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**A League of Their Own: A Textual Analysis of the Spiral of Silence, Media Representation,
and the Intersection of Gender and Race in Politics**

Asya Symone Robinson

Seton Hall University

Master's Project Primary Adviser: Ruth Tsuria, Ph.D.

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Communication
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ 07079
2021**

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION AND THE ARTS
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL PRESENTATION

Master's Candidate, Asya Symone Robinson, has successfully presented and made the required modifications to the text of the master's project for the Master of Arts degree during this Spring 2021 semester.

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Primary Adviser:

Name (printed)	Signature	Date
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Adviser:

Name (printed)	Signature	Date
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Abstract

Within the past fifty years, women and women of color have become active in the USA political sphere. However, there is still a visible gender and racial gap in politics that can be associated with uneven societal progression. This gap is documented through the media representation of women in politics. Analysis of the media coverage of Geraldine Ferraro, Sarah Palin, and Kamala Harris revealed four themes: Experience, Strength, Likeability, and Appearance. These themes are used to misrepresent women in politics and influence voter evaluations. This study analyzed how the layer of the evaluations is dependent upon not only gender but also race.

Keywords: politics, media representation, gender, political communication, spiral of silence, women in politics, race, sexism, textual analysis

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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Introduction

The American political institution has long been regarded as an entity only entered by individuals that uphold the most ethical and selfless characteristics and beliefs for the greater good. Since the inception of the United States, those who were deemed as worthy individuals were mostly white, Anglo-Saxon men. In the most recent century, people of color, women, and women color have created space within the political institution to expand the idea of what a politician could look like. Within the past fifty years, black women and other women of color have left the margins and claimed space among their white, male peers. However, there is still a visible gender and racial gap in politics that is associated with slow and uneven societal progression. This gap is documented through the media representation of women in politics. How they are represented during campaigns and after, can affect how female politicians are evaluated by voters.

According to a study conducted by UN Women, 21 countries have or had a woman serve as Head of State or Government (UN Women, 2021). Out of the 195 independent countries that exist in the world, UN Women reported that 119 of them have recorded not having a woman serve in a leadership role within their government (UN Women, 2021). In another study conducted by the PEW Research Center, a 2018 survey concluded that a majority of Americans would like to see women in leadership roles inside and outside of the political sector (Horowitz, Igielnik, & Parker, 2020). While this may reflect progress, this does not negate the structural barriers and expectations women in politics encounter, compared to their male peers. Today's modern woman in politics is not only weighed by her ethics and political acumen, but by those

she surrounds herself with, her appearance, and expansive knowledge that reaches far beyond her peers. By examining the political landscape, this project aims to examine the degree of judgment women in politics, even more, so women of color encounter. Also, analyzing the role of public opinion, media representation, and influence on their campaign experience and voting outcomes.

Women in Politics: A Brief History

There is a long history of the advancement of women's movement through the American political institution. Throughout history, women have made progressive strides in some of the most prominent political offices within the Federal Government. One early example is Victoria Woodhull, a suffragist, advocate, and journalist, who led a Presidential campaign against Ulysses S. Grant in 1872 (PBS, 2016; NPS, 2020). Margaret Chase Smith, the first Congresswoman to serve the state of Maine, became the first woman to be nominated on a majority party ticket at the 1964 Republican Convention (PBS, 2016). Though much did not happen after her nomination, Smith's political experience continued as she became the first woman to serve in both chambers of the United States Congress, and a career that lasted over three decades (United States Senate, 2020). The first black woman elected to a Congressional seat was Democratic representative, Shirley Chisholm in 1968 (United States House of Representatives, 2020). Chisholm was also the only woman among her male peers in the 98th Congressional freshman class (United States House of Representatives, 2020). Her role as a legislator gained national attention; praise and criticism, and her Presidential bid in 1972 only amplified the public opinion surrounding Chisholm's actions in Congress. Forty-four years later, Hillary Clinton won the Democratic nomination and received close to 16 million votes in the 2016 primary elections and won the popular vote the following fall (PBS, 2016). In 2021, Kamala Harris became the first woman of color to serve as the United States Vice President, following the campaigns of Sarah

Palin and Geraldine Ferraro. Though this history showcases progress and the inclusion of women in political spaces, women are still an underrepresented group in America's political institutions and lack in areas of political participation outside of voting (Elder, 2004). However, the lack of representation in politics is the consequence of how the political system was created.

Women & Political Participation

The visible chasm in political participation and running for elected official positions, stems from multiple factors, the main factor being (white) women not acquiring the right to vote until the 1920s. The Women's Suffrage Movement was more complex than previously depicted in historical contexts (North, 2020). The movement championed and managed by the likes of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton was not a revolution for all women (North, 2020). After the ratification of the 19th Amendment, there was an extension of voting rights movements and disputes. The acceptance of the movement in southern states came at a cost; as Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian women's rights were excluded. However, these women were asked to symbolically attend protests and rallies (North, 2020; Schuessler, 2019). The discrimination against women of color persisted, as the ratified amendment only stated that states could not discriminate in voting based on sex; racist laws and policies such as poll taxes, literacy test, and citizenship status, prevented women of color from getting to the polls (North, 2020; Schuessler, 2019). Left at the margins, leading women like Fannie Lou Hammer, Mabel P. Lee, Adeline Otero-Warren, Ida B. Wells, Diane Nash, Mary McLeod Bethune, and others advocated for those like them. Their efforts lead to the Equal Rights Amendment, Indian Citizenship Act, Immigration and Nationality Act, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (North, 2020).

Concluding the progressive milestones that occurred, politics were still considered male-oriented and dominated sector. Andersen's (1975) study examined the elements that contributed to women's political engagement, proceeding the voting rights movements. Andersen's analysis hypothesized key factors, which at the time of the study, generalized that those individuals would not participate in politics unless policies or outcomes directly impacted their life. Meaning, in general, people do not pay attention to politics unless it has an unambiguous connect to their daily life. Secondly, the socialization process of men and women differed. In this context, the socialization process is defined by the "external stimuli", that men and women are exposed to or experience that shape personal aspirations (p. 440). Andersen hypothesized that how men and women were raised, heavily influenced their involvement in certain entities. In varying time periods, women were trained to take on more domestic roles in society, while men were pushed to be career-focused and enterprising. Thus, the nature of politics and the communal disposition on women, created a gap that has continued today (Andersen, 1975). A study by Lawless and Pearson (2008) focused on women running for political positions, further examined the underrepresentation of women. Their study echoed the hypotheses of Andersen and discovered that cultural attitudes towards, "confident, assertive, and self-promoting", characteristics were not widely accepted attributes of women (Lawless & Pearson, 2008, p.68).

From Margin to Center

The documented opinion climate of Americans in the 1930s and beyond, were indicative of the idea that women in positions of power was still not a widely accepted concept, as gender roles and stereotypes were still enforced upon women. According to a Gallup survey in the 1930s, two-thirds of Americans shared they would not vote for a qualified woman for President, and 59% of participants opposed the idea of appointing a female lawyer to sit on the Supreme

Court (Elder, 2004). The survey results reflected the majority opinion and the “norm” of domestic arrangements in the home (Elder, 2004). Since the significance of decades-long catalysts movements such as the Women’s Suffrage and Civil Rights Movement, the public opinion pertaining to women has changed over time. However, like mentioned previously, the change that has occurred, is uneven and only touches the surface. In another study conducted by Bennett and Bennett (1999; as cited in Elder, 2004), in 1996, 21 percent of Americans still held to conservative gender roles, claiming most men were more emotionally capable to work within politics than most women. Proceeding past the stagnant larger opinion climate, women continued challenging the status quo and have been appointed as Supreme Court Judge, and Vice President.

In the United States Congress, a total of 366 women have served in either or both chambers (United States House of Representatives, 2017). Of that number, African American women were elected later than their white peers, as the first black women in the House of Representatives and Senate happened in the late 1960s and early 1990s (PBS, 2016; United States House of Representatives, 2017). The largest wave of women to enter Congress occurred between the 1970s and 2017, which accounts for 70 percent of women that have served in the history of Congress (United States House of Representatives, 2017). Within that percentage, 70 of those women elected to Congress between 1964 until the present day, have been women of color. Forty-seven of those women have been African American (United States House of Representatives, 2007).

As women continued to move towards the center, it did not come without criticism. Many of the criticism being broadcasted in traditional and digital media outlets. The remainder of this chapter plans to review how women nominated for the same political appointment, faced resistance and how this evaluation of their potential role was represented in media.

Three Vice-Presidential Candidates in Focus

In addition to progress on the hill, women have moved towards the second most powerful office within the entire executive branch of our government. Though many women in our political history have made it onto a majority party ticket, this research project will focus on three Vice-Presidential candidates. Geraldine Ferraro (1984), Sarah Palin (2008), and Kamala Harris (2020). Geraldine Ferraro's political resume made her a viable candidate and helped secure the nomination as the first female Vice-Presidential candidate (United States House of Representatives, 2020). During her campaign, she faced judgments in the media for her lack of experience on foreign policy issues, and misdeeds done by her husband soured the energy around the Mondale-Ferraro ticket (United States House of Representatives, 2020). In 2008, Sarah Palin was announced as John McCain's running mate. Prior to her appointment, Palin's political experience became a two-fold issue. Some peers and voters saw Palin as novelty, while others claimed her lack of experience deemed her incapable of the job (BBC, 2016). Additionally, personal matters influenced the opinion surrounding Palin as the knowledge of her 17-year-old daughter pregnancy became a turn-off to the Republican's conservative base (BBC, 2016). In 2020, Kamala Harris was announced as Joe Biden's running mate. Harris, like Ferraro, has an extensive resume accompanied by her terms as District Attorney of San Francisco, California's Attorney General, and seat in the United States Senate (Harris.Senate.gov, 2020; United States House of Representatives, 2020). Like her peers, Harris's appointment did not go without scrutiny and backlash from the public.

Purpose of This Study

Though progression within politics continues, primed by the example of Kamala Harris serving as Vice President, it is evident that pockets of regression are present. Analyzing the

spaces in which the “minority” opinion goes against the larger opinion climate, helps to acknowledge the impactful consequences of uneven progress in society. The specific focus of the Vice Presidency was chosen to examine the similarities and differences in the evaluation these women encountered. Therefore, the guiding research question of this thesis is as follows:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women’s political campaigns?

