Proclivity of sexual harassment and blame attribution in journalism: experiential narratives of ghanaian female journalists

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Abstract

Though the proclivity of sexual-related harassment in African journalism is high, the rates of reporting of these incidences and empirical studies are low. The study employs a gendered approach for an exploratory inquiry into the lived experiences and impressions of Ghanaian female journalists about sexual harassment. The study examines how female journalists experience both newsroom harassments and on-assignment sexual harassment, including the role they play in *quid pro quo* exchanges, which are relevant aspects of sexual harassment in the profession. The study also examines blame attribution strategies female journalists adopt in assigning blame for sexual harassment occurrences. The study uses a respondent-assisted sampling technique to select and conduct in-depth-interviews with twenty-three female journalists drawn from a cross-section of Ghana's journalism industry. Findings show that most Ghanaian female journalists have encountered sexual harassment from influential men either in the newsroom or on assignment. They also engage in *quid pro quo* exchanges with influential news related persons either for financial or job-related rewards. Consequently, older female journalists adopt other women blame attributions in assigning blame for incidences of sexual harassment in journalism practice in Ghana.

Keywords: Ghana, on-assignment sexual harassment, other-women blame attribution, self-blame attribution, sexual harassment, *quid-pro-quo*

Introduction

Despite decades of feminist agitations, which culminated in the promulgation of gender equality laws in workplaces across the world, the practice of sexual harassment persists. A 2013 global survey, completed by 921 women journalists worldwide, found that nearly 65 per cent of respondents had experienced intimidation, threats, and abuse related to their work (Barton & Storm, 2014[1]). A report on gender inequality in Zimbabwe (Radu & Chekera, 2014, p4[2]) states that the problem of gender discrimination in this African country is "so deeply entrenched and widespread within newsrooms that it is almost epidemic in proportion." The World Economic Forum's 2018 Global Gender Gap Index also claims that if current inequalities between the genders persist, it will take 135 years to close the gender gap in sub-Saharan Africa (Chutel, 2018a[3]). Some improvement, however, can be observed. According to the last Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2015[4]), more female reporters are visible in the by-lines of the stories and newscasts than

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[1] Barton, A. & Storm, H. (2014). Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media: a global *picture*. International Women's Media Foundation, International News Safety Institute. Retrieved from https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Violence-and-Harassment-against-Women-in-the-News-Media.pdf

[2] Radu S. W. & Chekera, Y.T. (2014). *Power, patriarchy, and gender discrimination in Zimbabwean newsrooms*. Media Monitoring Africa. Retrieved from https://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org/images/uploads/Power_Patriarchy_and_Gender_Discrimination_in_Zimbabwean_Newsrooms.pdf

[3] Chutel, L. (2018a). It will take 135 years to close the gender gap in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Quartz* 20 December. Retrieved from https://qz.com/africa/1503278/global-gender-gap-index-africas-gap-widens/

[4] GMMP (2015). *Who Makes the News? Global Media Monitoring Project 2015*. London: World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). Retrieved from http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/Imported/reports_2015/global/gmmp_global_report_en.pdf

previously. Within 15 years (2000-2015), in Africa, the number of cases of visibility of the female journalists in newspaper by-lines and broadcasts grew 6 per cent: from 36 to 42 (GMMP, 2015, p. 48).

Among African states, Ghana has passed laws to protect women and female workers against gender injustices. Ghana's media deregulation policy has been in line with its 1992 Constitutional provisions that guarantee citizens' rights to freedom of speech and expression. The country's media policy further mandates liberal, pluralistic, and diversified media. Ghana, with its robust Public Broadcasting System (PBS) and largely privatized media operations, has been acclaimed as one of the most liberal democracies with the most pluralistic media landscape in Africa (Gadzekpo, 2009). Ghana ranks 30 on the 2020 World Press Freedom Index (compared with the U.K.'s 35th and the USA's 45th position).

As of 2017, 354 FM radio stations, including 36 publicly owned radio stations and 79 community radio stations operated in Ghana, in addition to over 100 newspaper publications (African Media Barometer, 2017, p. 27.)   Ghana has a highly competitive private media ownership structure, with an equally rich and diversified media content (Gadzekpo, 2009).

There is no exact statistical data about the proportion of female journalists in Ghanaian media organizations. The Ghana Journalists Association (GJA[5]) is the only recognized body in Ghana that keeps a credible and valid register of journalists. The GJA membership lists and some other sources based on gender show that the female journalist population in Ghana has been slowly rising since 2005. The GJA membership list of 2005 shows that 27.3 per cent (171) of 626 registered journalists in Ghana were women. In the absence of data from the GJA, the International Women's Media Federation (IWMF) 2011 survey shows that 141 women worked in journalism (Byerly, 2011, p. 93[6]). Finally, the 2017 GJA membership stood at 656 registered journalists, of which 215 (33 per cent) were female (GJA, 2017). However, novice reporters and journalism interns are not members of GJA, and there is no information on how many of them are men and how many are women. Since most graduates of African journalism colleges are female (Boateng, 2017), the assumption is that women will form a majority of junior staff in Ghanaian newsrooms.

