

Fighting for Equality in The Workforce

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## Abstract

Inequality, discrimination, and sexual harassment has been occurring ever since individuals stepped into the workforce. All individuals are affected by these issues but in this paper, I mainly focus on women. I discuss the psychological effects these issues have on individuals, and then introduce my method and concepts. Throughout this paper, I use feminist criticism to take a closer look as to how women are portrayed in the two films, *Bombshell*, and *9 to 5*, which are decades apart, and see how women have been treated in the workforce versus men. I then use identification to discover how these films use tactics to identify with their intended audience to create a more powerful message. Then, I use fragments to explain how these films influence future discourse on these issues and how we are only seeing a fragment of the truth, but not the whole truth. Next, I review the history of women in the workforce and the negative consequences that have come along with their contribution. Lastly, I lay out the policies that have been enacted over the last few decades, express hope, and explain what we should do moving forward to tackle these challenges. These issues have been occurring for far too long. However, it has led to current movements such as the #MeToo movement. People have finally found their voices and will no longer be silenced about their experiences. What we need to do now is continue to raise awareness and fight harder than we ever have so that there comes a day where all individuals feel comfortable, valued, and respected while working.

### Fighting for Equality in The Workforce

Women have made tremendous progress to gain equality in the workforce and in all aspects of life. Now, women have more educational and economic opportunities, they have strong voices in political debates, the right to vote, chances to join the military, the right to make choices about their bodies, hold high positions in power, and much more. However, we still hear stories about sexual harassment and individuals being taken advantage of in the workforce. Nearly 1 of every 2 women will be sexual harassed throughout her career (Fitzgerald, 1993). Sexual harassment continues to be an ongoing issue for both women and men, and we need to raise awareness about the consequences it has had on so many lives in order to stop harassment and allow people to work in healthy environments. Since harassment has been going on for decades and not much change has been done, I thought this project would be beneficial since it looks at the history of women in the workforce, the negative consequences that have occurred, the psychological effects it has had on so many, and more. Being able to raise awareness about these issues and encouraging others to speak out about their experiences is going to create more powerful movements around the world and move in the direction towards a more equal and just work environment for all. Throughout this paper, I will be discussing the issue of sexual harassment, introduce two films that talk about sexual harassment in the workplace, and examine how my blogs turned out. I am interested in analyzing these two movies specifically because they are decades apart, but both talk about this ongoing issue of sexual harassment. Both films have influenced future discourse about these issues. The films continue to encourage all individuals who have experienced harassment, inequality, and discrimination to not tolerate it and use your voice to fight the perpetrators. The films also have many similarities and differences, which allow us to gauge how far we have come on these issues in society. The first

movie is called *9 to 5*. This movie stars three young women (Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin, and Jane Fonda). The movie shows these women being overworked, underpaid, and pushed to the edge by an ungrateful boss. The second movie is *Bombshell*, which stars three young blonde women (Megyn Kelly, Gretchen Carlson, and Kayla Pospisil), and sheds light on a real-life dilemma with Fox News that happened just a few years ago involving sexual harassment in the workforce. In order to further analyze these films and the messages they send about workplace harassment, I will be using the rhetorical lenses of Feminist/Gender criticism, identification, and fragments to showcase how men and women are being depicted in the workplace, how audience members continue to relate to the same messages decades later, and how we only see fragments of sexual harassment cases since many go unreported.

Sexual harassment occurs more than we wish it did and sadly, it most likely has happened to someone who is awfully close to you. Many cases also occur around other coworkers in public places. For example, here is a story from one female that felt uncomfortable during a happy hour she had with a few of her coworkers.

I was a 24-year-old inside sales associate at a big tech company at a team dinner with our field sales representatives and regional managers. There were maybe seven or eight of us, and I was the only junior employee. After a few rounds of drinks, one of the field sales reps looked at me and, in front of everyone, said: "If I had met you before I married my wife, you'd be in trouble." He was roughly 20 years my senior. I felt embarrassed and confused at the predatory nature of his comments. I wasn't sure if I should be leveraging my apparent attractiveness to my advantage or deny it completely. Ultimately, I decided to start changing how I dressed, stop going to work happy hours, and I moved to a new team at my company. I did not want anyone to confuse my success

with the favor I may or may not have received from these men or others. (“The stories about men we never tell,” 2018)

In a survey of approximately 9,000 clerical and professional women, 92% of respondents claimed they had experienced some sort of physical or verbal harassment in the workforce (Hm, n.d.). This clearly indicates that this is not just one person's story, but a story that represents millions of other similar cases around the world. Women have dealt with sexual harassment ever since females stepped into the working industry. Like many others, the woman quoted above, felt so uncomfortable to the point where she made drastic changes in her life to avoid the perpetrator. This has been an ongoing issue that needs to be taken more seriously. We need to encourage individuals to speak up about their experiences because harassment of any kind should not be tolerated and needs to be put to an end.

