

Revealing the Trauma of Sexual Harassment Against Men in the Film Dear David (Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes)

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ABSTRACT :

As a mass media outlet, films are entertaining and provide information for the public. This research examines the film Dear David, which was shown on a digital platform and directed by Lucky Kuswandi and intended to convey a message about men being victims of sexual harassment. This research aims to determine the representation of sexual harassment towards men conveyed in a film. This research uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory to analyze the representation of sexual harassment against men in the film Dear David. Seven scenes were found that depicted the reality of sexual harassment experienced by the character and ended up causing trauma. The results of this research are the issue of sexual harassment by men where there is a stigma of toxic masculinity, which emphasizes that men are strong and should not appear weak so that patriarchal culture means that victims are often ignored and do not receive attention.

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INTRODUCTION

The depiction of sexual harassment in a film is a complex topic and full of meaning. As a mass media, films can be a tool to increase awareness and education about sexual harassment. On the other hand, films can also trigger empathy and solidarity for the victims. Sensitive or exploitative depictions can potentially traumatize victims, reinforce stereotypes, and can also lead to the normalization of abusive behavior. Various cases of sexual harassment are often reported in the mass media. It started from cases that occurred in the household realm to cases of sexual harassment that befell famous artists. Sexual harassment is defined as the act of cornering someone through words or behavior that have a sexual or sexist connotation repeatedly and create an intimidating impression (Lacroix et al., 2020). Sexual harassment is carried out both physically and non-physically, targeting the victim's sexual organs or sexuality, resulting in the victim feeling uncomfortable and offended, and resulting in health and safety problems.

Reporting from the Online Perlindungan Perempuan dan Anak (Simfoni PPA), Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak (KemenPPPA), the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA) reported that throughout 2022 there were a total of 27,593 cases of violence that occurred in Indonesia. Of the various types of violence cases that occur, sexual violence ranks at the top as the type of violence that victims, namely 11,686 cases, often experience. In 2020, the Indonesia Judicial Research Society, together with INFID, released the Gender Equality Barometer Quantitative Study Report and reported that as many as 33% of men experienced sexual violence.

Although reports that women are generally more likely to experience sexual harassment, a study conducted at two high schools in the Philippines showed that men experienced sexual harassment significantly more often than women. Unfortunately, the majority of cases reported to the police and child protection units are cases of sexual abuse that occur against women (Madrid et al., 2020). A similar phenomenon also occurs in Ireland, where men experience a high prevalence of sexual violence, but there is little research exploring sexual harassment against men. When compared to women, male victims have more difficulty accessing care following abuse and are less likely to report the crime (Kane et al., 2024).

The high number of sexual harassment cases that occur in Indonesia has encouraged many parties to participate in increasing public awareness of the importance of the issue of sexual harassment. One of the media or channels often used to convey messages regarding the issue of sexual harassment is mass communication media, such as public service advertisements on television, radio, or online media portals. Advances in communication technology supported by human creativity also mean that the delivery of messages on the issue of sexual harassment can be packaged more interestingly, namely through media such as books or novels, music, and even films.

Film, also known as cinematography, is a loan word from the English language cinematography. Cinema means "movement," and Tho or photos means "light." So, film means painting movement using light (Alfathoni & Manesah, 2020). The film can be interpreted as an audio-visual medium that combines pieces of images into a complete story per society's social and cultural realities. Recently, Indonesian films have begun to deal with the theme of sexual harassment and have gained much interest. One popular platform for watching films is Netflix, which in early 2023 released the film *Dear David* with the theme of sexual harassment. This film attracted public attention and sparked pros and cons on social media such as Twitter and Instagram.

Dear David, a 118-minute film by director Lucky Kuswandi, tells the story of Laras, an outstanding high school student played by Shenina Cinnamon. Laras' reputation is threatened when a fantasy story about the boy she likes is leaked and spread widely at school. Winnie Benjamin and Daud Sumolang wrote this film, which features Shenina Cinnamon with Emir Mahira and Caitlin North Lewis in the leading roles. The film *Dear David* focuses on depicting sexual harassment against men through the experiences of David, the main male character. The character David, played by Emir Mahira, is described as a popular student and football star at his school. After writings about him were leaked to the public, David became the topic of

conversation for many people. Students who previously did not pay much attention now started talking about him and even bothered him with sexual comments based on the stories written by Laras. David also experienced forced sexual harassment from his male friends at school.

