

Freedom of Expression in The Movie Spotlight as a Medium to Convey the Voices of Sexual Abuse Victims to the Public

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ABSTRACT

Spotlight (2015, directed by Tom McCarthy) is a docudrama which told the story of the investigation of sexual assault of young boys in Catholic Church in Boston, United States of America. A group of four journalists from The Boston Globe, called Spotlight, specialized in investigation overlooked, forgotten cases, and one of the cases is the sexual assault cases that happened inside the Catholic Church. Although their journey to seek the truth has many challenges and problems, they helped a lot of abuse victims to have courage and speak up over the tragedy that happened to them. Spotlight's realistic expression on the narration was shown through the character's dialog, which contributed to the plot of the movie itself. The meaning of "Freedom of Expression" depicted in the movie Spotlight was to symbolize the struggle of the characters, which includes the journalists and the victims, to fight for their rights. Through this movie, McCarthy wanted to help more people who were victims to speak up about their traumatic abuse. Spotlight not only could be a technique of mental healing for victims, but also a media of advocacy for people to know, to inform and to communicate the negative aspects of victim blaming.

Keywords: Freedom of expression, docudrama, sexual abuse, victim blaming, advocacy

Introduction

Nanook of the North (1929) movie was the first documentary movie which became popular among the public. Ever since such movies appeared, non-fiction was no longer the desired genre by the audience. The amount of the movie can't also be compared to the fiction ones. Nowadays, the situation has changed. With the vast development in technology and the birth of VOD (Video On Demand) platforms, interest in the non-fiction genre has increased, along with the increasing amount of non-fiction movies. According to Hot Docs Report, the documentary movie's audience is around 72%, where the audience watched documentary films twice in a month. There is a 50% increase in documentary movie audience in comparison to 3 years prior. 94% of the audience watched the documentary films at home and 79% watched non-fiction movies in the theaters (telefilm, 2018).

Eitzen quoting Brody (2017), explained that fundamentally speaking, the function of documentary films is to discover something, so the documentary filmmaker's duty is to not just make entertaining films, but also respect the reality and be objective in delivering the reality.

This research's purpose is to achieve deeper understanding regarding the steps in building social awareness by using various media, especially movies. *Spotlight* was chosen because the story was based on a true story and it can represent sexual harassments done by the religious leaders, who were, at the time, considered to be a taboo to be opened to the public.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used qualitative methods where data collecting was done by using literature data and observing the movie, *Spotlight*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Docudrama

Docudrama gender development was marked by its popularity back in the television era in the 1970s. *Eyewitness* was one of the supposedly docudrama genre mini series. *Eyewitness* told the story of an investigation by the American

government toward various criminal cases. On segmentation in that series, the audience could enjoy rather dramatically enhanced dialogues through the actual recordings. The plot development from that series was also based on authentic journals and material from real live investigations. Karen Ann Quinlin's case from the series' title called "In the Matter of Karen Ann Quinlin" became docudrama's most interesting and selling illustration released on NBC TV (Hoffer & Nelson, 1978).

***Spotlight* Movie and Sexual Harassment Cases**

Spotlight was a docudrama movie released in 2015, directed by Tom McCarthy which narrated the investigations in child's sexual harassment cases by some Rome Catholic priests in Boston, United States of America, and won The Pulitzer Prize award. That media company named The Boston Globe owned a team called *Spotlight*, consisting of 4 journalists. The *Spotlight* team handled many neglected cases, one of them is child's sexual harassment done by church's priests which drawn one of the *Spotlight*'s team member's interest. It was a tough case to crack, because the case was covered by the Churches. In order to reveal the truth, the *Spotlight* team interviewed many of the victims and gathered some facts about the harassment cases covered by the Churches who did systematic manipulations to protect the guilty priests by relocating them to different parishes.

Child's sexual harassment cases are not a new thing in the United States of America. Statistically, according to research by David Finkelhor as the Head Research Bureau in Crimes Against Children Research Center; revealed that 1 of 5 girls as well as 1 of 20 boys are victims to sexual harassments. The most vulnerable victims are children around 7 to 13 years old (Finkelhor, n.d). Children who became victims to sexual harassment would usually show similar characteristics after they fully grown up. Those children had no confidence, no self-respect, and possessed abnormal views toward sex. Sexual harassment victims also found it hard to place their trusts onto their parents and ended up with suicide (NCVC, 2010).

