

## Depictions of Gender-Based Discriminations in the U.S. in Mimi Leder's 'On the Basis of Sex' (2018): as a Feminism Study

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### Abstract

Gender-based discrimination is one of many kinds of discrimination ever exist in this universe. It has been a crucial issue yet it is also often ignored by society. This phenomenon happens because patriarchy ideology has made it be a common thing in society. The patriarchy ideology influences and makes people hegemonized in behavior, way of life, and social structure. Related to this research, it is mainly discusses about the depictions of gender-based discrimination in the U.S. which found in the movie 'On the Basis of Sex (2018)' by Mimi Leder. The aim of this research is to find out the causes, the depictions, and the ways the main character take actions to overcome gender-based discrimination in the U.S. according to the movie. This journal is categorized as a qualitative-based research that uses feminism approach as the applied theory. The research is done by doing analysis on the conversations over the scenes in the movie regarding to the research questions and applies the theory of feminism by Simone de Beauvoir (1949). The research found that Depiction of gender-based discrimination and men domination in the movie 'On the Basis of Sex (2018)' occurs in the field of education, legal, working environment, and public place that is derived from patriarchal culture in the United State for centuries. The discrimination experienced by some characters both man and woman.

**Keywords:** *gender based discrimination, feminism, movie, patriarchy.*

### INTRODUCTION

Gender is a socially constructed term for attitudes, activities, roles and traits that are considered appropriate for men and women (Shastri, 2014:27). Discrimination itself defined as a hindrance on achieving the objectives of equality, peace, and development (Pokharel, 2008:1). While, gender discrimination is inequality between men and women.

Gender discrimination possibly happens in any aspects of daily life. Unfortunately, this issue has become such a common thing in some cultures. It is caused by ideology of patriarchy that makes such a hegemony to society's mindset and it shapes a standard on the way people should behave. This kind of phenomenon has been running for centuries in most countries worldwide. For instance, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, women had less access to come to university. It is one of some depictions of gender discrimination in the movie *On the Basis of Sex (2018)* by Mimi Leder which is the object of this research. The movie represents how man domination, women devoicing, and sexism culture existed in 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States.

The research applied the theory of feminism as the approach on analyzing the movie. According to Cambridge Dictionary, the meaning of feminism itself is the opinion that

women should be permitted to have the same opportunities, rights, and power as men and be treated equally, or the set of activities in purpose to reach this state (dictionary.cambridge.org). Broadly, feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the genders. (Hawkesworth, 2006:25-27) (Beasley 1999:3-11)

Until today, feminist movements have struggle and continue to struggle for women's rights, including the right to work, to vote, to hold public figure, to own property, to receive education, to earn equal pay, to have equal rights in marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists have also acted to ensure access to social integration and legal abortions, and to protect girls and women from any kinds of sexual abuse and domestic violence. (Echols, 1989:1967–1975)

This article focuses on the analysis of gender discriminations that represented in the movie *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) using Simone de Beauvoir's theory of feminism. The aim of this research is to find out the evidences of gender discrimination in the United States and to analyze the effects of gender discrimination that are depicted in the movie. Apart from possibly being reference for the next research, the reason why the researcher interested to discuss a topic related to feminism is because the researcher wants to open up the readers' mind and add their perspective on seeing gender relationship. In other words, this journal takes part on supporting gender equality in society.

## **THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Previous Studies**

The first previous study is from Andrey Shastri with title "Gender Inequality and Women Discrimination" published in 2014, which taking data from gender discrimination happened in India. This study aims to create elaboration about gender discrimination that faced by women and provides the society solution on how to lower it, and the finding of the study reveals that Indian society needs a social awakening and a shift of attitude of mindset in addition to making laws and enforcing the society itself, so that no more gender based discrimination and women obtain their rights of equality. (Shastri, 2014:30)

