Certificate
☐ D Research involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples ⁴ (Do NOT use TD2 form; use HPRC form) ⁵	• TD1 (signed by student, supervisor, and graduate program director) • Thesis/Dissertation Proposal • HPRC Protocol Form (signed by student and supervisor) • Sample informed consent and other relevant documents • Checklist for Researchers: Research Involving Aboriginal People • TCPS Tutorial Certificate → FGS will forward to Aboriginal Research Ethics Advisory Group (AREAG) & HPRC for non-delegated review
☐ E Human Participants, data collected under faculty research grant with HPRC Approval Certificate	• TD1 (signed by student, supervisor, and graduate program director) • Thesis/Dissertation Proposal • TD4 (original + 1 copy) • HPRC Approval Certificate for Supervisor's research project • TCPS Tutorial Certificate
☐ F Animals or biohazards (must be under faculty supervision)	• TD1 (signed by student, supervisor, and graduate program director) • Thesis /Dissertation Proposal • TD4 (original + 1 copy) • Animal Care Committee (ACC), or Biosafety Committee (BCC) Approval Certificate for Supervisor's research project
☐ G • Human Participants, more than minimal risk, or • Research involving Clinical Trials (Do NOT use TD2 form; use HPRC form) ⁵	• TD1 (signed by student, supervisor, and graduate program director) • Thesis /Dissertation Proposal • HPRC Protocol Form (signed by student and supervisor) • Sample informed consent and other relevant documents • TCPS Tutorial Certificate → FGS will forward to HPRC for non-delegated review

TD1 = Thesis/Dissertation Research Proposal Form
 TD2 = Research Ethics Protocol Form for Graduate Students
 TD4 = Statement of Relationship between Proposal and an Existing HPRC Approved Project
 TCPS= Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Tutorial Course on Research Ethics

graduate
studiesOffice of the Dean
York University230 York Lanes — 4700 Keele Street
Toronto, ON, Canada M3J 1P3Tel: (416) 736-5521
gradstudies.yorku.ca/

Proposal guidelines can be found on the FGS website:

Guidelines on Thesis & Dissertation proposals: gradstudies.yorku.ca/current-students/thesis-dissertation/general-requirements/**Guidelines on research ethics:** gradstudies.yorku.ca/current-students/thesis-dissertation/research-ethics/**Student Signature**

I hereby certify that all information on this form and all statements in the attached documentation are correct and complete.

Jenna Skogberg

11/27/2018

Student Name**Student Signature****Date (mm/dd/yyyy)****Supervisor Recommendation**

I recommend the Faculty of Graduate Studies approve the proposal for the above student. The Supervisory Committee has reviewed the Research Proposal and research ethics protocols (if applicable) and has recommended it be submitted for FGS approval.

☐ I attest that the Supervisory Committee has reviewed the Research Proposal and research ethics protocols (if applicable) and has recommended it be submitted for FGS approval. **(If this box is not checked, all members of the Supervisory Committee must sign this form below.)**

Luann Good Gingrich

01/09/2019

Supervisor Name**Supervisor Signature****Date (mm/dd/yyyy)****Supervisory Committee Member Name****Supervisory Committee Member Signature****Date (mm/dd/yyyy)****Supervisory Committee Member Name****Supervisory Committee Member Signature****Date (mm/dd/yyyy)****Graduate Program Director Recommendation**

I recommend the Faculty of Graduate Studies approve the proposal for the above student. The Supervisory Committee has reviewed the Research Proposal and research ethics protocols (if applicable) and has recommended it be submitted for FGS approval.

Graduate Program Director Name**Graduate Program Director Signature****Date (mm/dd/yyyy)****Faculty of Graduate Studies Recommendation**

I approve the proposal for the above student.

Associate Dean, FGS Name**Associate Dean, FGS Signature****Date (mm/dd/yyyy)****Notes:**¹ A pilot project is defined as preliminary research that is necessary in order to be able to write the thesis or dissertation proposal. Pilot projects must still include a description of research procedures and sample research instruments (e.g., survey or interview questions). Please submit TD2 form and informed consent documents.² Secondary Data Analysis is described as the analysis of data involving human participants collected for a purpose other than that for which it was originally collected in order to pursue a research interest which is distinct from that of the original work.³ The HPRC uses the definition of minimal risk as outlined in the SSHRC/NSERC/CIHR Tri-Council Policy Statement: "Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans" (December 2014): "minimal risk" research is defined as research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research" (Article 2.8B). An expanded version of this definition is available from the Office of Research Ethics upon request.⁴ Your research involves Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples if:

- your research will be conducted on Aboriginal land (Canada; international);
- recruitment criteria will include Aboriginal identity as either a factor for the entire study or for a subgroup of the study;
- your research will seek input from participants regarding an Aboriginal community's cultural heritage, artefacts or traditional knowledge;
- aboriginal identity or membership in an aboriginal community will be used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data; or
- interpretation of research results will refer to Aboriginal communities, peoples, language, history or culture.