As we can see, harassment is still occurring rapidly in our society. The fact that there are two films decades apart from each other, addressing the same issues, tell us we have only moved an inch. Many individuals are highly identifying with the messages being portrayed in the films. Therefore, it is time that companies start implementing and heavily enforcing stricter policies on harassment and discrimination. Individuals need to continue to communicate about this issue and fight for their rights so that we can live in a more equal and just society for all. In order to successfully get to the bottom of harassment in the workforce, I will be discussing the psychological effects harassment has had on victims, share some current events that have happened over the past few years to explain the relevance of this issue, and introduce my methods and website that I created. I will then go on to explain the history of sexual harassment and women in the workforce, the policies that have thus far been enacted in efforts to solve this

problem, display my findings and results of the project as a whole, and lastly, express hope and explain where we can go from here.

It is true that sexual harassment has been happening ever since women started getting involved in the marketplace. Since sexual harassment in the workplace has been occurring for decades, many have done research involving the topic. Unfortunately, it is rare to find a woman who has not been sexually harassed in some shape or form throughout her academic career. Many surveys of working women conclude that 1 of every 2 women will be harassed throughout her lifetime (Fitzgerald, 1993). At this rate, women assume it will happen to them, they just do not know when. Every individual going into the workforce should have equal opportunities to advance, should be treated fairly, and should be encouraged to have positive mental states. However, this is not always the case. Women have been discriminated against, have lost promotions that have been given to a man with less credentials and skills for the position, and have been psychologically affected by the actions of others. It has been proven that individuals who experience harassment, shortly after, end up reporting clear signs of anxiety, depression, headaches, weight loss or gain, trouble with sleep, gastrointestinal disorders, nausea, and sexual dysfunction (Fitzgerald, 1993). As you can see, harassment affects individuals in more than one way. Just like the story above, it can cause one to become hesitant coming to work and uncomfortable attending certain social gatherings. It influences many to change positions, teams, or even leave their current company for a different one. Women have gone through so much effort, just to avoid one individual. Want to hear something even more unreal? The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission defines harassment as conduct that is “severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive” (Widmer,2018). However, if anyone thinks about reporting a

sexual harassment complaint to the federal EEOC, the complaint must be made within 180 days from when the incident occurred (Fitzgerald,1993). Let me remind you, it is sometimes difficult for one to gather enough proof within that short period of time. Victims could potentially develop illnesses that interfere with the process; lawyers, HR, and other organizations need to get involved. Many also struggle to report their experience in fear of losing their job, damaging their reputation, and more. Giving an individual 180 days is not enough. Cases like these need time and should not be allowed to have a limit on when one needs to report.

The first step any company needs to make is ensuring their policies are enforced. Without policies, employees might think they can do whatever they please. It is like clarifying rules in a game. Once the rules are known and established, all players are clear on what they can and cannot do. If some of the rules were accidentally left out or not made clear, some players might feel they have more flexibility to perform any unspoken or unclear rule. To many, it is obvious that sexual harassment is never appropriate. However, research confirms that men have more of a limited definition of what sexual harassment is and are not as likely to recognize when they are being inappropriate (Fitzgerald, 1993). This is why it is important for all companies to have an in-depth training on what sexual harassment is, examples of what it looks or sounds like, a statement stating it is prohibited by the company and will not be acceptable, and statements telling everyone that action will be taken (Widmer, 2018). Failure to have these policies enacted could be used against the employer as evidence that an employee had authority to perform his wrongful actions. Lastly, in a recent article, Alexandra Witze (2019), an award-winning science journalist, sheds light on the US government's plan to weaken Title IX. Title IX “prohibits federal contractors from discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin” (Valentin, 1997). The government believes that in weakening this law, it will

support the accused as well as the accusers and help reduce the stress universities take on when dealing with these issues (Witze 2019). However, this idea has raised a lot of concerns and scientists have made it clear that this is a bad idea (Witze, 2019). Many argue that weakening this law would reduce protection and only make situations worse. By the US government looking to weaken one of the laws that protects citizens from discrimination, what does this tell us about how far we have come, how serious others are taking this issue, and the way we are currently handling sexual harassment and discrimination cases?

