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"Yes, My Career Would End": How the Existence of Illicit Digital Media May Inhibit Women from Participating in Politics

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THESIS TITLE: "YES MY CAREER WOULD END": HOW THE EXISTENCE OF ILLICIT DIGITAL MEDIA MAY INHIBIT WOMEN FROM PARTICIPATING IN POLITICS.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents; Yaw and Esi Appiah Dwaah, my niece Maame Kwansema, and my unborn children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Abstract

The challenges faced by women in their quest to be equal participants with men in politics is not hidden. This study set out to examine how women may be restrained from rising to the highest offices in politics amidst fear of their existing nude contents that exist digitally. The body and sexuality of women have countlessly been employed as a tool to keep them out of political participation. Relying on data gathered through interviews with twenty four respondents, the study confirmed that women who have their illicit digital media in existence are less likely to take lead roles in politics due to fear of being rejected by political parties, media and the electorates in general.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On 20st January, 2021, Kamala Harris was sworn into office as the 49th Vice president of the United States of America. This occurred after an election that was facilitated by digitization during the Covid 19 pandemic. The restrictions laid down by the federal government as efforts to curb the deadly coronavirus included social distances and cancelation of mass gatherings. This left political parties with no options than to keep to the available digital platforms and social media handles to sell out their candidates all over the country. Thus, campaigning was often done on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and the likes. The power of digitization through mailing votes and the power of social media platforms to convince, appeal and attract the votes of electorates in the 2020 election cannot be overemphasized.

The election of a female vice president and the advancement of digitization presents an opportunity for scholars of women's political participation to investigate how digital media can be used in empowering women in politics.

Justification of Study

Women's political participation has been hampered by so many obstacles over the years. It has always merged with the structure and systems of the current times. In an era where digitization and technology are advancing, this research is timely in solving some of the greater challenges women face in today's political world. This research would be relevant in recognizing, explaining and understanding how women's disempowerment in politics is being made manifest through the existence of the digital media.

In more realistic terms, irrespective of the level of development attained by a country, gender roles, politics and hierarchies among others as a restraint to the maximum participation of women cannot be overemphasized. Concerning how psychology may influence a woman's decision to participate in politics, Wertz (2011) argues that the motivation needed for women to "supply" themselves as human resources to take up any political career begins with a thought. Oftentimes, these thoughts are influenced by the experiences and knowledge they are exposed to before making the decision (Wertz, 2011). This implies that women are more likely to form negative perceptions and thoughts about politics since there is more evidence of unsuccessful women in politics than successful ones. Therefore, this may negatively influence many women from occupying frontiers in politics.

In this vein Tamale (2009), lays emphasis that, despite women's socio-economic class, religious-cultural background, ethnicity and other personal attributes, one mutual factor, which is gender, relegates all women to secondary status as far as politics is concerned. Women have to fight their way through politics, in a male- dominated environment where the definition and distribution of power resides in the hands of men (Tamale, 1999). Therefore, although not the only cause, societal creations about politics as a male space, creates a major restraint on women that prevents them from reaching the apex of decision making.

Tripp (2001:16) also argues that "women in many countries are constrained by obstacles such as culture and tradition (the view that men are superior to women), political turmoil, violence, money, workloads and lack of opportunities". Admittedly, different women face different challenges as they attempt to participate fully in politics depending on their country of residence. However, the arguments of both (Tamale, 1999) and Tripp (2001), raise concern that the individual's gender

coupled with some basic socio-demographic features such as, educational level, source of income are very significant issues that affect women directly.

This research would build on previous knowledge and focus the study on how digitization may be an impediment to women's political participation.

Research Questions

The following questions shall be generated in answering these questions.

1. What are the perspectives of women about existing illicit content and their political career?

2. What are the perspectives of gatekeepers on women who have their existing illicit content exposed?

3. What collective mechanisms can be employed in addressing the challenges that the phenomena presents to female political aspirants?

Research Methods

The research design that was employed for the study is the qualitative research design. According to (Creswell, 2009), this is the method through which the perception of a phenomena to a group of people is explored and understood in a social context. The motivation for employing this design for the study was to understand how the phenomena of existing illicit media means to women in terms of their political career.

Data sources

The primary source of data was solely based on interviews that were conducted. Interview is ideal for research into social issues because it allows the researcher the freedom to pose standard questions concerning a phenomena under investigation (Mann et al, 2010). The interviews were based on phone calls, zoom meetings and the face to face types. Interviews are useful for research because it allows respondents to express themselves freely without being forced to choose from limited available options. Through interviews, the moods, attitudes and emotions of respondents while narrating an experience can be useful in adding richness to the analyses of the study (Mann et al, 2010). The secondary sources for the study were from academic books, journals and other materials which are relevant to the study. This helped the researcher to understand the phenomena and also served as a guide as to which direction the study should be shaped into.

Sampling size and techniques

Considering the phenomena under study, the population refers to all women who aspire to take up any political career or already have an existing career in politics. However, the target population for this study was younger women who aspire to contest and run for political offices. The purposive and the snowball sampling techniques were employed in identifying the targeted population. According to (Mack et al, 2005), purposive sampling is used when the researcher already has the descriptive characteristics of the intended respondents who are likely to have experience with the phenomenon being studied. Meanwhile, snowball technique is used when the researcher meets other people who have answers to the questions being explored through recommendations from already contacted respondents. The study found these techniques relevant due to the brief time span of the research and how sensitive the phenomena being studied is.

The total sample size for this research is twenty-four (24). This is made up of two major categories; college students reading political science at the university of Illinois and the Eastern Illinois University respectively. The second category was made of card bearing party members of the Democrats and the Republicans in Champaign, Illinois. The age range of the respondents was between eighteen (18) –thirty –five (35) years with six (6) of the respondents being women of color.