As the numbers of women in journalism in Ghana increase, women encounter structural challenges. For instance, dwindling media financing (Cagé, 2014) tends to render media operations susceptible to market instabilities, which, in turn, increase job insecurity in journalism. Most graduating journalists, including women, may face unemployment or may enter the journalism job market on a low salary. It is widespread practice in Ghana for entry-level journalists to work virtually for no salaries. This problem often forces both male and female journalists to develop affiliations with people in business, influential financiers, and with political parties for financial support and survival (Skjerdal, 2010; Cagé, 2014; African Media Barometer, 2017). Also, the increase in the number of women in newsrooms invariably threatens traditional male dominance in the profession.

Consequently, male journalists may react by resorting to gender-discriminatory practices. They may heighten sexual harassment as strategic mechanisms for the preservation of their significance in the profession. However, in the sub-Sahara African media space, and despite widely held claims of sexual harassment incidences, the reporting rate of incidences of sexual harassment is low. As Barton and Storm

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[5] GJA (2017). List of eligible voters for the GJA 2017 National Elections. Ghana Journalists Association. Retrieved from http://www.gjaghana.org/images/gjalist2017a.pdf
[6]Byerly, C. (2011). *Global report on the status of women in the news media*. Washington D.C: International Women's Media Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/IWMF-Global-Report.pdf.

(2014) report, 'only one-third of the episodes involving harassment and violence were reported to an employer, police, or another authority (35.6 per cent, 288 out of 810 cases)'.

Empirical studies to ascertain the veracity of anecdotal claims are also non-existent at the academic level. Most studies in journalism in Africa do not consider sexual harassment proclivities in journalism as separate and distinct from other forms of gender discrimination. However, Nyarko and Akpojivi (2017), Barton and Storm (2014), Fawole and Asekum-Olarimoye (2005), IFJ (2009), and Radu and Chekera (2014) list sexual harassment high among the range of gender discrimination practices that suppress and frustrate female journalists in Africa.

Feminist media scholars around the world have investigated sexual harassment occurrences in the media sphere since women entered the field of journalism (Walsh-Childers et al., 1996; Andsager et al., 1997; Steiner, 1998; Robinson, 2004; Lachover, 2005; North, 2007, 2016; Djerf-Pierre, 2011; Ross & Padovani 2013; Melki & Mallat 2016). These studies identify socio-cultural prejudices and economic factors as essential elements that underline and engender the proclivity of sexual harassment and sex-related abuses within the industry. Social patriarchal views give male dominance and hegemony privilege, which also act as reproductive factors to sustaining sexual harassment. These natural misogynistic attitudes and sexist behaviours are accordingly transferred into newsrooms. Thus, newsrooms with ineffective gender policies tend to entrench these gender-discriminatory habits and attitudes, which may engender sexual harassment in the profession (Walsh-Childers et al., 1996).

Most media and gender scholars often disregard the essence of on-assignment harassment as a crucial element in the molestation of women in journalism practice. Another principal dimension of sexual harassment virtually ignored by gender-media researchers involve the female journalist's role in *quid-pro-quo* exchanges. Similarly, media researchers have ignored blame attribution options female journalists and victims of sexual harassment adopt in assigning the occurrence of sexually related harassment. Furthermore, most feminist media theorists have failed to emphasize the role of socio-cultural prejudices and debilitating economic factors could influence victim blame-attribution choices in cases of sexual harassment. This paper notes the significance of socio-cultural views as well as the dramatic shifts in media market operations as contributing factors to sexual harassment practices in the profession. The paper, therefore, assumes that female journalists also make blame attribution choices for occurrences of sexual harassment based on these changes and shifts within the media landscape.

This study first presents narratives of Ghanaian female journalists' experiences about three critical aspects of sexual harassment in the profession in Ghana. It enquires from female journalists their experiences with 1) incidences of the newsroom and on-assignment sexual harassment, 2) their impressions of the high incidences of *quid-pro-quo* involving female journalists exchanging sex for job-related rewards, and 3) the blame attribution strategies they adopt in assigning blame for incidences of sexual harassment that occur in the profession. The study employs a qualitative unstructured in-depth interview method for primary data collection from twenty-three Ghanaian female journalists sampled from different media types and regional news bureaus in Ghana.

Gendered notions of sexual harassment

Workplace sexual harassment discourse is fraught with divergent viewpoints. Most viewpoints consider workplace sexual harassment as an essential aspect of sex-based violence and gender discrimination mechanisms. For instance, sex harassment is viewed in one sense as an intentional barrier that blocks the entry of women into the workplace and adds to the subjugation and suppression of women in their career ambitions. A divergent view argues that sexual harassment is an innocuous amorous 'natural' affair' between two consenting work colleagues often misconstrued as harassment on female workers (Walsh-Childers et al., 1998). As a result, McDonald (2012) and McDonald and Charlesworth (2013) argue that such misconceptions are derived from entrenched gendered inequalities and insensitivity to gender issues at the workplace. Other scholars have, however, borrowed from perspectives in psychological approaches to argue that workplace sexual harassment is an enabling mechanism used to sustain male predominance and as a tool for entrenching male power and hegemony at the workplace (Dougherty et al., 1996; Andsager et al., 1997; Melin-Higgins, 2004; Herrera et al., 2017).