Just a few years ago, it was clear that we were not handling sexual harassment well by any means. One of the major recent sexual harassment cases that has raised many concerns, involves Harvey Weinstein and the numerous accusations that have been made against him. Harvey Weinstein is a former movie producer who created an American Entertainment company called Miramax Films Corporation (“Harvey,” Biography, 2020). He established it with his brother Bob in 1979. Weinstein was known for his success in the film industry and was able to make many individuals successful because of this. He knew how much power he had and that many women wanted to advance their careers as actresses. He used this to his advantage and ended up sexually harassing and raping many women. Ashley Judd, an American actress, was one of the first women to come forward and make allegations of sexual harassment against Harvey Weinstein (Harvey, BBC, 2020). Around this time, the #MeToo movement was formed and went viral. Individuals started opening up about their experiences and now, more than 90 women have shared their own story and accused Weinstein of sexual harassment and rape (Nath, 2020). In attempting to defend his actions, he claimed, “I came of age in the 60’s and 70’s, when all the rules about behavior and workplaces were different. That was the culture then” (Harvey, Biography, 2020). This proves my point that individuals will believe they can do whatever they



please if rules and policies are not enforced. Just because that was the culture back then, does not mean it is acceptable now.

There is no excuse for what Weinstein has done. Whether an individual has harassed one individual or more than 90, sexual harassment is not acceptable. There are no words that Weinstein can say that will ever make his actions excusable. He knew he had power and used that to his advantage. For example, Alice Evans, an English American actress, disclosed her experience she had with Weinstein in 2002 at the Cannes Film Festival. She locked eyes with him, introduced herself, and remembered that her husband screen tested for one of his films the previous night in New York. He told her that her husband did a good job and the very next thing that came out of his mouth was, "I just want to touch your boobs. Just follow me into the bathroom that's down the road." Evans goes on to explain that she was not fearing for her life since she was in public around lots of people, but she immediately knew that he could not help her advance her career unless she did what he asked. After he saw she was uncomfortable and was not going to do what he was asking of her, he told her, "Let's just hope your husband's career goes well" (Nath, 2020). This is one out of the many cases where Weinstein threatens the careers of individuals and makes them feel incredibly uncomfortable. Even more saddening and not surprising, Weinstein is not alone in pursuing this kind of harassing behavior. His actions are just one out of the many others who try to take advantage of people. Luckily, he was found guilty for what he has done and faced the consequences (Full Coverage, 2020). Due to the #MeToo movement and the recent cases occurring, millions of individuals are becoming more encouraged to speak up about their experiences. Women are no longer choosing to stay silent when people are abusing their power. However, this does show us that sexual harassment continues to be an issue and has been going on for far too long. To further prove this, I will be examining

*Bombshell* and *9 to 5*, two films that are decades apart from each other, more in depth throughout my blogs to see how these films have addressed the issue of sexual harassment. I will also be highlighting the similarities and differences to show how far we have come as a society on this issue.

To examine this issue more closely, I am incorporating one approach with two supporting concepts. The approach I am using is Feminist criticism, and my two concepts are identification and fragments. Feminist criticism, as described by Cindy L. Griffin, points out that the construction of women and gender is central to the study of communication (Griffin, 2009). While using this method, I want to explore and explain the construction of women and gender. One of the assumptions is that “women and men often have different access to channels and positions of power” (Griffin, 2009, p. 395). This access that women have versus men influences the way we communicate and the strategies that are used. This approach will help me understand these differences and highlight the depictions of men and women throughout the two films I am analyzing. Feminist criticism also poses the question, “How do women use communication to identify and resist oppression?” (Griffin, 2009). This aspect of Feminist Criticism is very prominent in the films and with sexual harassment cases in general. Throughout the films, the women soon realize that they are fighting against an environment that is only trying to oppress them. To challenge this, they knew they needed to come together and fight the status quo. They pushed against the norm’s society had set in place, went out of their comfort zone, and spoke out about their experiences until their voices were finally heard. This approach is important because it recognizes that women’s voices have been constrained throughout history and that women have established unconventional and creative tactics to speak their truth and tell their stories.

Since I will be combining this method with other concepts, I will focus on how a woman's status and gender affects her ability to communicate in situations, specifically in the workforce.