Ethical consideration

Before conducting the research, permission was sought from the EIU ethical review board and clearance was given after the standards had been met. To (Neuman, 2014), one of the increasing concerns of social science research is the respect for confidentiality. The researcher ensured that no information was shared to any other party apart from the respondent themselves. The data was kept under a secured locked device with a password known to only the researcher. All respondents were treated with maximum respect throughout the interview process. As (Mann et al, 2010) suggests, the principle of voluntary participation must always be fulfilled. No respondent was compelled to participate without their consent as they were even asked to sign a consent form before the interview started.

Methodological restraints and challenges

For the benefits of others who may be conducting research in similar areas, it is important for the study to highlight restraints faced during the conduct of the research. First, the research occurred during a pandemic which made data collection tedious due to federal laws on social distancing. This denied the researcher access to some relevant people such as party leaders who could have provided important additional details for richer analysis. The initial methods for the study which

was a focused group discussion was also replaced with interviews. Focused groups would have helped in gathering much data within the shortest possible time.

Due to how sensitive the phenomena is, respondents sometimes broke into tears while sharing their experiences which meant some sessions had to be postponed in order not to harm the respondents emotionally and psychologically. Such events limited the time for the study.

Measurement of concepts

In this study, two concepts were being measured. First, the term "illicit", in this research means unacceptable naked pictures, videos or audios. Digital media also describes the sharing and the storage of information through computerized technology as opposed to printed content. Therefore, illicit digital media refers to any naked picture, video and audios that have been shared and stored electronically through technology. The scope of the paper is on digital media that includes social media handles such as twitter, Facebook, Snapchats, Instagram and WhatsApp messenger. The scope of the paper is also limited to only women in America.

CHAPTER TWO

Perspectives of Women about Illicit Digital media and their Career

The subjectivity of illicit

 To most of these women, illicit media is subjective. They think that different people were groomed differently. This means that society cannot dictate the type of videos or audios they should share across the board. Their reflection on how illicit digital content should be perceived was based on thoughts that it was a purely subjective issue which needs to be treated with respect for individual differences and not considered as a problem. According to some of the respondents especially college girls, women can choose to be whatever they want to be at different times. It is of no value for it to have any effect on their career.

They explained further that they were trained by different parents under diverse circumstances. It is unfair to hold people accountable to the extent of linking it to their career just because they sent pictures or videos that are considered to be illicit. To some of these people, it is an unfortunate way through which people get judged and also think it's men's own way of keeping women from being free. "Why would anyone decide not to vote for me simply because they have seen my nude pictures or videos somewhere? What has that got to do with my career? What happened to private life?" One respondent queried.

On the contrary, respondents who were already committed party faithful revealed that in politics, there is little or no difference between public and private lives. To these women, everything they have worked for would crash when some of these images pop out and that could even lead to the end of their career. In this regard, one of the women shared a story about how she had always feared that her now divorced husband's past could have an effect on her political career. This fear

almost prevented her from partaking in frontline politics as she is doing today. According to her, she was married to the man and was oblivious of the fact that he was a porn actor a few years before they got married. Although she found this and other issues of drug dealings later, people still used this against her. She narrates that she had to constantly remind herself and her critics that this was not even her personal life and it would be unfair for others to use her past against her. Yet, she has suffered all these hardships because she lived with such a man. Thus, explaining that it would even be more frustrating if she was directly involved with his escapades as rumors have it.

She went further to explain how she was falsely accused of conniving and condoning with the now imprisoned and divorced husband. Some of the false rumors included claims that she joined her then husband to blackmail people with threats of exposing their nudity. The severely demonstrated emotions at this point clearly showed the depth of how women suffer when issues concerning their sexuality is being used against them.

These fears are not only limited to respondents who already had a career in politics. A percentage of the college students also confirmed that they are careful about how they live their lives today because they have political ambitions in the future. When asked why they were so concerned about the exposure of any of their illicit digital content, they were quick to mention that many people may not vote for me. One of them mentioned that, women in America were allowed to partake in voting just a little over sixty years ago. Thus, most electorates who are conservatives may not like her to even be in politics as a woman and would use every evidence against her. Hence, she is being careful not to give them any. She also stressed that she knows she has been called into public life as she has held a number of positions right from high school through to the university. This is the more reason why she strives to project a good image of herself unto society because lots of

people look up to her. Also, beyond this, she wants to lead a society that reflects higher morals and less profanity.

About 15% of the respondents introduced the idea of religion as the reason why she is so conscious of having her illicit content exposed. "I grew up in the Chicago west side and regularly attend the mosque till date. I am not perfect, no but I try my best to live according to the Holy Quran which contains all the dictates of the Almighty Allah. So I am conscious of my identity, my career and where I am at". This opinion throws more light on other areas in life where the existence of profane content could be worrying. However, projecting this into the discussion, it shows that the impact of illicit digital media cannot entirely be considered subjective and therefore remains very relevant to politics. The different opinions and dimensions goes further to show how this is embedded in our society, culture, religion, life and most importantly politics. Thus, making it a potent tool to inhibit women if not checked or controlled.

These variations in perspectives showed a sharp contradiction of opinions between the elderly generation and the college students of politics. Although, it would be inappropriate to marginalize the perspectives of some of these college students, the experiences of the female politicians and the divided perceptions even among the younger college girls showed that most of these women think that political career and illicit digital media have a link. The acceptance of their fears coupled with the seriousness in their tone confirmed the arguments of (Jordan, 2015) and (Hecket, 2018). To them, the majority of young women, irrespective of their career path, become apprehensive whenever they are confronted with threats of having their nudes exposed. This is because society has institutionalized ideals of how a woman's body should be treated. Some of the comparisons these respondents make between themselves and men in the occurrence of similar situations

showed that men are likely to be less bothered. Thus, this demonstrates that women are more concerned about this more than the men.