This thesis seeks to provide understanding of varying influences that contribute to the political opinion expression, attitude strengths, and the function of smaller opinion climates. Which can be defined as pockets that go against the larger public opinion that may be more progressive. A review of scholarly literature across different disciplines including the spiral of silence theory, two-step flow model of communication, critical race theory, and the intersectionality framework, was conducted to inform the analysis of the study. The concluding findings aim to close the gap in the scholarly literature by contributing to the research of the political communication field, exploring the role of public opinion and its connection to media representation and influences.

Summary

This chapter introduced the need to examine the elements that contribute to the climate of support or disapproval surrounding women in politics. Setting a foundation through, briefly reviewing the extensive history of the United States political institution, progress made by women, and women of color in politics and discussing opinion survey results. Chapter 2 provides a review of the scholarly literature in regard to public opinion, government, and media. The review explores the following themes: the role of the spiral of silence in the 21st century, the function of public opinion formation and opinion climates, and the added element of mass-

mediated communication and digital media. Chapter 3 then details the thesis's qualitative comparative case study functionality, including the data collection and analysis process. Chapter 4 presents the research's findings and the thematic interpretations of the data. Concluding with Chapter 5, a discussion about the data, findings, and overall thesis approach will occur.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

To begin the analysis of the spiral of silence theory and how it effects public opinion formation and expression on women in politics, a review of scholarly literature was conducted to understand the assumptions of the theory and the evolution of its theoretical applications since the theory's introduction in the early 1970s. The Seton Hall University online library database and Google Scholar were heavily consulted to gather peer-reviewed journal articles that provided varying definitions and functions of the spiral of silence theory, opinion climates, public opinion, political opinion expression, and attitude strengths. Other scholarly and academic texts, government archival websites, and journal publications were used to gather academic reports, historical facts, and relevant articles to examine the intersection between opinion formation, media communication tactics, and the evaluation of women in politics. For the sake of this literature review, the *opinion climate* is a defining term to explain micro-level or intimate relation to opinions, and *public opinion* is used to define the macro (societal)- level of opinion.

This literature review provides an overview of the spiral of silence theory and its application over time in various studies. The literature review explored the spiral of silence theory's role in the creation of opinion climates and the societal role opinion climates hold, the defining elements that separate public opinion from opinion climate, and the importance of understanding and identifying public opinion. Next, the literature review identified the elements of positive or negative attitudes within opinion climates and varying attitude strengths in the role of opinion beliefs. Lastly, the literature review delves into the theme of media communication tactics and its influence on the evaluation of women in politics.

The review of the literature revealed a gap in the research pertaining to the spiral of silence theory and the intersection of gender and racial discrimination, that led to the development of the following research question:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women's political campaigns?

The following sections present the compiled scholarly literature that led to the development of this question.

Spiral of Silence Theory

The spiral of silence theory was created by German political scientist, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) to identify why individuals have a fear of isolation in their environments (Noelle-Neumann, 1977). The spiral of silence theory is the action that is prompted by a prevailing opinion that is upheld by the majority, such as opinion leaders in a community. Once individuals identify which opinion is in the majority, those with the minority opinion refrain from expressing their opinion publicly (Noelle-Neumann, 1977; 1979). Since its conception, the spiral of silence theory has been identified as an influential principle in public opinion formation and changes. The spiral model itself can be visible through the expression of emerging societal constructs, values, and habits (Noelle-Neumann, 1979). For four decades, the spiral of silence has been defined by various communication and political science scholars. Glynn and Park (1997) explored the spiral of silence theory as an element that moves between micro and macro processes that “incorporates psychological, sociological, and social physiological variables” (p. 214). Commonly, individual's self-identity what they believe to be the majority opinion based on the mentioned variables above and their personal perception of the opinion climate. The personal perception of gauging opinion climate temperament was further explored in Kaid's (2003) study.

Kaid identified key points that elucidated how individuals determined the positions of opinion climates. The first point claims that not only do people scan their environments, but they also examine the behaviors of others around them. Kaid's second point echoes the previous explanation of the spiral model and the "silencing" of minority opinions in majority-opinion dominated spaces. The key elements classified by Kaid, revealed the characteristics of the theory have remained the same, even in present-day society. The significance of the spiral of silence theory still affects individuals' willingness to express their opinions, and the pressure to hide or conform to majority opinions. Specifically, the communication tendencies individuals engage in, regarding politics and political affiliations (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009; Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Shin, & Purcell, 2014; Scheufele, 2007). Therefore, the spiral of silence theory is helpful when investigating public opinion formation and how individuals evaluate others.

SOS Evolution

Researchers have shown that the spiral of silence theory intersected with other communication effects that influence opinion expression (Glynn & Park, 1997; Pomerantz, Chaiken, & Tordesillas, 1995; Salmon & Kline, 1983; Salmon & Neuwirth, 1990; Scheufele & Moy, 2000). In one study conducted by Salmon and Kline (1983), examined the spiral of silence theory in connection to opinion projection and the bandwagon effects. In the context of this research project, bandwagon is defined as movement or cause that individuals join due to the appeal or strength behind said movement. The bandwagon effect influences individual's perception and opinion, in relation to this study, a bandwagon behind a certain candidate can influence voting intentions (Salmon & Kline, 1983). Throughout the study, the authors connected the key elements of each theory and identified similar functions of the bandwagon effects and the spiral of silence theory that can alter an individual's intention to express their

opinion (Salmon & Kline, 1983). Another study by Salmon and Neuwirth (1990) analyzed the extent to which individuals are motivated to express their opinions, supporting the earlier claims from Noelle-Neumann's original study and Salmon and Kline's in 1983.

However, the bandwagon and spiral of silence effects are not inescapable. Pomerantz, Chaiken, and Tordesiallas (1995) applied the spiral of silence model in connection to attitude strength and the resistance process. In their study attitude strength was established as a contributing factor to an individual's place within the spiral of silence. The resistance process was dependent upon a person's strength in the reigning opinion (Pomerantz et al., 1995).

Following this study Glynn and Park (1997) built on the intersection between opinion intensity and social groups. Their findings explored how interpersonal relationships can influence how individuals engage with public opinion. In relation this research project, the evaluation of women in politics can be effected by varying interpersonal interactions which can impact how voters judge female politicians. Scheufele and Moy (2000) were one of the first to comprehensively examine how the spiral of silence theory was conceptualized, the "inconsistent operationalizations" and "macroscopic variables" (p.3) that made the theory what it was. Their comprehensive overview of the previous research took an empirical approach to the application of the theory and the shortcomings of the research conducted thus far.

As technological advances effected thought formation and opinion climates, researchers applied the spiral of silence theory to the mediums of television, radio, and newspaper (McDevitt, Kiouisis, & Wahl-Forgensen, 2003; Price & Allen, 1990). Throughout the media relevancy studies, the media mentioned above were identified as contributing elements of the spiral of silence theory affects. Price and Allen (1990) acknowledged that the media "serves as a conduit" (p.369) for conveying societal pressures on public opinion. Willnat (1996) delved into

the roles of mass-mediated communication and the connection to political outspokenness.

Willnat's findings acknowledged the connection between media influence and political opinion expression (Willnat, 1996). This connection touches upon the function of the two-step flow model of communication. Another study showed interactive media's potential expansion on the public sphere that gave way for more individuals to express their minority opinion (McDevitt et al., 2003). However, one consistent element of the spiral of silence that has not been affected from the added elements of traditional and digital media, are the four yardsticks, introduced by Noelle-Neumann (1977):

“(a) Indicates the difficulty or abstractness of a topic that influences the willingness to interact in conversation. (b) Measures strength of readiness and individual has to stand up for their opinion among contrasting groups. (c) The flow of the prevailing opinion is moving towards conservative or liberal assumptions. (d) Similarly, to two, indicates the degree to which one stands-up for their opinion, is dependent upon the conflicting opinions” (Noelle-Neumann, 1977).

Thus, provided the constituency of the four yardsticks this research project looks to examine how the complexity of politics and women in political positions of power are evaluated and the influence of media communication tactics.

In addition to the intersecting role of media, researchers have also related the theory to specific opinion expressions regarding political affiliations and agreeance on policies and political figures (Lasorsa, 1991; Turner & Sparrow, 1997; Noelle-Neumann, 1959; Perry, 1979; Salmon & Neuwirth, 1990). Noelle-Neumann's (1959) study first noted this intersection between opinion expression, the spiral of silence, and political opinion climate. Her study found that without the “press there is not politically effective, reasonable, and responsibility-conscious

public opinion” (p. 402). Perry’s (1979) study found that the spiral of silence theory supports reasons as to why people do not answer honestly on polls, which is still a subject that researchers continue to explore. Another study conducted by Salmon and Neuwirth (1990) examined the macro-level effects of the spiral of silence theory in accordance with local opinion climate. Their study found that local opinion climates had a bigger influence on the formation of public opinion and opinion expression. Lasorsa’s (1991) study investigated political outspokenness in concern with position popularity, which found that those who had clout within the public could actively speak against the majority opinion. Turner and Sparrow (1997) attributed the spiral of silence theory to the political opinion climate in the 1990s and the lack of accurate information that was prevalent in market research at the time. Additionally, Wyatt, Kim, and Katz (2000) also spoke to the element of political opinion expression and the significant role political discourse plays in determining the opinion climate. They noted that the research that was conducted thus was missing the attribution to the spiral of silence as a precedent in the democratic process. In the studies to follow, other researchers went on to further examine the intersection between the spiral of silence theory, political opinion climates, and political outspokenness to discover the element of attitude strength and other outside influences that effect opinion expression (Grvisman, 2014; Knobloch- Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Neubaum & Kramer, 2018; Porten-Chee & Eilders, 2015). Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng’s (2009) study found that individual’s use of avoiding or selecting “counter attitudinal” media – in the case of this study, newspapers – would influence the audiences’ public opinion expression. This made way for Grvisman (2014) to explain further why audience’s selectiveness in relation to their content – partisan selective exposure – influences their political affiliation and opinion expression. With the literature analyzed thus far, outside factors aside from opinion climates, influences peoples’ opinion expression, such as

selective exposure, situational factors, and environmental and social conditions (Neubaum & Kramer, 2018; Porten-Chee & Eilders, 2015).

