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A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: THE REPRESENTATION OF HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON AND WOMEN IN THE *NEW YORK TIMES*

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Introduction: Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) allows for a very open approach to linguistic material. It uses various methods and different definitions of salient concepts, such as “critical” and “discourse.” Hence, a clarification of these terms is essential before moving on to the actual analysis. According to Litosseliti and Sunderland, a linguistic perspective of the term “discourse” refers to language material in both spoken and written form that goes beyond the individual sentence—the researchers state that discourse is “language which communicates a meaning in a context” (2002, 9).

Norman Fairclough’s understanding of discourse includes the larger social context and, as a consequence, the importance of CDA’s essential principle, namely that it is vital to consider the societal context, becomes clear. Fairclough states that discourse is a form of “social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or a reflex of situational variables” ([1992] 2010, 63). Understood in this way, discourse is a way of people acting upon each other and/or the world by using language — discourse is seen as a “mode of action.” Aside from this, discourse is, of course, also a means of representing the world and the people/groups in it in certain, socially structured ways—discourse is a “mode of representation” (ibid.).

Fairclough states that there is a dialectical relationship between discourse, that is to say, linguistic social practice, and non-linguistic social practice. He claims that societal structures are constituted by discourse while, at the same time, discourse is constituted by the societal order (ibid., 63–64). In 1997, Fairclough and Wodak developed a comprehensive definition of discourse including this notion:

CDA sees discourse — language use in speech and writing—as a form of “social practice.” Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned — it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. (Wodak and Meyer 2009, 5–6)

In light of this definition and, in particular, given the indicated connection between language use and societal background, it becomes clear that Critical

Discourse Analysis can offer its most comprehensive and satisfactory results when the broader societal context is included in the analysis.

An additional important aspect with respect to the terminology of Critical Discourse Analysis is Fairclough's differentiation between two forms of discourse. On the one hand, he establishes that the uncountable noun "discourse" refers to spoken/written language as a form of social practice (see above). On the other hand, Fairclough defines discourse as a count noun that refers to structured language use to convey a certain viewpoint on a field of social practice (Fairclough 1995, 135). One example is the use of the discourse of "war/battle" when political candidacies are discussed: "He attacked his opponent and was defeated at the final elections," for instance. The given sentence is part of a large amount of language material—the discourse (in the uncountable sense) — that surrounds political candidacies. The given part of the discourse exemplifies the discourse (count noun) of "war/battle." The given sentences effectively hide the idea that candidates could cooperate. This effect is achieved by using words such as "attacked," "opponent," and "defeated" (which belong to the discourse of "war/battle").

Another relevant concept connected to Critical Discourse Analysis is the idea of "critique." Wodak and Meyer state that "critical" refers to several aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis. One understanding of "critical" (in the context of CDA) is that researchers should aim at uncovering power relations and exposing inequalities that persist in society (Lê and Lê 2009, 7). Additionally, Wodak and Meyer's understanding of "critical" is that the investigated "text" should always be considered in its embeddedness in the social background. They further emphasize that "critical" in the context of Critical Discourse Analysis means that researchers should be aware that they cannot give a neutral and unbiased insight into power relations and the world in general — Wodak and Meyer urge researchers to take a careful, self-reflective and selfconscious stance (2009, 6-7).

Social Practice

Gender and Sex

This work of Critical Discourse Analysis is based in particular on the conception of social practice as constituting and constituted by discourse. As a consequence, it is important to discuss several relevant aspects of social practice, which might have shaped the *New York Times*' representation of Hillary Rodham Clinton and of women in general. In turn, it is worthwhile to consider which parts of the societal status quo might be affected by the *New York Times*' representation of the candidate and women.