My first supporting concept is Identification, which is a theory created by Kenneth Burke. In his book, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke (1969) is interested and curious on the ways in which rhetoric can be used to work towards unity through identification. He believes that identification is achieved when a speaker mimics the audience's speech, gesture, tonality, image, attitude, and ideas, sharing commonalities with members who are receiving the information with a persuasive intent (Burke, 1969, p. 55). "In that moment, we become consubstantial: part of me is you, and part of you is me as we engage in this identification. We are, "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial"" (Burke, P. 55). Burke also believes heavily on knowing your audience to make a message persuasive. As Burke states, "Understand how your audience acts, thinks, behaves, what their beliefs and values are, what is considered good or bad, etc." (P. 56). This theory will allow me to explain how so many audience members are identifying with the same messages decades later and leads me to the conclusion that although women have come far in the workplace, we have not fought as hard as we should in order to improve the workplace for women.

My second concept I want to include is McGee's rhetorical theory of fragments. McGee (1990) argued, "The apparently finished discourse is in fact a dense reconstruction of all the bits of other discourses from which it was made. It is fashioned from what we call "fragments" (p.279). Fragments are pieces of text that make up a larger whole. Fragments that came before heavily influence the fragments that are created in the future. One person's understanding of harassment in the workplace is going to be influenced by the fragments they encounter, whether that is their own personal experiences, the instances they witness, or cases they hear. That is why

it is important for workplaces to have trainings on sexual harassment often, examples of what harassment looks like, and strict policies, so all workers have a clear understanding of what sexual harassment is. This way, more cases can be prevented, and individuals can receive the punishments they deserve. The two films are fragments themselves, influencing future discourse about sexual harassment in the workplace. Throughout the two films, *Bombshell* and *9 to 5*, and with sexual harassment as a whole, we only see a fragment of the truth since many cases go unreported, women sign NDA's, silencing them about their experiences, and/or, in many instances, too much time passes and it is too late to report them. As McGee explains, "the only way to say it all in our fractured culture is to provide readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue them to produce a finished discourse in their minds. Text construction is now something done more by the consumers than by the producers of discourse" (McGee, p. 228). He is basically saying that we never have the complete and full story right in front of us. Due to this, we need to take it upon ourselves to look deeper into the story and pick up the pieces to understand the full truth to any story. There is a bigger issue at hand that these two films are trying to portray to audience members. The fact that these two movies are decades apart and share many similarities on the same topic, shows that we need to fight even harder to tackle this issue.

One of the many ways individuals can start fighting back and raising their voices on this issue is by sharing their thoughts with others and creating conversations. In efforts to share my concerns with the public eye and raise awareness on this issue, I have decided to create a website for my blogs. Websites are one of the many ways to express yourself and share your passions with a selected audience. I wanted to reach out to teenagers and young adults and raise awareness that these issues are still occurring more often than they should, that companies need

to continue to implement and practice more effective policies, and that organizations need to clarify what sexual harassment looks like so men and women can watch out for the signs and know what to do in these situations if they occur. I think creating blogs is a remarkably effective way to reach my targeted audience. Many individuals searching for answers to their questions typically seek out websites and blogs since the platforms are more of a personal and open space for dialogue. Since I have my contact information included on my website, some might go the extra mile to reach out to me personally and share their experiences. In situations like these, people potentially feel more comfortable talking to strangers that are also victims of harassment or are simply knowledgeable on the topic, rather than someone they know. These platforms give them a way to release their built-up anger, frustration, and sometimes embarrassment and is a way to identify with someone about their experience.

For my first blog post, I explain why I am interested in the issue, talk about the history of women in the workplace, and the negative consequences that women have experienced as a result of them joining this environment. In my second blog and third blog, I will offer some description on the two movies I am analyzing and go into their rhetorical situations. For my fourth blog, I highlight how these two movies differ and where they share similarities while incorporating feminist/gender criticism. On my fifth and six blogs, I relate the films to the concepts of identification and fragments and explain what this all means for society. Lastly, on blog post number 7, I clarify why all of this matters, what the differences and similarities tell us about this issue, how we've dealt with it thus far, and discuss what steps we can take that will lead us in the direction towards healthy work environments for all. To tackle this issue, we need to start from the beginning, when women first began entering the workforce.