Entrenchment of patriarchy

According to (Clatbaugh, 2018), the inhibitions of female politicians have always been innumerable. Women have to struggle for space in public life as compared to men. There are several societal creations that restrain women. Women have also been expected to be more domesticated and "home" focused (Clatbaugh, 2018). Thus to take care of their husbands and families and play supportive roles for their husbands who partake in politics. To be successful in politics, a strong wallet is very important (McChesney, 2013). However, a few women have the financial resources to succeed in politics (Deeson and Greenslee, 2015). There are also issues concerning educational level and needed experience. Until recently, only a few women had the expected educational qualification (Ford, 2018). On the subject of experience, women were not given the chance to fully participate in politics not to mention growing through to gather all these experiences some men get (Allah-Mensah, 2009). Thankfully, situations are becoming a bit comfortable as both men and women can compete for positions with equal chances of winning without intimidations (Ford, 2018).

More than half of the respondents mentioned that, men and society always find the least possible chance to subdue women and to restrain them from competing with them in public life. This suggests that being a female in politics itself is a disadvantage and politics is also about exposing the weaknesses of your opponent for the benefits of the one engaged in exposing the latter. To

them, paying attention to these critics is patriarchal and must not be encouraged. One respondent lamented that;

Men are always looking for newer ways to keep us out of this game you see? There is absolutely no reason why I should not be able to live my best life in this college just because I want to be able to run for office in some few years to come. Any man who brings that up is a terrible loser. These narratives of trying to look for rooms to play against women are past and gone. Bring up new stories. Let's stick to business and keep these fairytales out of the way.

It is worth noting and interesting to understand that even women who seem not to care about the implications have considered this as a potential barrier that could rise against them in the future.

A little over 40% of the respondents also confirmed that it would be very difficult for them if they find out in the future that such private information of theirs has been exposed to the public. a young woman in college had this to say;

That would be the end of my career. What would be the point in having the whole country point accusing fingers at me. Maybe I would rather support from behind the scenes or do something else but I would definitely step down when I am confronted with this. Maybe I have not really thought about this from this angle until today, but who knows, I am pretty sure, I could have a few of those pictures on those drunk nights at parties with the girls.

Some of these perspectives support the argument that women are more likely to be affected by sexual intimidation as compared to men when they both contest for the same public positions (Isoke, 2013).

Rhode (2017) and Nzomo(2011) have raised arguments that the emotional intelligence levels and how women handle certain circumstances make them unfit for taking up lead roles in politics. This is due to how dirty the game of politics gets since many opponents would pull several stunts just to win.

They further explain that mostly, women's physiological make up restrains them from having the emotional strength to absorb all the hate speech, trolls among others that comes with running for public office. However, others such as (Bawa and Sanyare, 2013), have also argued that the physiological set up of women rather puts them in the position to be more thoughtful and discerning when they serve as public officers which mostly amount to their success whenever they emerge as leaders. They also give examples of some women such as Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia and Angela Markel of Germany to prove the quality of leadership women have expressed just because they are not hasty in decision making.

These divergent arguments point to a similar direction. Thus, the existence of these images is an entrenchment of patriarchy which creates enough room for women to be relegated in politics. Patriarchy in politics has been argued by Kandiyothi (2016) as how men are giving superiority as the main gender that should steer political affairs while dimming the light of all other genders especially females that seek to rise to political power. Therefore, using the existence of such images against women is a tool to keep women beneath men and that is a complete manifestation of patriarchal entrenchment. Thus, men are always looking for the means to be above women in politics and technology is one of the new ways to continue this tradition. It also points to the fact that patriarchy is trendy, systematic and dynamic. This means patriarchal believers have always found means to use the happenings of the current era to project the image of men and politics while marginalizing women. In today's world, digitization and social media are fast growing. It looks like a calculated attempt to force women to be "decent" or pay the price of not having a successful career whenever it is time for them to start one.

Perspectives of Gatekeepers

The gatekeepers refers to the people who control the recruitment and supply of people who enter and succeed in politics. They are institutions and humans that control the political dynamics in the country. In this paper, the focus of the gatekeepers are on the political parties as well as the media. The paper focuses on these two because the political parties for example is a major vehicle through which people participate in politics.

From the tables above, it is clear that the democrats have more support for women generally than the republicans. For democrats, the core of their ideology has to do with the concept of liberalism where people are allowed to be their best selves. At the heart of their ideology is a desire to see all Americans prosper economically and security without dealing with no restraints on their human rights. The party is known for its extreme inclusion and acceptance of minorities. In their recent survey, NBC news (2018) mentioned that about 80% members of the LGBTQ community voted for their district democratic house candidates and are more likely to vote for democrats during national elections. Their support for unpopular opinions and minority rights is often obvious in some of their policies on abortion rights, immigrant rights and transgender programs and protections.

For a party like the democrats, there is the likelihood of supporting women who face this challenge. They are likely to consider it as a means of increasing their commitment towards inclusiveness. Women who are victims may be given equal opportunities and receive maximum support from the political party. For example, many unproven allegations came up against Kamala

Harris as a woman who slept her way through the top.. Yet, she still has been able to run on the ticket of the democrats to secure this position for herself and the party.

On the other hand, the republican party is less likely to give maximum support to such women. Their party has great commitment for tradition, standards, high morality and a quest for conservatism. This partly explains why few women have been able to do much within the party over time. Moreover, women who find themselves in this position are more likely to not receive any much support from the party.

The media also plays a major role in this. As business people who are in competition for a higher audience. There is the possibility of the media channeling more energy in spreading the negativity of these women than empowering them. According to Enli (2013), negative news sells faster so they would rather spread all these. Hence, entrenching the disempowering of women in politics.