Being introduced to a larger opinion climate affected how individuals navigate public opinion expression, thus being a catalyst for self-censorship and expression avoidance (Hayes, 2007). While outside aspects were factored into the spiral of silence research, internal elements had yet to be included as an influence on the spiral. Traditional media expanded an individual's perception of the larger opinion climate and the need to wary of majority opinion. The advances of digital media have expanded opinion environments thus expanding an individual's need to scan their environment and self-censor their behavior in online spaces. An experimental test done of the spiral of silence theory shows the observations of discussion in computer-mediated modes of communication – chat rooms – served as a comparison for opinion expression in face-to-face communication (McDevitt et al., 2003). In this study, the researchers noted participants in the chat rooms had to gauge the majority opinion that was accepted in the digital space similarly to measuring opinion climates in face-to-face interactions. Other studies have furthered explained how the spiral of silence and climate can change opinion expression in digital spaces (Hampton et al., 2014; Yang & Li, 2016). Researchers acknowledge the act of self-censorship varies and is dependent upon the prevailing opinion in the moment, which changes often due to the fluctuating nature of digital media (Hampton et al., 2014; Yang & Li, 2016). The consistent mention to opinion climates throughout the review of literature, proved that it was an important component to the spiral of silence and the overall research project.

Opinion Climate and Spiral of Silence

For the sake of this literature review, the *opinion climate* is a defining term to explain micro-level or intimate relation to opinions, and *public opinion* is used to define the

macro(societal)- level of opinion. Opinion climates gauge the majority view within a particular group of individuals; this could be members of a church, social group, or those of the same political party. Public opinion is the culminative, or collection of opinions from smaller opinion climates that make up the opinion of a society or nation (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009; Noelle-Neumann, 1959;1979; Salmon & Neuwirth, 1990). Defining these terms separately was reflective of the evolution of the literature review over the past 40 years. Opinion climate has been mentioned heavily while discussing the characteristics and functions of the spiral of silence theory. Noelle- Neumann (1959;1979) describes public opinion as a social phenomenon that affects the judgments of knowledgeable and competent citizens and applies pressure on individuals within the space to conform. Salmon and Neuwirth (1990) echoed Noelle-Neumann's sentiments of public opinion as non-monolithic and ideological stances and characterized public opinion as a complex element that plays off of individuals' geographical placement. Such as communities and neighborhoods, that differentiate the varying degrees of opinions. Glynn and Park (1997) state that public opinion is based on individuals' "thresholds" in relation to the opinion of the group. Foss and Littlejohn (2009) describe public opinion as a reflection of the larger society (opinion climate), group values, and societal norms. Echoing the ideologies of the opinion climate was influential to individuals mimicking attitudes and behaviors that would be accepted. The introduction of digital spaces and the use of user-generated content (UGC) as cited in Porten- Chee and Eilders (2015), the relationship between selective content and opinion expression has eliminated the need for others to be fearful of isolation. Thus, creating a spiral of those with minority opinions to gather and express elsewhere with opinions congruent with their own.

Theoretical Characteristics of SOS

Before media influences and the nuances of social media, public opinion was considered static in some instances or fluid and subjected to change in others (Noelle-Neumann, 1977). For instance, in a study by Noelle-Neumann, she explored the methodological applications of the spiral of silence theory, specifically citing John Locke's "Law of Opinion and Reputation" phenomenon (p.144). Noelle-Neumann pulled from the chronicled development of public opinion research to determine four central theses (Noelle-Neumann, 1977). The third thesis speaks to the static nature of public opinion, Noelle-Neumann notes how customs or traditions causes public opinion to become stagnant. Individuals acted accordingly to avoid the consequences of being isolated from the larger society (p. 144). In a later study, Noelle-Neumann conducts a re-evaluation on the nature of public opinion. She expanded upon the nature of public opinion that was discussed in her previous research, this study concluded individual's reverence of public isolation is weighed by our "opinion organ" (1979). This opinion organ allows for individuals to register the feelings around minute and significant concepts, because of our "social psychological mechanisms" or informally known as the opinion organ (p.148). Individuals' observation and perceptions of attitudes, customs, and traditions is the component that causes public opinion to "emerge or vanish" (p.148). Throughout the years of public opinion research in association with the spiral of silence, many researchers have found multiple forms of opinion climates – local or national – and correlation to societal views (Price & Allen, 1990; Salmon & Neuwirth, 1990). In the literature reviewed, opinion climate and public opinion analyzes the impact they have on opinion expression, specifically political opinion expression. Political opinion expression, or outspokenness in certain cases, is the symbol of United States' democracy (Moscovi, 1991). An exchange of ideas, where individuals express or avoid discussing their opinions based upon their level of confidence in the "correctness" of

position popularity (Lasorsa, 1991). The gauge of position popularity influences the individual's perception of opinion congruence, individual's political perceptions, and their level of fear of isolation (Glynn & Park, 1997; Willnat, 1996).

In conservative spaces, the characteristics of the opinion climate and the surrounding public opinions will differ from those in liberal spaces. The spiral within the spiral of silence is indicative that if certain individuals have high opinion thresholds (Glynn & Park, 1997), they will create space elsewhere that is coherent to the minority opinion to fully divulge in opinion expression. Scheufele and Moy (2000) introduced a similar thought, stating that individuals do not care about others and their opinions. They simply are just interested in where the opinions are shifting and will populate next (Scheufele et al., 2001). The egocentric verbalization of opinions has become our current reality, resulting in *avant gardes* and "hard cores" who are resistant to opinion climates due to their attitude strength and ideological beliefs (Scheufele, 2007). The creation of *avant gardes*, in the case of political opinion climates and expression, arise from the acumen of an individuals' political interest, involvement (reading, watching the news, or lack thereof), the indulgence in partisan media (Matthes, Morrison, & Schemer, 2010; Grvsiman, 2014).

The research on public opinion and opinion climates have expanded and gone further in-depth over time in connection to the spiral of silence theory. Through the abounding amount of information available on the functionality of opinion climates and public opinion, we can determine considerable elements that identify the importance of this connection between spiral of silence and how women in politics are evaluated.

SOS Theoretical Importance

Since the first acknowledgement of opinion climates and public opinion, the perception of the group (society) has determined the opinion expression of others. Individual's knowledge and personal connection (age, environments, and issue awareness) to certain issues alter their willingness to express their opinions regardless of negative reactions or positive benefits (Salmon & Kline, 1983; Salmon & Neuwirth, 1990; Willnat, 1996). Though majority opinion climates and public opinion is thought of as mirrors that reflect one another, the expression of minority opinion is a diminutive element with its own sub-influences that contributes to the willingness of an individual to express their opinions in contrary opinion environments, such as morals, time, and media (Scheufele & Moy, 2000). The core of the spiral of silence theory involves the interplay of various influences on individuals, public opinion, opinion expression, audiences, and media messages (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009; Hayes, 2007; Neubaum & Kramer, 2018). The research on the characteristics of public opinions and spiral of silence has shown a significant connection between opinion expression and attitudes; strength, certainty, and extremity. These elements are discussed below, starting with attitude strength.

Attitude Strength

The act of opinion expression is not solely based on the gauge of the opinion climate, it is also influenced by internal elements such as the strength of an individual's attitude. *Attitude* strength is the extent that attitudes embody the impactfulness and durability of information processing and judgments (Krosnick, 2014). The durability and resistance of the attitude describe the persistent or perseverance nature of an individual's unchanged attitude whether it be challenged by contrasting opinions or not (Krosnick, 2014). It is a "commitment factor" to an individual's opinion position (Pomerantz et al., 1995). Attitude strength can be broken down into

meta-attitudinal measurements such as attitude certainty and extremity (Haddock, Rothman, Reber, & Schwarz, 1999).

Attitude Certainty

Attitude certainty, though not a uniform construct, has distinctive dimensions that have varying consequences depending on the level of commitment an individual feels about their opinion (Petrocelli, Tormala & Rucker, 2007; Pomerantz et al., 1995). The consequences of attitude certainty can cause individuals to negate information that contradicts their beliefs, thus indulging in avoidance strategies. This, in turn, creates “hardcore” individuals, who are bound to a set of ideologies and a particular method of expression. Attitude certainty not only affects an individual’s opinion expression, but it also affects their engagement and avoidance strategies of media messages from TV, newspaper, etc. that are incongruent or contrasting views (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). The selectivity that stems from an individual’s attitude certainty, encourages the clarity of their attitude juxtaposition. Attitude clarity, which is a subset of attitude certainty, stems from the cognitive activity of attitude awareness (Matthes et al., 2010; Petrocelli et al., 2007). The line of attitude continuation furthers to attitude correctness, which is “the feeling of confidence that one’s attitude is correct, valid or justified” (Petrocelli et al., 2007). In connection, the spiral of silence theory, attitude strength, certainty, and correctness indicate how likely or unlikely a person will act on an attitude (Haddock et al., 1999).

Noticeably, the tenets of the spiral of silence theory will be relevant to the opinion expression of those who have greater attitude certainty and correctness will feel they are in the best position to speak on a topic because their opinions would not be challenged in a like-minded environment. However, those who feel their opinion is in the minority, or have lower levels of

attitude certainty or correctness, will exhibit avoidance methods in contrasting environments (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Petrocelli et al., 2007).

Attitude Extremity

Attitude extremity, like certainty and clarity, is another measurement of the meta-attitudinal indices (Haddock et al., 1999). It is defined as the extreme involvement, emotion, and thought that influences one's attitude strength (Boven, Judd, & Sherman, 2012). With attitude extremity, individuals are more likely to engage with others who are in agreeance with their attitude and select media that shares congruent information. Thus, creating greater dissonance between counter-attitudinal information and those with different opinions (Pomerantz et al., 1995; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). Extreme attitudes in accordance with opinion expression can lead the individual to express their opinion before gauging the opinion climate and influence the individual's perception of the surrounding attitude climates (Westfall, Van Boven, Chambers, & Judd, 2015). In conjunction with the spiral of silence theory, people with extreme attitudes have a lesser fear of isolation, attitude extremity prompts an "our group versus opposing group" thinking. The security in their attitudes leaves the individual unperturbed to counter-attitudinal opinions and "prepared" to dismiss contrasting claims (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Westfall et al., 2015).

The review of the literature thus far has examined the evolution of the spiral of silence theory, the defining elements of opinion climates and public opinion, attitude strength, clarity, and extremity. The continuation of the literature review will provide a brief overview of the two-step flow model of communication, critical race theory, and the intersectionality framework, in relation to the spiral of silence theory.

