

READING THE VALUES OF LIBERAL FEMINISM IN HILLARY CLINTON'S SPEECH AT THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION 2016

Andra Fakhrian; Dini Nur Islamiyati

(Sultan Agung Islamic University Semarang/ fakhrian.andra@gmail.com)

Abstract

In history, Hillary Clinton is the only female candidate as the president of the United State, and she got the name in politic, and having significant roles as a politician in America. Hillary performs a strong leadership and how the picture of women in the modern era. Thus, this study examines the representative women in the lens of Hillary Clinton. It is also under descriptively qualitative research supported by primary data from the script of Hillary Clinton's speech at the democratic national convention 2016 along with relevant literature as the secondary data. The theory of liberal feminism is used to get a deep analysis of the women's roles in modern society. Now Women seize the same chance for involving their roles in modern society. Women are not only in a domestic sense, but also in masculinity areas.

Keywords:

America, liberal feminism, Hillary Clinton, Women, Speech

A. Introduction

Patriarchy acts a precursor to the women's development and advancement. Regardless about the differences in levels of domination the broad principles remain the same, as the men are in control which keeps women to be subordinated in society. Wirono studied about women's status in politic as reflected in legislative sector in Indonesia which somehow exploits women's position. From the election in 1997 with 57% women voters, women only got no more than 12% representatives. Henceforth, it was similar to the election on the last June, 1999. Worse than previous election, women are only capable of obtaining 6.7% representatives in June 1999 (358). As the

political party conducted the recruitment of legislative members seemed not to trust women to sit in legislative institutions. Thereof, this disbelief rooted in the view that politics is public area related to the Nation's power that men become the center of politic.

In United State, women's history in politics which deals with women's leadership records in 2016 also less dominant than men. Below is the overview of percentage of women's elected office in U.S, 2016 as reported by Center of American Women and Politics:¹

¹ "Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership," *AAUW: Empowering Women Since 1881* (blog), accessed October 27, 2017,

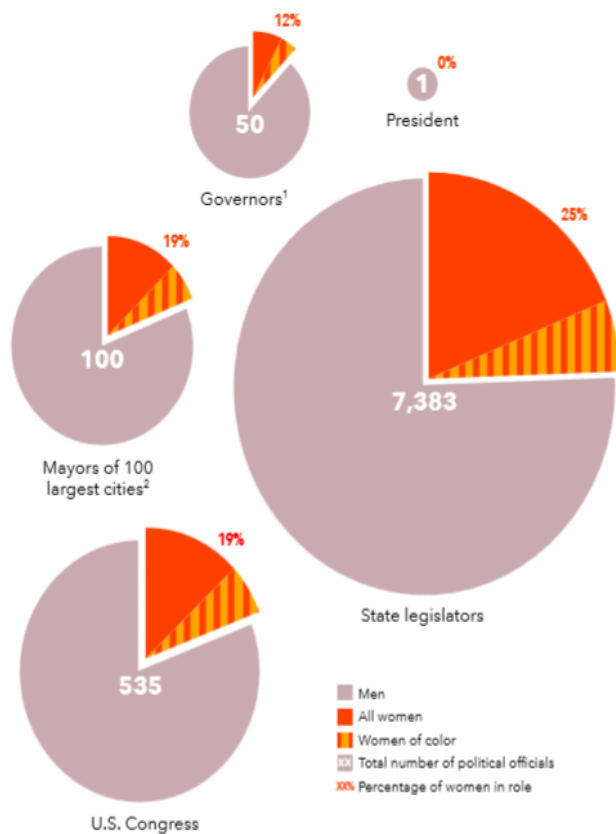


Figure 1. Women's Elected Office in U.S., 2016

As State legislators, women' elected office are only in the percentage of 25% from the total numbers of elected men 7.383. In U.S Congress also showed minim numbers of women's contribution which were 19% from 535 numbers of men. For president, there was 0%. These data prove that gender stereotype toward women still exists even in modern society. Even if women are no longer be exploited in terms of their voice in society, but still the patriarchy sets men in the higher level

<https://www.aauw.org/research/barriers-and-bias/>.

and indirectly against women's right to lead the nation. This supports by Sultana in his article who reveals about women's authority through the lens of common society:

Consequently, all the power and authority within the family, the society and the state remain entirely in the hands of men. So, due to patriarchy, women rights were deprived of their legal rights and opportunities patriarchal values restrict women's mobility, reject their freedom over themselves as well as their property. (7)

Yet a feminism campaign had been done in a few decades, however as the matter of fact in society, women's world with their limits which influence by their biological factor shade and set people's mind to limit feminist's movement for their leadership.