* **Note:** Literary criticism and/or history (excluding oral history) and/or primarily textual activities are not applicable.⁵ To access the HPRC form, contact the Office of Research Ethics: ore@yorku.ca

Privacy: Personal information in connection with this form is collected under the authority of *The York University Act, 1965* and will be used for educational, administrative and statistical purposes. If you have any questions about the collection, use and disclosure of personal information by York University, please contact: Faculty of Graduate Studies, 230 York Lanes, (416) 736-2100 x 55521.

Form TD2: Research Ethics Protocol Form for Graduate Student Thesis, Dissertation, or Pilot Project

Research ethics protocols for theses, dissertations, and pilot projects are approved by the Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS).

- Submit paper copies of the relevant forms to your Graduate Program for review and signature.
- Graduate Programs will forward forms to FGS Thesis & Dissertation Coordinator.
- All submissions must include:
 - TD1 (Thesis/Dissertation Proposal Submission) Form signed by the student, supervisor, and Graduate Program Director,
 - thesis/dissertation proposal
 - In cases requiring preliminary research (e.g., pilot project), submit the pilot project research proposal instead of the thesis/dissertation proposal.
 - Informed consent form
 - If applicable, other documentation required for your specific research ethics protocol
- The average time to process minimal risk protocols is approximately 40 working days from the date of receipt by FGS. INCOMPLETE OR ILLEGIBLE PROTOCOLS WILL BE RETURNED TO THE RESEARCHER, WHICH WILL DELAY THE PROCESS.
- Research involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples; that is more than minimal risk; or that involves clinical trials, is approved by the York University Human Participants Review Committee (HPRC). [Use HPRC Form](#)
- Research ethics protocols for a course, or a Major Research Paper (MRP), are approved by your Graduate Program's Delegated Research Ethics Committee. Consult with your Graduate Program for appropriate forms.
- For more information on research ethics related matters, please visit the ORE website: <http://research.info.yorku.ca/research-services/research-ethics/> or FGS Research Ethics: <http://gradstudies.yorku.ca/current-students/thesis-dissertation/research-ethics/>
- Contact: Research Officer (fgsro@yorku.ca)

Part A – General Information

A. Student Information

Student Name		Date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Jenna E. Skogberg		11/27/2018
E-mail	Phone	Student number
jeskogberg@gmail.com	403.870.1859	216060758
Program		Degree
Social Work		Advanced Standing MSW
Check one: ☐ Thesis ☐ Dissertation ☐ Pilot Project		
Title of Research Project		
Women politicians in Canada and online harassment: Experiences, perspectives, and insights		

Privacy: Personal information in connection with this form is collected under the authority of *The York University Act, 1965* and will be used for educational, administrative and statistical purposes. If you have any questions about the collection, use and disclosure of personal information by York University, please contact: Faculty of Graduate Studies, 230 York Lanes, (416) 736-2100 x 55521.

Part A – General Information continued**A. Student Information continued**

Name of Supervisor	
Luann Good Gingrich	
Is this a revised version of a protocol previously submitted to FGS and/or HPRC?	☒ No ☐ Yes
Proposed start date for research involving human participants (mm/dd/yyyy):	01/15/2019

1. Is this research defined as:

- ☒ Minimal Risk?
☐ More than Minimal Risk?

If More than Minimal Risk, do NOT use this TD2 form. Submit [HPRC Protocol](#).

The HPRC uses the definition of minimal risk as outlined in the SSHRC/NSERC/CIHR Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) "Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans" (December 2014): "If potential subjects can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the subject in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research then the research can be regarded as within the range of minimal risk" (p. 1.5). An expanded version of this definition is available from ORE upon request.

NOTE: Full board review is required for ALL research that is more than minimal risk. A full board review requires a meeting of the Human Participants Review Committee (HPRC) for the purposes of providing final approval and which, as a consequence, may take longer to review.

2. Does this research involve clinical trials?

- ☒ No ☐ Yes

If Yes, do NOT use this TD2 form. Submit [HPRC Protocol](#).

