

Verbal Abuse and Gender Discrimination in a Work Environment (Semiotics Analysis of Short Film ‘Please be Quiet’)

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is often regarded as taboo because it is a disgrace that must be covered. The existence of patriarchal cultural practices that have been implemented for a long time has made marginalized groups become silenced. Entering the development of science and technology that continues to advance, many social figures, institutions, and organizations have begun to fight for women’s rights to live more comfortably through films. Researchers analyzed verbal harassment and gender discrimination in the world of work, using the object of a short film entitled Please Be Quiet. Researchers use group theory, mass communication and communication, film as a mass medium, and gender discrimination. Researchers used Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis method with a descriptive qualitative approach and a case study research design. This study aims to understand the meaning of denotation, connotation, the myth of the silent mouth, and the forms of verbal abuse in the film.

Keywords

Analysis, Short films, Muted Group, Please Be Quiet, Sexual harassment, Roland Barthes, Semiotics.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of gender discrimination is still a problem that often occurs in various communities, one of which occurs in the work environment. Often this act of gender discrimination occurs in women because there are still many people who apply the principles of patriarchy, namely believing that men have a higher degree or position and will continue to have that power in leadership, ownership, morals, and social rights (Griffin, 2012). Based on data from the annual records released by Komnas Perempuan on March 8, 2022, there were a total of 338,496 cases of sexual violence. Meanwhile, according to report data from women’s and children’s service institutions, 108 sexual cases occurred in the work environment in the public or community sphere, which was higher than the report of sexual violence in 2020. In the workplace, generally, men have a more favorable position. Higher education is not only limited to work but also has power in other areas because society is like that.

Nevertheless, as time passes and technology continues to develop, many movements aim to help victims get justice. Many social figures, institutions, and organizations have started to take various ways to fight for women’s rights so that they can carry out their activities safely. One media used in delivering messages, especially the campaign to eliminate gender-based violence, is film. The film is one form of mass media that is well known by the public. Not only getting entertainment after doing activities or filling spare time, but films can contain various educative, informative, and persuasive functions

(Sugiono, 2012). Besides being one of the media that is often used, films are not only intended as entertainment. However, they can also be a means of delivering messages that follow social phenomena to the audience so that they can make people who watch see ideological constructions packaged through storylines, dialogues, characters, and moral messages. To be attractive and accessible.

One film that delivers a unique message is the short film *Please Be Quiet* by William Adiguna. The man who graduated from Deakin University and produced four works has produced a film with the theme of gender discrimination in the workplace, entitled *Please Be Quiet*. The film incorporates storylines, characters, cinematographic concepts, and moral messages with sensitive stereotypes was successfully screened at Jakarta Film Week and received an IMDB rating of 7.4/10. The unique theme researcher tells the story of a female employee who has had a verbal experience and wants to do a semiotic analysis of Roland Barthes to find out the meaning of denotation, connotation, and the myth of the silent mouth sign and to represent how the verbal form is shown in the film *Please Be Quiet*. With this study, the researcher aims to describe how verbal forms and work gender discrimination are depicted in the short film *Please Be Quiet* using semiotic analysis methods.

To be able to compile this study, the researchers used previous studies as references, including *Between Violence and Exclusion: Cinematic Representation of Gender Politics in Antarmahal and Water* by Imran Mazid, which met in 2018 in the *International Journal of Communication* volume 8, and *Sexual Harassment in the Creative Industries: Tolerance, Culture and the Need for Change* by Sophie Hennekam and Dawn Bennet released in 2017 in *Gender, Work and Organization*. The first and second reference studies have differences for the first reference study discusses how the form of patriarchal socio-cultural practices and gender roles in society are shown in the film using the semiotic analysis method, and the results of the study find how the form of patriarchal culture is applied to the film directly through the film—culture in that country. The second reference discusses how sex work occurs in the workplace, especially in the creative industry environment, by conducting qualitative interviews with several workers, especially workers in the creative industry. It turns out that previous research found the phenomenon of gender discrimination in the world of work through interviews that have been conducted. Then the researcher found that verbal and gender discrimination in the workplace were depicted in the film the researcher was doing.