One important aspect of social practice in the context of Clinton's representation in the *New York Times* is the concept of gender, which — for the purpose of this essay—refers to socially constructed aspects that lead to the identification of "woman" or "man," in contrast to the (allegedly) biologically given sex. U.S. society is among the many Western societies that allow only for two sex categories—female and male. Furthermore, the sexes are connected to the socially constructed genders—femininity and masculinity (Disch 2003, 91). Although gender and sex are seen as separate but connected in certain ways for the purpose of this essay, it is important to take note, briefly, of Butler's work

in this context. She argues that assuming a distinct separation of biological sex and socially constructing gender does not do. Rather, Butler suggests that the body — that sex itself — is a construct that is gendered already (1990, 6–7).

As mentioned above, this essay uses the idea of a societal connectedness between the separate concepts sex and gender as a basis. In this context, it is remarkable that this sex/gender connection is so strong that gender markers are perceived as reliable sources from which to draw conclusions with respect to a person's biological sex and, generally speaking, U.S. society does not even perceive sex and gender as separate concepts. Halberstam's "Bathroom Problem" proves this point: biological males who exhibit feminine gender markers or behavior tend to be miscategorized as "female" since the identifier assumes femininity markers to be inextricably connected to femaleness or even assumes that femininity and femaleness are "the same" rather than two very separate concepts. As a consequence, feminine males' "mistake" is pointed out to them when visiting the men's room (2004, 21).

Halberstam's "Bathroom Problem" shows that it is the sex of a person that is expected to "match" the bathroom (e.g. a male in men's bathroom): as long as, for example, femaleness is given, "incongruent" gender markers (e.g. masculine markers) do not lead to expulsion from a women's bathroom. Hence, the "Bathroom Problem" exemplifies that sex is at the core of the identification "women" and "men"—assumed *femaleness* is essential to being recognized as "woman" (ibid., 21).

In addition, the situation is not easily resolved once it is clear that a person is in the "correct" bathroom, that is to say, a male in the men's room or a female in the women's room, despite sex/gender incongruence. Rather, Halberstam argues that such an individual might still be perceived as deviant, as somehow "not-man" or "not-woman" due to the broken connection between biological sex and expected gender behavior/identity. According to Halberstam, perceived sex/gender incongruence might lead to negative or hostile and derogatory reactions (ibid., 21–23). Some of the problematic aspects of sex/gender incongruence are dealt with in more detail in the discussion of Coates's "catch-22" (2004, 201–02) and Anderson's "Bitch Narrative" (1999, 599–605) later in this essay.

In U.S. society, men are considered the norm-group and women the deviant, not-norm, and subordinated group (Lorber 2003, 98–99). Generally, groups constituting the norm in society are *not* perceived as *groups* of a society but as the *standard* that *constitutes* society. Simone de Beauvoir states that this phenomenon applies to the division of "men" and "women," with "men" as the *standard*. She claims that "humanity is male and man defines woman not as herself but as relative to him" and refers the reader to Aristotle's proclamation that women are defined as women (and not men) due to a "lack of qualities" ([1949] 1956, 15). As a consequence, the deviant "woman" is automatically defined as a *group* in society that *lacks* certain (male/masculine) qualities, that is *not-man* (Lorber 2003, 99).

The Dominant Femininity, Emotion and the Work-Family Conflict

The dominant concept of femininity in the United States is characterized by several aspects. Firstly, due to the aforementioned connectedness of gender and

sex, “femaleness” is expected and feminine females are most likely to be identified as “women.” Secondly, Buddhapriya claims that women are perceived in terms of features such as “dependence, passivity and emotionality” (1999, 18). She further explains that women are very often perceived as “weak and passive, more capable of being led than leading” (ibid.). In addition, this dominant femininity is closely associated with family life. Women are defined in terms of their role in the domestic sphere, for example as mothers rather than in terms of their profession (MacDonald 1998, 132). Coates draws similar conclusions and claims that women are likely to be seen in terms of caring and self-sacrificing motherhood (2004, 139–40).

