

Prime Minister of “Sexy”

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Johanna Quinney is an MSc Student in the Department of Media and Communications at LSE. She previously served as the Spokesperson and Press Secretary for Canada’s Ministers’ of National Defence and Foreign Affairs. @Johanna_Quinney



Last week, the tides of political change swept through Canada and the country elected Justin Trudeau as its new Prime Minister. Trudeau’s win was historic. He led the Liberals back from the political wilderness where it had languished since its devastating loss in 2011 and defeated a government that had been in power for a decade. In the process, he made many election promises that could very well change the face of Canada. All of this left plenty for the international media to write about the next morning but most of them were only focused on one thing, his “sexy” looks.



Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

An NBCNews headline read “Meet Justin Trudeau: Canada’s Liberal, boxing, strip-teasing new PM”. “Is Justin Trudeau the Sexist Politician in the World” asked the Mirror headline, and E!Online even referred to Mr. Trudeau as a “Smoking-hot Syrupy Fox”.

These headlines created a narrative that circulated quickly internationally. The morning after the election, my phone was flooded with messages from new LSE friends from around the world telling me how “sexy” my new PM is and asking if I’m happy the “old guy with the bad hair is gone”. Most of them were shocked to learn that I voted for the “old guy”, despite his hair, because I thought he was the best leader for the country.

By way of full disclosure, I spent several years on Parliament Hill in Ottawa working for the government that Mr. Trudeau defeated last Monday. With that said, as a scholar of communications and a proud Canadian citizen, I think an honest conversation needs to take place about how the international media is portraying our country and the new PM.

Aside from the Globe and Mail's Tabitha Southey, few journalists have made any comment on the apparent double standard in the media's fixation on the physical appearance of our new PM. If any journalist dared to even make mention of a female PM's physical appearance let alone call her "sexy", feminist groups would be crying foul and taking to airwaves to express their outrage. This irony has been largely lost on the media and citizens alike.

Now win the election, PM tells new girls including Esther McVey, the queen of the Downing Street catwalk



David Cameron replaced older male ministers with up-and-coming Tory women such as Esther McVey, Liz Truss and Nicky Morgan in an attempt to make his team more representative of the population. The Prime Minister declared his new team 'reflected modern Britain', but faced a backlash from some of the Tory old guard who accused him of culling middle-aged male ministers regardless of their merits.

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Canada is a G7 nation with an economy worth almost 2 trillion dollars and on the world stage it stands strong on its values. The discourse about Canada in the international media should certainly not be reduced to old Canadian stereotypes involving igloos, maple syrup, and now Canada's new "sexy" PM.

Trudeau overcame relentless election attack ads dismissing him as a light weight who while not ready for the top job had "nice hair". With a number of international summits to attend before the end of the year, expectations are high. Canadians want Trudeau to deliver and he will try to put doubts about his abilities to rest.

If I were part of Trudeau's communications team, I would certainly be concerned about the way in which he is being portrayed by the international media and the damage it may cause to his image. Alas, however, as I drag myself back to the library to finish writing my first academic essay in over 6 years, I come back to reality. This is a problem for another Press Secretary of a different persuasion to handle.

As an aside note to my international media friends – when you see our new PM at the upcoming international

summits, take a deep breath, and then try to write about what Canada is actually bringing to the table.

[@Johanna_Quinney](#)

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