The history of women in the workforce is an essential aspect to highlight throughout this paper since it explains why things have been the way they have, based on gender and sex. Throughout history, it has been transparent that women have always been seen as the weaker sex that needs protection from their male counterpart, whereas males have been perceived as the stronger individual who is more fit for the harshness of the work environment (Albee & Perry, 1998). Due to this, in the late 1800's and early 1900's, when single women were of age to marry, employers discriminated against them and refused to hire them. They have also laid off women after they chose to get married since "the traditional roles of women involved taking care of the family and house while the husband worked," and denied women access to their company if they were already married while applying (Barnett, 2004). Since many employers believed women had different roles in society, they also deemed it acceptable to pay women less. Since men had a family to support, they got paid more. Since women, especially single women, did not have families to support, they got paid less (Kranzberg, 2017). Of course, this is ridiculous since not all women were in similar situations. Women needed to support themselves just as much as men did. As you can see, inequality was clear, and many women had to make the choice whether to pursue a career or have a family and did not have much of a choice to do both.

Women started to become annoyed at the fact that they did not have equal opportunities as men. To challenge this, women finally decided to fight the status quo and took the matter into their own hands. To give you a bit of a run down on how women started involving themselves into the workforce, it began with the Daughter of Liberty, which was created in 1765 to boycott British goods and this organization became the first society of working women (Giang, 2013). They contributed and performed many roles during the American Revolution (Brooks, 2015). Then, in 1903, the National Women's Trade Union league began fighting for an increase in

wages and working environments. About a decade later, during WW1, women started working industry and public service jobs, and in WW2, approximately seven million women filled positions that men had previously performed before they went off at war (Giang, 2013). WW2 was a turning point in history for women. When soldiers left, all women were recruited to fill the open positions (Barnett, 2004). Men finally started to realize that women were just as capable, if not better, at performing these roles. Even though women proved themselves worthy in the workplace, men still treated them with disrespect and harassed them.

Considering sexual harassment has been an ongoing issue since the beginning, it is important to know how sexual harassment got its name and how men versus women perceived it. There was no name for sexual harassment until the Working Women United decided to survey many employed women about sexual attention they were receiving in the workplace during the mid-70s (Belknap & Erez, 1997). During this time, sexual harassment was defined as, “any repeated and unwanted sexual comments, looks, suggestions or physical contact that you find objectionable or offensive and that causes you discomfort on your job” (Belknap & Erez, 1997). Although sexual harassment was highly frequent during these times, it was also seen as forbidden for a woman to talk about and acceptable for a man to do. Reading this, you cannot deny the concept that “men were seen as the dominant and powerful sex and women were seen as the weaker sex” did not play a factor. Men believed they had authority over women and had flexibility to do what they wanted. Women were told not to speak up and to carry on with their work.

Over the years, since more and more women have been brave enough to speak up about the harassment that was occurring in the workforce, people began to realize how big of an issue it was. Therefore, many policies have been enacted. For example, the Equal Pay Act was passed

in 1963 and was set in place to protect administrators, professionals, and executives against sex discrimination (Giang, 2013). Although this law was set in place in 1963, many women currently continue to get paid less than men (Hegewisch, 2019). Currently, women are almost half the workforce. They also earn more college and graduate degrees than men do. Yet, women still earn less (Hegewisch, 2019). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a huge advancement for women. This law prohibits employers from discriminating against their employees based on race, skin color, religion, sex, or national origin (Fried, 2000). In accordance to this, employers are also responsible for any discrimination that occurs within their company. If companies have outstanding policies, have clear guidelines that harassment is not tolerated, and treat the situations fast and effectively, the company will not get in as much trouble. However, if a company's policies are not clear or absent, the company is taking big risks (Widmer, 2018). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was then founded in 1965. The EEOC is a federal agency that enforces laws against workplace discrimination. They investigate cases when individuals send in complaints (Widmer, 2018). Title IX of 1972 prohibited federal contractors from discrimination during employment relating to race, color, religion, or national origin (Valentin). To reiterate my point, it is impressive to see how many laws and policies have been implemented in efforts to decrease sexual harassment cases. However, it does not mean all companies, employers, and employees, are going to act accordingly. Therefore, we need to continue to fight this ongoing issue so that all individuals no longer must put up with harassment and discrimination.

People get harassed at work, during happy hour with coworkers, at holiday parties, and even in public places around lots of familiar faces. People should not have to deal with this issue in a place surrounded by their friends. We need to continue to fight this issue with even more



strength. Individuals should be able to feel comfortable and valued when they are at work and around the people, they do business with. No person should feel scared, disrespected, out of place, and silenced on what they are going through. No one should have to go through psychological illnesses, move teams, or change jobs just because of the words or actions of another person. The fact that we are still seeing similarities within the two films I am analyzing clearly indicates that we have not come as far as many would like. Hence why I am passionate about this project and seek to raise awareness about these issues to hopefully create change in the future.