In an interview with Screen Slam, McCarthy (2016) explained their first interest toward *Spotlight* story was on the power of local journalism which affected

unfinished global issues or even never really brought to the media. The *Spotlight* team succeeded in reporting the complete sexual harassment cases through some interviews with the survivors, and in that movie, Tom McCarthy narrated and visualized the story through the eyes of the journalists. The movie won the Oscar trophy for Best Picture category, Best Original Screenplay category, Best Director category, and many more. Its win in the prestigious event also elevated “Spotlight” popularity in audiences from other countries and certainly, it also massively impacted the foreign audiences’ emotion.

Literature Study

Psychology Theory: Sexual harassment and Victim-blaming tendency

Sexual harassments not only befallen girls but also boys. From a total of 10,677 reports of exposed victims in The Boston Globe’s investigation, 81% of them were boys with three fourths of them in their adolescence (Cullen, 2004). According to Lew (2004), media’s doctrines toward masculinity and femininity’s stereotypes are particularly high and uniformed without looking at cultures, surroundings, and dynamics occurring in the smaller scoop which is family. In actuality, boys’ and girls’ growth patterns vary, hence can’t be generalized from one culture to another. From those doctrines, the public has its own way in determining how to be a girl or a boy (Lew, 2014). Not only in the media such as commercials, movies, video games, theaters, music’s; even reference books also dictated the difference in masculinity and femininity. Masculinity always being described as being in control and career, or manly looks should be athletic and strong; and there are many other words used as the standards in describing a masculine person, for example: brave, macho, energetic, strong, healthy, and ready for anything. These masculinity standards created a negative impact in society. Due to these stereotypes, the public can easily judge and label someone as a “failure” if they don’t meet these standards of masculinity.

It had become pretty problematical for boys, especially those who are victims to sexual harassments. Every victim is equal, girls or boys, feminine or masculine.

The impacts on the victims depend on many factors, for example individual characteristic, which is not determined by sex (Lew, 2004). One of many negative impacts on the victims is losing self-confident that they are men, so Lew (2004) stated that not little victims believed that they are still kids or immature, as well as extremely believing themselves as women and later on turning as homosexuals (Lew, 2004).

Aside of that, perspectives over dominance and grown-up men on sexual harassment victims would be generalized, that all grown up and dominant men are abusive. So the first thing that must be done by the sexual harassment's victims is to accept themselves and understand the mindset of masculinity, dominance, and grown up men must be changed. Also believing that the victims can mentally recover. The victims must also enrich themselves with correct information that they are not plunged in, but rather, suffered from a bad relationship.

Acceptance can only be done if the victims can view themselves in a more mature way, and usually happens around 30 to 50 years old. Victim-blaming mindsets have been dictated by the society and their surroundings or there must be a change for victim-blaming. Lew (2004) endorsed the word "survivors", as a form of identification towards the individuals who suffered sexual harassments when they were kids. That positive approach gave active verbs, where anyone who wants to be healed is a warrior who deserves an appreciation for their hard work (Lew, 2004).

Several things that are commonly suffered by the warrior, such as:

- Depression, usually follows by suicidal thoughts
- Low self-confidence
- Shame and guilt
- Trust issue towards everyone
- Nightmares and sleep disorder
- Sexual dysfunction such as unable to make a commitment
- Alcohol and drugs addiction

Recovery strategies recommended by Lew (2004) are: forgetting, denying, avoiding, and pretending. Those strategies require the warrior's own awareness to

face their dark pasts. Meanwhile, shall the strategies fail, then the next recommended psychological technique is to observe and discover a consistent pattern that is commonly used by the warriors to shut down the pain or traumatic memories from their past. Such patterns to kill off the pain may vary; it could be in the form of addictions such as: alcohol and drugs. It can also be an addiction towards food, goods, or even sports (Lew, 2004).

Movie Theory: Artistic Expression Media, Ideology, and Advocate Media

According to Pasaribu (2011), Truffaut had a long discussion with Bazin regarding the movie's analogy in making mayonnaise which later became more commonly known as Bazin's Mayonnaise Theory. "Technical expression and intellect in a movie will merge into its own system, just like mayonnaise's ingredients. The system will later be tasted by the audience's eyes and minds, whether it is perfectly mixed or not" (JB Kristanto and Jonathan Pasaribu, 2011).

Essentially, movies are not just a work of art, but also a creation which needs special attention in the making, just like the metaphor in mayonnaise making stated by Bazin. The success in the making of thick mayonnaise is also a reflection of the behind the scene's process, from combining scenarios, cinematography taking, and on-screen performance. A movie requires passion, honesty, and inspiration (Joret, 2019). Due to these aspects, a movie is also a creation of artistic expression, for it's not just about the story but also the visual audio factor in it.