Two-Step Flow Model of Communication

The two-step flow model of communication was first formulated and presented by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet in the late 1940s. The model they presented was reflective of research of voters' decision-making in the 1940 presidential race (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009; Postelnicu, 2016). The theory confers that relational communication that occurs among individuals is a stronger influence on public opinion than media outlets (Postelnicu, 2016). The veracity of the two-step flow model of communication has been echoed in opinion climate and attitude strength research to explain individuals' interactions or avoidance in expressing their opinion. Also, similar to the function of the spiral of silence model, the two-step flow model measures within the spiral of silence model, it measures where and how popular opinion is created and circulated. The stipulation of the flow model acknowledges the media effects on public opinion concluding that the mediums individuals engage with influences "opinion leaders" that have an established or notable authority within an industry or social group, who share this information with "less-active members" in the public (Postelnicu, 2016, para. 1).

The habituated nature of public opinion creates a connection between the functions of the two-step flow model and the spiral of silence model. An individual's interpersonal interactions with friends, coworkers, and family, determine their willingness to express or shelter their opinion.

This in turn influences attitude strength, engagement with ideological leaning media and content, and voting behaviors. In a study conducted by Suin Choi (2015), the two-step flow of communication model was examined in social media-based public forums, specifically political discussions on these platforms. The study's concluding research found that social media and the lack of social mediation, created space for opinion leaders' messages to be shared widely and

frequently retweeted (Choi, 2015). Provided how the platform shared the opinion leaders' attitude and viewpoint, the researcher noted how the content inside of the smaller group, accounted for a larger discussion that occurred due to the dissemination of the opinion leader's posts and conversations. In this regard, the distributed information encourages the formation of public opinions within a social media platform, that others share with those in their day-to-day interactions, thus having a macro-level effect on the flow of information (Choi, 2015). Therefore, public opinion research in congruence with media effects cannot analyze the behaviors of individuals as homogenous and uniform (Postelnicu, 2016). The connection to media tactics further expands on the relationship between opinion formation and opinion expression on women in politics. Since politicians are public figures, how they are represented in media can affect the evaluation voters have. Outside of media influence, race also plays a role in how politicians are evaluated by voters, the next section will review critical race theory.

Critical Race Theory

The basis of this study is rooted in analyzing the possible relationship between the spiral of silence and race and the intersection of other identity groups. To fully investigate how this relationship may or may not materialize with women in politics, a synopsis of critical race theory is needed. Critical race theory (CRT) was a framework popularly used in legal studies to examine how institutions operated to preserve the oppression and exploitation of women and people of color (Curry, 2020). CRT establishes the belief that "racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and legal differences that white people create between 'races' to maintain elite white interests within labor markets and politics" (Curry, 2020, para. 1). According to CRT, the act of perpetuating racial injustice does not happen in just extremists' situations such as the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) or the implementation of Jim Crow Laws, but in daily discourse within society

(Foss & Littlejohn, 2009). Given the normality of racism in society, “CRT advocates for careful historized and localized studies of race and racism... mapping the racial landscape,” (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009, p. 231-232). The importance of documenting how race and racial acts function in our society is key to identifying how it manifests in a “post-civil rights world” (p.232). The intrinsic viewpoint of CRT has allowed for its application in women and gender studies (Curry, 2020), thus CRT’s relevance to this study’s leading research question. In addition to the layered element of race, gender also influences how politicians are evaluated by voters, hence the objective of this research project examining women in politics.

Intersectionality

Among the multi-layered core themes within CRT, the emphasis on intersectionality is one of relevance. Intersectionality, a phenomenon credited to Kimberle Crenshaw, delves into the “invisibility of women of color and delineated ways in which women of color are systematically disadvantaged...” (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009, p. 232). Crenshaw, along with other scholars, has argued that the social practices are also rooted in the failure to recognize that “women of color are simultaneously women and minorities” (p.233). The intersection of identity for women of color prompts the experience of sexism and racism in society, the evaluation through CRT has exposed this experience not only occurs at the hands of extreme racism but through day-to-day discourse and microaggressions. CRT calls to context the heterogeneous nature of each individual’s lived experience, analyzing not just overt acts of racism but acts that are dismissed or invalidated (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009). The lens of CRT, together with the spiral of silence model, can examine how public opinion, the temperament of opinion climates, and political opinions function in society.

Summary

The spiral of silence theory constructed by political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974), explained the nature of an individual's preference to shy away from expressing their opinions in majority-opinion-dominated spaces. When studied, the spiral within the spiral of silence exposed the opinion expression of those in the minority. The literature review focused on the function, characteristics, and importance of the spiral of silence theory. The literature review also defined the elements that affect the spiral of silence such as self-censorship, attitude strength, certainty, and extremity. The literature that was examined, revealed a gap in the literature that explored the intersections of the two-step flow model of communication, critical race theory, and the intersectionality framework in congruence with the spiral of silence theory. The literature review provided an overview of the communication flow model, critical race theory, and how intersectionality between two or more identities can affect elements such as self-censorship, attitude strengths, and opinion climates. In response to the gaps in the literature the following research question was developed:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women's political campaigns?

The following chapter, titled "Methods", will further expand on the project by specifying the methodology selected, detailing what will be used for data collection, and how the data will be analyzed. The methods used to develop the project will further examine opinion climates, public opinion, and opinion expression around women in politics, specifically women who have been chosen as Vice-Presidential candidates, and how Ferraro's, Palin's, and Harris's experiences are comparable and diverge.

Chapter 3

Methods

Introduction

This research project seeks to understand the media representation of women in politics and how this influences the perception of their political campaigns. To understand the behavior of the spiral of silence theory in citizens' reactions to political appointments of women, a qualitative comparative case study of media (newspaper, broadcasts, and digital media) was gathered to analyze three different political appointments. The data collection and analysis process informed the investigation of the following research question:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women's political campaigns?

A qualitative comparative case study was selected as the methodology due to the approach's ability to examine one or a few phenomena in-depth (Given, 2008). Additionally, case study research identifies how a specific case is bounded to certain parameters (Creswell & Poth, 2018), in this instance, the bounded system is time, gender, the United States political institution, and media practices. The resulting themes and patterns across the data under review are utilized to explain the evolution of the spiral of silence theory in the three separate cases of Vice- Presidential candidates: Geraldine Ferraro, Sarah Palin, and Kamala Harris. This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the project's chosen methodology, the data collection process, including a rationale for text/document selection, and the data analysis procedures.

Method Description and Rationale

The case study research methodology has been used across several disciplines, such as the social sciences, business, health, to answer a range of research questions (Harrison, Birks,

Franklin, & Mills, 2017). The strength of case study research is the methodology's ability to have an in-depth lens when analyzing cases and heavily considers the "descriptive-interpretive elements" (Give, 2008, p.69). With such a specified focus, qualitative case studies help to achieve a deep understanding of processes and provide an emic perspective of a case (Woodside, 2017). In addition to the strengths of the qualitative case study methodological approach, the direction of the study correlates with the purpose of the case study application. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) and Lapan, Quartaroli, and Riemer (2011), case studies are a good approach when the inquirer has identifiable cases with boundaries and inquisition focus on contemporary events and/or issues to comprehend activities, decisions, and human interactions. The design of case studies can include one or several cases of a similar phenomenon: single-case studies look to examine one phenomenon and multiple case studies look at several phenomena at the same time (Lapan et al., 2011). The purpose of this study aims to compare three different cases, bound within the same systems: gender, time, and political positions. The secondary purpose of this study is to examine the behaviors of support or disapproval in these cases and how the spiral of silence might affect citizen's reactions, according to Lapan *et al* (2011), case studies can investigate behaviors through observation.

There are three methods used in congruence with the case study methodological approach: interviewing, observing, and document analysis (Simons, 2009). Gillham (2000) refers to case study research as a "main" method with different sub-methods that are used to solidify the research. In terms of this study, the sub-methods of interviewing and observation would not have captured the process of the spiral of silence. Especially given the current climate of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, textual/document analysis will be used in conjunction with the case study methodology. It is important to note, there is a difference between the use of documents

and textual analysis. Document analysis examines written text, the physical condition of the artifact, and idiosyncrasies, while textual analysis examines the content and meaning of the text structure and words and phrases used (Given, 2008). Texts, when gathered for data collection, can range from newspaper articles, broadcasts clips, blogs, and social media platforms (Given, 2008). The textual analysis examines the message cues that are depicted through the language, symbols, or pictures of texts (Allen, 2017). The themes, messages, or patterns that are identified through textual analysis, allows the researcher to explore “historical, cultural, political, and ethical” changes (Allen, 2017). Similar to textual analysis, document analysis is used to supplement other research methods to triangulate a study (Bowen, 2009). Given the nature of this study, a qualitative approach to analyzing the themes, patterns, and relationships that exist between the spiral of silence theory and intersectional discrimination women in politics may encounter, should be explored by such means.

Consistent with other research practices, the case study methodology and chosen analysis of textual and document analysis have their strengths and weaknesses. Comparative case study research can be time-consuming, redundant, and in certain cases’ boundaries may not have a clear beginning and endpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 2006). Additionally, the analysis method of textual and document components is also time-consuming, ambiguous in nature, and researchers in the past have questioned the method’s validity (Given, 2008). The following section, “Data Collection”, will review the data collection process, including what constitutes data, and where the artifacts will be extracted from.

Data Collection

As mentioned in the previous section, the goal of this study is to compare the three cases of Vice-Presidential candidates and the cases’ relationship to the spiral of silence theory and the

formation of political opinion climates. To inform this analysis, the study examined publications from varying news outlets including, PBS New York Now (a sub-station for PBS), CNBC, CNN, FOX, and C-SPAN. To reflect the addition of digital media into the news marketing space, Twitter was also examined. The data set was collected from the oldest to the most current events, thus, the research process began with Geraldine Ferraro's Vice-Presidential appointment, post-debate media coverage, and post-election results in media coverage. The timeline which reflected Ferraro's political landmarks ranged from July 1984 to November 1984. Sarah Palin's timeline also reflected her election run, from August 2008 to November 2008. Kamala Harris's timeline ranged from August 2020 to February 2021, which reflects the political landmarks in the initial appointee announcement, post-debate coverage, and post-election coverage. With a difference of almost 36 years, this resulted in a range of broadcast clips, newspaper coverage, and transcripts that were acquired in the data set for each candidate.