Considering that case, as depicted that "Men are thought to be assertive, dominant, decisive, ambitious, and self-oriented, whereas women are thought to be warm, passive, nurturing, emotional, and friendly. These are gender stereotypes",² Hillary Clinton, the candidate of U.S' President in 2016 was genuinely accepted in society and campaigned her feminist's goal that can be further discussed thought the representative women's view. The records of Hillary Clinton in her carrier in

² Nicole Parcheta, Belal A. Kaifi, and Nile M. Khanfar, "Gender Inequality in the Workforce: A Human Resource Management Quandary," *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (2013): 242.

politics draw the meritocracy between men and women for justice. Therefore, the background of Hillary Clinton with her political experiences in U.S portrays the values of liberal feminism.

In liberal feminism perspective, "liberalism suggests all human being either men or women is created in the equal position, harmonious, and having the same potency and rationality. Women must be independent to struggle so they are equal with men".³ Still, liberal feminism is being portrayed by the responsibility of women by their choice and action toward the individualistic form.⁴ The vision and the background of Hillary Clinton clearly reflect through her speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2016, as she campaigns her framework, as the candidate of U.S's President for the future of America ahead.

This study uses descriptive qualitative research, "qualitative is usually in the form of words rather than numbers."⁵ The qualitative data are sources of well-grounded, rich

³ Aenun Nahdiyati, "An Analysis on Liberal Feminism Values of the Main Character in the Film 'Miss Potter,'" *Universitas Syarif Hidayatullah*, 2009, 18.

⁴ Wellington Samkange, "The Liberal Feminist Theory: Assessing Its Applicability to Education in General and Early Childhood Development (E.C.D) in Particular Within the Zimbabwean Context," *Global Journal Advanced Research*. Vol 2 (2015): 1172–1178.

⁵ Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (London: SAGE, 1994), 1.

descriptions and explanation of processes in identifiable context of words, sentences, utterances, and dialogues. Thus, the primary data is taken from Hillary's speech transcript at Democratic National Convention, 2016, and the secondary data were obtained from relevant literatures relate to the women's status and liberal feminism.

This study is designed to describe about representative women in the view of liberal feminism theory and put Hillary Clinton to be the center of analysis. As she competed Donald Trump on U.S' Presidential election 2016, and got huge votes yet she could not take the White House. However, as considered about the result of the votes, a half of Americans supported Hillary for becoming the President of USA. Furthermore, as the problems of feminist's status in society are still in a hot topic, while women's stereotype still exists, however among of those matters Hillary broke all about women's stereotype in America, and made a campaign for her great leadership, and other capability in terms of masculinity traits to be a President of U.S. Moreover, this study examines Hillary's speech which draws the representative women in U.S with the approach of liberal feminism.

B. Discussion

1. Women's Leadership

For decades, women were under controlled by men. They have no rights and voice to support them to show up in public area. It is true that the tendency for women is should be at home, doing some home's tasks and take care of children and husband. While husband is not at home, women, as the wife and mother, take the job to control and to be responsible for the whole house. Nothing wrong with those kinds of activities since those are lofty jobs. Instead, it shows how women also can be a leader, start from the small society, and it is possible to touch the larger area in the society. The change dealing with women's leadership in the society is performed by Hillary Clinton through her speech in her campaign on July 2016. It was for the US' presidential election, she said,

"In this campaign, I've met so many people who motivate me to keep fighting for change.

And, with your help, I will carry all of your voices and stories with me to the White House.

I will be a President for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

For the struggling, the striving and the successful.⁶

⁶ "Transcript: Hillary Clinton's Speech at the Democratic Convention - The New York Times," accessed October 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/29/us/politics/hillary-clinton-dnc-transcript.html>.

She battled the elected president 2017, Donald Trump, in the presidential election in 2016. She was continuing her step to be the first lady of all Americans after she battled Barack Obama in the previous election. Even though through the two elections she still could not reach the step that she wants, but through her spirit, it can be seen that she is struggling to show feminist movement in order to gain the voice in front of public. Through her speech, she supports that women also can take a role in some public fields that usually did by men. Her act is the portrayal of liberal feminists' thought, "Liberal feminists have moderate aims, their views do not radically challenge the existing values and as such they aim for gradual change in the political, economic, and social system."⁷ This kind of feminism supports women to be brave take the role in any social fields in the society. This kind of feminism insists that women believe and should be believed they can perform it well. And this kind of feminism give the chance for women to share their thoughts, ideas, and contributions to help the political, economic, and social system become better. Start in the political field, as Hillary started, then through politic aspect, the way to enter other fields become smooth since the economical and other social systems are controlled by government.

⁷ Michael Haralambos and Martin Holborn, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (New York: Collins, 2008).