Intersectional Identities

Research has shown that the differences faced between men and women are diverse when it comes to politics (Phipps, 2016). In this study, it is evident that the challenges women face in their rise to politics keep increasing by the day. As these challenges increase with the era and times the challenges of black women even increase the more (Isoke, 2014). The challenges faced by women of color are totally different from women different from white women (Versey, 2014). This challenge is extremely different from that of what other women may encounter.

For black women, having their illicit digital media exposed would mean an end or a near end to their career. Historically stereotypes have been built on the personality and sexuality of many black women which is based on experiences of slavery and responses of the then slavery (Versey, 2014). One black woman shared her experience.

We have always been seen as aggressive people who do not care about our sexuality. These people do not like us. They think we like to do whatever we want with our bodies. Girl, you know what I mean? But that is not it. We have suffered enough to appreciate freedom. Nothing can bind us again and that is us living our best lives. Why put rules on our bodies and all that don't matter no more. We know genuine happiness stems from within and not what others think of us.

Another respondent said;

I think if my nudes get exposed later after college while I try to pursue my dreams I would not care about it. Because whoever likes me would vote for me but those who don't like me would not vote for me. And it is not because I am black and I did this. I think it should not matter but we are black girls so it would.

To another respondent, who is already actively involved in party politics, the response is different.

"My career would end. The competition is tough here for us black women. Imagine me, a black woman doing this? Nobody is even gonna vote for me within this party to compete with our opponents. It is a no no for me. That's why we thread more cautiously around here".

One thing was evident with most women within the minority group, there was unison of voices and opinion. They were all already aware of the existing perceptions that people have about black women. To them, this would greatly affect their career than other women. This would definitely add up to the many restraints they face as compared to other existing women. This challenge would cause them a lot more than all other women. The figure below explains the frustrations faced by restraints.

In this study, it is called the "triple minority". This concept is being used to explain how the problem presents itself for black women.
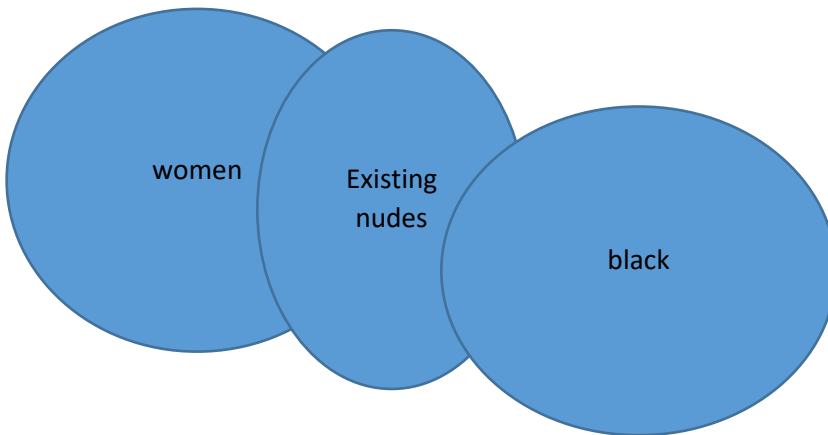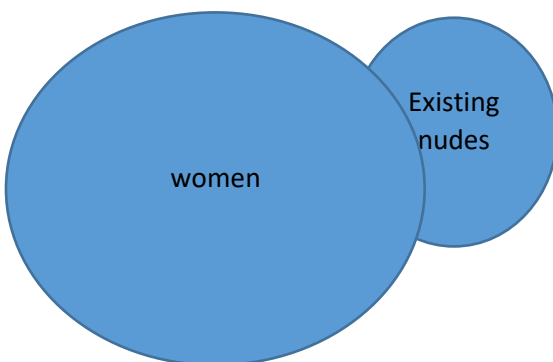
Figure 1(Triple minority concept)

figure 2(challenges of women in politics)

Intersection of race and gender presents opportunity for restraining more women into politics.

From the figures 1 and 2 shown above, the concept of triple minority seeks to explain that black women face different levels of challenges as compared to all other women in politics. First, the inhibitions of all women in politics affect all people who identify as women. These are general challenges that range from cultural, social, religious, economic and social status that have been discussed in the literature review. The second level of challenge all women have to deal with has to do with the emerging inhibition of women who have their existing media being exposed. According to the perspectives shared by the respondents, these women would have to deal with

the challenge of being accepted, even having the support of their political parties. In some extreme cases, they may have their whole political career crashed because some of these images may have resurfaced.

Beyond these two levels of the problem, there is a third level which affects only women of color. This is the place where gender and race intersect to present a different dynamic to the problem. Women of color have a long standing battle of having to fight for a seat in the political front. Historically, people of color have struggled to even have their political rights bestowed on them later by the federal government (Isoke, 2013). Black women fall in the intersection of two minority groups who are continuously facing challenges in politics which is a dominant field for the majority. Thus people of color and women. Black women are more likely to be greatly affected by the problem of having their illicit digital media pop up later in their career. This explains the concept of triple minority in this study. Moreover, overcoming this challenge also becomes a problem for black women who are caught in this web. According to two women of color and respondents in this research:

Look at Michelle Obama, Have you read Becoming? You see all the stress she had to go through, beat against all odds. She is educated, she is a lawyer. She is in the top class. She is from the southside, a local girl with a humble beginning like many black girls. But you see all the backlash people had against Obama, Michelle stood by him and is visibly loved all over this country. We know Michelle, now Kamala is also with Biden. But girl, how many of these women do we have in the senate and the local politics?

The other had this to say; "Yes, they put us on because they know we would bring in the numbers. We would help them win. The black community and the women would support because they put us there. It is not because they really want to help us. It's gonna be hard if I find myself in that position".