Since the 1960s, various studies (Schultz, 1998; Scott, 1999; Crouch, 2001; McDonald, 2012; North, 2016; Saul & Diaz-Leon, 2017) have highlighted the significant relationship between gender power differences in gendered organizations and the high prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace. For instance, Mackinnon (1979) adopts various aspects of feminist arguments to argue that the dominance of men in positions of authority in work organizations engenders masculine attitudes, and attitudes and tendencies which subsequently underpin sexual harassment practices in the workplace. Thus, according to the African Media Barometer Ghana (2017, p. 71), in Ghana, 'with regards to gender, males continue to dominate the top ranks of media houses as editors and managers. The faces of media houses are male'.

By its nature, sexual harassment practices are often unobtrusive, subtle, and done in secrecy. Though the practice ultimately has physical and verbal manifestations, its non-verbal and secretive nature disguises the deliberate intention to suppress, repress, bully, or denigrate female workers into sublime submission at workplaces. Thus, sexual harassment can be a formidable strategic tool of coercion. More importantly, scholars consider most harassers as 'sexual blackmailers' demanding sexual favours in exchange for career and financial benefits, i.e., *a quid-pro-quo* (Schultz, 1998; Andsager, 2011; Melki & Mallat, 2016; Herrera et al., 2017). The *quid-pro-quo* idea is significant here since it brings into the discourse the role women play in the exchange of sex for desired favours.

Also, any objective discussion of sexual harassment must attempt to disaggregate the constituent elements of sexual harassment encapsulated in the act and practice. For instance, there is the likelihood of misconstruing innocuous amorous sexually infused flirtations with deliberate intentions to harass (Colarelli & Haaland, 2002; Pina et al., 2009). McDonald (2012), among others, stress the importance of identifying and examining the various causative factors that underpin justifications for sexual harassment. The range of factors is generally categorized under two broad perceptual approaches: behavioural/psychological and legal perceptions. First, legal perceptions tend to reflect different national laws, policies, and circumstances that inhibit or encourage tendencies of sexual harassment (Schultz, 1998). Secondly, behaviour/psychological perceptions highlight individual character traits, attitudes, and behaviours, encouraging the persistence of sexual harassment, including its psychological effects on victims (McDonald, 2012).

Consequently, three analytical models – natural/biological, organizational, and socio-cultural – emerge from various court cases and legal defences of sexual harassment cases in the U.S. (McDonald, 2012). According to McDonald, the natural/biological model sees sexual harassment as a manifestation of natural sexual desires that are part of both men's and women's natural composition. Therefore, some scholars assume that as both sexes work and interact in the workplace, the natural desire for sex heightens. Other scholars have critiqued this rational justification for the causes of sexual harassment for its lack of depth and rigour since it ignores socially induced male hegemonic factors that influence men into engaging in sexual harassment at the work environment. In contrast, the socio-cultural model offers some rationalizations that consider the significance of traditional socio-cultural factors as reinforcing or enabling agents of sexual harassment at the workplace. This model considers sexual harassment as a manifestation of social constructs influenced by traditional reasoning, allowing for the classification of men as 'sex agents and women as sexual objects' (McDonald, 2012, p. 6). Therefore, most traditional/conservative societies posit that women's entry and survival into male-dominated work domains require them to acquire male attitudes and behaviours and exhibit such masculine character traits. Thus, workplace sexual harassment practices reflect and reproduce endemic socially constructed ideas about the superiority of male behaviours, attitudes, and sexual beliefs. The organizational model links the level of sexual harassment to the scope of hegemonic power men hold in work organizations. This claim is evident by the number of reports that accuse senior management personnel as the main perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Borrowing from Acker's (2006) gendered organization theory, Pina et al. (2009) and McDonald (2012) point to the extent to which male dominance and power in organizations can be a catalyst to the coercion of women for sex in workplaces. They argue that though the organizational model emphasizes the role of legislations, labour policies, and regulations as instruments to restrict sexual harassment behaviours and attitudes in work organizations, the flexible implementation of such laws and policies could instead encourage sexual harassment (Rospenda et al., 1998). Some scholars, for instance, presume that the flexible implementation of gender policies, especially policies that are vague on gender equality may be incapable of regulating sex harassment at the workplace. As such, this may also create a conducive 'organizational climate' for sexual harassment to thrive (Pina et al., 2009).