### **Project Description**

When coming to Cal Poly as a transfer student, I started to hear the word “senior project” but did not know exactly what that meant. I heard stories about people creating Jamba Juice, delivering artistic performances, building things, and other cool ideas. After taking a few classes at Cal Poly, I started to realize senior projects can be extremely broad and should be about something that a student is passionate about. The entire project takes up a lot of time and research and it is more fun if you are interested in the idea. For me, I did not figure out what I wanted my project to be about till my last quarter at Cal Poly. I would watch a few shows and come up with some ideas here and there, but nothing seemed to stand out to me. However, in December of 2019 while I was home for winter break, my two aunts, mother, and I, decided to go see the movie *Bombshell*. The movie portrays a toxic work environment where the CEO Roger Ailes, sexually harasses more than 20 females. What was sad to see is that many women allowed this to happen or stayed silent about it due to fear of losing their jobs or because they simply wanted airtime on television. After hearing many women share their traumatizing experiences in the film, I felt many emotions. I felt encouraged, motivated, proud, but I also felt

angry, discomfort, and sadness. I realized this movie was released during a perfect time to speak out to so many individuals about harassment, since the #MeToo movement has recently gone viral and so many celebrities have told their stories. It is a time where women need to come together to fight this battle that has been going on for too long. Interestingly, I also felt this story was not complete. I decided to write about this film in my Contemporary Rhetorical Theory class and realized that Megyn Kelly (one of the main women that the film focuses on), was not even aware the producers and directors were creating a story about her dilemma with Fox News. After reading this, I realized that the audience is only seeing a piece of the truth. If they allowed her to contribute to the production of the movie, their information would have been more accurate, and she could have implemented other aspects that were left out. As for Gretchen Carlson, she was forced to sign an NDA and could no longer speak about her situation. This caught my eye the most while researching this film and made me question those in power. Why is there a film being made encouraging women and other individuals to find the courage to talk about their stories, while those in power still want to silence those that try? This made me want to investigate this issue even more. After speaking with my teacher, Dr. Kolodziejki about my idea, she motivated me to watch *9 to 5* - starring three female secretaries who come together to get revenge on their tyrannical, sexist boss by holding him hostage while running the business themselves. This film was released in the 1980's and inspires women to fight for their rights and prove that they are just as worthy to lead as men are. So here we are, decades later, still dealing with the same issues many have fought long and hard to overcome. I was so fascinated by this topic and knew I would learn something new every day.

As a Communication major who loves to interact with others and learn about people's opinions and stances on issues, performing an applied project in this way has been extremely

exciting and new to me. It has given me my own voice to speak up about a matter that is important to me. It gives me an opportunity to share my research, thoughts, and ideas with others and hear their informative feedback so that we can grow from one another. Developing a website allows me to build a community, meet strangers from across the globe, talk about similar topics others are also interested in, and identify with one another. When deciding on which platform to use, I used the advice and direction others have stated from their experiences. I began researching, starting with the website, “10 best website builders 2020.” As soon as I clicked on that link, Wix was the number one most popular choice ranked at a 9.8 (Best website builders, 2020). It has over 500 designer templates, stunning design features, and is free to use. When researching, I realized there was another competing website called WordPress. However, Wix is perfect for beginners whereas WordPress is a self-hosted open source content management system. This means that if you choose to use WordPress, you are attempting to build your website from scratch. Sounds difficult for a beginner, right? As for Wix, everything is built in beforehand (Carmichael, 2020). If you are a techie or coder, WordPress might offer more flexibility and suit your interests (Wix, 2020). As for me, Wix was a perfect and fun choice to create my beautiful first website. There were so many templates so choose from and you it is truly up to you to design it however you like. I decided to go for a simpler look. As soon as you reach my website, the first thing that will catch your eye is the “about” section. It includes information on who I am, why I am passionate about sexual harassment, and an introduction to my blogs. After that, you will see an image of a woman hugging herself as a sign of needing comfort. I thought this picture was great for the beginning of my website because it represents a woman who feels lonely, isolated, alone, and could be experiencing trauma from a potential harassment experience she had. Directly after the image, are my 7 blogs where I go into detail

about my research and findings. To successfully accomplish this project, and receive my bachelor's degree in Communication studies, I had to become skilled with my research abilities, familiar with many concepts and theories, and learn how to think critically. In my Communication Research Methods class, I was introduced to the methods commonly used in communication research, began increasing my knowledge on the principles, objectives, ethics, and limitations of the research methods, improved my ability to evaluate research and more. This has been helpful to my research by allowing me to more easily distinguish accurate, reliable, and well-established sources throughout my senior project. Communication theory, Rhetorical Criticism, and Contemporary Rhetorical theory have all helped me tremendously to dive deeper into what the methods and concepts I have used, are all about. All these classes have taught me how to better criticize and analyze passages, videos, and films.