3. Does your research involve Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples?

- ☒ No ☐ Yes

The following questions may assist in determining whether your research involves Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples:

- Will the research be conducted on Aboriginal land (Canada; international) for which permission and/or approval from an authority (such as band council, First Nations Research Ethics Board, etc.) may be required? ☒ No ☐ Yes
- Will recruitment criteria include Aboriginal identity as either a factor for the entire study or for a subgroup of the study? ☒ No ☐ Yes
- Will the research seek input from participants regarding an Aboriginal Peoples' cultural heritage, artefacts, or traditional knowledge? ☒ No ☐ Yes
- Will research in which Aboriginal identity or membership in an Aboriginal community be used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data? ☒ No ☐ Yes
- Will interpretation of research results refer to Aboriginal communities, peoples, language, history or culture? ☒ No ☐ Yes

(Note: "Research" does not include literary criticism and/or history (excluding oral history) and/or primarily textual activities)

If you have answered "yes" to any of the above noted questions, then your research involves Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples. If Yes, do NOT use this TD2 form. Submit HPRC Protocol. Researchers are required to familiarize themselves with the [Guidelines for Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples](#) and complete the [Checklist for Researchers — Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples](#). Note that research involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples will first be reviewed by the Aboriginal Research Ethics Advisory Group (AREAG) prior to being forwarded to the HPRC. Researchers may receive initial comments from the AREAG for which a response will be required.

4. Is this research part of a faculty-led research project for which a faculty member is the Principal Investigator?☒ No ☐ Yes

If Yes, do NOT use this TD2 form. Instead, please attach [TD4, Statement of Relationship between Proposal and Existing Approved Research/Facilities](#), as well as a copy of the HPRC Approval Certificate.

5. Does this research involve animals or biohazards?☒ No ☐ Yes

If Yes, do NOT use this TD2 form. All student research involving animals or biohazards must be under faculty supervision. Please attach [TD4, Statement of Relationship between Proposal and Existing Approved Research/Facilities](#), as well as a copy of the HPRC Approval Certificate.

6. Are you conducting secondary data analysis?☒ No ☐ Yes

If yes, please review the [Secondary Data Analysis Guidelines](#) and ensure that you complete section B. 8 below.

NOTE: Secondary Data Analysis is described as the analysis of data collected for a purpose other than that for which it was originally collected in order to pursue a research interest which is distinct from that of the original work. Researchers are advised to review the Secondary Data Analysis Guidelines for further information on requirements related to use of secondary data for research purposes.

7. Is any anticipated funding* for this project from any external (i.e., outside York) sources?☒ No ☐ Yes

If yes, what is the funding agency and/or program?

*The definition of “funded” does not include funding in the form of student OGS scholarships, SSHRC fellowships, NSERC scholarships, or CIHR awards. These awards are intended to support students through their studies and do not require reports from students on the specific research activities conducted. The definition of “funded” does apply to grants awarded for specific research projects, whether those projects be the student’s own research projects or research being conducted as part of a faculty member’s funded research project. Typically, for “funded” research, granting agencies require reports of the research conducted.

8. Does this research involve another institution? Research involving another institution (such as a school, university, business, government agency) may require additional ethics review and approval or permissions if using institutional resources (such as internal listservs, or conducting interviews on the premises of the institution).☒ No ☐ Yes

NOTE: If the research is to be conducted at a site requiring ethics approval or administrative permission, please include all draft informed consent forms/administrative permission requests. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine what other means of clearance are required, and to obtain clearance prior to starting the project.

a. Do any of the institution(s)/site(s) have an ethics review board? ☐ No ☐ Yes

If ‘Yes’, specify the institution(s)/site(s):

b. Do any of the institution(s)/site(s) require administrative permission? ☐ No ☐ Yes

If ‘Yes’, specify the institution(s)/site(s) and provide a copy of the letter of permission:

c. Has any other Research Ethics Board (REB) cleared this project?

☐ No

☐ Yes

If 'Yes', please submit the original application and provide a copy of the clearance letter.

Part B – Research Information

1. Project Description

In layperson's terms, please provide a general and brief description of the research (e.g., hypotheses, goals and objectives, etc. – maximum 3,000 characters).

I will be conducting an exploratory study of the experiences of diverse Canadian women politicians with harassing or abusive posts targeted at them online. I use the term diverse women to account for the multitude of intersecting identities for people who identify as women, trans, or non-binary; this includes the variety of social locations in gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability. This research seeks to explore, from an intersectional feminist perspective, their experiences, perspectives, and insights and then discover themes to further explain the social issue. I aim to start a conversation in Canada about the hardships diverse women politicians face online when engaging in sociopolitical conversations. Furthermore, my intention is that this research would highlight the diverse women's voices and their views or insights on ways forward to achieve social change with online harassment.