In Ghana, according to the African Media Barometer Ghana (2017, p. 9), 'many newsrooms have no sexual harassment policies or policies that work to promote women to editorial or management levels.' The Media Ownership Monitor Ghana (2017)[7] also reveals that although the state-owned companies have women on their governing boards, men outnumber them. On the other hand, despite the critical role private media houses play in Ghana since the 1990s, many do not have women on their governing boards. Out of twenty-one companies monitored by the Media Ownership Monitor, only three had female CEOs. The survey also found only two women as the owners of media companies, and another two as shareholders (wives of the majority shareholders of these companies).

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[7] Media Ownership Monitor Ghana (2017). Retrieved from http://www.mom-rsf.org/en/countries/ghana/

Blame attribution perspectives

Most empirical analysis of sexual harassment ignores blame attribution options as significant to the discourse of sexual harassment. De Judicibus and McCabe (2001) posit that most female victims often adopt two main blame attribution options. Whether they are victims of sexual harassment or not, most women often engage either in self-blame attribution or other-women blame attribution. For instance, most victims tend to blame themselves, believing that some character traits, actions, or behaviour play a crucial part in instigating sexual harassment. On the other hand, some women often assign, or shift blame for the prevalence of sexual harassment to other women's behavioural tendencies, attitudes, actions, and characters. Kenig and Ryan (1986) point to gender-based perceptions about sex and sexual practices as significant factors for attribution choices. For instance, others argue that victims' blame attribution choices may be fuelled by anxieties and fears related to social labelling that tags victims of sexual harassment as promiscuous and morally lose (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). This fear of denigration and social disdain also explains why most women seldom report incidents of harassment and violence to the police, employers, or any other authority. Journalist Linsey Chutel (2018b[8]) underlines this fact arguing that African women 'missed the chance to add their voices to the global phenomenon that the #MeToo movement became in 2018. Their relative silence /---/ is a reminder of where power resides in patriarchal societies'. Thus, the adoption of a 'culture of silence' could be construed as an avoidance mechanism adopted to mitigate possible backlash from editors, government officials, or attempts to avoid social stigmatization from family members and colleagues (Walsh-Childers et al., 1996; Wolfe, 2011). As a result, most African female journalists rarely discuss sexual harassment issues either in public or even among themselves (Opoku-Mensah, 2004).

Study design

The study collected primary data using in-depth unstructured interviews from twenty-three (23) Ghanaian female journalists. The interview sessions were conducted in the autumn of 2016. Vandenberghe et al. (2017) explain that ethnographic in-depth interview formats are useful tools for accessing lived experiences and collecting primary first-hand data. The respondents provided informational depth and context that would have been missed in a survey or any other quantitative method for data collection. Thus, the in-depth interview method allowed respondents to express the nuances of their subjective lived experiences concerning sexual harassment and its consequent blame attribution.

The sampling protocol involved selection criteria that targeted female journalists with flexible work-time schedules and the willingness to commit to extensive interview sessions. Since most of the target population were unwilling to participate in interview sessions due to work-related time constraints and domestic pressures, a non-probability non-random snowball sampling or respondent-assisted sampling approach was adopted. Despite weaknesses with this sampling technique, it has, however, been deemed a convenient and useful means, in cases when the 'study has an explorative purpose' or in cases where researchers have

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[8] Chutel, L. (2018b). The #MeToo movement should listen to the silence of African women. *Quartz*. Retrieved from https://qz.com/africa/1501088/the-metoo-movement-should-listen-to-the-silence-of-african-women/

difficulties accessing 'critical elements of the population' (Daniel, 2012, p. 69). Two female journalists were initially identified and interviewed. They were then convinced to persuade two other female journalists to participate in subsequent sessions. The interviewees, however, represent various media types in four out of ten of Ghana's geographical regions.

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the twenty-three respondents for the study. As is indicated, the respondents' work and career experiences range between 5 and 45 years. The table provides further details on respondents' age, academic qualifications, marital status, and other essential information, including the media types they work for and regional or urban locations. All twenty-three interviewees have been given fictitious traditional Ghanaian names to maintain absolute anonymity.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the interviewees

Age Range	37-70 years
Work Experience	5- 45 years
Educational Qualifications	MA:5; BA:10; Diploma & certificate:5; High School Diploma:2
Marital Status	15 married, 7 singles, 1 divorced
Parental Status	18 with children; 5 with no children
Metropolitan Newsroom	10
Regional Correspondents	13
Private Media	13
State Media	10
Type of Media	Print 9; Radio 5; TV 5; News Agency 4

The findings are analysed under four thematic areas: 1. Experiences of newsroom sexual harassment 2. Experiences of on-assignment/news source sexual harassment 3. Exchange of sex for favours (*quid pro quo*) 4**.** Blame attribution options involving self-blame and other-women blame.