2. Literature Review

In compiling this research, the researcher used 5 theories as the conceptual basis: mass communication and communication, film as mass media, gender discrimination, silence group theory, and Roland Barthes' semiotics.

Mass communication and communication

Humans will not be able to escape from communication, and humans will continue to communicate even though it is only limited to behavior. Without communicating, of course, it will cause an imbalance in social problems. Harold D. Laswell, one of the figures who put forward the basics of communication science in the book *Introduction to Communication Science* (2017), states that there are three factors why studying communication is very important. First, humans have a desire to control the environment. Second, humans need to adapt to the environment and are always trying to transform and socialize. Laswell's communication model is the oldest communication model that is still used today because communication model is linear. The concept of Laswell's communication model consists of who conveys the message, what is the content of the message, what channel or media is used to convey the message, who receives the message, and what effect it has.

Film as Mass Media

Mass media is a medium used to convey information more broadly. Mass media is divided into two, namely print media such as newspapers and magazines, while electronic media is in the form of radio, television, and films. In conveying a message, mass media are needed as intermediaries from the message to the recipient. The film is a means of spreading messages through entertainment that presents stories, jokes, and technical presentations to the general public (Prasetya, 2019, p. 27). To make a film as a medium of mass communication, it must have three film functions for the mass media, including an informative function that contains new knowledge for the audience, educative containing about how a film can provide education to the audience to capture the message contained therein and the function entertainment that can convey the turbulent atmosphere and emotions presented by the film to the audience.

Gender Discrimination

The concepts of gender and sex are still difficult to distinguish by ordinary people. Sex or gender is the division of two human sexes determined biologically. There are only two sexes, male and female. At the same time, gender is a trait or behavior that is culturally and socially constructed; although having a different gender, a person's nature or behavior can change. Many factors lead to the formation of gender differences, one of which is socially or culturally constructed through religious teachings or the state. This long construction process is finally considered as the nature or provision of God that cannot be changed, even though this behavior can change and is not natural because of what forms the community itself, causing gender discrimination (Fakih, 2013). Gender discrimination is an unequal behavior towards gender that affects a person's life, and this behavior is usually more often experienced by women due to several factors, one of which is patriarchal culture. Patriarchal culture is a system that places men as the dominant group with power in various aspects of society's culture. Not only that, a society that adheres to this patriarchal principle imposes limitations on women regarding social, political, and economic rights that make women shackled to receive discriminatory treatment (Rokhmansyah, 2016). The impact on victims of gender discrimination is subordination, marginalization, violence, stereotypes, to double burdens.

Mute Group Theory

The theory of silence groups focuses on how dominant groups communicate by silencing words, ideas, and discourses of groups with lower power often called marginal groups (women, poor people, people of color), who are not as accessible as men in conveying their words. The silent group theory comes from the opinion of social anthropologists Edwin and Shirley Ardener. Edwin argues that women are people who are silenced because they have low power or power in their group hierarchy (Griffin, 2012) the dominant group has power in determining the cultural communication system, while the marginal must follow what is applied by the dominant group. Then the silent group theory was developed by Cheri Kramarae; he argues that language is a construction of men, and language in certain cultures does not treat everyone equally. Women and other minority groups do not have broad freedom or access as men express themselves; this is indicated by the words and norms used by the dominant group itself.

Semiotics Roland Barthes

Along with the development of the times, life and human thought patterns develop into a foundation for forming meaning. Humans cannot be separated from understanding the meaning they see. Consciously or not, we often think about the form of an object and then interpret it; it can be from objects that are often seen to objects that are imagined, this is called semiotics. Semiotics is a scientific study that examines a sign or symbol and describes the meaning of the sign. Roland Barthes was a Ferdinand de Saussure student who absorbed much knowledge and dedicated his thoughts to the study of semiology. According to Barthes, the meaning of a sign significantly influences the concept of culture due to the emergence of the popular public thought that makes the sign means. Each culture, group, and society, of course, has its way of interpreting something. Community groups have different understanding backgrounds in each of their cultures, so not all community groups can understand the culture that has been agreed upon by other community groups. For this reason, the concept of a sign's meaning becomes one of the crucial parts that will be used in this research process to serve as a reference for interpreting the messages in the film.