The metadata consisted of twenty-two texts, clips, broadcast transcripts, and tweets that were collected through a systematic search that validated each artifact, the texts' relevance to the research study, and accessibility to the archived content. First, newspaper articles, and broadcast transcripts were identified through the online library database searchers. The key terms used to collect the data set included 'Geraldine Ferraro', 'Sarah Palin', and 'Kamala Harris' to develop the initial list of documents and texts. Additionally, the predetermined date ranges were used to narrow the search of articles, clips, and transcripts. The date ranges reflected the boundaries in which these cases have been examined. Simultaneously, the American Archive of Public Broadcasting was used to gather data around Ferraro and Palin's media coverage. Also, LexisNexis University via the Seton Hall University newspaper database was examined to gather broadcast transcripts and articles.

An initial read-through of the articles, transcripts, and viewing of clips was conducted in order to select texts and clips that demonstrated political opinion expression of varying networks with different ideological leanings. This was critical in the data collection process, as it ensures the data gathered reflects the opinion climate around each political appointee. Texts and clips were selected for their relevance to the nature of the research study and the guiding principles and practices of case study research methodology. The use of tweets in this study showcased the evolution of the spiral of silence theory, political opinion expression, and the overall integration of digital media into the mainstream news market. These elements made Twitter a viable source to gather data on the opinion expression of Palin and Harris's run for Vice President.

Given the transitory nature of social media and Twitter specifically, the data collection process for tweets was conducted through a systematic search via Twitter's advanced search tool. Through the search tool, tweets that were posted during the specified timelines surrounding Palin and Harris's Vice-Presidential announcement, post-debate reactions, and election results were collected. Tweets were added to the data set to fully capture the evolution of the spiral of silence theory in the case of women in political positions of power in the Federal Government. During the preliminary examination of texts, and viewing of clips, the articles, transcripts, tweets, and videos were analyzed for their relevance to the central topic of the research study and the leading research question. The themes and patterns found in the data collection were thoroughly reviewed in the data analysis process. The following section, "Data Analysis", will summarize the data analysis process, including the hours spent gathering data and the formation of the data Microsoft Excel sheet.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an integral part of the research process, it involves “simultaneous data collection and analysis”, allowing the researcher to shape the study through notetaking, a generalized coding system, and the comparison of concepts in the literature (Given, 2008, p. 186). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are essential elements of the qualitative data analysis process which include, coding and thematic identification. Coding consists of creating ideas and concepts from “raw data” into “meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments” then placing the data into categories based on the usage in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008, p.85). After creating codes and identifying themes, Creswell and Poth (2018) advise using graphs, tables, or other forms of visual aids to compare the different themes. Therefore, the research study followed the practices of the qualitative coding and thematic identification process. Overall, the research study’s qualitative textual analysis was completed between November 2020 and January 2021. Throughout the weeks of research, 75+ hours were recorded searching for texts and clips, and 30+ hours were recorded for the preliminary read-through and data compilation.

First, the process of data analysis began with the preliminary dissection of articles, transcripts, and tweets to become familiar with the material that would be examined. The initial observation of the language and descriptions used in the data set were noted through notetaking. The observation analyzed the similarities of words and phrases used to describe the candidates. From the initial review of data, the notetaking was translated to a secure word document that served as a data coding catalog. The creation of this document aided the analysis process by providing accessibility to the entire data set.

Next, broad categories and possible themes were developed to serve as a set of codes. The codes were placed into the word document to categorize the themes and patterns that informed the following read-through and interpretation of clips. During this step of the analysis process, the data set was examined to create comparisons among the three cases. While comparisons across cases were being identified, the analysis process was informed by feminist and race theories like the critical race theory and the intersectionality framework. Within the document, quotes and clip time stamps were compiled and organized based on themes. For each quote and time stamp, the document included the context of the statements, thematic interpretations of the statements, and connections to other thematic statements made in the other cases.

Lastly, as the patterns emerged across the compiled data set, another readthrough and viewing process began to continuously review the compiled data to assess the themes that emerged during the preliminary readthrough. The multi-step process of analyzing the data allowed for several themes to be identified and adapted to reflect new connections that were found. The data set in the word document was transferred to an Excel spreadsheet that furthered the analysis process. The data within the Excel sheet was categorized by the case study, meaning each subject of the study had their own sub-sheet within the Excel sheet. Within the separate sheets, the main themes found across the larger data set were placed into a separate table with color-coded tallies associated with the links to the varying media outlets. The color-coded system was created by organizing the data by outlet, media type, thematic expression, and specifically for broadcasts, the clips and transcripts were split even further by regular news programming and special coverage with relevant time stamps. Through the repetitive act of reviewing the data, the only themes that appeared across the three cases were included in the study's findings to

triangulate and ensure the validity of the themes that were discovered. The results of the data analysis process will be discussed in the following chapter title, “Findings”.

Limitations of the Method

There are unavoidable limitations within a qualitative study, particularly the usage and practical application of case study research methodology and textual/document analysis. The literature surrounding the practices and nature of the case study methodology has acknowledged the time-consuming nature and drawn-out analysis process that can take place (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008). The limitations also are dependent upon the fluidity of social media posts, most of the tweets that were gathered relied heavily on the process of examining tweets through the strategic search system. Which was limited due to the fluidity of social media and the removal/deletion of older tweets. Similarly, the textual analysis relies on the interpretations that have been concluded by the researcher which complicates the triangulation and validity of the research project (Given, 2008). However, the predominant limitation of the study was gathering all digital sources. This created a barrier in access content on larger network archives like MSNBC, ABC, and FOX. Additionally, degraded videos and not properly transcribed clips were other obstacles met in this research project.

Summary

As previously stated, the selected qualitative approach to the research study was the case study methodology, with the added element of textual analysis used to triangulate the study. After examining and considering the strengths and limitations that exist within these methodologies, it was determined that case study and textual analysis were the best choices to capture the spiral of silence evolution, media representation, and opinion climates through

varying communicated messages regarding the three cases of Vice-Presidential candidates. The methodology and analysis were used to examine the following research question:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women's political campaigns?

The approach used to examine this research question allowed for an extensive review and examination of newspaper articles, broadcast clips, transcripts, and tweets. The leading practices of textual analysis allowed for these data artifacts to be reviewed and validated to accurately identify themes and patterns within these communication messages. The study's findings and thematic analysis are presented in Chapter 4 titled, "Findings", then Chapter 5 proceeds to the discussion of the study.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

A comprehensive review of the scholarly literature pertaining to the political communication field's relation to the spiral of silence and the formation of opinion climates discussed the following: the role spiral of silence in opinion formation, opinion expression, the varying degrees of attitude certainty, and how this intersects with the following communication theories and frameworks. The theories include the two-step flow model of communication, critical race theory, and the intersectionality framework. These theories elicited a gap in the scholarly literature regarding the effect the spiral of silence has on women in politics. Specifically, the opinion formation and expression surrounding gender and race. Therefore, this research project sought to answer the following research question:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women's political campaigns?

As detailed in Chapter 3, this research project conducted a qualitative comparative case study of three Vice-Presidential candidates, Geraldine Ferraro, Sarah Palin, and Kamala Harris. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, four themes emerged as areas of comparability across the three candidates' experiences under review. The four themes included: (1) Experience, (2) Strength, (3) Likeability, and (4) Appearance. The following chapter provides evidence of each theme's presence within the experience of the candidates' political run and the intersection of the spiral of silence. Divided by theme, the discussion of each theme features a sub-heading pertaining to each candidate, followed by an analysis of the theme's relevance to the

leading research question. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a summary and brief introduction to the project's resulting discussion in Chapter 5.

Theme #1: Experience

In politics, experience is a large part of the evaluating criteria among voters and their assessment of the candidate (Carey & Lizotte, 2019). Diplomatic ability, political career, public service, and other related skills separate electable politicians from their competitors.

Candidate #1: Geraldine Ferraro

As a career politician Geraldine Ferraro garnered experience in foreign policy, national security matters, and other national operations. While conducting research, the political experience did not benefit all candidates uniformly. During her candidacy to run for Vice-President, Ferraro's abilities were called into question, consistently, by opponents and members of the media. This was reflected in news segments, special TV coverage, and newspapers, where Ferraro received ongoing criticism throughout the campaign. In a nightly news segment from *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* (Appendix A, timestamp 16:15-17:10), a reporter conducted a focus group the night of the Vice- Presidential debate between Ferraro and George H.W. Bush. The portion of the clip showed the participant's evaluation of how Ferraro did in the debate. Some of the participants undermining her foreign policy knowledge, framing her as naïve, and criticized her debate stage presence. One participant, George Thrush, said, "She came across, I should say to me at least as being somewhat naïve, specifically the disbarment issue where she suggested that all you need is a strong-willed administration. And I certainly don't agree" (timestamp 16:27 – 16:42). The female participants in the group commended Ferraro's efforts in showcasing her political familiarity, "I was very impressed with the amount of effort she's taken to educate herself on it, and I was impressed with her sincerity," shared Karen Howell

(timestamp 16:43 – 16:52). This difference in attitude might be explained based on the participants' gender. A study conducted by Carey and Lizotte (2019) explored how their political experience was judged differently by men and women voters. One of their findings concluding that a candidate's experience varies depending on a citizen's gender bias (p. 245). The participants' reactions above exemplify how these gendered biases might impact voters' evaluation of female candidates.

In the actual debate (timestamp 17:16 – 17:24), candidate H. Bush poked at Ferraro's knowledge on foreign issues, "Let me help you with the difference Ms. Ferraro, between Iran and the embassy in Lebanon...". Ferraro did respond condemning Bush's behavior (17:24 – 17:30), however, this continual criticism by men affects the evaluation of voters. Despite this, Ferraro was elected to three Congressional terms in New York's 9th District, where she sat on several committees that confronted issues on healthcare, housing, taxes, and more (House of Representatives, 2021). Prior literature has supported evidence that "gender stereotyping of candidates affects evaluations of issue competency and traits", (Carey & Lizotte, 2019). Women in politics are deemed competent in areas such as healthcare and women's issues, while their male peers are acknowledged as competent in economic issues and national security (Carey & Lizotte, 2019). The analysis of the broadcast clip that aired the focus group and clips of the debate, shows that men and voters apply gender bias when evaluating the political experience of female candidates.

