

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

One of the prevalent women's issues that are still rampant in its discussion is an issue regarding sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is targeted toward someone on the basis of their perceived gender, sexual orientation, or gender expression and expressed through unwanted sexual gestures, actions, or comments (Burn 2019). The categorization of sexual harassment includes unwanted attention and coercion of sexual nature, and gender-based harassment (Fitzgerald, Gelfand and Drasgow 1995). Sexual harassment affects the victims physically and mentally. Reports show that victims of sexual harassment may develop self-blame and guilt for the harassment that happened to them (Foster and Fullagar 2018) and negative body image that may develop an eating disorder (Buchanan, et al. 2013).

Moreover, sexual harassment in a workspace interferes with the victim's career aspirations and performance and creates a hostile working environment for the victims to work (Jacobson and Eaton 2018). Even though sexual harassment is often associated with women's issues, reports show that men may also experience sexual harassment. However, the case of harassment targeted toward men is lower in frequency and has a less severe impact than harassment targeted toward women (Waldo, Berdahl and Fitzgerald 1998). Furthermore, a

survey conducted in 2017 reported that between 1976 to 2017, the cases of sexual harassment against women only saw a 10% decrease (Mateo and Menza 2017).

Discrimination against women continues to exist and persist in modern society. The discrimination against women roots in an assumption of women's inherent inferiority toward men generated from physical attributes differences (Tyson 2006) and varies from limiting agencies and stereotyping perceptions to objectifying based on appearance or capability. The belief of women's inferiority is viewed as society's norm and often justified in practice. As a consequence, patriarchy expects women to be subservient to male dominance. For instance, the power imbalance between genders in a household is a criterion in a patriarchal marriage that maintains male dominance (Chen, Fiske and Lee 2009). The levels of power and privileges that men possess over women may contribute to violence and humiliating acts targeted toward women in the forms of harassment and assault of sexual nature (Haas and Timmerman 2010).

The power imbalance between genders continues to be a problem even in modern society, as on account of gender inequities, women remain to experience discrimination and oppression. The writer of this study attempts to demonstrate the impact of unequal power between genders that contribute to women's oppression, but systemic protection for men that is evident through

the occurrence and the dismissal of sexual harassment in the context of workspace harassment.

Oppression and discrimination against women exist in the working environment despite the consensus of women's liberation signified by their right to be commodified through their labor (P. H. Jensen 2017). Even so, the patriarchal notion of women has resulted in the women's inability to acquire jobs due to their gender (Arimbi 2009). Moreover, the display of patriarchy's oppression of women in the workplace also occurs in the forms of gender-based discrimination and exploitation. For instance, nurturing or humanities-focused jobs are dominated by women due to the patriarchal assumption of women's inherent caring nature (Veale and & Gold 1998). Furthermore, men occupy leadership positions in companies, with women only accounting for less than 30% of leadership positions (Kark and Eagly 2010).

The substantial number of men in positions of power creates a male-dominated working environment. A male-dominated working environment often generates a culture of misogyny that includes feminine denigration and supporting sexual posturing and bravado (Haas and Timmerman 2010). In addition, normative male dominance in a working environment contributes to the rise of sexual harassment cases in the workplace. For instance, Ed Razek, the Chief Marketing Officer for Victoria's Secret, is reported to have perpetrated misogyny, harassment, and bullying culture in the company (2020).

Reports say that Razek asked models to kiss him, sit on his lap, touch one of the model's nether areas, and body-shamed his female employee. A former employee of Victoria's Secret, in an interview with *The New York Times*, stated that the series of abuse happening in the company was diminished into a simple joke and considered normalcy in the company. Razek's invincibility within the company generated career repercussions for the employees who complained against him.

Another example of sexual harassment cases generated from male dominance in a working environment is apparent in the Harvey Weinstein cases. On October 5, 2017, Twohey and Kantor (2017) first reported several sexual allegations against Weinstein. Shortly after, Ronan Farrow (2017) said that Weinstein had a history of sexual misconduct in which he claimed that Weinstein had raped three women and assaulted thirteen. It is now revealed that Weinstein had begun harassing and assaulting women as long as the 1970s when he was still a promoter (Honig 2021). Weinstein's predatory behaviors were viewed as an open secret in Hollywood before they aired to the public. A year prior to the allegations being made public, Weinstein hired private investigators to collect confidential information on journalists and victims. He utilized personal information as intimidation to suppress the news of his sexual misconduct from the public (Peters and Besley 2019). In addition, in 2015, Ambra Gutierrez reported Weinstein to the New York City Police Department,

accusing him of sexual assault, and obtained audio where Weinstein visibly admitted the assault. However, the district attorney dropped the case against Weinstein, claiming insufficient evidence, and the media labeled Gutierrez as an opportunist.

On account of both Razek's and Weinstein's cases, it is apparent that male dominance may generate and contribute to the pervasive oppression of women through sexual harassment. In addition, before their misconduct aired to the public, both Razek's and Weinstein's managed to hold their leading positions in their company for years despite the sexual allegations made against them. The popularization of the *#MeToo* movement is widely credited to actress Alyssa Milano in the wake of Weinstein's expulsion from the Academy Awards due to his sexual misconduct. Utilizing her *Twitter* account, Milano encouraged other sexual harassment and assault victims to speak up, which sparked a viral *#MeToo* movement (Orgad, De Benedictis and Rottenberg 2019).