One tangible effect of the idea that women belong to the private sphere and are caring, loving individuals is the so-called “work-family conflict” (Gornick and Meyers 2009, 8). According to Gornick and Meyers, the traditional family model “man = breadwinner” and “woman = home maker,” which indicates a high degree of separation of men and women into their assigned sector, changed gradually throughout the 20th century (ibid., 7–8). However, Gornick and Meyers claim that, to this day, the dissolution of the model remains only partial. Even though women joined the workforce, they still hold the position as the family’s major caregivers in most OECD countries. Nowadays, women are expected to fully participate in the public sphere, while, at the same time, they have to meet the demands of the private space (ibid., 8). Consequently, women in the USA and other OECD countries struggle with balancing both sectors — they struggle with the “work-family conflict.”

In order to find further characteristics of the dominant version of femininity in the United States, it is worth taking into account characteristics connected to emotion and emotionality. According to Lutz as well as Nunner-Winkler, emotions (and expressing emotions) are connected to women (feminine females), whereas the perceived polar opposite “rationality” applies to women’s “opposite”—men (masculine males) (Nunner-Winkler 2008, 91; Lutz 1996, 151). Lutz even claims that the “qualities that define the emotional also define women” (ibid.). Hence ideas and qualities connected to emotion are the same as the ideas and characteristics that are connected to femininity in the United States.

Lutz claims that there are two prevalent perspectives on emotion. On the one hand, there is the idea of emotion as something fundamentally human, positive and humane, something that enables us to form meaningful interpersonal relationships, whereas the absence of emotion signifies social distance and alienation (ibid.). On the other hand, there is a less positive perspective on emotion, and on women due to their connectedness to emotion. Lutz states that emotion is also seen

as something natural rather than cultural, irrational rather than rational, chaotic rather than ordered, subjective rather than universal, physical rather than mental or intellectual, unintended and uncontrollable, and hence often dangerous. (Ibid.)

According to Lutz’s understanding of emotion, emotions cannot be planned or controlled. However, emotions and *expressing* them are not the same.

In this context, Brody explains that societies have “display rules” (2000, 25). These are “prescriptive social norms that dictate how, when and where

emotions can be expressed by [masculine] males and [feminine] females” (ibid.). As a rule, women in the USA are expected to show more emotion than men, except for aggression and anger, for instance. According to Brody, women are identified with self-conscious emotions, such as grief, sadness or shame, and are more likely than men to receive societal support, in the form of comfort or approval when exhibiting such emotions (ibid.).

Masculinity, Leadership and the “Bitch Narrative”

In a discussion of Clinton’s representation in the *New York Times* it is further important to consider the dominant idea of leadership prevalent in the United States. Sczesny and others explain that society’s views on leadership and femininity are incongruent (2004, 633). Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra even claim that leadership is perceived as *masculine* (2006, 52) and Buddhapriya supports this by stating that many of the qualities assigned to masculinity are perceived as prototypical leadership traits (1999, 18). Due to the societal connectedness of masculinity with maleness, leadership is associated with men in general. Consequently, women (feminine females) are considered to be lacking leadership qualities. In addition, leadership and masculinity/men are set in diametrical opposition to emotion and femininity/women.

According to Buddhapriya, the dominant conception of leadership — apart from its connection to masculinity — includes features such as “assertiveness, emotional stability and ambition” (ibid.). Additionally, the stereotypical leader is expected to be self-reliant, “tough, unemotional [sic] and dominant” (ibid.), and, due to the connectedness of “men” and “leadership,” “dominant, strong, independent, aggressive, and knowledgeable” (Gaffney and Blaylock 2010, 5).

Societal expectations concerning leadership and femininity present women with a dilemma, or — as Coates calls it — a “catch-22” (2004, 201–02): if women decide not to adopt masculine traits associated with the ideal of leadership, they are considered “too feminine” and unfit for leadership (Sczesny et al. 2004, 633). Buddhapriya’s work supports this — the researcher states that women leaders are likely to be seen as “weak and passive, more capable of being led than leading,” as I have previously quoted (1999, 18). However, if women adopt sex/gender incongruent “masculine” behavior in order to fulfill the ideal of leadership, they are often seen as “hostile, arrogant, maladjusted and overbearing” (ibid.).