Bazin as a movie's theory promotor: Art of Reality, truly favored the objectivity in a movie like a genre in documentary movies. Authentic images are way better than using special effects or manipulative techniques commonly used in huge studios in Hollywood. One of the rather interesting case studies was Steven Spielberg with his movie, *Jaws* (1975). To reach its realistic aspect in his movie, Spielberg chose on-site shooting, which was the beach, instead in the studio.

Aside from that, realistic movies contain strong ideology which is believed by their audiences. Ideology is a belief originated from individuals or collectively. A movie surely contains the maker's ideology, especially the director, the important

figure in the movie's production. Director's ideology is reflected in characters' building, institution, or even cultures created at the front or behind the scene. There are several categorized ideologies which commonly appear in movie making: (1) neutral; (2) implicit; (3) explicit. Movies have power in creating a new culture order, because movies carry the society's ideologies.

Greta Gerwig became an example of a director with a strong feminist-based ideology, reflected in her movies. In *Little Women* (2019) and *Lady Bird* (2017) movies, Gerwig lifted a strong woman character as the main lead in her story, where the character stripped off stereotypes over women in terms of growth and development limitation in the community. Women should own talents, ambition, and dreams just like men. Especially in the *Little Women* (2019) movie, where the supporting characters, Jo March's sisters, were also strong-willed women with their own life path. Celebration over discrimination toward women also strengthen feminist ideology which is firmly held by Greta Gerwig (Gensburg, 2019).

An interesting advocate project to study is Steps for the Future made to decrease the number of HIV/AIDS patients in South Africa, Mozambique, and Lesotho. People in South Africa, Mozambique and Lesotho refused to believe that there are many people around them contracted HIV/AIDS. The documentary movie was used by Ikka Vehkalathi, a documentary movie producer in YLE Finnish Broadcasting Company, to communicate the pandemic occurring in their nation.

That documentary movie was made into a series of 37 episodes, various durations, ranging from 4 to 74 minutes. *Step for the Future*'s collection contains guidance for facilitators, specifically used for advocate media. Aside from that guidance, screening or watching together were held in collaboration with local media in several areas in those 3 locations. Then, one of the little boys, as the audience, asked whether the movie can be shared with the others as he continued: "At home, I told my siblings because I thought they are pretty grown up to talk about HIV/AIDS. They did not believe me and I asked them to go and ask my female friend who watched it with me, and when they found out that I've been telling the truth, they got surprised and interested in watching the movie. I also told my mother and she was

impressed because I saw people contracting HIV/AIDS. My mother became curious whether the person I watched told their parents about what happened to them and what their parents' reactions were. Then I told her that the mother was shown in the movie and was being supportive toward her child's condition."

Through a movie, a teenage boy can be an advocate. Steps for the Future documentary movie proven to be able to invite discussions as well as being an advocacy media for cases happening in South Africa, Mozambique, and Lesotho.

Artistic expression in *Spotlight* movie poured in its narration. Struggling for a realistic story of *Spotlight* team's investigation, this artistic expression existed in each dialogue happening in every plot's development as well as uniquely attached to each character.

Spotlight will discuss how an ideology held by one of the main characters ended up developed into a collective ideology believed by the entire *Spotlight* team. This discussion will be elaborated through each journalist's character's development story flow, because according to McCarthy (2016), *Spotlight* took the narration perspective from the eyes of the journalists from The Boston Globe, especially the *Spotlight* team.

No	Scene Images	Characters' Descriptions and Narrations
1	 Okay but the fact remains, a Boston priest abused 80 kids.	<p>Marty Baron, this character is a figure who smashed The Boston Globe. Marty was new in Boston and a non-Catholic. Marty felt restless over the news of a Boston's priest who molested 80 children. This dialogue was the beginning of the plot's development and the dynamic's determinant happened in <i>Spotlight</i>.</p> <p>Dialogue: "Okay but the fact remains, a Boston priest abused 80 kids."</p>