Through analyzing previous research, it became obvious that there exists a deficit in research on diverse women politicians in Canada using intersectional feminist theoretical frameworks. This includes no prior academic research on their experiences with online harassment or abuse in Canada. Thus, this exploratory research seeks to begin to add to the literature on diverse women politicians, Canadian politicians, and how they experience online harassment or abuse. The question that guides this proposed research is "what are the experiences, perspectives, and insights of diverse women politicians in Canada with online harassment targeted at them?"

The findings will be presented in a paper for my master's research paper, as well I may submit for peer-review to publish the research. In addition, there is a possibility of the research findings being used in presentations at conferences that are applicable to the research.

2. Participants

State who the participant(s) will be: Describe the participants that will be recruited and about whom personal information will be collected (i.e., numbers, age, special characteristics, etc.). Describe the size of the group from which participants will be recruited and the estimated number needed for the research (minimum/maximum). Where active recruitment is required, please describe inclusion and exclusion criteria. Where the research involves extraction or collection of personal information, please describe from whom the information will be obtained and what it will include (*include permission letters*).

The inclusion criteria for the participants of this project is that the participants are woman-identifying politicians from any level of government with an active presence on social media while in public office. They do not need to currently hold a position in politics to be a part of the study. The exclusion criteria is men as I am interested in studying only women's experiences at this point in the exploratory research.

I am seeking a minimum of four participants to a maximum of eight through purposive sampling from a pool of approximately 150 people who fit the sample criteria.

I will be collecting the following demographic information from the participants: municipal/provincial/federal political office and other social location identifiers as they see relevant to the experiences (e.g. gender, race, abilities, sexuality, and so forth). I would use this information in my research paper with caution so that it would not identify them and have the participants view and edit how I spoke about their social locations prior to publishing.

☐ This study will be using a participant pool

Please indicate which participant pool(s):

- ☐ URPP
- ☐ Schulich Marketing Pool
- ☐ School of Administrative Studies participant pool
- ☐ KURE
- ☐ Glendon Participant Pool
- ☐ Other:

3. Recruitment

a. **How will participants be recruited** (e.g., snowball technique, random sampling, previously known to interviewer, telephone solicitation, etc.)?

I will be using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Four to eight participants will be sought and connections with them would be established through my networks; for example, my current and previous professors', co-social work students', or friends' connections. With purposive and snowball sampling, I am confident in my abilities to connect with potential participants. I have drafted a recruitment email that my network is able to use to send out to women-identifying politicians they know or use as talking points if reaching out on the phone or in-person. After the first connection(s) have been established with me, I would then invite those politicians to reach out to their contacts as well to invite them into the study.

b. **Will you be using any advertisements, flyers, posters, email scripts, social media postings, etc. for recruitment purpose?**

☐ No ☒ Yes

If 'Yes', please attach a copy of each with your application.

4. Inducements

a. **Will you be offering inducements to participate** (e.g., money, gift certificates, academic credit, etc.)?

☒ No ☐ Yes

If yes, please elaborate:

(Please check all that apply)

- ☐ Financial
☐ In-kind
☐ Draw
☐ Participant Pool Bonus Points
☐ Other:

b. If inducements are provided, please provide the source of funding for them:

5. Methods

a. Please indicate **all** the research methods that apply:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Action Research | ☐ Ethnography |
| ☐ Observation | ☐ Survey |
| ☐ Documentary Filmmaking | ☐ Focus Group |
| ☐ Experimental lab study | ☒ Interview |
| ☐ Oral/Life history | ☐ Human Tissues |
| ☐ Experimental behavioural study | ☐ Online Research |
| ☐ Other: | |

b. Do any of the methods involve:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Audio Recording? | ☐ No | ☒ Yes |
| Photographic Recording? | ☒ No | ☐ Yes |
| Video Recording? | ☒ No | ☐ Yes |

- Please note that explicit consent is required to use these methods of recording. Please see Section 10, Informed Consent for details.
- If you are using recordings, you will be required to account for how they will be safely stored, eventually destroyed or archived, and how, if used in research dissemination, confidentiality will be maintained. Please see Section 11, Data Security for details.

c. What will be required of the participant(s)? Clearly specify in a step-by-step outline exactly what the participant(s) will be asked to do in each methodology. A separate outline is required for each methodology. Include the settings, types of

information to be involved, and how data will be analyzed. Include details about identifying participants, recruitment, procedures participants will undertake, etc. Include copies of study instruments. Please also include the estimated time commitment required of participants for each method.