While looking at my two films, it is clear women have been treated differently than men. In *9 to 5*, the boss was able to give orders to the secretaries and if they did not comply, they would be fired. For example, the women had to grab his coffee every morning, had to make sure his car was filled up with gas, told to go out and buy gifts for his wife or mistress, and the boss would get credit for the women's creative ideas. In *Bombshell*, the women had to wear tight dresses, skirts, and high heels when coming to work. Those who wanted to represent the company and get aired on television needed to be skinny, beautiful, and show their legs to attract people's attention. Throughout the films, the women are sexualized, objectified, and treated with disrespect while the men get promotions and are treated well. This has sadly been the reality of things for decades now. Sadly, these two films had many similarities. The women were forced to wear certain clothing while the men had to wear business suits. The women had to work hard to attain promotions while the men easily filled higher positions. Both films showed the many ways

women have been oppressed and seen as inferior while the men are superior. This just reiterates the fact that the workplace culture has not changed much. Due to this, women have sought out other creative ways to find their power and let their voices be heard, which includes building websites and blogs. Knowing this, creating a website was perfect for my senior project.

I was further able to incorporate the methods and concepts within my films to better analyze the underlying messages that are portrayed to audiences. For example, when using feminist criticism, I learned that women have always been treated differently in films. They are normally seen as the weaker sex, objectified, the shape of their bodies and beauty are highlighted to appeal to the audience's eye, and women typically have to find other creative outlets to let their voices be heard. This is something that needs to be recognized and studied more closely since it is only further perpetuating the gender and social roles that society has set in place since the beginning of time. If we let films continue portraying each sex as such, we will never fully reach gender equality and society will continue to oppress women. Now, with identification, we use this all the time. Humans like to be in sync with others and have commonalities. The more time we spend with someone, the more similar our personalities usually are. They could also have different qualities that intrigue us. When we identify with others, we feel more comfortable with ourselves and with one another. Movies like *9 to 5* and *Bombshell* attempt to identify with women and other individuals who have struggled with inequality, discrimination, and harassment of any kind. Their main goal is to make audience members remember that they are not alone in what they are dealing with and to encourage others to fight back against the perpetrators that try to cause harm to them. To have a powerful and moving film, you need to find ways to identify with your audience. Directors and producers know this and use this as a rhetorical strategy to improve the movies ratings and spread word about the films. People are not going to talk about,

spread word, and want to see movies that do not relate to them. Individuals seek to feel reassurance, acceptance, and gain confidence in themselves when they share commonalities. Lastly, with fragments, it is important to remember that everything we read, hear about, and watch are pieces to a bigger whole. Even though a movie says, “true story,” does not mean it is an accurate depiction. We need to be critical and question all things to seek the truth. It is essential to also realize that these films are only a fragment that is going to influence further discussion about this issue. Every film being made about harassment is one step closer to reaching equality in society. What all individuals need to do at this point is to continue to talk about these difficult problems that we have been dealing with for decades. The more we communicate and raise awareness to others and those in power that these issues matter, the more change will come. We need to stand and fight together and change the status quo that has been long overdue.

At first, I was nervous about building my first website since I had never done so before. However, as soon I told my friends, roommates, and family about my ideas, they could not wait to read what I had built. That made this project more enjoyable and motivated me to be innovative. All things considered; I believe my senior project went very well. I chose a topic I was highly passionate about, enjoyed researching and learning more about the history and everything that comes along with the topic of sexual harassment, and my website turned out beautifully. The only aspect I struggled with was landing on the correct topic and going for it. I was hesitant about my ideas but once I discussed things with my advisor, Dr. Kolodziejki, it was clear where my passion was. I personally do not think I would do anything differently next time because I feel everything worked out the way it was supposed to, and I am satisfied with the outcomes. It was important for me to create a senior project where I could talk about serious and