2		<p>Matt Carroll, another <i>Spotlight</i> team member who rarely worked in the field but is an expert of data and statistics. Matt was the one to discover the rotten system patterns in Catholic Church. Where in order to cover the guilty priest, they moved the priest to a different parish.</p> <p>Dialogue: <i>“Did the same thing and was moved again.”</i></p>
3		<p>Walter Robinson, in his every dialogue, was a player-coach who defined <i>Spotlight</i> team's solid success in their investigation. Walter Robinson strongly influences people around him.</p> <p>Dialogue: <i>“I think we oughta start ignoring everybody on this one.”</i></p>
4		<p>Mike Rezendes. Mike Rezendes relationship with Walter and Ben according to their dialogues in this movie shown a pretty solid commitment and unshakable character as well as not caring about other stuffs in finding the truth over the sexual harassment cases. In one scene, Mike believed that what is being investigated is a good story.</p> <p>Dialogue: <i>“It's a good story, why?”</i></p>
5		<p>Sacha Pfeiffer, the only female member in the <i>Spotlight</i> team. Her approach in the interviews was so considering and humanist toward her interlocutor's emotions. In one of her dialogues, Sacha showed a character who owned a specific purpose in gaining detailed and personal stories.</p> <p>Dialogue: <i>“Joe, I think that the language is gonna be so important here. We can't sanitize this. Just</i></p>

		<p><i>saying molest isn't enough."</i></p>
6		<p>Mitchell Garabedian. This character was a key character who pushed the <i>Spotlight</i> team to continue their investigation over the child's sexual harassment cases. Mitchel was a one-step forward person compared to the other <i>Spotlight</i> team members in realizing how rotten the case was, but was limited by cost and other resources.</p> <p>Dialogue: <i>"If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one."</i></p>
7		<p>Survivors' representatives. Studying some of the victims' characters also invited the audience to believe in what was being investigated by the <i>Spotlight</i> team. From the way they speak, language usage in describing their past, these two characters elaborated the incidents visually in flat emotions, grieves, or dilemmatic.</p> <p>Dialogues: <i>"And I think, he could tell I was gay."</i> and <i>"His hand just slides right up and..."</i></p>



The meaning of “Freedom to Express” described by *Spotlight* was to symbolize Elizabeth’s struggle in fighting for her right as a woman. The key success of this film was how the *Spotlight* team expressed their opinions through their investigation. They were aware of child’s abuse and pedophilia happened inside Catholic Churches were bad news, especially since the Church covered the cases. Even though many people believed that they should investigate it further, they did so because they believed it was the right thing to do and they can unravel it because they had strong evidence to support them.

Through the movie’s flow, it was clear that the investigation was not just about the reporters’ “voices”, but also the victims’ “voices”. In the movie, one of the victims stated that the majority of sexual harassment cases happened in the churches almost never solved and they didn’t get any compensation. Since they couldn’t find justice through laws, the only way they could find it was through the media and that was the main idea of *Spotlight*.

Spotlight as a movie itself was a way to speak about those harassments. Its director, Tom McCarthy stated that the movie helped more victims to speak up, helped the public to realize the importance of investigation reports, and not just in America, but also other countries (Liton & Shubhra Adhikary, 2016). McCarthy himself believed the *Spotlight* was a movie about truth findings free of charge or resources, and McCarthy’s willingness to emphasize the victims as the strong and effective voice of truth (Forrester, 2018). Thus, he avoided overdramatization and

sensationalism because they will only betray the real value of the movie (Forrester, 2018).

Spotlight solely focused on speaking up and the benefits that can be gained by the victims if they speak up. A source document from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) stated this point about speaking up: “As a way to regain their power from the incident who robbed their controls, some survivors found that speaking up about their attacks was a part of the healing process”. Sexual harassment may cause issues if not handled, it may cause drug addiction, sexual addiction, eating disorder, and even turning the victims into doers (Hansook, 2021). Speaking up doesn’t always mean in front of the public, just like the recently famous #MeToo moves on the internet, but also speaks up to other people, families, friends, and even their trusted therapist.

CONCLUSION

From *Spotlight* we learned that not only freedom in expression described by the movie, but also how speaking up is actually important for the victims. *Spotlight*, based on its narration and movie characterization, described how an ideology held by one of the main characters developed into a collective ideology believed by the whole *Spotlight* team members. And in the movie, itself, Tom McCarthy’s own ideology was born to help even more people to speak up over traumatic experiences that happened in the past, especially related to church’s priests.

Movies like *Spotlight* can be a recovering technique for the warriors’ mentals so that they no longer cover or bury their traumatic past, but instead, try to accept themselves and understand that they can be healed. Furthermore, movies such as *Spotlight* are expected to become an advocacy media to all people who know, inform, and communicate the negative impacts as well as getting rid of victim-blaming tendency.

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