Experiences of newsroom sexual harassment

In conservative African societies like Ghana, journalism is considered the preserve of men with male-dominated organizational and hierarchical structures. The newsroom is generally regarded 'a no go for women, with those that have survived, having to summon all their muscle to fight for their space' (Radu & Chekera, 2014, p. 12). The general perception assumes that such male-dominated newsrooms are rough and intolerable work environments for women. For instance, Skjerdal (2010) describes the general perception of male journalists in Ethiopia as being prolific smokers, binge drinkers, promiscuous, and easily influenced by money and political players. This perception is widely accepted as a normalized newsroom culture across the African continent. The broader society sees most journalists as people with loose moral. This impression also holds for female journalists who work late night shifts or cover late-night assignments. Thus, the assumption is that most female journalists are easily open to and may readily respond positively to amorous advances. Such accepted perceptions embolden male senior editors and other influential persons

to prey on single or even married female journalists. The majority of our respondents seem to accept such male mentality and behaviour as a norm of the profession. In a way, some female journalists tend to contribute to such accepted norms by failing to confront the harassers, thereby giving a signal that it is okay to misbehave. The responses of our interviewees corroborate this assertion that they subconsciously provide a rational justification for such behaviour. However, they find normalized trash and profane talk in the newsrooms uncomfortable.

> Ama: *I have not experienced it, but I have heard that…some people have experienced that. People have actually approached people, and they have commented on their figure or on how beautiful they are or something, that connotes sexuality or something. They say it jokingly as if they are just saying it in passing or I mean it is just a normal discussion.*
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> Adjoa: *I think every newsroom has its own culture. In here, mentioning certain parts of the body and saying certain things is common. They try to play it with other people in the newsroom. They do it as if it is just for fun, just for jokes and things.*

As a rule, female journalists choose to remain silent for fear of losing their jobs and being socially labelled. Social stigmatization and social labelling are, therefore, decisive inhibiting factors that influence victims from admitting to having experienced sexual harassment (North, 2007). Respondents like Ama and Akua deny ever experiencing sexual harassment but are ready to narrate the harrowing experiences of their friends:

> Akua: *I remember one of my female colleagues; one day I came, and as I was entering the newsroom, I saw a senior colleague coming out of the pantry and I saw my colleague friend in there. She was crying, I asked her what the matter was, and she said, "Can you imagine this man forced me and kissed me" and I asked why she did not slap him. She said the thing was so sudden that she was so shocked, she could not do anything.*

This statement here provides insights into how victims of sexual harassment cope in such a stressful working environment. A Zimbabwean report argues: 'The coping mechanisms range from drinking alcohol to praying and believing in God for wisdom and strength to survive in the newsroom. Besides, in trying to cope with gender discrimination, some have had to develop thick skins, and some have had to ignore it and concentrate on their work' (Radu & Chekera, 2014, p. 21).

Experiences of on-assignment/ news source sexual harassment

An essential newsgathering technique requires that journalists cultivate and build trust and cordial relationships with influential news sources. Lachover (2005) states that this cordial news source relationship's construction becomes a means for easy access to news scoops. Afua's experience confirms this statement:

> Afua: *I remember there is this man, he is now in opposition and in Parliament. You know you create the relationship with them so that in case of any story when you call them, and they have your number, they are quick to pick-up then they react to it so that it makes the work less stressful. Then it begins to send the wrong signal to the fellow.*

Afua also admitted that her frequent requests for financial support from one politician (her news source) prompted his request for sex – a *quid pro quo* exchange. As Berkowitz (2009) argues, such relationships indicate the inter-play of power dynamics between journalists and their news sources. Afua's and Maame's experiences also confirm Walsh-Childers *et* al. 's (1996) assertions that prominent news sources often create conducive atmospheres that could lure female journalists into sexual relationships. For instance, Maame describes her harrowing experience with an influential news source to elaborate the point.

> Maame: *I remember somebody asked me to travel to Benin; at that time, the person was in charge of an Association, to come to Benin and interview him. Those were the times that exclusives sold. So, I took the risk, and I went over the weekend only for him to tell me: "Oh, I wanted you to come so you spend the weekend with me". I was like "Really!", and he says "Yes but you are not married. You have nothing to lose. You have to have fun" and I said "Fun! Fun is not part of my vocabulary when I am working. Do not try anything funny because if you do, I will write about it" and he asked: "So what do you do now that you are here?" and I said: "There are two things; you either give me the interview and I go my way, or I go away, and I will still write the story on what you did, and you know what that means to you." Eventually he gave me the interview and asked his driver to bring me to Lomé to cross the border.*

Maame and Akweley (below) narratives underscore the extent to which news sources may entrap journalists into on-assignment sexual harassment or misinterpret news source–reporter relationships.