Undeniable, there are some people who are still hesitating the capability of women to be a leader. Since the stereotypes for women are still a weak and gentle creature that should be protected and affected. Those reasons may be a reference why people state that women should to be led not to lead. Instead, to be a leader is not always about strength and physically powerful, moreover in this modern era. Brain, skill, sincerity, solidarity, and responsible are one of the qualifications which should be owned by leader. Of course every human has those kinds of qualification, depends on how the individual control and manage those characteristics. Since men and women are human being, these two creatures certainly have those characteristics, which mean it is possible for women to be leader. Women are trusted to be a leader for their children, help and guide them to reach the higher level of their children's life in the future. Undeniable, there are so many success people in both, career and private life which is supported by the existence and the role of women behind. Rosemarie Tong supports by stating that women should not be limited and forbidden their movement to explore their capability,

"If all women are worse than all men at something, this still does not justify forbidding women from trying to do that thing, for what women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing. What they can do, but

not as well as the men who are their competitors, competition suffices to exclude them from. Because the ordinary way to maximize aggregate utility (happiness/ pleasure) is to permit individuals to pursue their desires. Society must provide women with the same political rights and economic opportunities as well as the same education that men enjoy."⁸

What women needs to support their action is just a credibility from many sectors surround them, the same like they believe in men. Not only in the matter of politics, but also the education opportunities, economic chances, and even who is the leader should be. By gain the same education and equal rights with men, the chance for women to be a leader could be permitted, because those factors teach, guide, and help women to grow leader's characteristics. In the US' presidential election last time, Hillary Clinton showed it by encouraging herself to be a president's nominee 2017 and advance to be a leader for all Americans. In her campaign speech she declared,

"And so it is with humility ... determination ... and boundless confidence in America's promise ... that I accept your nomination for President of the United States!

Now, sometimes the people at this podium are new to the national stage.

⁸ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 3rd ed (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2009), 16–17.

As you know, I'm not one of those people.

I've been your first lady. Served 8 years as a Senator from the great state of New York.

I ran for President and lost.⁹

The credibility which addressed to her from her supporters becomes the power which build her confidence in entering the mega battle which hold once in every five years in America. Her words indicate there are so many people believe in her that she can bring America to be better and gain their American dreams even though they know the fact Hillary is a woman. It convinces that women just need believe by her surround to support them doing something men usually done. Although Hillary lost in voting against Trump, but her achievements in some important positions for America become the proof which shows women's movement can bring a change for society, adds by her performance in US' presidential election.

2. Women's Strength

It is a common topic or even a reality dealing with the weakness of women which is always discussed in many forums. This discussion is not unreasonable since the fact that women always use their emotions and feelings in facing something. Freedman explains,

⁹ "Transcript: Hillary Clinton's Speech at the Democratic Convention - The New York Times."

"women were judged to be less reasonable than men, more ruled by emotion, and thus incapable of political decision-making."¹⁰ This characteristic which distinguishes women and men who always facing any problems logically and circumstances support it. Logical such a usual way which is used by people in solving or reasoning something, and it is used by men commonly. Meanwhile, women are authorized and controlled by emotion and feeling in facing any problems, perhaps it is the reason why women find a bit difficult to solve their problem unlike men. This becomes the indicator to state women are weak. But women can wake their confidence up and rebuild their spirit becomes stronger in living their life. Such Hillary, she came from the down and run to the higher level of her life,

"And I know it from my own life. More than a few times, I've had to pick myself up and get back in the game.

Like so much else, I got this from my mother. She never let me back down from any challenge. When I tried to hide from a neighborhood bully, she literally blocked the door. "Go back out there," she said.

And she was right. You have to stand up to bullies.¹¹

¹⁰ Jane Freedman, *Feminism, Concepts in the Social Sciences* (Buckingham [Pa.]: Open University Press, 2001), 12.

¹¹ "Transcript: Hillary Clinton's Speech at the Democratic Convention - The New York Times."

At first, the same like other women and as expected by the majority, she was weak since she is a woman. She had experienced the difficult times during her past life. But she proves she can stand up again even becomes stronger even though shadowed by the difficulties. By the support of her mother, she can show up to be a strong Hillary as the representation of women's movement. Rosemarie Tong argues,

"A woman should not be reduced to the "toy of man, his rattle," which "must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused." A woman is not a "mere means," or instrument, to one or more man's pleasure or happiness. To treat someone as a mere means is to treat her as less than a person, as someone who exists not for herself but as an appendage to someone else."¹²

Women have kept the hidden power which could be excluded whenever and wherever, depends on the situation they are faced. Power here doesn't mean supernatural power or anything illogical, but it such as energy which lead them for doing some unexpected movements. That's why women shouldn't be forbidden to do something as well as men, because who knows the strength of women is stronger than men's itself. It is not the matter who could lift a steal up, but the strength to bring the society becomes better and be regarded equally as well as men in many aspects in society.

