

Against sexual harassment in workplace as seen in *Bombshell* movie (2019)

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Abstract

This article aims to empower woman to fight sexual harassment in workplace as seen in how characters of the film find out what steps were taken in the *Bombshell movie (2019)* in fighting sexual harassment by Roger Ailes, the CEO of FOX News that based on actual event that happened on 2006. To reach the aim of the study, the author uses qualitative method, and uses the liberal feminism theory of Tong (2009). The data sources were taken from the movie itself and several previous article that have been published between 2011 - 2021 which have been selected according to the topic discussed. The results of this research are, there are several ways shown by some of the characters from this film in fighting sexual harassment, in physical resistance, Gretchen shows it by the way she dares to report the lewd acts committed by Roger Ailes to the authorities. Meanwhile, the fight against verbal sexual harassment is shown by Megyn Kelly's character who firmly opposes the oppression of women which done by Trump, when he is present on her talk show, and the second is shown through Megyn Kelly's dexterity in motivating victims to get up and speak up about Roger Ailes' bad habits.

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INTRODUCTION

Artwork is one of the effective media to send messages to the audience. Film is one of the most popular works of art by the public. A film or movie is a collection of moving images that tell a story and can be watched by the audience through a television or cinema screen (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Films have various genres, some of them are: horror, romance, sci-fi, comedy, family, and many more. In a film, filmmakers usually include a moral message or moral value depending on the topic raised in the film, one of which is a message against sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is an unwanted, threatening sexual act and often involves an abuse

of authority differentials (Howald et al., n.d.). Sexual harassment can happen anywhere and can be experienced by anyone, whether it men or women. It is not only in the form of a physical act, it can also be verbal by telling rude jokes, bad comments, cat calling and visual by showing pornographic images or videos. Sexual harassment can cause trauma for the victims, victims can feel like they are being bullied, humiliated, and can experience prolonged stress. (Burn, 2019). The effects of the trauma that arise if not treated immediately can interfere with other aspects of the victim's life, such as the work aspect, the trauma causes severe stress that interferes with tenacity and discipline in doing a job, in women case, sometimes they leave from work and even

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worse they end their life (Doss & Mukherjee, 2014).

Sexual harassment can occur in the workplace due to the lack of knowledge of employees in dealing with it (Aman et al., 2016). For that, we need a rule that regulates discipline in work, and the punishment that will be given if someone violates it. If the rules are implemented correctly, then the negative things in the workplace will decrease and even disappear. If a sexual harassment case arises from a company, the negative impact is not only on its employees but also the company itself, the company's image can be tarnished because of the case, to prevent that, the company must immediately make rules (Ali et al., 2015).

Some movie directors have raised sexual harassment issue into their project, they are: Seth Gordon with his movie, *Horrible Bosses (2011)*, Barry Levinson with the film called *Disclosure (1994)*, Colin Higgins with the film titled *Nine to Five (1980)*, Niki Caro with her film *North Country (2005)*, and much more (Vogel, n.d.)

In 2019, one of the movie that discusses the issue of sexual harassment is *Bombshell (2019)* which was directed by Jay Roach. The film is inspired by true events that took place circa 2016 on FOX News, United States. *Bombshell (2019)* starring several famous Hollywood movie stars, some of them are: Margot Robbie as Kayla Pospisil, Charlize Theron playing the role of Megyn Kelly, Nicole Kidman as Gretchen Carlson, John Litgow as Roger Ailes, and many more. This movie has been nominated for several prestigious film awards in the world, including *73rd British Academy Film Awards, 77th Golden Globe Awards, 26th Screen Actors Guild Awards and the 92nd Academy Awards* (IMDb, n. d). This film tells about the tenacity of a group of women who loudly speak up about what they experienced while they were working at FOX News, they dared to say that they were victims of sexual harassment by their CEO, Roger Ailes.

Febriansyah in tirto.id explain that *Bombshell (2019)* is a movie that telling story about A group of women, who want to expose the scandal that happened in the Star Fox News and

trying to prove that women can work equally with men without any pressure and cleaning the workplace from sexual harassment (Febriansyah, 2019). They started a fightback against Roger Ailes, the chairman of Fox News because of sexual harassment and arbitrary actions that happened to her.