> Akweley**:** *On the field, people do not even care. I do a lot of personality profiles, human interest stories. We go on the field, especially for these personality profiles, CEO's and other things; they do not even care if you are wearing a ring. They do not care about your ring, and they want to go out with you. So, you look at the money. I mean, these days, there are people with money, and if you also love the money, you end up sleeping with them or going out with them.*

Quid-pro-quo

Akweley's allusion to money and financial gain associated with working as a journalist brings to the fore the culture of silence surrounding women's prominence in the practice of *quid pro quo* exchanges in sexual harassment in journalism. One significant enabling factor of the *quid pro quo* exchange is the extent of limited job opportunities in journalism in most African countries. Most young female journalists often fall victim to the promises of job offers by male news editors and other associated male workers. Radu and Chekera report the narrative of one respondent from Zimbabwe: "Female journalists are often taken advantage of and asked to give sex for promotions or other important assignments. This culture is rampant in Zimbabwean newsrooms" (Radu & Chekera, 2014, p. 12). Our respondents (Maame) reiterate similar experiences in some Ghanaian newsrooms.

> Maame: *When they tell you there is no sexual harassment in the newsroom they are lying. When you come as an intern, you are eager to make a name, eager to establish your position. Those older men who would want to exploit their positions will make you stupidly believe that they are the only people who can give you a job, so they would try it at you and exploit you, there were people that would harass you, promising you jobs and all that.*

In Ghana, the use of authority and power play also embolden male perpetrators to 'punish' their victims if they refuse to surrender:

> Akweley: /---/ [If] *you are not giving in to their demands it affects your work; they will not even assign you or use your work. /---/ now you do not care about by-line; "my story goes without the by-line I am not worried" – but when you are young journalist the by-line that is your pride, to see your name in the paper.*

In some patriarchal societies, the entitlement notion further emboldens men to consider sexual assault and sexual harassment as a feasible means of asserting power and control. Those in positions of power in newsrooms, mostly men, often exercise power over junior staff members, including female reporters and interns. They tend to demand sex to improve the job conditions for women or assign women to less stressful and convenient assignments, or for promotion.

According to informal evidence, *quid pro quo* cases are prevalent in African newsrooms. For instance, one of our respondents (Yaa) testifies that she had "heard a lot of stories". However, there is a paucity of studies on the problem. There are also high incidences of a culture of silence concerning the practice. Most victims prefer to remain silent and decline to make official complaints about fear that they may lose their job or become tagged as promiscuous. As a respondent in the Zimbabwean report (Radu & Chekera, 2014, p. 20) complains: "I felt if I reported him, I was the one to lose my job and would be humiliated in the process socially."

One respondent provides an alternative but essential dimension to the narrative of *quid pro quo* practice in newsrooms in Ghana. She argues that some female journalists are also complicit in and actively instigate

quid pro quo exchanges. To some respondents, the *quid pro quo* exchanges act to impede gender activists' efforts at reducing gender discrimination. Meanwhile, other respondents claim that the *quid pro quo* exchanges are powerful tools used by some female journalists to negotiate the profession's volatilities.

> Afua: *I have come to understand per things that I have witnessed since I came into this particular industry that women, some of my colleagues, trade sex for higher positions. You do not fit to be the host of the program; everybody knows that it,….you are just not ready but somebody else who is good at the job is taken off the air and you are put there, and you are struggling, and you have people in higher positions coming to defend you. So, it brings to a conclusion what people are saying that you have slept with this person.*

The comment above belies the position that men are the primary perpetrators of sexual harassment. It is necessary to note here that certain debilitating circumstances may force women to either initiate, instigate, or be willing participants often referred to in local Ghanaian parlance as 'partners in crime.' For some respondents, *quid pro quo* exchanges are manifestations of the patriarchal mentalities aimed at derailing women's career progressions in a professional field meant for men. According to this patriarchal viewpoint, women are generally inadequately equipped for newsroom and journalism work; they are often assigned to less challenging tasks and are seldom promoted to senior posts (Radu & Chekera, 2014, p. 18). Respondent Afua, therefore, argues that such humiliating circumstances frustrate most female journalists to levels of desperation.

> Afua**:** *I believe that ladies, most of us, are so desperate to make it in this industry, so we go for anything at any length to compete with the men because the gap and the pace are really widening in this industry.*

Also, many other contextual factors act as enabling agencies for *quid pro quo* to happen. For example, in countries with high unemployment rates, high costs of living, and large families, dependent on low incomes, (young) women may be led to take such desperate steps to maintain their job or get better assignments to get ahead in the newsroom.

Blame attribution: Self-blame and the other woman blame

In Ghana, victims' blame attribution options for sexual harassment in journalism could reflect the negative social perceptions and low self-esteem many women have about themselves. As Miller et al. (2010) assert, in more sophisticated jurisdictions, some female sexual harassment victims are also significantly influenced by their socio-psychological beliefs about sex. In most cases, some of these socio-psychological beliefs force a substantial number of women to blame themselves for sexual harassment occurrences. For instance, respondent Akosua who is in her 40s still blames herself for having a long-term relationship with an influential politician and news actor when she was 22 years old. In the modern Ghanaian cultural setting, a

22-year-old girl is considered too young, immature, and ill-prepared to engage in intimate relationships with older men, let alone have a baby.