The research will be conducted using semi-structured 60- to 120-minute interviews, meaning there will be some interview questions to guide the conversation, with the goal of making social change. The participants may ask to see the guided questions before the interview so that they feel more prepared.

Two weeks after the interview, I will call to follow up with the participants to check in on their emotional and mental health and ask if they had any further thoughts that they wanted to provide. Lastly, an invitation will be extended for them to review the interpretation of their words and messages for research accuracy and to protect their right to confidentiality before the paper is finalized.

Overall, if they participate in each step, inclusive of reviewing their part in the paper, I estimate that this would take approximately three to five hours of their time over the course of three months.

d. What is the experience and training of the researcher with this kind of research? If applicable, please provide a description of the supervisor's support for this research.

This is a new research method for me, my previous research experience has been using secondary data. The participant population is also unfamiliar to me as my social interactions with politicians has been limited to men.

6. Risk

Please indicate potential risks that the participants as individuals or as part of an identifiable group or community might experience by being part of this research project:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| a. Physical risks (including any bodily contact; administration of any substance)? | ☒ No | ☐ Yes |
| b. Psychological/emotional risks (feeling uncomfortable, embarrassed, anxious, upset)? | ☐ No | ☒ Yes |
| c. Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy and/or reputation)? | ☐ No | ☒ Yes |
| d. Data security (i.e., risk to participant from data exposure)? | ☐ No | ☒ Yes |
| e. Tied to deception involved in the study? (See DEBRIEFING section below) | ☒ No | ☐ Yes |
| f. OTHER: | ☒ No | ☐ Yes |

g. No known or anticipated risk: ☐

If you answered yes to any of the above, please describe how each of the potential risks described above will be managed and/or minimized:

b) Psychological / emotional risk: I will check in with the participants on their support systems and offer a follow up of applicable resources, including counselors and 24-hour distress lines, as support. I will ask if it is okay if I contact them two weeks after the interview. c) Social risks: I will limit any phrases, words, or instances of using identifiers in the research and offer them the opportunity to review what I wrote about them and their words to check for accuracy and privacy. e) Data security: my laptop and external backup hard drive will be encrypted, my computer and external hard drive are password protected, and I will code each participant and store the codes separate from the documents.

7. Benefits

What, if any, are the benefits to the participants?

Or, ☐ No benefits

a. Discuss any potential direct benefits to the participants from their involvement in the project; these might include education about research methods, useful knowledge gained about self, etc.

This research provides a few benefits for the participants: 1) an opportunity to talk about their experiences with online misogyny in a way that they may not have before; 2) a connection, through reading the research paper afterwards, with other female-identifying women who share the same struggles with online misogyny; and, 3) the opportunity to provide insight on ways to deal with this issue.

b. Comment on the (potential) benefits to the scientific/scholarly community or society that would justify involvement of participants in this study.

This research has the possibility to make public the harms of harassment or abuse on social media for the advancement of diverse women in political spaces. It could be used to inform the need for policies on protecting diverse women in the online world from gender-based harassment, or misogynist, racist, homophobic, or able-ist harmful commentary. Additionally, it could uncover new gaps in research for Canada about diverse women in politics, diverse women online, and intersectional online violence, abuse, or harassment.

8. Secondary Analysis of Data

NOTE: Secondary Data Analysis is described as the analysis of data involving human participants collected for a purpose other than that for which it was originally collected in order to pursue a research interest which is distinct from that of the original work. Researchers are advised to review the [Secondary Data Analysis Guidelines](#) for further information on requirements related to use of secondary data for research purposes.

a. Are you conducting Secondary Data Analysis? ☒ No ☐ Yes

If "No", please GO TO QUESTION 9

If "yes" please answer the following questions:

i. Are you using **anonymous data** (data which never included personal identifiers)

☐ No ☐ Yes

If 'Yes,' please provide a description of the provenance of the data set:

NOTE: Research that relies **solely** on secondary analysis of anonymous data is exempt from ethics review.

ii. Are you using **anonymized data**? (data which has been stripped of personal identifiers; no potential for data linkage)

☐ No ☐ Yes

If 'Yes,' please provide a description of the provenance of the data set:

iii. Are you using **identifiable data**:

☐ No ☐ Yes

If 'Yes,' please provide a description of the provenance of the data set:

b. If you are conducting secondary analysis **using identifiable data**, please address the following:

i. Do you plan to link this identifiable data to other data sets?