In order to change the narrative about black women, it is important for more black women to be in positions of power so that more people can get to change the stereotypes they have of black women (Versey, 2014). However only, a few women get directed yearly which makes it even harder to change the narrative. As the respondent rightly quizzed "*But how many michelles do we have*"? The absence of black women at these important areas continuously sustains the stereotypes being held by the masses about black women. The agencies such as political parties that should have helped these women overcome this challenge have also carried a cosmetic approach over the years. They pull the support and recruit women who are more likely to only increase the fortune of the party during elections. Instead of supporting these women whenever the need arises, they pull out leaving the women unprotected during the career crises.

CHAPTER THREE

Collective Efforts to Overcome the Identified Challenges

Political parties

Political parties have been grossly identified as the vehicle through which most citizens participate in politics (Enli and Skorgebo, 2013). They are often formed with the aim of encouraging, identifying, recruiting and grooming people to take over governance through legal means of power change and also put people in places to function in public offices (Maning and Smith, 2016). Thus, they provided the needed guidance which is essential for a successful political career. Although independent candidates have of themselves won elections under many circumstances, political parties often make the process simpler and easier (Maning and Smith, 2016). Despite the arguments on the existing disparities that occur during internal political participation where men are given better opportunities as compared to women, political parties have continuously aided women in their rise to politics and removing the many barriers that come with this process (Allah-Mensah, 2009).

The agenda of women empowerment progresses faster when political parties are involved regardless of the many identified challenges women many face. This institution is a necessary evil. In addressing this challenge, most of the female party members who were interviewed indicated that the women's wings within the political parties must be strengthened. Like a respondent said; ''It is not enough for us to pay dues or be pushed to join these unions. This is when the unions should matter not only during campaigns. There should be support not only when the issue is made public. Right here within this party, there must be support.'' Another respondent said; "I think the

support is better as compared to when I first joined. Now we women are understanding ourselves better and rooting for each other. Although some are still silly snubs, I just think this is better".

From some of these responses, it is obvious that the women are demanding internal support even when such issues come up against a female later in her career. To them, this should not be the end of their career regardless of the fact that it carries a high potential for ending a career. Women's wings are supposed to be built on stronger pillars where the interest of women can be pushed (Cowell-Meyers, 2016). It should not only serve the interest of women but the party in general. However, they can be strengthened by encouraging attendance and creating interesting yearly programs which would encourage more women to attend. In that way, they can build up themselves and grow together. This would foster unity and a sense of solidarity where the women within the party would support each other irrespective of which office or challenge the candidate may be facing. Thus, establishing and building better women's wings is one of the major means through which such issues can be overcome.

The political parties are also expected to encourage women to grow through peer mentoring and assignments of tasks. A respondent indicated;

I think this may be better, if we are allowed to start from the scratch. Like sometimes, I am called as the black divorced woman who was married to a convict who was a porn star. You remember the story I told you earlier? Girl, those things got to me. Did I cry? Yes I did. Did I feel like giving up? Of course, because I knew this was not meant for me. But guess what today I am tougher and all these things do not matter no more. I have developed a tougher skin. Tell me whatever you want, I would still run for president of this city's council someday.

Although Markinkowski (2014) has argued that overly experienced politicians are not always successful politicians due to their tendency to rely on past lessons which may not fit present times, Phipps (2016) also thinks otherwise. The relevance of experience can never be irrelevant in politics. It provides direction for the future with confidence and guidance from the past (Phipps,

2016). Thus, political parties should recruit and groom more women to make them qualified enough to contest for inter and intra party competition. They can be captured as young as college and be given basic tasks. As women, they are likely to experience minimal effects, of some of the insults and inhibitions. If they are able to overcome them, then they can get better even if they meet some of these challenges later in the future.

Early experience would not also give them enough emotional and psychological strengths to overcome these challenges. It can also save them from avoiding this inhibition. Identifying and recruiting some women for grooming can be achieved if women invest more money into the women's wings and other women groups within the political parties. These organizations can achieve more, if they have enough financial resources. It would enable them to have many in service training and peer mentoring. Such events could have more women who would guide the younger ones from making similar mistakes they did in their earlier career development stages. Thus, younger women who aspire to hold public offices would come out more refined, not perfect but with lifestyles that would reflect societal ideals of a politician. This also means that younger women who have already made this mistake would not be afraid of contesting for the position because they would find better ways of handling the situation even if it comes up against them later in the future.

Political parties can be more embracing and adjust some of their ideologies to fit contemporary politics. According to Roberts (2015), most American youth are gradually losing interest in politics despite an increase in political consciousness. In as much as this apathetic behaviour is sad, it is a reflection of the contradiction between politics and the youth. As indicated earlier from the interview with the party members, most of them mentioned the ideology of the party as factors

that could kindle and institutionalize this challenge for women. Political parties are likely to benefit and gain mass support from the youth if they project such women who may be facing chastisement from the general public.

To win the support of the youth, the political parties should learn to publicly support these women without any fear of losing voters. The parties must defend them instead of preventing them from competing on their parties' tickets. If more youth observe such liberality from the parties, they are likely to give them their support since they would not feel judged. More potential youth can be recruited as the fear of their existing illicit materials would not hold them down. The party would then obtain not only votes from many youth but would also groom more people who could bring bigger wins to the party in the future. This also means the party should invest more into grooming and training of human resources.

Media

This study has largely focused on the role played by the media which may result in their removal or inhibition of women from politics. The media can give affected women more support than the women who are not going through this challenge. Already, it has been established that women have a lot of challenges that they face as they seek to rise to political power. The media especially in this technological era carries great potential. They seek to educate, inform and entertain largely (Roberston, 2015). Thus, they can employ three of their key strengths to help affected women overcome this challenge while maintaining their achievements in politics irrespective of what the masses may say. The power of the media to inform cannot be overemphasized.