> Akosua**:** *I had the baby, and at that time, I was 22 years old. I was not so matured, and so I had some challenges. In 2004, I wanted to quit journalism because as a female journalist, I had many friends, especially politicians. Most of the Ministers, mostly, those who were M.P.s in the region were my friends because since 1997, I have been covering them and I was most of the time associated with them. People thought I had an intimate relationship with them, and it got to me.*

Akosua's self-blame attribution is also strongly related to her fears about social labelling; it also relates to deep-seated cultural beliefs and perceptions about unmarried female journalists, news sources and sex.

> Akosua: *At 40, I am single; it is because I am a female journalist. I am not ashamed to mention this because people think when you know too many big men; it means that there is something going on between you and those big men.*

On the other dimension of blame attribution, most attribution scholars argue that a substantial number of women prefer to blame 'other women' for sexual harassment incidences. Walsh-Childers et al. (1996) find that older female journalists are more likely to resort to 'other women' blame than younger female reporters. Older female journalists are more likely to blame young inexperienced cub female journalists who often fall prey to the allures of fake promises from male colleagues, elderly news editors, and financial inducements from influential news sources. In most cases, older female journalists see young female journalists as morally imprudent and with a penchant to offer sex for getting better assignments or other privileges.

> Yaa: *I have always had problems with the victims, so I normally do not want to talk about it. If you can prove yourself, nobody will deny you that position and nobody will even request for a favour, let alone a sexual favour before giving you a job to do. So, I have a reservation about that, but I have heard a lot of stories. They will tell you "you have to use what you have – to get what you want." And it is very common.*

> Serwaah**:** *It's not exciting to be a female journalist at all because you need to dress up nicely when you are going out for assignment and where will you get the money to dress? I think that is the reason some of our colleagues are following these big men.*

As traditional sexist and socio-cultural ideological beliefs have a tenacious grip in people's minds, it is frequent to connect fancy clothing and make-up to seduce the opposite sex and blame women for immoral behaviour. Symptomatic is Angela Lansbury's (a star of Murder She Wrote) sentiment in an interview with Radio Times in November 2017: 'There are two sides to this coin. We must sometimes take blame, women. I do think that. Although it is awful to say we cannot make ourselves look as attractive as possible without being knocked down and raped.' This kind of sexist ideology deprives women of the right to present

themselves beautiful to feel confident and valued. 'Beauty is social currency, and women have every right to capitalize on that currency when, and how they please' (Fessler, 2017[9]).

Discussion and conclusions

Some of the roots of gender discrimination in journalism can be found in the historical development of journalism. Journalism emerged as a 'man's world,' and up to the late 20th century, there were no countries where most journalists were female. This situation has been gradually changing, although gender parity in journalism remains a target to achieve. According to Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS) data, only in 20 out of 67 surveyed countries, the proportion of female journalists is 50 percent or more. Among African countries, South-Africa stands out with 62.1 per cent. The smallest percentage of women journalists worldwide are found in Japan – 17.9, South Korea – 23.7 and USA – 27.1 (WJS, 2012-2016). Overall, men dominate the profession, and masculine attitudes and tendencies further engender androcentric dispositions in newsrooms (North, 2016; Goldstein, 2017[10]; Steiner, 2017), especially in the countries where gender equality is not a societal norm (unlike, for example, in the Nordic countries). In deeply patriarchal societies, like Ghana, the journalism field reflects and reproduces gendered discriminatory ideologies and practices that are embedded in everyday life and culture. Androcentric, misogynic attitudes become naturalized and taken for granted in work cultures to the extent that both male and female journalists often ascribe proclivity of sexual harassment in the journalism profession as being 'natural' behaviour and 'open secrets' to be conveniently ignored (Hanson-Young, 2017[11]). Research indicates the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in journalism on the African continent. In Zimbabwe, over 900 female interns reported having experienced forms of sexual-related harassment (Zhou, 2015; Akwei, 2017[12]). In Tanzania, most female journalists report experiencing sexually related harassment, mostly from senior editors, news managers, and other male peers in newsrooms (Media Council of Tanzania, 2019, p. 15[13]). In African journalism, despite high rates of the proclivity of sexual harassments, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reports that most female journalists fail to report incidences of sexual harassments due, in part, to anxieties related to social labelling and negative job-related consequences (Wolfe, 2011).