Anderson discusses the very similar “Bitch Narrative” (1999, 599–605), which describes how women in political leadership positions are censored for exhibiting apparently gender/sex incongruent behavior by adopting a “masculine” leadership style. According to Anderson, Senate staffer Jean Dugan once said, “[y]ou do hear the term ‘bitch’ applied to women while their male counterparts are simply called ‘aggressive’” in U.S. American politics (1999, 603). All in all, society disapproves of women who exhibit apparently sex/gender incongruent, “masculine” behavior.

Hillary Rodham Clinton and the *New York Times*

After having discussed salient aspects of U.S. social practice, it is now important to investigate how the representation of Clinton in the *New York Times* affects,

and is affected by, these aspects of social practice. The article “Clinton’s Message, and Moment, Won the Day” will serve to exemplify issues regarding the representation of the Democratic presidential candidate and women in general (Healy 2008). It was published at a vital point during the presidential candidacy campaigns, namely in January 2008 after the Democratic pre-elections in Iowa and New Hampshire. The pre-elections in these two states are considered particularly important since they give some indication as to who will be nominated the party’s actual presidential candidate. The focus of the article is an incident where Clinton allegedly exhibited emotions of sadness and exhaustion in her campaign effort for New Hampshire. Clinton lost Iowa to Obama but won in New Hampshire — the article discusses possible reasons for her victory and, in particular, focuses on how the candidate’s expression of emotion affected her campaign (ibid.).

The article portrays emotion and expressing emotion as indicative of a lack of strength and experience. The following passage exemplifies this: “it [the expression of emotion] would badly undercut her [Clinton’s] message of strength and experience” (ibid.). Generally, this representation reiterates the existing understanding of “emotion” as the polar opposite of “leadership ideal” since it doubts the combinability of expressing emotions and strength (and experience). As mentioned above, strength is a core leadership ideal. However, the *New York Times* insinuates that Clinton’s expression of emotion *contrasts* with strength. Hence, the newspaper calls Clinton’s leadership abilities into question. This is remarkable, particularly since Clinton presented herself in terms of the dominant ideals of leadership: her “ability to be strong and uncompromising” (Adolphsen 2010, 40). Another point is that the *New York Times* weakens Clinton’s campaign by casting doubt on one of the pillars of her campaign efforts, namely her *experience*. According to Adolphsen, Clinton continuously emphasized her extensive experience and track record in political matters throughout the campaign (2010, 38-41). However, the *New York Times* implies that her expression of emotions damages precisely this message of experience.

Furthermore, the *New York Times* also draws on the idea of emotion as indicating humanity and human connection (see section “The Dominant Femininity, Emotion and the Work-Family Conflict”), for example by referring to the expression of emotion as a “humanizing moment” with Clinton showing a “human side of herself that they [voters] had never seen” (Healy 2008). Even more importantly, the latter passage exemplifies that the newspaper stresses the *rareness* of Clinton showing emotion and, consequently, femininity (due to the aforementioned societal connectedness between emotion and femininity). This point is essential since Clinton had struggled with balancing feminine and masculine traits in her public persona before her presidential candidacy campaign (Anderson 2002, 115–18). Furthermore, Sklar claims that Clinton indeed preferred a masculine persona during her presidential candidacy campaign 2007–2008. The candidate exhibited allegedly sex/gender incongruent behavior—she behaved like “a woman pretending to be a man” (Sklar 2008, 320). To some extent, therefore, the newspaper merely picks up on a pre-existing attitude regarding the candidate by emphasizing the *rareness* of Clinton’s expressing emotion. The *New York Times* merely draws attention to what the public already assumes, namely that Clinton is mostly sex/gender incongruent. This emphasis on Clinton’s predominant sex/gender incongruent

gender performance might have had negative repercussions concerning her reception by the public: Halberstam's "Bathroom Problem" shows that, generally, sex/gender incongruence is met with hostility and distrust. Moreover, Anderson's "Bitch Narrative" and Coates's "catch-22" show that female masculinity, in particular, is not well received.