☐ No ☐ Yes

If 'Yes', please describe:

ii. What type of identifiable data from this data set are you planning to access and use?

- ☐ Student records (please specify in the space below)
- ☐ Health records/clinic/office files (please specify in the space below)
- ☐ Other personal records (please specify in the space below)

iii. What personally identifiable data (e.g., name, student number, telephone number, date of birth, etc.) from this data set do you plan on using in your research? Please explain why you need to collect this identifiable data and justify why each item is required to conduct your research.

iv. Describe the details of any agreement you have, or will have, in place with the owner of this data to allow you to use these data for your research. **ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any data use/access agreements.**

v. When participants first contributed their data to this data set, were there any known preferences expressed by participants at that time about how their information would be used in the future?

☐ No ☐ Yes

If 'Yes', please explain.

vi. How will you obtain consent from the participants whose identifiable data you will be accessing? Please explain.

Note: Consent of the participants is required for research involving secondary analysis of data that includes personal identifiers. Waiver of consent may only be considered if researchers meet the additional criteria. Please consult the [Secondary Data Analysis Guidelines](#) for further information.

vii. If you do *not* intend to seek consent of participants for use of identifiable data for secondary analysis, please provide a rationale as to why:

9. Conflict of Interest

a. Is there a possibility of an apparent, actual, or potential conflict of interest on the part of researchers, the University, or sponsors? (e.g., commercialization of research findings, self-funded research, etc.)

☒ No ☐ Yes

If yes, please elaborate and outline how the potential or real conflict of interest will be addressed:

b. Do any members of the research team have multiple roles with potential participants (e.g., researcher and therapist, researcher and teacher, student/supervisor, teaching assistant and students, etc.)

☒ No ☐ Yes If 'Yes', please review [Research Involving Investigators' Students](#)

i) Describe the nature of the multiple roles between researcher(s) and any participants

ii) Describe how the potential conflict of interest that will emerge as a result of the dual roles will be minimized or managed

c. Are there any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information/results/data at any point during the study including completion that the funder/sponsor has placed on the researchers? (These include controls placed by sponsors, funding sources, advisory or steering committees.)

☒ No ☐ Yes

If 'Yes', please describe:

10. Informed Consent

This section pertains to issues around informed consent.

a. Is there a relationship between participants and either of the following:

Principal Investigator: ☒ No ☐ Yes
Person obtaining consent (if other than the PI): ☐ No ☐ Yes ☒ Not applicable

If 'Yes', what steps will be taken to avoid the perception of undue influence in obtaining free and informed consent?

b. Ongoing consent is required if the research occurs over multiple sessions or over an extended period of time. Does the research occur over multiple occasions and/or over an extended period of time (i.e., beyond 6 months)?

☐ No ☒ Yes

If 'Yes', please describe the process of how you intend to obtain *ongoing* consent?

Initial written consent will be obtained before the interview commences and ongoing consent will be done when the participants review what was written using their words or an interpretation of it. If they wish to withdraw their consent, I will offer that it can be done so through email to make it official and to maintain records.

c. Is substitute consent involved (e.g., recruiting individuals under 16; those without capacity to consent)?

☐ No ☐ Yes

If 'Yes', please elaborate on how consent and assent will be obtained. Please attach 1) Substitute Consent Form for the parent/guardian, and 2) Assent Form for the participant which includes all information required in the consent form but is written in age appropriate language.

d. Is deception involved? Specifically, do you intend to withhold any information from and/or intentionally mislead the research participants?

☐ No ☐ Yes

If 'No', please go to question "e"

If 'Yes':

i) Please provide a description of the nature of the deception and whether it is full or partial. Please provide a rationale as to why deception (in whole or part) is required:

ii) Please append a copy of the debriefing statement

The debriefing statement needs to explain three elements:

- (i) Why the experiment was developed and why the deception was necessary.*
- (ii) What the current research says about the topic, which includes providing two references (text, article, on-line reference) that the participants can reasonably access and understand (if you have an academic and non-academic population, you may need to provide more than one version of the debriefing statement or make sure that the references can be accessed by the least educated of the population).*
- (iii) Any additional resources that would be useful for the participant. Resources need to be appropriate and accessible for the participants. For example, if you are conducting a study on parenting, you could include community resources for parenting classes or recommendations for parenting guides. (source: Univ. Virginia, IRB)*