 Generally, not all people would seek to get information from the right source. Since social media such as Facebook, twitter, Instagram are so easy to reach, readers would rather make use of

information they obtain from such platforms (Vitak et al, 2011). Therefore, it is likely that these platforms can be used to spread information regarding this illicit digital media (Vitak et al, 2011). It is through these platforms that the general public would know the details surrounding such controversies. Sadly, other bloggers and websites may take up information from these sites for commercial purposes and sell them out such that they would make money from the negative news circulating around the country (Theocharis and Lowe, 2016). Others would also form opinions about such culprits which may affect their political fortunes.

Enli (2017) has shown in his research that the projection of political candidates by certain media platforms go a long way to enhance their political fortunes and vice versa. Thus, the potency of the media cannot be overemphasized. In order to support women's political participation and to help remove these barriers, social media platforms can also find rewarding measures for platforms who use their voice to rally around women who have such challenges. This would be a way of attracting more platforms that inform the general masses on the ways to accept these women. There would be informative resources that would also shape public opinions. Through their consistent effort, others would also understand the reason why such women deserve love and support and not public backlash. As this happens, women who already have such an existing past would not be afraid to seek their place in politics. They would understand that the same media that can be used to break them can be used to put them at the top as well.

These platforms can also be used to educate other young women as well. The media can also educate the general public on cyber security issues and their digital rights. Many women who face such situations do not know that human rights extend beyond the physical land area to the digital space (Nnena, 2013). Human rights also exist on social media. There has been recent advocacy for

cyber security and privacy where some media houses have been found and are being tried (Ifeanyi-Ajufor, 2017). It behooves on the owners to ensure that their users are mostly protected in terms of human rights. It is unfortunate to mention that some of these women do not even know who shared these existing photos and it just shoots up into the media which drains down all other efforts that have been put in place to keep them successful in politics. This cannot continue.

When more people are educated or assured of their rights and privacy protections, they would know what to do when they encounter such challenges (Ifeanyi-Ajufor, 2017). Educating the masses could be done through short videos. When women start taking court actions against people who bring out such existing media, others would be discouraged from doing so. This would also reduce the occurrence of such unfortunate happenings in the country. Until more education is done by these social media platforms, people would continue to trample on the human rights of others without being punished (Nnena, 2013).

There should also be education on what to do when women go through this. Encouraging more women to overcome this challenge can be possible when more education is done on the other factors that makes women successful in politics. More people should be educated by the media to know and understand the relevance of having more women participate in politics. The masses should be taught about the already existing barriers that women are facing and why it is important that we do not reintroduce newer ones as the era changes. This would encourage people to be more empathetic towards women who are into politics. They would understand the balance and fairness they bring into decision making while presenting distinct perspectives.

The media can also use entertainment to help women overcome this challenge. In their bid to support these women, the platforms can use creativity to create programs, fun games and other humorous means to attract more people to gain the attention of these women and to understand

their plight as well. One of the major keys that digital media has over the printed media is its ease in catching the attention through great sounds and visuals (Ifeanyi-Ajufor, 2017). This same means can be used to compliment the educational aspect. Education can also be done through entertainment. This would make more people watch such projects. Thus, making it easy to catch the attention they seek and also provide the education they hope to give out to the masses.

To make media houses more responsible, governments should ensure enforcement of the existing rights. If media houses and owners are not punished or fined consistently, there would not be enough motivation to ensure that people precisely women's data shared are protected. If more media houses are removed or forced to tighten their privacy measures, this problem can be reduced (Nnenna, 2013). Media houses should also be clearer on things that contribute to abusing someone's privacy and this should include sharing illicit digital media of women without their consent (Nnenna, 2013). Having the rules is not enough and should come with the supporting punishment. For example, people who give hate comments, share, and post or like derogatory contents of unapproved illicit details of women could be warned, suspended or even removed permanently under extreme circumstances. Introducing punishments and enforcing punishments would be a good way of helping these women overcome the challenges this problem poses.

Women Groups

The power of the collective efforts in women's groups in overcoming this challenge cannot be overemphasized. Most women's groups are formed in order to support the cause of women empowerment and for women in all other spheres of lives (Bawa and Sanyare, 2013). The women's

groups that are being analyzed do not only refer to political ons but all other women's organizations be it domestic, international religious or secular that have the general empowerment of women at the heart of their empowerment agenda. The women organizations must seek for ways to provide financial assistance for such women to pursue their political career. As already indicated, female politicians often struggle to get the necessary assistance needed to fund their programs as compared to men.

Although there are "politi preneurs" who fund politicians, most of them give their support to men over women. Politpreneur (political enterpreneurs) are just like businessmen who invest so much into political candidates with the hope of yielding profits or benefits when their candidates win power (Silander and Bergen, 2016). Like any businessman, they are unlikely to invest into people who have less chances of winning power (Wood, 2018) . Women who have their existing illicit content easily fall into the category of bad candidate. Thus, may not be attractive enough to get adequate resources not only from the "politi preneurs" but from other institutions as well. It is important that women's groups come together to lobby for funds for these women. They are supposed to find means of turning misfortune into very attractive means so that more groups would provide enough resources to help fund the political activities of such women.

In their search for means to help raise funds, women's groups can host fundraising events or even sell souvenirs or render community services such as car wash or baby sitting to gather money to support the campaign activities of suh women (Thomson and Swers, 2017). When enough financial resources have been gathered, women who are going through such challenges would be in the right position on their way to success.

Apart from helping affected victims raise enough funds for their campaigns, women's groups must be sources of psychological and emotional support. This challenge comes with the need for

psychological and emotional support. These groups must find ways of embracing these women. There is the tendency for them to be charged, chastised or banned from such groups (Hecket, 2018). Yet, women's groups should always choose the bigger option of standing in solidarity with these women, welcoming them into their programs and meetings and helping them overcome the shame of being social misfits and almost losing a career. Other younger women who may also be scared to partake in politics due to such experiences would also be encouraged to start their entire career with the hope that the existing groups would provide them with support they need as they journey through their political career with this attached stigma.