Films have a role in influencing people's perspectives on phenomena that are occurring in the social environment. Film media can also be used as educational material and a reference for actions that can be taken by the public when faced with situations raised in films (Asti et al., 2021). Conveying messages using film media is generally through a sign. Signs can be objects, concepts, or ideas that represent a message. The displayed signs also do not work individually. A code or system that regulates use and interpretation is needed. Interpretation of a sign always uses a specific social and cultural context. Therefore, the meaning of a sign can differ depending on the recipient's cultural, social, and historical context.

Studies related to films. Film is one of the media that produces culture and is the most popular worldwide. Film can reflect society's values, norms, and beliefs at a particular time and place. Studying film teaches about the culture and society that produces it. Films can also be a source of information about various existing and hotly discussed topics. In accordance with this, this research looks more at the reality and social aspects of the depiction of sexual harassment in films, which are studied using semiotics.

Semiotics are needed to explain how a sign or symbol has a meaning. Through semiotics, we can analyze the meaning of the signs that appear or are displayed in films to convey specific messages to the audience. Signs in films can take the form of narration or dialogue, non-verbal scenes, shooting techniques, and others. Based on this background, the film *Dear David* is unique in that it raises the issue of sexual harassment. In this era of sophistication and the rapid dissemination of information, sexual harassment can occur via the internet or online. Apart from that, sexual harassment, which was previously identically experienced by female victims, is now being highlighted as a phenomenon that can also happen to men.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was carried out by first determining the research object in the form of scenes containing forms of sexual harassment against men in the film *Dear David*. Furthermore, every sign that appears in the *Dear David* film scene will be categorized based on indicators of sexual harassment according to Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia Nomor 30 Tahun 2021 about Pencegahan dan Penanganan Kekerasan Seksual di Lingkungan Perguruan Tinggi.

This research uses descriptive qualitative research to describe the forms of sexual harassment against men that appear in the film *Dear David* based on the four types of sexual harassment above. The data collection technique was carried out using document analysis techniques because the research object was a document, namely a film. Data was collected through two sources, namely primary sources and secondary sources (Sugiyono, 2013). Primary data comes from the film *Dear David* by selecting scenes that contain representations

of sexual harassment against men and semiotic theory, according to Roland Barthes. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from other reference sources.

The research's unit of analysis is divided into seven scenes showing forms of sexual harassment against men. The scenes in the film *Dear David* raise several issues, such as self-identity, exploration of sexuality, and the realm of privacy. Therefore, all scenes were reviewed, and only those containing forms of sexual harassment were selected. The seven scenes were then analyzed in depth using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory by interpreting signs in the aspects of denotation, connotation, and myth.

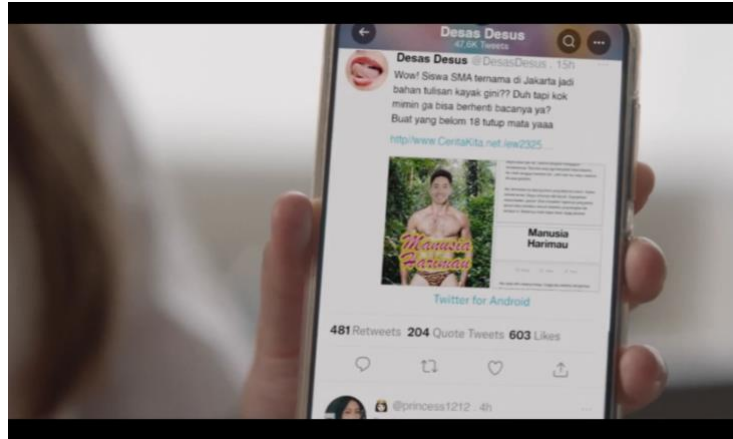
Roland Barthes' semiotic theory focuses on two orders of signification. The first stage of signification is characterized by the relationship between the signifier and the signified external reality, also known as denotation. Meanwhile, the second stage of significance is indicated by connotation, which describes the interaction when a sign meets the reader's feelings or emotions and cultural values (Wibowo, 2013). Barthes divides semiotics into two primary levels, namely denotation and connotation. These two aspects are vital to understanding how signs work in communication and culture. Denotation is the literal or primary meaning. A sign has the meaning of what it directly represents. Connotation is an additional meaning or cultural association attached to a sign. This aspect shows how the sign is interpreted in a particular social and cultural context.