In Ghanaian journalism, the gendered newsroom culture is primarily based on the contorted power dynamics typical of patriarchal ideology, which enables blaming victims for cases of sexual harassment and abuse. Thus, those in the higher levels of the hierarchy often dare to be insolent without fearing that they may be held accountable. Furthermore, the victims tend to accept sexual harassment as an inevitable appendage

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[9] Fessler, L. (2017). Everything wrong with Angela Lansbury's claim that women are to blame for sexual assault. *Quartz*. Retrieved from https://qz.com/quartzy/1140056/angela-lansbury-comments-dont-blame-beauty-for-sexual-harassment-and-assault/

[10] Goldstein, K. (2017). *The news industry has a sexual harassment problem: #NowWhat?* Retrieved from http://niemanreports.org/articles/the-news-industry-has-a-sexual-harassment-problem/

[11] Hanson-Young, S. (2017). Sexual harassment opinion: The 'open secret' of sexual harassment in the media is staggering. There's plenty yet to come, *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2017/dec/04/the-open-secret-of-sexual-harassment-in-the-media-is-staggering-theres-plenty-yet-to-come

[12] Akwei, I. (2017). *Zimbabwe: Female journalists, interns face high level of sexual harassment*. Retrieved from http://www.africanews.com/2017/03/13/zimbabwe-female-journalists-interns-face-high-level-of-sexual-harassment//

[13] Media Council of Tanzania (2019). *Challenging the Glass Ceiling. Study of women in the newsrooms in Tanzania*. Retrieved from https://vikes.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Women-in-the-Media-in-Tanzania.pdf

of their professional experience, thus normalizing these skewed power relations. However, as researchers claim, the 'tolerance of sexual harassment and sexual harassment proclivities are correlated with sexist ideology, hostility towards women, acceptance of interpersonal violence, adversarial sexual belief...' (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001, p. 404). To break this vicious circle needs a radical change of society's mentality and people's beliefs and attitudes concerning women's status in society. Although having taken some legal measures for uprooting gender discrimination, Ghanaian society and media still have a long way to achieve gender equality. It takes a long time to change a culture, including the newsroom culture. An essential factor that would accelerate this change and make newsroom sexual harassment less common is undoubted: appoint more women to managerial positions in newsrooms.

The experiences recounted in this article support previous findings concerning gendered power dynamics in journalism practice (e.g., Chambers et al., 2004; Radu & Chekera, 2014; Ruoho & Torkkola, 2018). The findings reinforce assertions that sexual harassment practices prevalent in newsrooms across Africa, embody complex socio-economic dynamics occurring in extremely gendered journalism spaces. The study adds an economic dimension to the widely held notion that sexual harassment proclivities are reflections and derivatives of broader socio-cultural patriarchal attitudes. Unlike some countries in the Northern hemisphere with elaborate social security and employment benefits, most African countries lack social security networks that provide benefits for the unemployed or low-wage earners. Women working in journalism with low salaries must resort to other means to supplement and regulate their income. Therefore, this study maintains that such economic challenges provide some rationale and justification for the persistence of sexual harassment in Ghana and other African countries.

Another significant observation relates to the taken-for-granted attitudes concerning sexual harassment practices in journalism in Ghana. Underscoring this posture are the implicit frustrations embedded in the responses outlined above. While most Ghanaian female journalists seem to see sexual harassment as 'normal', their stance can instead be interpreted as adaptation/survival strategies needed to thrive in sexist/gendered and highly insecure journalism practice. The narratives strengthen socio-professional notions that women's successful survival in journalism could be dependent on adoption and demonstrations of equal amounts of masculine attitudes, aggressiveness, and behaviours as displayed by their male counterparts (cf. McDonald, 2012; North, 2016).

The experiences relating to on-assignment sexual harassment emphasize the misuse of male hegemonic power in the media industry as a means to harass female journalists. Two significant conclusions are drawn here. First, they affirm the often-overlooked fact that female journalists encounter high rates of on-assignment sexual harassment. Secondly, the narrated experiences support Lachover's (2005, p. 308) observation that 'sexuality appears to be a key aspect of any relationship that a female journalist establishes with her male sources of news.' As most respondents point out, male news sources conveniently or blatantly misuse political and economic positions to pressure women for sex. Female journalists also engage in using sex to gain rewards in *quid pro quo* situations.

The lack of a robust analytical framework creates limitations for extensive empirical examination of blame attribution options in incidences of sexual harassment and sexual harassment studies in journalism in Africa. Though De Judicibus and McCabe (2001) contend that women tend to blame other women for sexual harassment incidences, this contention is difficult to verify from the Ghanaian experiences narrated here. However, it is evident from the narratives that older female respondents believe younger female journalists

instigate or willingly participate in sexual harassment relationships for financial and job-related motives. It is pertinent to point out that these high levels of 'other women' blame attributions may breed mistrust and create relationship tensions between older female journalists and their younger colleagues. This study has revealed the extent to which news-source/journalist relationships and blame attribution are significant aspects of sexual harassment practice and debate in gender-journalism studies. These two areas need further empirical attention from African feminist-media studies.

To conclude the article positively, we would like to quote Marcy McGinnis, former CBS News executive and a journalist for more than 40 years, who has an idea how to stop harassment in newsrooms: 'My advice to men: Just behave like your wife, daughter or sister was in the room' (Tompkins, 2017[14]).

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[14] Tompkins, A. (2017) 'Why Newsrooms are so ripe for sexual harassment', *Poynter.org*, 4 December. Retrieved from https://www.poynter.org/news/why-newsrooms-are-so-ripe-sexual-harassment

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