Candidate #2: Sarah Palin

Between the political campaigns of Ferraro and Palin, the public opinion around women in positions of power shifted between the 1980s and the early 2000s. Instead of more candid comments from voter evaluations and members of the media, this type of criticism transformed

to subtle or ‘dog-whistle’ phrases. In the case of this research project, *dog-whistle* means an “inclusion of code words or phrases that will be heard by some of those listening, while not disturbing the other listeners” (Urban Dictionary as cited in Perlman, 2016). Despite this apparent shift, experience remained a critical conversation in Palin’s campaign. After her Vice-Presidential nomination, an article written in the Catoosa County News newspaper by journalist and conservative advocate William Rusher noted, “It isn’t that [Palin] was an obvious choice selected because of a record of stunning achievements... it is going to take more than Palin’s undeniable charm and vivacity to power the GOP to victory...”. Palin did not have a lengthy political resume compared to the other cases investigated in this research project. Prior to her appointment, Palin’s career started in 1992, running for city council, Mayor, and winning the general election in the fall of 2006 to become Governor of Alaska (n.d., 2020). Due to the appointment being her first experience on a national stage, Palin’s experience was not a topic that many spent much time evaluating because it was evident that compared to her opponents she would lack in certain areas of national political awareness.

Candidate #3: Kamala Harris

The climate surrounding Palin differed in comparison to Harris due to the difference in political experience. Harris’s political career included District Attorney of San Francisco from 2003 until 2010 before being elected California’s Attorney General. In 2017, Harris was elected to the United States Senate. During her time in the Senate Harris was on various committees that had oversight over national affairs, issues, and public works (n.d., 2021). Given her experience of over 10+ years, Harris’s expertise was not a prevalent topic in traditional forms of media, such as daily news coverage. However, Twitter became the epicenter of discussing her political acumen (see Appendix A). One of the tweets claiming Harris’s progression in politics was based

on her personal relationships, hinting at her performing sexual favors. This Twitter user claimed that because of Harris's political connections to male politicians, she would not want any woman in her life to look up to an individual who has used "herself" to gain political traction. A prominent political figure Marco Rubio also tweeted about Harris, claiming that voters would not want a woman so close to the nuclear codes. As previously discussed, men engaging in gender bias severely affects how women in politics are evaluated by voters. Because voters depend on "cues from the political environment or the candidate themselves to draw conclusions about the candidate's traits and make an evaluation" (Conover & Feldman, 1989 as cited in Carey & Lizotte, 2019). In another Tweet, a user [@MojoKookamunga, 2020] shared a meme of

Figure 1 (Twitter, 2020, October 8)



Harris in a dominatrix manner with a leash around her running mate's neck (see Figure 1.1). This lens of gender bias has and can continue to become a disservice to future female campaigns and create a negative relationship between female politicians and voters.

Theme #2: Strength

For this research project, political strength describes a candidates' stamina, endurance, and "power-seeking" (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). Normally gender stereotypes do not depict female politicians as power-seeking individuals, instead they are seen as "communal, sensitive, warm, caring," and other attributes that relate to maternal characteristics (Okimoto & Brescoll,

2010, p. 1). These gender stereotypes work against women campaigning for powerful roles, specifically in politics.

Candidate #1: Geraldine Ferraro

During Ferraro's campaign, her political gusto was analyzed in the public eye mainly before the Vice-Presidential debate. In a news segment from *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* (time stamp 12:03 – 12:10), an interview with then Vice-Presidential candidate, George H. Bush. The interview question shared by Lehrer prompted Bush to discuss his opponent, "Have you had to develop a special strategy because Geraldine Ferraro is a woman," Lehrer asked. While the interview only touched upon the notion Ferraro did not have the political stamina to face her opponent during the debate, traditional media outlets also questioned her political strength to pull a majority of women voters and handle a position that had such proximity to the most powerful seat in the United States. In the aforementioned focus group segment, one participant shared, "We're not just electing a Vice President. We are electing a potential President – heartbeat away is the coined phrase. I don't think to assume the position of President of the United States, she has adequate depth". Power-seeking and strong characteristics are mostly associated with masculinity and since Ferraro was a woman, voter's evaluations of her did not see her as a suited candidate to garner political power. In a transcript from the *Ten O'clock News*, women voters were interviewed about Ferraro's candidacy. One woman saying, "If anything ever happened to Mondale – God forbid – I was concerned as to whether or not Geraldine Ferraro was really capable of taking over the country in his place". The opinion formed surrounding Ferraro's strength assumed she would be unable to handle the role of the Presidency if something were to happen to her running mate, Walter Mondale.

Candidate #2: Sarah Palin

The majority of the data that arose from examining Palin's political strength came from discussions on Twitter. The running hashtag, #differencebetween__andSarahPalin (see Appendix A), contributed to the larger conversation of Palin's lack of national experience. One tweet saying, "Do you think Sarah Palin knows the difference between the Red Button and the Easy Button" (Appendix A). This connection between Palin's lack of political knowledge and how well she would be able to handle the position again is reflective of gender norm's that are placed upon women. The sole purpose of the hashtag was to highlight that Palin did not know what she was doing and express that she did not have the agentic character, nor qualifications, to become Vice-President. In traditional media, post-debate coverage also discussed Palin's fortitude. Political commentator and Journalist Ken Lovett mimicked the sentiments of the Lehrer interview with Bush over 20+ years ago. He shared, "There were questions about whether or not she could she stand-up to Joe Biden, whether she was up to the task of even a Vice-Presidential debate". Additionally, in an article in the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, a small column published a female conservative endorsement reneged. "Kathleen Parker, writing on the National Review Online, says that her 'cringe reflex is exhausted' after watching the Alaska governor stumble through TV interviews and it has become clear Palin is out of her league...". This portion of the article again highlights how gender stereotypes negatively affect the evaluation of supporters. The majority of the evaluations played up her lack of national political experience to further the narrative that Palin did not have the political strength to benefit the Republican party or the United States.

Candidate #3: Kamala Harris

Once announced as the Vice-Presidential appointee for the Biden campaign, some outlets did a review of Harris's original campaign for the Presidency in January before dropping out in

March. During analysis of this data, this can be seen as a slight against the longevity of Harris as a politician, who had a three-month-long campaign that did not raise enough funds to continue. For example, when the *National Public Radio* (NPR) mentions that "...but Harris struggled to articulate a clear reason for her candidacy in a crowded field, and her campaign experienced bouts of infighting" (Detrow & Sprunt, 2020), it is another example of traditional media outlet illustrating the areas in which Harris lacked in political stamina. On Twitter, live-tweeting during the Vice-Presidential debate and post-debate tweets displayed users' reactions to Harris and Pence's interactions with one another (Appendix A). Some were saying she "looked completely out of her depth", "buffoonish facial expressions over answering questions", "valley girl", and "smug and narcissistic" were just a few Tweets that evaluated her behavior on the debate stage. Based on the Tweets gathered, the opinion climate surrounding Harris's stage presence was judged differently than her opponent. While most of the Tweets about Pence discussed the fly on his head, some Twitter users continued to diminish Harris's level of professionalism on the debate stages. Again, the data shows that not only are gender stereotypes involving the strength of women problematic, but these stereotypes also set a standard of how women in politics are supposed to behave (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). Harris's popular rebuttal, "I'm Speaking", to Pence was an exhibit of "male" characteristics, prompting a backlash on Twitter. For example, one tweet specifically claimed she was acting "self-righteous like Hillary" (see Appendix A). The data that emerged during Harris's investigation confirmed that the absence or the possession of political strength is a liability in the eyes of voters.

Theme #3: Likeability

The previous themes, experience, and strength are elements that can be supported by a candidate's political experience or actions on the campaign trail. Likeability however is

contingent upon other influences that a candidate may not know are contributing to voters' evaluations. The likeability of a candidate has a large impact on voter evaluation and relationships with the candidate's competency and trustworthiness (Teven, 2008).

Candidate #1: Geraldine Ferraro

While there is considerable evidence alluding to Ferraro's likeability overall with voters, the main focus examines her pull and attraction to women voters. A clip from the *Ten O'clock News* shared, "Women's groups wanted Ferraro because win or lose she would help women crash through the barriers they face when they run for office in America," reporter Christy George said (time stamp 1:40 – 1:45). Being the first woman on a major ticket played in Ferraro's favor with female voters. The exposure on such a national stage showed female voters evaluated her as a serious contender including, some female interviewees who expressed sympathy for how Ferraro was treated on the campaign trail. Though her likeability was not a prominent topic outside of female interviewees, the importance of her relationship and representation of voters became a bigger conversation over the years. In the year of her passing in 2011, a *New York Times* article shared how Ferraro's campaign extended the women's movement (Martin, 2011). It seems that the initial positive evaluation with voters overall lasted well beyond her political career. Relevant to the base of the research, Ferraro's campaign reflected the change that occurred over time. The weight of her campaign has helped to support the further involvement of women in politics.

Candidate #2: Sarah Palin

During Palin's candidacy, the degree of likability she had with voters was described as a negative asset for her running mate John McCain. In Appendix A (time stamp 18:45), PBS Wisconsin's segment *Here and Now* mentioned, correspondent Frederica Freyberg asked, "She's

gangbusters at the convention, is she outshining him and what is the danger there?” This is one of the many comments on traditional media platforms that Palin’s likeableness was highlighted as a negative influence on her campaign. However, in a segment from *New York Now*, political commentator Irene Liu said, “These nice sound bites play very, very well and the folksiness shows the warmth...”. This was evident that Palin’s personality had dual ramifications to her campaign experience. While people enjoyed seeing her on the trail and viewing her debate stage presence, it also contributed to why voters evaluated her as unprofessional and not experienced enough for the role. This data uncovered in this theme shows that women in politics face contradictory standards while campaigning. Although power-seeking traits in male politicians aid their popularity with voters, it creates biasing effects against female politicians (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). Voter’s likeability or lack thereof for Palin was consequential of her running for Vice President. When comparing her likeability among voters to Barack Obama, Obama was complimented during his campaign on his rapport with voters.

Candidate #3: Kamala Harris

Traditional media outlets did not tackle the topic of Harris’s likeability among voters outright. This was the first case in which the data gathered from Twitter supplemented what was missing from the traditional media sources. Twitter users voiced their grievances

Figure 2

with the then Vice-Presidential candidate (see Figure 2), one comparing her to the 2016 Presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton. The comparison of the two women highlighted the controversy over the 2016 election and her lack of likeability among voters. An article written by *The Guardian* discussed why Hillary Clinton lacked in that area with voters, citing her Wall Street



connections, the Benghazi attack, and more (Carpentier, 2016). Other users griped with Harris's intersecting identities, this data was the first to discuss voter's evaluations on Harris's race and

ethnicity and how race plays a role in likeability in black and POC

Figure 3



candidates. Some black Twitter users claimed Harris being of South Asian decent did not make her “black enough”, one user specifically saying because of her mixed-race Harris could “double-dutch” in and out of blackness to be a pet of white supremacy” (n.d.