In conducting this research, the researchers use several references from previous study range from 2011 – 2021 to reach the aim of the research. Because references to the issues that raised from this film are still difficult to find, the researchers try to find previous studies that are relevant to the topics that raised in this article. The first article is talking about patriarchy, Christ explained, the patriarchal system is a system where men are the most dominant gender and can control women, and have the right to personal property. (Christ, 2016). In a subsequent study, McLaughlin et al. explains why the bosses of a workplace sometimes act arbitrarily to their workers, those act can happen because they think that employees are the lowest class of a company that they can take advantage of (McLaughlin et al., 2012).

In the following journal, Handayani stated that there are two legal protections from the government that can be utilized by the public, namely: preventive legal protection and repressive legal protection. Both of them can be used optimally by the community to prevent and protect them from any interference from crime (Handayani et al., 2019). Another journal by Dumpratiwi explains about the steps that can be taken by someone to raise someone from the slump due to the act of sexual harassment they have experienced (Dumpratiwi, 2020).

There is a gap between this previous studies and this study, in the previous studies, they only mention several reasons about why and how the victim experience sexual harassment in workplace, meanwhile, in this study, the researchers elaborate them and provides some representation how to counter sexual harassment in workplace through *Bombshell movie (2019)*. There are two steps how to against sexual harassment in workplace, the first is through physical act, and the second one is through verbal act.

METHODS

In order to achieve the objectives, this research uses qualitative methods. This study uses the liberal feminism theory. The data sources in this study are from: (1) the *Bombshell* (2019) movie, as the object of the study and (2) published articles that have been selected according to the topics discussed. To collecting the data, the researchers use several steps as follows: (1) The researchers watches the movie repeatedly to fully recognize the whole story of the movie, (2) The researchers write all of the important things in the movie that match to the topic. After collecting the data, the researchers analyze the data that have been collected before by using the relevant theory, which is liberal feminism by Tong (2009), especially sexual harassment. The analysis started by selecting several scenes that are appropriate to the topic to be discussed, then correlated with liberal feminism theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sexual harassment is a shameful behavior that violates human rights, besides that, sexual harassment does not only in form of physical acts, cat calling and rude jokes is also an act of sexual harassment (Hersch, 2015). Sexual harassment is an action that must be resisted, because this action can have bad effect on the victim, such as: prolonged stress, depression, and even attempted to suicide. According to Tong (2009), sexual harassment including sexual oppression from social system and sexism are immoral, because it can limit people freedom and underwhelming their social life nor their mental health. Therefore, there must be some efforts so that this heinous act can be lost and the perpetrators can be punished according to the applicable regulations.

Against Sexual Harassment in Workplace based on *Bombshell* movie (2019)

Workplace should be a quiet place and free from any distractions, because it is a place where people focus on working to earn wages to meet their daily needs. However, sometimes the

workplace can also be a nightmare for some people, they can get pressure at work, bad treatment from other employees or even from their superiors, the worst is being a victim of sexual harassment in the workplace. Sexual harassment can be in the form of physical or verbal actions, this also applies to fighting it, physical or verbal methods can be used in fighting sexual harassment.

Physical Resistance Against Sexual Harassment in Workplace

In fighting sexual harassment, physical action is very necessary because the effects of this action can be directly felt by the perpetrator. One example of physical action against sexual harassment is reporting the perpetrator to the authorities so that the perpetrator can be processed immediately in accordance with applicable law.

Report The Perpetrator to The Authorities

Patriarchy is a social structure where men dominate and can control women, including private property (Christ, 2016). Meanwhile, according to Maulida (2020), patriarchy is a cultural structure which think that men are superior than women. In this system, women are considered as gentle, obedient creatures, in contrast to men who are considered to be in full power, able to do everything, and know everything. Patriarchy is everywhere, in schools, universities, workplaces, government and so on. For so long this has existed in society, the patriarchal system has been said to be a normal thing that occurs in society. In the *Bombshell* film, the patriarchal system is described by the characteristics of Roger Ailes, who controls all divisions of Fox News. He has employees who are very obedient to him, and if anyone does not want to follow his orders, then the employee will receive the consequences, the punishments can be range from relocation of the work division to punishment of dismissal.