Researchers must re-obtain consent from the participants once the debriefing statement has been provided. Participants shall be provided with and sign the [Debriefing Consent Form](#).

iii) If a debriefing statement will not be provided to the participants, please provide a rationale as to why a statement will not be provided:

iv) For studies that are not deceptive, briefly describe the process and nature of any immediate post-study information that will be provided to participants and the rationale for providing this information (e.g., counselling or trauma resources, information links, etc.):

e. How will informed consent be obtained? (Please check all that are applicable):

- ☒ Informed Consent Form. Please attach draft version. Attach Substitute Consent Form and Assent Form if applicable.
- ☐ Verbal Consent. If informed consent is being obtained verbally, please provide a rationale regarding why verbal consent may be necessary and an Informed Consent Form is not being used. Please note that verbal consent is permissible in only exceptional circumstances where written consent is not feasible or inappropriate. Please attach draft Verbal Consent Script of what participants will be verbally told.

- ☐ Online consent form. Please attach draft version. If online consent is being obtained, please indicate the website where the questionnaire/survey will be hosted:

11. Data Security

Privacy refers to an individual's right to be free from intrusion or interference by others. It is a fundamental right in a free and democratic society. The ethical duty of confidentiality refers to the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information. Security refers to measures used to protect information. It includes physical, administrative and technical safeguards.

For a fuller description of researcher obligations surrounding confidentiality, privacy and data security issues, please consult the [Data Security Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants](#).

In light of the above, please address the following questions:

- a. Will the data be treated as confidential? ☐ No ☒ Yes

If "No", please provide a rationale:

- b. Will the participant(s) be anonymous? ☐ No ☒ Yes

If "No", please provide a rationale:

c. Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity/confidentiality of participants (where applicable) –or– the confidentiality of data during the conduct of research and dissemination of results, such as data anonymization.

The audio recordings will be stored on my computer and backup hard drive that are password protected and encrypted and deleted and overwritten once they are transcribed. They will not be used in the dissemination of the research. Once transcribed, they will also be stored in the same manner with a coded identifier provided for each participant. The code and transcripts will be stored in separate files.

d. Please describe how you plan to store hard copy data securely, i.e., consent forms and other written records. Note that consent forms must be stored for 2 years.

- ☒ Locked filing cabinet
☐ Other

e. Please describe how you plan to store electronic data securely (such as video/audio recordings and document files)

- ☒ Encrypted and/or password-protected USB keys, laptops and/or other portable electronic data devices
☐ Secure Server
☐ Other

f. Please describe how you plan to store other formats of data (if applicable):

g. If you plan to destroy research data,

- provide a firm date by which the data will be destroyed (mm/dd/yyyy): 01/15/2020
- provide details of their final disposal
 - for hard copy data (e.g., cross-cut shredder, etc.)

Consent forms will be shredded two years after their collection.

- for electronic data (e.g., deletion and overwriting of drives; destruction of drives; etc.)

The audio interviews will be deleted and overwritten once they have been transcribed.

h. If you plan to retain data indefinitely, please provide a justification (e.g., data use for future research):

I will keep the data, the transcriptions that have coded participants numbers, for future research on the topic or delete them should I decide not to pursue the research any further.

i. Describe any limitations to protecting the confidentiality of participants whether due to the law, the methods used, the nature of the sample population, or other reasons (e.g., duty to report) that you are aware of.

If the participants indicate intent to harm themselves or others, or that a minor is in danger I will need to report.

The other limit of confidentiality is that because they are women-identifying politicians, it is more likely that speculation would happen on who was a part of the research. I will take all steps possible to ensure their confidentiality.

j. Identify all parties who will have access to the data.

☒ Primary Investigator/student

☐ Supervisor

☐ Other (please specify):

k. Uses of the data: Please describe all forms of output that are anticipated to result from this research (e.g., presentations, written papers, placing data in an archive, creative works, documentary films, etc.). Describe how any potentially identifying information will be handled in each form of output.

Written paper, for class and possibly submit for publishing in a journal. In both instances, I will not use identifying information other than what the participants agreed to; i.e. after they review and agree with how I wrote about them in relation to their social locations in the paper. The participants would be referred to using pseudonyms in the paper, either of their choosing or assigned numbers.

l. Subsequent use of data: Will the data potentially be used for other purposes in the future (e.g., teaching, future analysis, publishing of dataset, archiving in an institutional repository, etc.)?

☐ No ☒ Yes

If 'No', the data will be solely used for the purposes described in this application and will not be used for other purposes in the future.