[@GRE8TBLACKSHARK], 2020) (see Figure 3). In

her *Vogue* interview, the interviewer credited Harris's popularity among voters as the “Obama effect”, due to her being a representative for a certain demographic, garnered her enough attention. While analyzing this data, the researcher deemed this a slight to Harris's ability to gain traction with voters. However, during Obama's campaign and presidency, he received praise for being the first African American to win the Presidential Election. Though some questioned his citizenship, others never deemed him “not black enough”.

Theme #4: Appearance

Voter evaluations not only examine the experience, strength, and personality of the candidate, the outward appearance of politicians is also being judged (Gunn, 2016). Though it may seem trivial, the appearance of a candidate can even affect election outcomes (Rosenberg et al., 1986 as cited in Mattes, Spezio, Kim, Todorov, Adolphs, & Alvarez, 2010). In the most recent election cycles, politicians' appearances have aided in their campaign, gracing the cover of various fashion magazines, including *Vogue*. Ferraro's case did not bring mention to appearance; thus, this section will only cover Palin and Harris.

Candidate #2: Sarah Palin

Appearance became a more prevalent evaluation element during Palin's candidacy. Throughout the campaign, her wardrobe, looks, and even tone of voice were discussed, in the data collected almost all of the media reviewed discussed some part of Palin's appearance. In a post-debate discussion on *New York Now*, the commentators shared how they felt each candidate handled the debate, one shared (time stamp 13:48), "... Style wise she was very folksy and warm," Ken Lovett said. An article in *Vanity Fair* did a breakdown of

Figure 4 (*Vanity Fair*, 2008)



how much Palin's RNC outfit cost, providing readers with a detailed account of the designer brands and price of each piece (see Figure 4). This kind of coverage was not done on her running mate, John McCain, nor her male opponent Joe Biden.

The addition of social media, especially Twitter, also created space for commentary outside of traditional media to be documented. Unlike the nature of meme culture today, most of the tweets were text-based content (see Appendix A), one criticizing Palin's mannerisms as overly sexual. Other users showcased disdain for Palin's behavior overall during the campaign (see Appendix A), claiming her word choice was a part of her "cute woo-in". The researcher did not deem the response to her appearance good or bad, but the data in Palin's campaign experienced highlighted how women are hyper-sexualized in society. The comments surrounding her appearance made Palin out to be the typical beauty queen, another component to downplay her political experience.

Candidate #3: Kamala Harris

Throughout her campaign experience, Harris's style and even speech deliveries were dissected in portions of the media. Her February 2021 *Vogue* cover described her time on the campaign trail, "In Bethlehem, Harris was charismatic at the microphone, sounding down-home and authoritative, even when she stumbled... before falling into that

Figure 5 (*Vogue*, 2021)



sometimes-awkward laugh of hers..." (Okeowo, 2021). Though described as authoritative, Harris's *Vogue* Cover projected a lacks/apathetic demeanor (see Figure 5). On Twitter, Harris's demeanor on the trail became the epicenter of discussion (see Appendix A), specifically referring to her interactions with men in politics making sexually suggestive memes. Some of the memes referring to Harris as a hoe, others placing her in a dominatrix stance with Biden on a leash. This data again contributed to the conversation that women in powerful roles are hypersexualized, and their accomplishments are usually traced back to their interpersonal relationships and outward appearance. Since Harris was a young political professional, her interactions with older political male figures were deemed sexual by users on Twitter.

Comparing the Themes

This chapter provided a detailed presentation and thematic interpretation of the research findings. Four themes emerged as areas of comparability across the three different Vice-Presidential candidates' campaigns. The themes are as follows: (1) Experience, (2) Strength, (3) Likeability, and (4) Appearance. Each theme played a pivotal role in the media misrepresentation

of the candidates that influenced voters' unfair evaluations of the candidates. While theme #4 Appearance, did not relate to Geraldine Ferraro's campaign experience, the media representation during her campaign was based solely on traditional media platforms. The theme of appearance became relevant to Palin's and Harris's experience due to the addition of digital media and the nature of social media use. Voters were able to express their political grievances in real-time openly and consistently about candidates. The other themes, experience, strength, and likeability however were repeatedly present in all three candidates' evaluations. Working incongruence, the themes can be seen as significant indicators that shape how women approach campaigning.

Summary

The research's findings are related to the guiding research question as they reflect how the spiral of silence, opinion formation, and political opinion expression affect women in politics. The review of scholarly literature, the data's findings, and thematic interpretations informed the development of the leading research question:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women's political campaigns?

In Chapter 5, these themes discussed in conjunction with the two-step flow model of communication, critical race theory, and the intersectionality framework will be used to compare and acknowledge the differences of each candidates' campaign experience. The following chapter also discusses the research project's limitations and potential directions for future research.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Introduction

The unfair representation of women in politics highlights how voters perceive female candidate's political expertise. This specifically influences voting behaviors, public opinion, the perception of women in positions of power, and women's overall political engagement. This systematic deprecation of female politicians and a gap in the scholarly literature, the research project sought to understand the evaluation of women in politics in connection to the frameworks of the spiral of silence theory, critical race theory (CRT), the two-step flow model of communication and the intersectionality framework effects on opinion formation and political opinion expression. A qualitative comparative case study was conducted to compare the experiences of three female Vice-Presidential candidates. The data collection and analysis process informed the examination of the leading research question:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women's political campaigns?

From this research, four themes emerged in the three Vice-Presidential candidates' experiences and media representation. These four themes were (1) Experience, (2) Likeability, (3) Strength, and (4) Appearance. Informed by the research project's findings and previous literature review, this chapter presents a discussion of the four prevalent themes, the addition of digital media, and relevant theories and frameworks.

In Chapter 1, "Statement of the Problem", the American political institution is acknowledged as a flawed system that has experienced slow progression over time. Key elements that have influenced the inconsistent progression in politics are male-made structural

barriers and nonsensical expectations for women in politics to encounter. Given the relevancy of the topic in today's political climate, this led to the creation of the leading research question.

In Chapter 2, "Literature Review", the previous academic literature explored the influence of the spiral of silence theory and its theoretical connections to opinion formation, attitude strength, and media evolution. As a result of the explored literature, the spiral of silence theory created by German political scientist, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) became the foundation of this research project. After discovering a gap in the literature that, lacked to acknowledge the connection between communication and Feminist and race studies such as the two-step flow model of communication, critical race theory (CRT), and the intersectionality framework, influence the evaluation of women in politics.

In Chapter 3, "Methods", using the foundational elements of the spiral of silence theory a comparative case study was used to analyze the media representation of the only three female Vice-Presidential candidates to be on a major party ticket in the American political institution.

Examining the cases to see how they compared and differed in media representation during their campaign runs. This discussion will expand on the previous chapter, "Findings", and dissect the themes that applied to all the candidates, the role of the two-step flow model of communication, critical race theory (CRT), and the intersectionality framework which influenced voters' evaluation of each appointee. Next, this chapter will discuss the research project's limitations and suggestions for further research. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the research question and the overall impact on the field of political communication.

The Use of On-Camera Interactions to Discredit Appointee

The two-step flow model of communication examines the relationship between media influence, interpersonal communication, and public opinion (Postelnicu, 2016). Media influence was noted as a constant in Ferraro's, Palin's, and Harris's campaign experience. During Ferraro's campaign, her opponents would take the opportunity in front of cameras to disparage her political expertise and acumen. One daily news segment on *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, showcased a focus group discussion surrounding the four themes discovered in the data analysis process, each participant expressing caution on voting for a woman a seat away from the Presidency. Ferraro faced more outspoken and candid critiques in traditional media outlets compared to the Vice-Presidential candidates to come after. Though the interpersonal communication of voters was not documented, daily news clips, transcripts, and articles allowed the researcher a glimpse of the larger conversation surrounding the climate of Ferraro's campaign. The focus group segment also contributed to the opinion of voter's assumptions of naivety and unprofessionalism, claiming the position of Vice President was out of Ferraro's political reach.

Throughout Palin's campaign, the habitual nature of the two-step flow model of communication was relevant in written content on digital media platforms. While the candid language changed on traditional media platforms, the addition of social media allowed for interpersonal communication among voters to be documented. Twitter became a place where voters could voice their political grievances or approval of candidates. Similar to Ferraro and Harris, Palin's campaign was faced with questions regarding her political experience. However, this was not the notable element of the discussion surrounding the McCain/Palin ticket. Given her outward appearance, Palin's strength and appearance were hot topics. The running hashtag

#differencebetween__andSarahPalin played on the fact that animals or male political figures would understand concepts or have knowledge that Palin would not. One tweet even compared her to a Pitbull. Palin's demeanor became a double-edged sword however, in news segments that covered the debate, phrases such as "folksiness and warmth"- received apparent praise. On Twitter, her presence on the debate stage was deemed overly sexual and off-putting to voters. Nevertheless, the discussions on news segments and Twitter contributed to the convention of Palin's apparent callowness.

Harris's overall campaign experience did have identifiable elements of the two-step flow model of communication present in the political opinion, surrounding her Vice-Presidential campaign and her win in November. However, given the stark difference of her being a woman of color, the critical race theory, and the intersectionality framework were able to fully capture her media representation.

The Influence of Race in Voter Evaluation

Critical race theory (CRT) is based on the analysis of institutions and the laws that oppress people and women of color (Curry, 2020). CRT claims that racial inequality in social, economic, and legal entities meant to uphold white supremacy (Curry, 2020), affects the normality of people of color in the United States. The importance of CRT in today's political climate helps to analyze how these elements of racism still occur in a "post-civil rights" environment (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009, p. 232). Though CRT was not relevant to the analysis of Ferraro and Palin's campaign experiences and media representation, throughout Harris's campaign being of mixed race brought on another layer of critiques. The discussion around Harris's racial identity sparked speculation of who and what communities she represented. This became the center of conversation concerning her likeability, voters questioning what

communities she could relate ‘fully’ to. With the analysis of CRT, we can spot that not only do racial judgments occur outside of communities of color but internally as well. Within communities of color, black women and others, encounter judgments, discrimination, and criticisms from those inside of their own community (Conroy, Martin, & Nalder, 2020). Harris’s multicultural identity, similar to Palin’s personality on the campaign trail, became a double-edged sword. While some praised having a politician that could relate to many people of colors’ experiences, some voters called to question who and what communities she would advocate for in her position.