In a patriarchal system, women are often seen as easy targets for men, things such as persecution to acts of sexual harassment are often experienced by women. This happens because men think that they are the most powerful gender.

(Wall, 2018). According to research conducted by Vagins and Gatta (2019), female employees do not dare to report acts of sexual harassment because they are afraid that they will receive more vicious retribution from the perpetrators, such as losing their salaries, up to unilateral dismissal. In some workplaces there are still using patriarchal systems and sexism, where they consider women to be considered as weak creatures and normalize sexual harassment (Davies et al., 2019). In this film, this is proved by the number of women who are became the victims of sexual harassment by Roger Ailes. Because of the patriarchal system that has been attached to society, the female employees did not dare to rebel against Roger, and in the end there was one woman who dared to speak about the disgraceful actions carried out by the CEO of Fox News, the woman named Gretchen Carlson.

In the figure 00:14:44, revealed that Gretchen is very angry and disappointed to see Roger Ailes as CEO of Fox News still abuses power and demeans female employees by exploiting their bodies, with consciously and bravely she filed a lawsuit against Roger on concerns of sexual harassment. She hopes that with this lawsuit, she can stop any bad behavior of Roger Ailes, including acts of sexual harassment and abuse of power that he did.



Figure 1. (00:14:44)

Nancy : *What do you want out of a lawsuit?*
Gretchen : *What do I want? I want this behavior to stop.*

According to McLaughlin et al. (2012), lower level employees are often being the object of abuse of power by people who have positions above them (McLaughlin et al., 2012). This is clearly seen in this film, when Gretchen, a presenter who complained about her interviewees cat calling her when she hosted a talk show, instead

of trying to relaxing Gretchen down, Roger made fun of Gretchen, as if she was a woman who hates men, easily offended and bullied by men. Therefore, she loudly indicted Roger to the prosecutor's office in the hope that he could stop committing these despicable acts. In addition to low-level workers, factors that can cause sexual harassment in the world of work are: victims who are younger, the number of male workers in the workplace, so that they are more domineering, and superiors bosses, so they think that they are the more experienced and they can oppress the younger ones (Hersch, 2015).

Reporting the perpetrators of sexual harassment to the federal is a good thing, because if all the evidence and testimonies from witnesses can incriminate the accusations given to the perpetrators, the perpetrators will be given a commensurate punishment according to the applicable law. Every human being has human rights, and it is the right of everyone to report if they experience an unpleasant incident as a result of the mistakes of others and get legal protection from the authorities. Legal protection is divided into two, namely preventive legal protection which aims to guarantee protection for every citizen in society and repressive legal protection which aims to guarantee protection to every citizen who has reported a crime so that they are safe during the investigation process (Handayani et al., 2019).

Based on data from 2016 – 2018, women are still frightened to file a lawsuit to the perpetrators of sexual harassment in the workplace because those who are the victims are mostly lower-level workers, and the perpetrators are their superiors, who easily abuse their power by forcing his women employees to follow or obey all the orders he gave (Keplinger et al., 2019). However, after there was a lot of news about the victims who dared to talk about this issue, many women were then agreed to voice their feelings and file a lawsuit against the perpetrators of sexual harassment. Moreover, with the existence of social media, victims can easily post stories or chronology that they experienced and then go viral so that their posts are heard by a wide audience and become a boomerang to the perpetrators. Keplinger et al. in his research also

said that the victims of sexual harassment, especially women trust organization to talk about their experience more than when they talk to their friends (Keplinger et al., 2019). Women trust organizations because organizations have lawyer and legal policies that can ensure their safety and privacy Organizations also updating their policies regularly to reduce the scope of perpetrators of sexual harassment and provide comfort and empowerment to victims (Burn, 2019).

Verbal Resistance Against Sexual Harassment in Workplace

The second way to fight sexual harassment is through verbally. This can be done by making a declaration against sexual harassment, motivating victims to rise from the adversity and pressure they experience, and several other ways.

Against Women Oppression through Speech

In the figure 00:08:32, it can be seen that Megyn Kelly publicized Donald Trump, as one of the presidential candidates were disrespecting women by underestimates them, even they are likened to animals.