3. Methods

This research uses a semiotic analysis method with a descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative research expresses a picture or understanding of how and why a phenomenon occurs. The description is intended to provide an understanding of phenomena that occur in the work environment (Lexy J. Moleong, 2018). Based on the problem formulation and data collection results, the researchers wanted to take as many as five visually and verbal scenes with denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings in the short film Please Be Quiet. After doing the research, the researcher can analyze the object to understand the signs contained in the film based on semiotic analysis and a descriptive approach. The researcher uses a case study research design, in which the researcher will observe the phenomena in each scene in the short film Please Be Quiet to analyze verbal harassment and gender discrimination shown in the film.

In collecting data that is relevant to the research objectives, here are some techniques that the authors will use during data collection, which are expected to produce representative data:

- a. Primary data is information collected by researchers directly from the data source. Therefore, the researcher took several pieces in the short film footage entitled *Please Be Quiet* using the screenshot technique.
- b. Secondary data was obtained through several journals and books by this research and took some information from videos from interviews conducted by the *YouTube creator BB69 Channel* with the short film producer *Please Be Quiet* William Adiguna as primary data reinforcement.

In conducting this research, the researcher used Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis as technical data analysis, and the object studied was the scene contained in the short film *Please Be Quiet* by William Adiguna, which was released on November 25, 2021, and can be accessed for free through the *Vids* and *Youtube* applications. Researchers will analyze Roland Barthes' semiotics by analyzing the meaning of the film's denotation, connotation, and myths by observing each scene shown. After finding the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth contained in the film *Please Be Quiet*, the researcher can describe the findings research results by describing the meaning of each scene that has been studied and then relating it to the current phenomenon. In carrying out the data validity technique, the researcher uses a source triangulation technique, namely by observing several scenes to get the meaning of signs of gender discrimination in the short film *Please Be Quiet* and linking them to current social phenomena. There are four to explore the validity of qualitative data criteria based on Mekarisce (2020, p. 150): *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*.

4. Results and Discussion

The short film "*Please Be Quiet*" by William Adiguna, produced in 2021, talks about acts of sexual harassment and abuse of power in the workplace by a superior named Benny to an employee named Putri. The film's beginning tells the story of two office employees named Sarah and Putri working late because they are finishing their work in the office. That night was a nightmare for Putri; she had a very unpleasant experience with her boss. Putri experienced verbal sexual harassment because Mr. Benny offered Putri be promoted to junior manager on the condition that Putri had to go home with Mr. Benny. Even though Putri refused, Mr. Benny still approached Putri while making the same offer. Feeling the situation was getting increasingly unsafe, Putri finally strengthened her courage to leave her superior's room and went home feeling scared. The next day Sarah approached Putri to offer help to the princess to get justice because Sarah understood what Mr. Benny was doing was sexual harassment, but Putri rejected the offer because Putri felt this was not a big problem, and she still wanted to keep her job. (Figure 1)



Figure 1. Footage of scene 1

Denotation: A well-dressed man approached two women in their office in a company room.

Connotation: The clothes worn by Mr. Benny, Putri and Sarah indicate that they are working participants in the company. Mr. Benny's attitude in giving orders to Sarah and Putri shows that Mr. Benny has a higher position than Sarah and Putri (Griffin, 2012).

In the scene, Sarah expresses an opinion to offer help but is rejected by Mr. Benny, and it shows that men have the main control in deciding something (Sakina & A., 2017).

Myth: In a patriarchal culture, women's opinions tend to be considered useless because society shapes women's and men's roles to be unequal. Men have a higher position and control everything in making decisions, so women's opinions are often silenced or not listened to (Griffin, 2012; Karkono et al., 2020).



Figure 2. Footage of scene 2

Denotation: A woman carrying her bag in a hurry spontaneously froze because she saw a man and woman talking in the study. In the scene, a man who is a boss in the office approaches a woman who is an employee and then embraces the woman sensually while talking. The scene also shows the expression of a woman uncomfortable with the man's treatment, and the response also evidences this the woman immediately stood up and rushed home.