important issues that others need to be informed on while also encouraging people to change the status quo and fight for what they believe in. My senior project allows me to communicate with others about sexual harassment, motivate them to talk about the inequalities that are still occurring in our society today, and come up with ways to create a healthier work environment for all. Being able to create my own personal website enables me to share my thoughts with others, find my unique voice, and show it to the public eye. After posting my blogs and receiving feedback from friends both on my website and through direct message on my cell, it was clear this topic needed to be discussed and focused on. Believe it or not, these issues are not as widely understood or discussed by many. This makes films and other mediums that address these problems more meaningful and impactful because it is finally speaking up and addressing the importance of harassment, discrimination, and inequality that we are struggling to fix. After reading my feedback online, it was clear people have a hard time talking about these matters, but it is needed and essential. Many people hope it is not a common obstacle that women must face but the reality is that it is. People need to be aware that this issue is not decreasing with time but increasing. Women have been silenced for too long and many individuals have recently discovered their voice and power given the movements that have been surfacing lately. Given this, I hope we can all see harassment rates finally start to stabilize and decrease as time goes on. Hopefully, future discourse will create more powerful, multidimensional women that are perceived by younger generations as more equal to men. We need the generations after us to not have to deal with the issues we are faced with today. We need to create change so that the others that come after us will live in a society where they only look at the most qualified candidates. Where sex, gender, and other aspects are not deciding factors, but qualifications and personalities

are. To receive this change, we need others to be informed about these issues and know where they stand.

Sexual harassment cases have been increasing over the past few years and despite the tremendous effort from millions, we still have not made it far. Due to the current receptive climate from the #MeToo movement, sexual harassment complaints have increased: “The EEOC received 7,609 sexual harassment complaints during the last fiscal year, up 13.6% on the previous year” (Keshner, 2019). Harassment has been going on throughout the years and people have been staying silent. The #MeToo movement created a voice for millions to finally tell their story and give them the courage and strength to relate to each other about the horrible things others have done to them. To defeat this battle, the perpetrator needs to be punished so that there are no more perpetrators in the future. Companies need to be strictly addressing this issue and fix their toxic environment that has been created over the years. There needs to be harsher laws and policies enacted so that all individuals are fearful of the consequences and know what they would face if they decided to move forward with these types of actions. For something to be stopped, people need to be afraid of the aftermath, understand what not to do, and realize their actions and words are unacceptable under any circumstance. As for future directions, looking into what policies and laws other countries implement to handle this issue, how difficult harassment is in their areas, and comparing them to the way the US handles sexual harassment would be a fascinating project. For anyone who is about to start their own senior project or design creative platforms such as websites or blogs, find something that interests you where you want to learn more. Choose something that catches your eye and where you are not yet knowledgeable on everything that story entails. Pick something that will be relevant and relatable to others but also encourage them to reconstruct our current system in some way. Throughout the



creation of this project, I realized I have a new desire for letting my voice be heard on creative outlets.

All in all, our current system is broken and needs reforming. The pay gap that still exists today between men and women should not be allowed. Men should not be getting the promotions over more qualified women. Women should no longer live in fear of losing their jobs or feel that they need to be silent when harassment occurs. Discrimination, harassment, and inequality need to stop here and stop for good. We should be looking at individuals as people and value their souls and personalities, not their gender, sex, or race.

We do not have time to be questioning whether we should weaken laws. It is clear sexual harassment still occurs today and will continue to occur unless we strengthen the current laws and pass more. We need to protect the citizens of America. We need to encourage individuals to have the courage to speak up when they feel uncomfortable. We need to listen when people are telling their stories, instead of questioning their integrity. Every individual should have the chance to receive equal opportunities to advance, should always be treated fairly by others, and should be encouraged to have positive mental states. If we want companies to succeed and all workers to reach their top potential, sexual harassment and discrimination needs to end now. We need to implement better policies, have frequent trainings, a clear understanding of what sexual harassment is, and get all citizens to work together to stop this issue. If we came together and made tremendous efforts to maintain healthy work environments, imagine what we as a society, could accomplish. It is time we start moving in a better direction for all. Due to the current movements, we are seeing that individuals are finding the courage to speak up about their experiences and not feel like they must be silent anymore. If we continue this trend, change is bound to come. We have seen what women have accomplished already. Women have more

opportunities, voices in political debates, the right to vote, chances to join the military, the right to make choices about their bodies, and hold high positions in power. However, women are just getting started and this is the beginning of the fight for equality in the workforce.

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**Appendix A**