Figure 2. (00:08:32)

Megyn: Mr. Trump, one of the things people love about you is you speak your mind and you don't use a politician's filter. However, that is not without its downsides. In particular, when it comes to women. You've called women you don't like "fat pigs," "dogs," "slobs" and "disgusting animals."

From the dialogue above, when interviewing Trump, Megyn asked Trump about his habit of shouting women that he doesn't like with inappropriate names. This question has made Trump angry, and the next day he attacked Megyn by writing a hate speech on his Twitter and mobilizing people to follow her.

The incident above is often found around the workplaces; it happens because of the culture of sexism that is spreading among superiors in a workplace. They often abuse their power to fulfill their own desires, such as bullying their employees and even to some acts that disgrace their employees, such as sexual harassment.

Motivate Other Women

Maturity is a period in which every human being looks for his identity by blending in and adapting to society or organizations. Sometimes, in organizations, people can experience any kind of social problems, such as bullying and harassment which can cause someone's mental condition to be unstable, it can also happen in the world of work, at that time, motivation is needed so that they can be strong and get back up to live their life.

There are several ways that can arouse victims of sexual harassment, namely: (1) The culture of the surrounding environment, (2) The ability to understand yourself, (3) Giving motivation either from yourself or others, (4) being grateful that you don't find anything worse than this (Dumpratiwi, 2020). In this film, it can be seen through the figure when Megyn encourage other women to speak up about their experience.

In the figure 01:17:59, Megyn investigated for several victims of sexual harassment by Roger Ailes and interviewed them, as well as: Juliet Huddy, a prior Fox News anchor and Kayla, an employee of Fox News.



Figure 3. (01:17:59)

Megyn : Juliet, did Roger ever...
Juliet : No. I heard things, but nothing firsthand.
Megyn : Good



Figure 4. (01:20:41)

- Megyn : *Listen, I wanted to ask you... I wanted to ask you if Roger is harassing you.*
 Kayla : *How did you know?*
 Megyn : *We find each other.*
 Kayla : *You too?*
 Megyn : *Long time ago.*
 Kayla : *Wow.*

In the dialogue above, Megyn started looking for victims of sexual harassment by Roger, starting with talking to Juliet, her colleague, followed by meeting her junior, Kayla, and some other women. She also encourages the victims to stay strong and dare to speak so that Roger gets punished for everything he did. According to Ponterotto (2014), today, women are victims of marginalization, abuse of power, and excluded as less important in several fields, such as rights, opportunities, and freedom. This figure showed that Megyn want to motivate other women to unite and encourage them to dare to speak about no workplace harassment. Women should not be the object of sexuality and discrimination by men.

The victims of sexual harassment can experience prolonged psychological trauma, such as stress and feeling depressed. Some victims can experience severe stress because they can't control their frantic thoughts (Mushtaq et al., 2015). Depression can also harm ourselves, because it can lead to anger at ourselves, blame ourselves, and question our identity (Houle et al., 2011). As well as psychological trauma, victims can also experience a decrease in their enthusiasm for life and enthusiasm for work. Sometimes they feel that they are shunned by their co-workers, betrayed by their own company because the company is not doing its best to prevent sexual harassment in it (Barr-Walker et al., 2021). All of those side effects can be decreased by motivate the victims, so if we find someone who are a victim of sexual

harassment, we have to accompany and motivate them, not ignoring them

CONCLUSION

Sexual harassment is an act that we must fight together, because it has a very bad effect on the victims. There are two forms of fighting sexual harassment, namely physically and verbally. In *Bombshell* (2019) movie, physical resistance is shown in the scene where Gretchen files a lawsuit against Roger Ailes on charges of sexual harassment. While the fight against sexual harassment through verbally is shown in the scene when Megyn Kelly asks Trump who is present on her talk show about the truth that Trump calls women he doesn't like with inappropriate names, the second is shown in the scene where Megyn asks the victims of sexual harassment who are sexually harassed. carried out by Roger Ailes and motivated them to dare to speak and testify about what happened to them. This is in accordance with Tong's (2009) explanation, women can get their rights in the civil sector and are able to co-exist with men in public work.

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