In 2017, the *#MeToo* movement became a prominent discussion in the western media. The movement that Tarana Burke first coined in 2006 helped reveal the immensity of the sexual harassment problem within academia, the workplace, and medicine (Lee 2018). The *#MeToo* movement has become one of the critical points of the fourth-wave feminist movement in which feminists unite to demand justice and raise awareness of sexual harassment and sexual assault (Keplinger, et al. 2019). Furthermore, the *#MeToo* movement

significantly increased the coverage of sexual harassment in the media (Ennis and Wolfe 2018). Consequently, Hollywood also covers the sexual harassment-centered issue in movies such as *Promising Young Woman* (2020) and *Bombshell* (2019). Both films end with the women's success in achieving justice for the harassment upon them or their close ones. However, in reality, the number of women who reported sexual harassment is low. A survey showed that two-thirds of women did not report the harassment, and those who did make a complaint were unsatisfied with the result (Usdaw 2018).

As indicated by the survey, most sexual harassment cases are either unreported or dismissed upon reporting the harassment. The writer has found a short movie that conforms to the reality of the dismissed claims of sexual harassment. The object of analysis in this study is a short film written and directed by Hazel McKibbin, entitled *Doublespeak* (2021). The short movie has earned several nominations, including from Sundance Film Festival. *Doublespeak* (2021) follows a meeting between Emma, the victim of sexual harassment by her senior, Peter, with the senior managers of her company regarding her complaint of sexual harassment that she previously filed against Peter. Despite compelling evidence Emma obtains, Emma is told that her complaint holds no merits as the evidence is deemed insufficient. Furthermore, despite the sexual comments her senior targeted at Emma, the seniors claim that what Emma's senior did does not constitute what is called sexual harassment.

As portrayed in *Doublespeak* (2021), in which Emma's claim is disregarded and diminished, and Peter remains protected despite his sexual misconduct toward Emma, the writer attempts to elaborate on the practice of power disparities between genders in the working environments that generate oppression toward women due to the systemic protection of the perpetrator and ignorance of sexual harassment claims. In order to conduct the study, the writer utilizes the concept of sexual harassment proposed by Catharine MacKinnon. In *Sexual Harassment of Working Women* (1976), MacKinnon argues that sexual harassment is one instance of discrimination that demonstrates inequities between genders in working environments. In addition, the writer further employs the sexism theory by Laura Bates (2016) in order to uncover the practice of normalized sexism that contributes to the pervasiveness of sexual harassment in society. Furthermore, this study employs both narrative and non-narrative techniques to demonstrate the portrayal of the issues in *Doublespeak* (2021) short film.

The writer of this study has found three previous studies related to the issue that this study tries to demonstrate. The studies are *#MeToo, popular feminism and the news: A content analysis of U.K. newspaper coverage* (Orgad, De Benedictis and Rottenberg 2019), *Sexism, rape myths and feminist identification explain gender differences in attitudes toward the #metoo social media campaign in two countries* (Kunst, et al. 2019), and *From Bodies to*

Blame: Exposure to Sexually Objectifying Media Increases Tolerance Toward Sexual Harassment (Bernard, Legrand and Klein, *From Bodies to Blame: Exposure to Sexually Objectifying Media Increases Tolerance Toward Sexual Harassment* 2018). The previous studies cover the same issue relating to the relationship between the media and sexual harassment. One study finds that U.K. news media had an extensive impact in heightening the sexual harassment and sexual assault campaign of *#MeToo* in the country. However, they also find that the U.K. news media failed to provide a place for discussion in finding solutions to the problems that arise from *#MeToo*. Moreover, the two previous studies reveal the relationship between the media and the attitudes of the participants regarding the issue of sexual harassment; the first study reveals the tendency of the male participants to pose a hostile stance toward the *#MeToo* campaign on social media, whereas the other study reveals the role of media in objectifying women and the participants' tolerance of sexual harassment.

The writer has found gaps between the previous studies and the current study. The first gap between the studies lay in the context of the issue. The three related studies discuss the relationship between the media and sexual harassment regarding how the media frames and influences issues related to sexual harassment. In contrast, the current study discusses the portrayal of sexual harassment in the media as a reflection of the majority of the cases as indicated by the surveys. Furthermore, the gaps between the previous studies

and the current study are also apparent in which none of the three related studies discusses sexual harassment in the context of a working environment and none of the three related studies discusses the root of sexual harassment.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of the study, this study formulates the following questions:

1. How do cases of sexual harassment, such as portrayed in *Doublespeak* (2021), reflect the power imbalance between genders in a working environment?
2. How does the power imbalance between genders in a working environment generate protection for harassment perpetrators, as portrayed in *Doublespeak* (2021)?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems, the writer determines the following objectives:

1. To find out how cases of sexual harassment reflect the power imbalance in the context of working environments.

2. To find out how sexual harassment male perpetrators are protected through power imbalance between genders in the context of working environments.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study has the significance of revealing oppression against women through sexual harassment cases and the potential of exposing the systemic protection and ignorance of the corporation of sexual harassment complaints that roots in the power disparities between genders in the workplace. This study may bring awareness to the readers of women's discrimination and oppression in the professional world that have long been concealed by the corporate's protection of the powerful perpetrators and ignorance of the sexual harassment claims. This study also serves as a form of criticism directed toward corporations for their lack of action in protecting their workers and providing a safe environment for their female workers.

1.5. Definitions of Key Terms

1. Sexual Harassment: Forms of unwanted non-verbal/verbal or physical advances of a sexual nature with the intention to humiliate or intimidate and create a hostile environment (McGolgan 2004).
2. Gender Inequality: The absence of equal representation of women and men in the social field (Young, Fort and Danner 1994).

3. Power Imbalance: The participating parties have different sources of capital as well as levels of power (Holland 2020).
4. Perpetrator: A person committing a crime or a violent and harmful act (Cambridge Dictionary 2021).
5. Oppression: Situations where unfair or cruel treatments govern and prevent people from having opportunities or freedom (Cambridge Dictionary 2021).