Connotation: Sarah, carrying a bag, indicates Sarah has just returned to the office because Putri's Flashdisk containing a job proposal given to Sarah to be completed at home is left behind. Sarah's fixated attitude when she saw Mr. Benny, who was sexually harassing Putri, indicated that Sarah was shocked because she saw an incident that she should not have seen. Pak Benny's attitude towards Putri was sexual harassment.

Myth: Based on the ILO (*International Labor Organization*), convention No. 190 states that violence and harassment in the world of work refer to a series of unacceptable behaviors and practices or threats that occur once or repeatedly, intending to cause physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm. According to the *Never Okay Project*, sexual harassment in the workplace has two categories: *Quid Pro Quo* sexual harassment, which can be interpreted as offering something to get something. *Quid Pro Quo* sexual harassment occurs not because of the consent of both parties but is coercion because only one party wants it.



Figure 3. Footage of scene 3

Denotation: In an office pantry, two women are seen talking seriously; it can be seen from their formal clothes that they are both employees of a company and work in the same place. The first woman's

expression was worried, and she tried to say something to the second woman, but the second woman showed an angry expression after hearing this statement. Then when the first woman tried to restrain the second woman, the second woman slapped the first woman's hand and curtly left the first woman. Connotation: The state of Sarah and Putri, who fold their arms when talking, has two meanings. First, Sarah is trying to think of a solution while asking Putri to talk about what Mr. Benny did to her last night. Putri's attitude that folded her arms while staring intently at Sarah showed that Putri did not agree with Sarah's opinion to report what happened to her because, according to Putri, Mr. Benny had not done anything to Putri. When Sarah tries to persuade Putri to let Sarah help her, Sarah understands that what Mr. Benny did to Putri is sexual harassment. However, Putri refused by slapping Sarah's hand. Putri told Sarah to forget about this incident because Putri's condition was still traumatized, and she did not want to discuss what happened.

Myth: According to an online survey conducted by the *Never Okay Project* in 2018, victims who experienced sexual harassment, especially in the workplace, did not dare to report it sooner because the victims tried to deny reality, lacked factual information or evidence, had shame, and were afraid of being punished. Suffer consequences such as losing their jobs and getting victim blaming. The impact of this sexual harassment act can disrupt the victim's mental health, make the victim feel insecure, try to avoid work situations, and resign from work.



Figure 4. Scene 4

Denotation: Two people are seen talking face to face in a room. Judging by the atmosphere and the room being quite large and closed, it shows they are talking in the boss's office at the company.

Connotation: Sarah's attitude is trying to threaten and fight because Sarah feels capable of helping Putri. Mr. Benny's attitude towards Sarah is to try to silence Sarah by using his power by saying that there is no law that Mr. Benny can buy.

Myth: Patriarchal culture instilled by society for a long time makes it more difficult for women to express their opinions. The image of men being considered to have power over everything makes adherents of this patriarchal principle abuse their power, as seen in the scene of Mr. Benny is trying to threaten Sarah (Karkono et al., 2020). In addition to threats, victims are silenced because they are traumatized by the events they had experienced, thus making victims reluctant to report. After all, the trauma experienced by the victim makes it difficult for the victim to tell what events were experienced when sexual violence occurred.

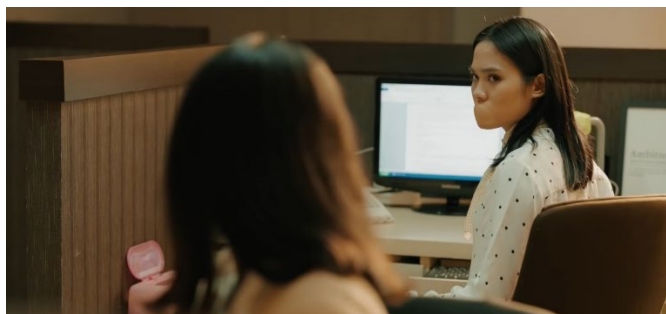


Figure 5. Scene Footage 5

Denotation: In a work room, two women stare at each other with their mouths missing or silenced. Then the woman wearing a polka dot shirt turned around, showed a pensive expression, and then looked at the camera with a puzzled look.