The second previous study entitled "Reflection of Feminism in Jane Eyre" by Haiyan Gao published in 2013. The aim of this study is to analyze the contemporary social, historical and cultural background of Victorian period and key points of feminism, and Jane's experiences. The method applied in this study is qualitative method which analyze a novel entitled Jane Eyre as the object using feminism theory. This study ends up to the finding that Jane Eyre gradually becomes a feminist in obtaining independence and equality also true love. (Gao, 2013:926)

The third previous study entitled "The Reflection of Marxist Feminism in Suzanne Collins's Mockingjay" by Nailah published in 2016. The aim of this study is to understand more about Marxist feminism in Mockingjay. This study applied qualitative method which analyze Mockingjay novel as the object using Marxist feminism approach. The findings of this study are the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of prose analysis. The intrinsic elements

which discussed are character, conflict, allegory, and setting. While the extrinsic element analysis discusses Katniss Everdeen as the main character in the novel *Mockingjay*. The extrinsic element analysis provides descriptions of alienation, class struggle, Marxist feminism, and domination. (Nailah, 2016:1)

### **1. Popular Culture**

According to John Storey (2009:5-6), popular culture is a culture that attains support and is liked or well understood by many people, which can be proven quantitatively based on data from a cultural product, such as: book sales, CD / DVD, concert tickets, festival visitor tickets, etc. Furthermore, John Storey said that every popular culture must include quantitative dimension in it, in order to define the classification of “popular” in the cultural products itself. But quantitative index is not sufficient as the only factor to define the “popular” in popular culture, because quantitative index such as television rating or book sales can also include classic cultural product which considered as “high culture” in it.

### **2. Gender-based Discrimination**

Gender is a socially constructed term for attitudes, activities, roles and traits that are considered appropriate for men and women (Shastri, 2014:27). Discrimination itself defined as a hindrance on achieving the objectives of equality, peace, and development (Pokharel, 2008:1). While gender-based discrimination is inequality between men and women.

### **3. Feminism**

According to Cambridge Dictionary, the meaning of feminism is the opinion that women should be permitted to have the same opportunities, rights, and power as men and be treated equally, or the set of activities in purpose to reach this state ([dictionary.cambridge.org](http://dictionary.cambridge.org)). Broadly, feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the genders (Hawkesworth, 2006:25-27) (Beasley, 1999:3-11).

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

Depictions of gender-based discrimination and men domination in the movie *On the Basis of Sex* (2018) occur in the field of education, legal, working environment, and public place that is derived from patriarchal and sexism culture in the United State for centuries. The discrimination experienced by some characters both man and woman that mostly portrayed in Ruth as the woman and Moritz as the man. Women in United State have less opportunity to access higher education, because after graduating from school, they are suggested to stay home taking care of their family or getting married soon. Therefore, higher education regarded unnecessary for them.

While from the man side, Charles Moritz, he experienced discrimination in the field of law. It is when his proposal for caregiver tax deduction rejected by the court. The prevailing law proves that Moritz does not have the right for tax deduction since he is a bachelor and unmarried man who should not be a caregiver at home. This depiction represents sexism

culture that exists in the United States. The patriarchal and sexism culture have gone massive and inherited that causes discrimination happens in many field.

## CONCLUSION

Patriarchal society also created a situation that men dominated public environment in the United State in the century. They created regulations and legal in such way that drive women into a situation of becoming “the other”, subordinate, and depend on men. Women regarded as obstacle and stranger to men in public although they appear as impersonal opponents (Beauvoir, 1949:199-200). Meanwhile, Charles Moritz is a representation of male character who experiences discrimination because he does not appear as how a man should be in patriarchal society. Thus it gets him into uneasy relation between him and his fellows (Beauvoir, 1949:201).

Ruth Bader Ginsburg presents as an independent and visionary female figure at the age. She is a proof that woman can go beyond expectation of society although they live under limitations. She has high ambition but still cares about the public interest. Despite experiencing discriminations in her community, Ruth remains tough and firm to her goals. The discrimination experienced by her does not prevent her from continuing to learn and develop until she achieves her goals one by one. With her desire to uphold justice and eliminate discrimination, she has taken the right steps and through her arguments she has succeeded in opening public minds about the massive discrimination that has occurred in the country.

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