If 'Yes', participants must be informed of this possibility during the consent process. Subsequent use of the data for new purposes may require additional review by the REB.

If 'Yes', please describe how the data will be prepared to make it suitable for future use (e.g., anonymization, storage, archiving, etc.). Please describe what future uses might occur (e.g., use within the PI's research group, transmission to other researchers, publication of the dataset, etc.). Please identify any known repositories to which data may be submitted. (The REB recognizes that all potential future uses cannot be anticipated, but does expect that data will be prepared in a manner for future uses that respects the conditions under which the data were originally collected.)

I anticipate that the data may be used for future research by myself, the primary investigator. I will not share the interview transcripts with other researchers for the protection of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the participants.

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Is there any additional information that you would like to add that may assist the HPRC in reviewing your protocol?

No.

Part C – Declarations**Student Declaration**

I hereby certify that all information on this form and all statements in the attached documentation are correct and complete. I have examined the guidelines and principles detailed above, and the Senate Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, and affirm that, to the best of my knowledge, this research conforms thereto. I affirm that I have informed all members of my research team of their responsibilities as it speaks to the conduct of research involving human participants and as outlined in the Senate Policy for Research Involving Human Participants. I have advised all research team members that all human participants in the research must have signed a written consent form or have provided oral consent for their participation in the research. I hereby undertake to notify the Human Participants Review Committee via the Office of Research Ethics (HPRC) if I make changes involving the use of human participants on this project and submit the required documents (e.g. Amendment request) to HPRC for review and approval; if these changes are not minor, my research proposal may be required to undergo a further ethics review. I understand that any misrepresentation in the proposal or attached documentation may lead to a charge of breach of academic honesty. In the case of an adverse/unanticipated event, I will notify HPRC. I also understand that I must retain Consent Forms for two years following the completion of the research. I will also notify HPRC if any unforeseen risks not specified in the research proposal appear. In such a case, the study will be suspended pending clarification.

11/27/2018

Signature of Student

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

Supervisor Declaration

I hereby certify that all information on this form and all statements in the attached documentation are correct and complete. I have advised the student that all human participants in the research must have signed a written consent form or have provided oral consent for their participation in the research. I have advised the student that the Human Participants Review Committee via the Office of Research Ethics (HPRC) will be advised of any changes in research methodology or any increased anticipated risks to human participants and that a further ethics review and approval is required as a result of such changes. I have advised the student that Consent Forms must be retained for two years following the completion of the research.

01/09/2019

Signature of supervisor (of Thesis/Dissertation)

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

Section to insert Digital Signatures (if applicable):

Electronic Signature of Principal Investigator (PI)

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

Document Checklist

Please attach the following items, if applicable, to TD2, Graduate Student Human Participants Research Protocol.

Incomplete forms will not be accepted for review.

- 1 All TD2 forms must have the following attached:**
 - a. Informed Consent Form(s)
 - b. TCPS Certificate
- 2 Other Consent Documents (if applicable):**
 - ☐ Substitute Consent form (Parental/Guardian consent) — required if your research participants are under 16 years of age or without capacity to consent
 - ☐ Assent Form — required if your research involves substitute consent
 - ☐ Verbal Consent Script — required if you plan to seek verbal consent for any of the research participants
 - ☐ On-line Consent Script — required if participants are asked to consent online
- 3 External permission and approvals (if applicable):**
 - ☐ Decisions Needed From Other REB Boards — required if your research requires ethics approval from an institution other than York University
 - ☐ External REB approval required — certificate attached
 - ☐ External institutional permission required — documentation provided
 - ☐ Internal institutional permission/approval required (e.g., OIPA) — documentation provided
 - ☐ Medical directive
 - ☐ Research Agreement(s) — append all copies
 - ☐ Data use/access agreements (for use in secondary data analysis)
- 4 Test Instruments (if applicable):**
 - ☐ Questionnaires and Test Instruments
 - ☒ Draft interview questions, focus group questions
- 5 Recruitment (if applicable):**
 - ☒ Recruitment Materials: Posters, Letters, Participant Pool Advertisement, etc.
- 6 Debriefing (if applicable):**
 - ☐ Debriefing Letter — required if your research involves deception (see Section 10, Informed Consent for details)
 - ☐ Debriefing Consent Document — required following administration of debriefing statement (if your research involves deception)
- 7 Other (if applicable):**
 - ☐ Provenance of Anonymous Data
 - ☐ Research Team Member Confidentiality Agreement
 - ☐ Participant Images Informed Consent Addendum