There must be a collective approach to name, shame and established punishments for other women within these groups who would want to continuously tear down affected women with regular reminders. This is a very good way of providing support. The collective shaming and condemning of such behaviours create a sense of caution among women. This would make them more confident and sure about the part they have chosen to pursue which is politics.

Women's groups should also find means of supporting these women during the campaign seasons. They must be visible enough to give women all the needed help they need even if all other expected parties neglect these women. These groups must be intentional about creating and highlighting the good image of the candidate (Enli, 2013). They need to take active roles during campaign rallies, forming groups on social media to enhance the image of the affected victims (Bawa and Sanyare, 2013). They must be present at the campaign offices of these women and engage in all legal activities that characterize campaigning. This would provide the affected candidate the maximum energy to forge ahead whenever necessary.

Education is a good tool these women's groups may use in order to overcome this challenge. The groups must find ways of providing counselling sessions for affected women and women who

have fears of engaging in politics due to fear of having these issues mar their career. These counselling sessions must be done by professional psychologists who have been paid for the job. Where there is the need for individuals to be financially supported in order to begin or progress within the counselling sessions, the groups must do so. They should also ensure that affected women are taking these counselling and educational sessions seriously. They must regularly check up on them if reforms have taken place as they progress. If all counselling and psychological sessions are completed, the women can stand on their own grounds and defeat whichever obstacle they may face.

The women groups must also teach their members some negative attitudes to avoid in order to prevent them from personally creating these challenges that could affect their career. These teachings would guide women against sharing such details of themselves online just so they do not find themselves in these problems even in the future. The women must also teach their members about cyber security and digital privacy laws so that they would be knowledgeable about their rights. The more people are enlightened, the more likely they are to also take legal actions against others who may want to work around their ignorance and destroy their career (Nnnena-2013). Although this may not totally erode the problem, it would help to hamper the frequency of its occurrences.

In order to create more avenues for education, these women's groups can also be encouraged to try publishing blogs or write ups where the images of the affected women would be projected. The publications would give the women the chance to tell their stories and to explain how this has prepared them for their future and the position they are vying for regardless of all the backlash. Proceeds from publications could also be reinvested as funding sources for these affected women.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

The barriers to women's political participation is enormous. This study set out to examine how illicit digital media may be an impediment to women's political career. Illicit digital media refers to any nude content which has been stored as an audio-visual material. Responses were gathered from interviews to make analyses and conclusions for the results. The study confirmed that existing illicit digital media is more likely to restrain women's participation in American politics in the nearest future. Although some women consider the subject of illicit content as relative, about 40% of the respondents confirmed that it was of great concern to their career. There was a sharp distinction in the answers given between the younger women and the older women who are already into politics with most of the older women narrating their worrying concerns while some of the college women downplayed the negative potential it carried on their career.

From their response, the women mentioned that, this new development of victimizing women with their illicit content from their past, is a way of manifesting and entrenching patriarchy in the contemporary age. Further explanation showed how patriarchy has always found a way to merge itself with time as women also try to rise above all the existing barriers. This new mechanism is a confirmed way of institutionalizing patriarchy while making all efforts to disempower women from becoming equal participants with men in politics.

It is also clear that there is no distinction between the private life and public life of anyone who decides to take a career in politics. This explains why most of the women were concerned that society would condemn them as deviants and societal misfits. This would also mean they may lose more votes from the electorates as this may end their entire career. Due to this fear, some of the

women confirmed that they would rather want to take up administrative positions instead of lead roles out of fears of having their past play out before them. They were not prepared to deal with all the backlash and frustrations that would surface if they should contest as candidates. Thus, this would prevent some women from contesting. While others agreed that they had not previously thought of this, some of the older women confirmed that they had some of their past sexual escapades being used against them even within their own political parties. This has influenced their attitudes and the content they shared out there because of their concerns to run for office in the future.

This problem is different for black American women as they have to battle with the problem of the triple minority concept. The triple minority concept means that black women are more disadvantaged than women from other races when they become victims of the problem. This is because they have to deal with the intersection of race and gender plus the challenge of having their illicit content spread overboard. It is even a much bigger problem because a few black women are able to win power to change the narrative about women of colour. Women of color equally have many other important values to add to politics which goes beyond all the negativity attached to their race and their gender. This makes them more victimized than any other group of women when affected.

From the perspectives of gatekeepers such as political parties, the parties ideologies as well as the ultimate aim to win office at all cost would make it more difficult for them to choose affected women as candidates. Just like businessmen or coaches, political parties are likely to recruit, invest and support any candidate that is likely to yield more acceptance from the general public. Women who are victims of this problem, may not receive such support from the political parties. Although the democrats may be more welcoming of such women due to the gross respect for liberalism, it

would not be without restrictions. The republicans on the other hand are highly unlikely to support such people due to their strong respect for the principle of conservativeness and traditions. The media would ride on the negativity of the news to make more money from the masses, contestants and the politicians due to how this would sell out to the masses.

Implications for Women and American Politics

This challenge presents a very interesting future for American politics as technology is advancing. As indicated from the responses, patriarchy always revolves and aligns with the contemporary tools. It is important for leaders and all parties interested to collectively ensure that these elements of patriarchy have been removed. It is also very likely that digitization would increase and many restrictions would breed which would not only affect women but other political candidates as well. For the younger women who are the future of American leaders, they must be consciously taught about all these existing barriers. If they are obvious of these matters, they would be more careful not to fall into this challenge. As more women are made aware of these pending issues ahead of their career, they would be better prepared to meet it, in case they become unfortunate victims in the future. In the nearest future, cyber security laws would also be tightened. More people would find out more about the existing laws while others offenders would be prosecuted with time.