¹² Tong, *Feminist Thought*, 16.

Talking about strength could not be separated from gender identity, most people may think strength related to masculinity which are aggressive, competitive, and instrumentally oriented (Stets & Burke 3). But the characteristics whether she/he is masculine or feminine is not determine by innate factor, behavior, or temperament, but Stets and Burke explain more that "the characteristics owned by female or male are based upon social and cultural conditions" (3). Either an individual regards its sex as male or female but the characteristics which nurture inside the individual are shaped through how society treat the individual itself. Social and cultural condition teaches an individual how should they react and act appropriate with the atmosphere society has made. At last, Stets and Burke add,

"a person may label herself female, but instead of seeing herself in a stereotypical female manner such as being expressive, warm, and submissive, she may view herself in a somewhat stereotypically masculine fashion such as being somewhat instrumental, rational, and dominant."¹³

Hillary through her speech found herself that she has 'switched' her characteristics from feminine to masculine. It is not physically but

¹³ Richard D. Ashmore, Frances K. Del Boca, and Scott M. Bilder, "Construction and Validation of the Gender Attitude Inventory, a Structured Inventory to Assess Multiple Dimensions of Gender Attitudes," *Sex Roles* 32, no. 11 (1995): 753–785.

mentally which bring her to go forward US presidential election.

“For all Americans.

Tonight, we’ve reached a milestone in our nation’s march toward a more perfect union: the first time that a major party has nominated a woman for President.

Standing here as my mother’s daughter, and my daughter’s mother, I’m so happy this day has come.¹⁴

She is supported by one of the major parties in America which made her as the first woman nominee from the party. As a woman, she may reject it since being a president is not an easy job and it has a massive responsibility, but the condition and her surround support and believe in her to be brave to take the chance. And her masculinity side dominates her to handle and guide her performance during the campaign of the election last year. It proves that social condition can influence an individual whether she/he is feminine or masculine.

C. Conclusion

To be a woman is destined, but to be powerful is a choice. Hillary Clinton has taught for women all around the world that gender is not a matter anymore that can be used as a reason to be passive and minor in the society. Women’s strength and a leadership skill

¹⁴ “Transcript: Hillary Clinton’s Speech at the Democratic Convention - The New York Times.”

which are owned by Hillary are just few of abilities owned by women. From Hillary, women could learn how to be an influential women, how to show a leadership skill which can control and guide society, and how to be strong in facing so many global problems through her brightness and experiences. State a quotation from Hillary, “*too many women in too many countries speak the same language, of silence*”, is like a magic words, she invites and influences women to be brave, confidence, and qualified to be an agent of change who could break the stereotype marked on women since a long time, which are weak, inferior, and illogical, and to show up that women can do what is done by men for society and cooperate together to build and change a better life to the society.

References

- Ashmore, Richard D., Frances K. Del Boca, and Scott M. Bilder. “Construction and Validation of the Gender Attitude Inventory, a Structured Inventory to Assess Multiple Dimensions of Gender Attitudes.” *Sex Roles* 32, no. 11 (1995): 753–785.
- “Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership.” *AAUW: Empowering Women Since 1881* (blog). Accessed October 27, 2017. <https://www.aauw.org/research/barriers-and-bias/>.

- Freedman, Jane. *Feminism. Concepts in the Social Sciences*. Buckingham [Pa.]: Open University Press, 2001.
- Haralambos, Michael, and Martin Holborn. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. New York: Collins, 2008.
- Miles, Matthew B., and A. Michael Huberman. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. London: SAGE, 1994.
- Nahdiyati, Aenun. "An Analysis on Liberal Feminism Values of the Main Character in the Film 'Miss Potter.'" *Universitas Syarif Hidayatullah*, 2009.
- Parcheta, Nicole, Belal A. Kaifi, and Nile M. Khanfar. "Gender Inequality in the Workforce: A Human Resource Management Quandary." *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (2013): 240.
- Samkange, Wellington. "The Liberal Feminist Theory: Assessing Its Applicability to Education in General and Early Childhood Development (E.C.D) in Particular Within the Zimbabwean Context." *Global Journal Advanced Research. Vol 2* (2015): 1172–1178.
- Tong, Rosemarie. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. 3rd ed. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2009.
- "Transcript: Hillary Clinton's Speech at the Democratic Convention - The New York Times." Accessed October 27, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/29/us/politics/hillary-clinton-dnc-transcript.html>.