Connotation: The state of Sarah and Putri, whose mouths are silenced, indicates the condition of the victims of sexual harassment who cannot defend themselves because the perpetrator silences them. The silenced mouth is interpreted as the image of women belonging to marginalized groups who are not given the right to voice their opinions because men have more control than women, and women cannot voice their opinions because they are considered useless (Griffin, 2012).

Myth: The patriarchal culture that some dominant groups still embrace is very detrimental to women. Although many movements have been made to prevent sexual harassment and gain women's rights to live safer, patriarchal culture is still difficult to eliminate. According to the annual records of gender violence published by Komnas Perempuan, until now, there are still many reports of sexual harassment cases from various environments. The latest data on the annual record of gender violence shows that as many as 108 cases occurred in the workplace, and the victims were also silenced because the solutions to the problems taken were still difficult to solve legally.

Discussion

Representation of the meaning of the silent mouth sign

Representation is an image constructed in terms of meaning and reality by phenomena in the real world. Representation depends on signs and images that exist or are culturally agreed upon in language, media, and various textual significations (Wibowo, 2019). In the short film *Please Be Quiet*, William Adiguna shows a visual silence sign by William Adiguna because he wants to illustrate to the public that the silenced figures are victims or marginalized people who are not allowed to express their opinions or justice. The silencing forms are not only shown visually but also found in some of the dialogues uttered in the scenes in the short film. The form of silence found is seen in the scene of Sarah who offers to assist Mr. Benny but is not heard, then in the scene of Mr. Benny who tries to silence Sarah who is trying to report acts of sexual harassment to human resources and the police by threatening Sarah using the power that Mr. Benny as the boss. The first threat regarding Sarah and Putri's career, Mr. Benny said he would terminate Sarah and Putri because of their declining performance reasons and because Mr. Benny had given statements of harassment without clear evidence. Then the second threat made by Mr. Benny is that if Sarah still insists on reporting Mr. Benny, then Mr. Benny does not hesitate to hire the most expensive lawyer in town because Mr. Benny is very sure that there is no judge that he cannot buy.

Forms of Verbal Harassment and Gender Discrimination

Forms of verbal harassment and gender discrimination are quite common in the scenes of the short film *Please Be Quiet*. The form of discrimination was shown starting from the first scene of Sarah, who offered to help Mr. Benny, but his opinion was not heard, and delegated Putri's work to Sarah so that Putri could help Mr. Benny complete their project. Then the second form of discrimination carried out by Mr. Benny is seen in the scene where Mr. Benny tries to corner Sarah, who is trying to help Putri get justice. From the dialogue shown in the scene, Mr. Benny can be seen intimidating Sarah by asking questions that are cornering and blatantly refusing. Sarah's opinion is that women and victims of abuse can get justice. The verbal abuse carried out by Mr. Benny was to offer Putri a promotion as a junior manager but had to grant Mr. Benny's condition that Putri had to go home and stay with Mr. Benny. The act of harassment shown in the film is called sexual harassment *Quid Pro Quo* or something to get

something, where the perpetrator of sexual harassment offers something to the victim but must be returned with something in return. Komnas Perempuan recorded cases of sexual harassment in the work environment as many as 108 cases in 2022.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research results of Verbal Harassment and Gender Discrimination in the World of Work (Analysis of Semiotics in the Short Film Please Be Quiet), using Roland Barthes' semiotic model and interpreting the scene based on denotation, connotation, and myth, the following results are obtained:

1. The meaning of denotation, connotation, and the myth of the silent mouth sign in the short film Please Be Quiet is the situation of Sarah and Putri as victims of sexual harassment by Mr. Benny at work. Mr. Benny is a dominant group who holds the principle of patriarchy in his life, and he believes that the position of men is always above women from all sides, such as social position and position in the workplace. The silent mouth describes the condition of the victims who belong to the marginal group and do not get the opportunity to express their opinions as freely as how men express themselves. The dominant group has several methods of silencing marginal groups, including ridicule based on rituals or culture, controlling to committing violence or sexual harassment. The silence carried out by Mr. Benny is to control and carry out sexual harassment.
2. The form of verbal harassment shown in the short film Please Be Quiet is Quid Pro Quo harassment or something for something, where the harasser offers something to the victim and then asks the victim to give something in return which leads to sexual harassment.

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Biographies

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