A point connected to this is the representation of Clinton's expression of emotion as a performance, as a strategy designed to gain favor with voters, particularly women voters. Throughout the article the discourse of "acting/theatre" is employed: "cast herself," "display," "appearance," "performance," "play" are a few examples of words used in reference to the candidate's expression of emotion. In addition, the overlapping discourses of "warfare" and "competing/gaming" are used, for example by the repeated use of words such as "attack," "strategy," and "plan" (Healy 2008). By portraying the expression of emotion as a strategy-driven performance¹, the *New York Times* implies that Clinton only performed sex/gender congruence when she expressed emotions in order to sway voters in her favor. In this way, Clinton is portrayed as attempting to hide her general sex/gender incongruence by occasionally performing sex/gender congruent "feminine/emotional" behavior.

Hillary Rodham Clinton as a masculine female would, by default, fulfill the leadership ideals prevalent in the United States, for she possesses the necessary "masculine" traits that constitute a good leader. However, due to the newspaper repeatedly doubting her leadership abilities throughout the article it is very unlikely, though possible, that the readers of the *Times* would draw this conclusion.

One major way in which the *New York Times* casts doubt on the candidate's leadership abilities throughout the article is the following: Clinton is repeatedly portrayed as depending on, and needing advice/help from, active campaign supporters and her husband, Bill Clinton. The repeated use of words such as "adviser" and "aide" shows this, since synonyms of these terms are: "authority, coach, . . . guide, helper . . ." whereas Obama's active campaign supporters are called "associates," which has the synonyms: "ally, collaborator, colleague, companion."²In addition, the newspaper correlates Clinton's success with Bill Clinton's popularity (Healy 2008).

In this way, Clinton is portrayed in accordance with the gendered stereotype that women are seen as "weak and passive, more capable of being led than leading" (Buddhapriya 1999, 18). As a result, Clinton is represented as wholly unfit for leadership.

¹ Performance here is not to be confused with Judith Butler's conception of gender as a performance, of gender identity as a "repetition of acts through time" rather than the expression of a stable identity (1990, 141).

² See Reverso-Collins Dictionary (2008).

It is fascinating here that, apparently, this “feminine” representation is successful, despite the readers’ perception of Clinton as masculine. It can be concluded that the attachment of feminine gender stereotypes does not conflict with Clinton’s masculine persona due to the social practice of inextricably connecting femaleness and femininity. Clinton is female. Hence, feminine gender stereotypes can be used in her representation in spite of her sex/gender incongruent behavior.

On the whole, when taking into account the aspects of social practice discussed in the previous section, Clinton’s representation in the *New York Times* can be summarized in three major points. Firstly, Clinton is portrayed as predominantly sex/gender incongruent—she is a *masculine* female. Secondly, Clinton *performs* sex/gender congruence in order to sway voters in her favor. Thirdly, due to the societal connectedness between sex and gender, Clinton is still described in terms of feminine gender stereotypes, which includes the implication of being unfit for leadership.

Women and the *New York Times*

There are several noteworthy aspects to the *New York Times*’ representation of women. First of all, the *New York Times* treats women as a discrete sub-group of society. In doing so, the newspaper reflects and reinforces the social practice of perceiving “women” as a collective with the shared identifying feature of being “woman”; as a non-norm group that exists within society (see this essay’s section “Gender and Sex”). The *New York Times* constructs “women” as a discrete group, for instance, by implying that “several” individuals who share the feature “womanhood” can speak for the collective “women”: “Women, in particular, responded: Several said they . . .” (Healy 2008). In the given quotation the *Times* claims that the societal group “women” responded, when, in fact, only a number of individuals who are identified as belonging to the group “women” responded, namely “several.”

Moreover, the *New York Times* reiterates that biological sex, that is, femaleness or maleness, is the essential constituent that creates the categories “woman” and “man.” In the course of a discussion of women voters’ reaction to Clinton’s expression of emotion, for example, the *Times* introduces a new term in reference to these “women voters”: “Several *female* voters interviewed this week . . .” (Healy 2008; emphasis added). As a result, “women” and “female” are understood as identical — only people who are female are “women.”