Outside of the internal discussion of Harris’s race and ethnic background, Harris’s intersecting identities furthered her criticism in traditional and digital media platforms. Primarily because Black women intersecting identities places them in an “often neglected and invisible category,” (Conroy et al., p. 53). Thus, bringing in the relevancy of the intersectionality framework.

The Influence of Race & Gender on Voter Evaluations

Intersectionality, a theory credited to Kimberle Crenshaw, explores the systemic disadvantage women of color encounter (Foss & Littlejohn, 2009). Crenshaw, in addition to other scholars, has examined how the foundation of social practices ignore the simultaneous identity of women of color (p. 233). This intersection of race and gender prompts the experience of double-isms: racism, and sexism, in the forms of not only extreme racism but microaggressions and dog-whistle words and phrasing. This was present, for example, in the sexually suggestive memes posted on Twitter. Some memes depicting Harris as a promiscuous individual who seized opportunities with men in politics (Appendix A). The over-sexualization of women of color, especially black women, is a topic that arises when one finds themselves in a

position of power. As a discussion point, many users accredited Harris's political accomplishments to personal relationships. The intersection of Harris's identities overlapped with associated systems of discrimination. The misogyny/sexism she experienced on Twitter differed from her white female peers, similar to the racism/microaggressions she encountered, which differed from her black male peers.

Main Takeaways

The findings of the research project highlighted different elements that contribute to voters' evaluations of women in politics, specifically the three female Vice-Presidential candidates. The themes that emerged during the data collection and analysis process affirmed the systematic media tactics that are used to misrepresent women in media. The themes are as follows: (1) Experience was constantly catechized and challenged by candidates' opponents and media, (2) Strength, similar to experience a candidate's ability to compete and handle a prominent political position, (3) Likeability of candidates emphasized outside elements, such as gender and race, influence on voter evaluations, and (4) Appearance similar to likeability, affects how candidates are perceived, regardless of political background and knowledge. For Ferraro, themes 1 through 3, impacted the level of confidence voters had in her ability to obtain the vice presidency, and the media representation during her campaign only furthered this rhetoric. Palin's campaign experience encountered all four themes and the addition of social media only allowed for those active in smaller opinion climates, to be heard. In Harris's case, most of her traditional media coverage did not affect her campaign experience. However, the Tweets gathered in the data collection indicated that not only does gender impact voters' critiques of candidates, but also race. The four themes indicate the consistent systematic misrepresentation in traditional and new media that can influence how women in politics, campaign.

Limitations

All qualitative research projects pose a varying set of limitations. First, is the limitation of qualitative comparative case study as the research method. There is room for different interpretations of each case due to the contextual factors that were analyzed in this research project. The analysis of the data collected is not quantifiable and is based solely on thematic interpretations. Additionally, the research project's time constraints and available resources affected the generalizability of the research findings. Qualitative methodologies are time-consuming and require the researcher to spend a substantial amount of time collecting, coding, and interpreting data (Allen, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Given, 2008; Stake, 2006). As a result, the findings discussed in this research project only speak to the themes explored in the set limit of sources explored. Outside of the timeline, the consequence of COVID-19 interrupted the process of source collecting, limiting the researcher to online databases and archives. If in a pre-pandemic environment, this would have left room for the researcher to conduct interviews and observations to expand the qualitative research options. Lastly, the addition of social media allowed for the fickleness of 'post and delete' to affect data collection, which affects the generalizability of the overall research project.

Future Research

Provided the limitations of this research project, future research could reflect elements absent from this project. One aspect of furthering the research is the inclusion of the experience of male Vice-Presidential candidates, how their experience differs or compares to the experience of their female peers. By doing so, this study could solidify how men and women are supported differently in politics and how heavily media can influence each gender's campaign experience.

Secondly, another future research opportunity could examine black politicians and how gender affects their political experience. This in turn would further the research of critical race theory, the intersectionality framework, and the sole focus on race can tackle the deeper issue of racial identity and politics. Lastly, how could the experience of women in local politics differ from women in national politics, examining a smaller landscape could provide in-depth analysis of the function of smaller opinion climates and if the exposure of being on a national stage prompts more criticism? Overall, further research is recommended to examine the developing digital media landscape and the effect it has on American politics.

Conclusion

The American political institution has experienced a slow and staggered progression towards reflecting the different demographics within the society it seeks to serve. As women, people of color, and women of color continue up the proverbial ladder, pockets of regression are still ever-present. A review of the scholarly literature pertaining to political communication uncovered the following themes: the spiral of silence theory is the foundation to opinion climate research/investigation, opinion formation is influenced by the interpersonal interaction's individuals engage in, and media communication tactics shape the opinion of candidates. The in-depth discussion of the themes revealed a gap in the literature relating to the experience of women in politics. More specifically, it revealed how women in politics are evaluated and represented in media. This gap led to the research project to answer the following research question:

RQ: How do media communication tactics frame the representation of women's political campaigns?

To answer this question, a qualitative comparative case study of three Vice-Presidential candidates was conducted. Through a systemic and detailed data collection and analysis process, the research project uncovered four themes across the political campaigns under review, to inform the research question. The themes are as follows: (1) Experience, (2) Strength, (3) Likeability, (4) Appearance. The themes expose the systematic strategy of media to misrepresent the political campaigns of female politicians. This misrepresentation can possibly lead voters to question a female candidate's credibility, think inadequately about future female candidates, and possibly influence long-term voting behaviors. The role of the spiral of silence in this research project was used as a foundational element to examine the basis of opinion formation, expression, and attitude strength. Through a qualitative case study methodology, the themes that emerged shaped the 'typical' political opinion formation about women in politics. Through analyzing the three cases of Vice-Presidential candidates' experience over a 40+ year period confirmed the validity of the study. The themes shared in this research project appeared across most of the appointee's media representation. However, appearance was not a part of the data gathered on Ferraro. The investigation of media representation in newspaper articles, broadcast clips, transcripts, magazine articles, and Twitter captured just a glimpse of the evaluation of women in politics. Thus, prompting the question, has society made fundamental changes to how we see women, women of color, and women in positions of power?

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Appendix A




Geraldine Ferraro

Articles	
New York Times: “Woman in the News; Democrat, Peacemaker: Geraldine Ferraro”	
New York Times: “Geraldine Ferraro is Chosen by Mondale as Running Mate, First Woman on Major Ticket”	
New York Times: “She Ended the Men’s Club of National Politics”	
Broadcast Clips	
Nightly News	Features/Special Coverage
MacNeil and Lehrer Newshour	MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour (VP Debate)
Time stamps: 16:08-16:15; 16:15-17:10; 17:15-17:50; 18:46-19:00; 19:40-19:50; 21:53-22:00; 22:46-23:00; 23:20-23:26; 24:29-24:50; 26:02-26:56	
MacNeil and Lehrer Newshour	
Time stamps: 8:20-8:27; 10:57-11:20; 12:06-12:11; 12:20-12:45; 13:35-14:54; 14:58-15:35; 16:38-17:45; 19:00-20:20; 27:33-27:46; 28:57-35:00; 35:53-36:30	
MacNeil and Lehrer Newshour (11/6/1984)	
Time stamps: 11:51-12:05; 36:55-37:05; 38:15-39:00	
Broadcast Transcripts	
Nightly News	Features/Special Coverage
Ten O’Clock News Segment (Ferraro post-debate coverage)	
<u>Transcript highlights:</u> <i>"The theory was that Geraldine Ferraro could help Walter Mondale win women's votes. And, since there are more women than men, win the election. But in practice it just didn't work that way."</i>	
<i>"For some it cost a vote for Mondale. If anything, ever happened to Mondale. God forbid. I was concerned as to whether or not</i>	

<i>Geraldine Ferraro was really capable of taking over the country in his place."</i>	
<i>"She was picked on I think more than a man in her position might have been. I think it's too bad that people were jumping all over her earlier in the campaign."</i>	

Sarah Palin

Articles	
The Catoosa County News: "The Palin Phenomenon"	
Vanity Fair: "Sarah Palin's RNC Outfit: \$7,000 Down, \$143,000 to Go!"	
Sarasota Herald-Tribune: "Writer Takes Back Endorsement of Palin"	
Broadcast Clips	
Nightly News	Features/Special Coverage
Here and Now (After announcement)	
Time stamps: 18:47-19:50; 21:15-21:40	
New York Now Daily Segment (VP Debate)	
Time stamps: 13:36-14:07; 14:09-14:47; 15:08-15:45	
Tweets	
 Aaron Cormier @splارش Do you think Sarah Palin knows the difference between the Red Button and the Easy Button? 12:26 PM · Oct 4, 2008 · Twitter Web Client 1 Like	 Bradley C Hughes @AngelsInTheAl Retweet @Steli: "The difference between Sarah Palin and a pit bull? The dog knows it's not qualified to be president." A harsh but fair call 2:08 AM · Oct 4, 2008 · Twitter Web Client 1 Like

 John Attebury @attebury What's the difference between President Bush & Sarah Palin? (lipstick) 9:08 PM · Oct 3, 2008 · Twitter Web Client 1 Like	 Jon Deal @zuhl Sarah Palin has found that winking and being adorable connects with white male voters. Jeez, what's next? Suggestively eating a banana? 5:29 PM · Oct 3, 2008 · Twitter Web Client 20 Likes
 Brian D Rendel @Attitude This morning I counted the times Sarah Palin said "also" (48) versus Biden (3). Sarah's semantic voodoo, doin' it's cute woin'. 9:29 PM · Oct 3, 2008 · Twitter Web Client	

Kamala Harris

Articles	
CNBC: “Joe Biden picks Sen. Kamala Harris to be his Vice-Presidential running mate, making her the first Black woman on a major ticket”	
CNBC: The case against Trump is ‘open and shut’ says Kamala Harris in her first speech as Biden’s VP pick”	
Vogue Interview: “Vice President Kamala Harris on the Road Ahead”	
Broadcast Clips	
Nightly News	Features/Special Coverage
National Public Radio (NPR): “In Historic Pick, Joe Biden Taps Kamala Harris to Be His Running Mate”	C-SPAN: “Campaign 2020 Joe Biden Introduction of Senator Kamala Harris Running Mate”
Tweets	