Recommendations for Victims and Important Stakeholders in overcoming this challenge.

Womens' Groups

As indicated earlier, women who are victims of this problem are more likely not to receive funds from lobbyists and other entrepreneurs who would want to fund politicians for their own parochial interests. It is important for the women's groups to help finance the careers of the affected women. They can provide assistance by organizing fundraising events that would help to finance the campaign of the women. Apart from fundraising events, women's groups can also render community services and selling of souvenirs which would help in raising money. Money can also be obtained from publications of vlogs,blogs, magazines and the likes which speak about the challenges these women face. As more women become aware of the financial resources available to them despite their circumstances, others who have similar fears would be encouraged to jump along.

Beyond raising money through publication of these dailies and vlogs, these publications can be used as conduits of change. As part of educational means of changing the mindsets of society about victims, women's groups can continuously publish on the same media platforms that are used for tarnishing victims' images. They must portray in their publications what these women stand for and the significant role they can play in politics when given the opportunity to lead. The groups can also educate their members and other women on the rights they have. This would help them know about their cyber security rights and their privacy rights. When more women are aware of these, they can easily report to the appropriate institutions when others deliberately expose their nudity in the media. As more perpetrators are brought to book, others would be deterred from doing the same. Hence, reducing the occurrence of this problem.

Women's groups can also offer emotional and psychological support to affected victims. The negative effect on the minds and emotions of affected victims cannot be overly emphasized. It is very important for the women's groups to be extremely compassionate towards affected victims. They should not also partake in the deliberate efforts to disempower these women. They should rather find collaborative means of naming and shaming others who put in efforts to bring down victims. Where there is the possibility to fund women to get counselling and emotional therapy, women's groups should endeavour to encourage victims to partake in such events.

Political Parties

As vehicles through which most people participate in politics, political parties also have a role to play in overcoming this challenge. Political parties must build and equip their women's wings. It should not just be about choosing women to rally along only because of the number of votes they can give to the parties. Empowering and equipping women must be an intentional agenda of the political parties. Women's groups within the parties must be given enough resources to organize training and events that would help women to grow. When such events occur regularly, more women would become aware of the already existing inhibitions faced by women. This would make many women conscious as they grow in politics to avoid the problem others may have incurred.

Political parties must also give women the opportunity to grow in all aspects of their political career by assigning them to roles within the party. Experience is a very essential aspect of politics. As women grow through from the scratch, they would be accustomed to the trolls that come with women's experiences with politics. They would get emotionally tougher as they progress along their career. Early career experience would also help in grooming them to avoid such mistakes.

Political parties are encouraged to also make some adjustments in their ideologies in order to make it more attractive to accommodate the opinions of the youth. If the youth realized that they would be accepted despite being victims of the past, most of them would be encouraged to take up a career in politics.

The Media

The media should use the major keys of entertainment, information and education to help in addressing this challenge whenever it occurs. This is considered very significant because the media is a powerful tool through which others spread all the negativity about these women. It is important for the media to use this same means to spread positivity about the affected women. The media should also make the punishment for culprits who share others' nudity without their compliance more stringent. This would deter others from engaging in the act. The media must also be clear about their definitions of what makes up these rights and when it can be deemed fit as violations.

Victims of Existing Illicit Digital Media

The affected women themselves also have the responsibility to rise above all these challenges. Like all other impediments to women's advancements in politics, the victims would need to play a major role in removing this. It is important for victims to exude more positive behaviours that would help electorates and society know them to stand for many other important issues, apart from what relegates them to the background.

Attention for future researchers.

In the nearest future researchers are encouraged to consider examining how this phenomena may play out in different countries outside America. This could be comparative analysis that may need more cases to be carefully selected in drawing conclusions. There could also be specific studies on

the individual cases of affected victims that have risen beyond the negativity to rise to their highest in their political field. There is also the need for studies that would include some quantitative methods which would focus solely on college girls since they are the future of American female politicians. Also, the quantitative methods would allow more women to participate in the project. The greater number used for the research would increase the validity of the findings.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS

1.   Profession

      A) Student B) Other (Mention)

2.   Age

  A)   18-24 B) 25-30 c) 31-40 d)

  3. Education

A) Basic B) high school C) Tertiary d) None

  4. Marital Status

Single B) Married c) Never married) D) widowed e) other

SECTION B: CONCERNS AMONG WOMEN OVER PAST INTIMATE DIGITAL MEDIA AND THE IMPACT ON A POTENTIAL RUN FOR OFFICE AT ANY LEVEL.

     5.   Do you have any intimate digital media from the past?

     6.   Would it be necessary for media, opponents, and electorates to bring it up today?

     7.   Would you be concerned as an individual, if this should come up?

8.   What would drive you to be concerned if such intimate digital media is submitted to the general public, nature of intimate digital media/ person in possession/ pure embarrassment/ career failure/ relationship concerns)?

9.   What would be your reaction if intimate digital media from your past comes up today?

10.   How would you expect your party to react towards it?

11.   Do you think it has any impact on the decision of the electorates? (If so, what are they?)

SECTION C: COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM

12.   Do you consider this as a problem?

13.   Why is this a problem to you?

14.   How do you understand this kind of problem?

15.   What actions can you put in place to ensure that this problem is solved?

16.   Are there anyways you find inappropriate in solving this problem?

SECTION D: FACTORS THAT WOULD AID WOMEN IN OVERCOMING THIS IMPEDIMENT IN OPTING TO RUN FOR OFFICE

17.   Do you think there are any resources women can depend on to overcome this challenge in running for office?

18.   (If so), What are these and how would it aid women?

19.   In what ways do you think your party, family, friends, colleagues can assist you in overcoming this impediment?

20.   Are there any ways in which the government can aid in overcoming this impediment?

21.   Are there any personal means you can use in overcoming this impediment?