Additionally, the use of “female” in the *New York Times* when referring to “women” indicates and reinforces the tendency of society to blur the borders between biological sex and socially constructed gender. Since femaleness is difficult to determine from physique alone without requiring interviewees to undress in order to “prove” their femaleness, the *Times* obviously *deduced* biological sex by identifying gender markers. In spite of this, the newspaper informs the reader about biological sex (“female voters”), rather than gender identity, which is the only truly observable aspect. Thereby, the *Times* effectively blurs the borders between sex and gender. Moreover, the newspaper reinforces the practice of using gender markers to identify sex (see “Bathroom Problem,” section “Gender and Sex”).

Furthermore, a combination of several of the hitherto discussed aspects of women's representation in the *Times* yields remarkable results. The newspaper uses gender markers to deduce "femaleness" and then classifies "females" as "women." Hence, femaleness does *not* equal womanhood. Rather, individuals who exhibit sufficient *feminine gender markers* to be judged female are then categorized as "women." All in all, the *Times* does not contradict current social practices with this representation of "women."

The representation of women in the *New York Times* also reinforces the existing display rules for emotions, for example, by including the quotation "At first, I thought it was bad that she cried, but then I thought, she's a woman, give her a chance" (Healy 2008). The inclusion of this quotation construes Clinton's *womanhood* as either an excuse for the expression of emotion or as some other form of reason/validation for why expressing emotion was not "bad," after all. This quotation exemplifies that the display rules for women still hold true: women are entitled to express self-conscious emotions and are more likely to receive societal support for doing so than men.

In addition, it can be argued that, in the article from January 2008, the *New York Times* reinforces the connection between "women" and "emotion" by discussing the effects of Clinton's expression of emotion and then moving directly into a discussion of how women, in particular, responded:

"We have absolutely no idea how her getting this emotional will play with voters," one adviser said. It turned out to play phenomenally well, one of several turning points during Mrs. Clinton's five-day sprint in New Hampshire after the Iowa caucuses that transformed the dynamic of her race against Senator Barack Obama for the Democratic presidential nomination. Women, in particular, responded: Several said they chose to vote for Mrs. Clinton at the last moment because she had shown a human side of herself that they had never seen. (Ibid.)

Furthermore, the *New York Times* reports on women in terms of their interpersonal, mostly familial, relationships, for instance, "Estelle Glover, 57, an office manager whose son just returned from a tour of duty in Iraq . . ." (Healy 2008). This representation is in accordance with the dominant concept of femininity in the U.S, which includes a strong focus on family and domestic life. Interestingly, the newspaper mentions women's interpersonal/familial relationships as well as their *professional* affiliation. This form of including women's role in both the private and public spheres might be indicative of women's active participation in both. It might be indicative of the existing work-family conflict (Gornick and Meyers 2009, 8) many women experience, since today women are not only expected to fulfill their assigned roles as major caregivers in the private space any more, but are expected to contribute to the public sphere in equal measure as well.

Conclusion

A linguistic analysis of the representation of Hillary Rodham Clinton in the *New York Times* yields noteworthy results in itself. However, enriching such an analysis with information about the societal environment in which the given article was produced allows for comprehensive conclusions with regard to the effects that *The Times'* portrayal of the candidate might have had. Only by investigating the complex connection between femininity/emotion and

masculinity/leadership is it possible to conclude that most of Clinton's representations in the newspaper might have had disadvantageous consequences in the context of a presidential candidacy campaign.

In addition, it is remarkable that the representation of women in the *New York Times* does not differ significantly from given social practice in the United States of America. This conclusion proves the stability of current social practice, that is to say, it is highly improbable that the conception of femininity, for example, is going to change significantly in the foreseeable future.

Still, I would like to emphasize that this essay can only present a short and rather one-dimensional insight into the workings of U.S. society. Future work in this field should include a broader spectrum of linguistic material, information on relevant discursive practices and a more in-depth insight into U.S. social practice that manages to adequately explicate the complexity of social reality.

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