Apart from that, Barthes also added a mythical aspect to his signification system. The myth aspect of Barthes' theory reveals and justifies the dominant values that apply in a particular society or period (Budiman in Sobur, 2013). Myth is also defined as how culture can influence the meaning of signs and explain what happens in reality or when ideology is realized (Wibowo, 2013). Semiology is more often applied to writing or discourse because it depends on language and linguistics aspects. Meanwhile, in cinema, television, and advertising, signs are seen in integrated actions based on a collection of images, sounds, and written words or dialogues (Barthes, 1987).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dear David is a film produced by Palari Films in collaboration with one of the most extensive streaming services in the world, Netflix Studios. Lucky Kuswandi directed this film based on a script by Winnie Benjamin and Daud Sumolang. *Dear David* first officially premiered on Netflix on February 9 and February 9, 2023. This film, which raises the issue of sexual harassment against men, has become a trending topic on social media, with 12.5 thousand tweets uploaded by more than 4 million Indonesian language accounts (Arimbi, 2023).

The film *Dear David* also ranked first with the most viewers on the Netflix Top 10 list from February 6 to February 12, 2023. Based on the author's observations while watching the film, seven scenes contain representations of sexual harassment against men.



Source: (Netflix, 2023)

Figure 1 Dear David's story spread on social media

Figure 1 is the first scene that shows a form of sexual harassment against men. In the first scene, the visible denotational meaning is the atmosphere in the school hallway, which is full of students passing by whispering while looking at cellphone screens. A short-haired female student looked curious about what the other students were doing. A friend told her about a story entitled Dear David, which went viral because a gossip account uploaded it to social media. The female student looked confused when she saw the cover of the story that went viral. Not only students but teachers have also read the story, Dear David.

The connotation in this scene is that a female student named Laras is panicked and confused because the sexual fantasy story she wrote was spread on social media. She did not expect that the story written privately and in secret would suddenly be spread by someone without her knowledge. Knowing that many people had read the contents of the story she wrote, Laras was afraid that she would be discovered as the author of the story because her reputation as an exemplary student and her scholarship would be lost.

The myth contained in this scene is that policies or society rules that prohibit talking about sex will encourage people to be afraid and think that sex is taboo, and also can make everyday things appear wrong. The story of Laras' sexual fantasy, namely Dear David, is a normal thing that happens in adolescence. The action that is considered sexual harassment is when other people spread the story without Laras' knowledge. As a character in Dear David, David became uncomfortable and disturbed after the story spread and was read by people at school. This is consistent with the sound of Pasal 14 Ayat 1 (Undang et al. 12 Tahun 2022 Tentang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual, 2022), namely transmitting electronic information and electronic documents that contain sexual content against the recipient's will, which is intended to fulfill sexual desires, is categorized as electronic or cyber-based sexual harassment.

In this scene, social media is used as a tool by someone who spreads Laras' story for entertainment through her uncivilized behavior. One reason that acts of online incivility are increasing is anonymity. Anonymity on the internet means that anyone can do anything without worrying about their identity being known. This can also lead to acts of harassment and hate speech in cyberspace (Jones et al., 2022).

Anonymity on social media is still considered untraceable, and generally, this situation also makes users free to speak and act without thinking about the consequences. On the other hand, this anonymity makes someone honest in expressing what is on their mind. Something more authentic will be formed in a person by anonymity. Research that has been conducted also shows that perceived anonymity on social media can increase self-disclosure and significantly negative emotions because this anonymity provides a sense of security regarding privacy. Individuals who use pseudonymous or anonymous identities on social media tend to show openness. Nevertheless, research also indicates that online anonymity can lead to selfish and antisocial behavior, resulting in a tendency to carry out cyber aggression (Pan et al., 2023).

A study that has been conducted shows that completely anonymous communication via social media is made vague by using pseudonyms (pseudonyms). Furthermore, they are guaranteed to be able to freely express themselves through social media and allow users to carry out cyberbullying (Adiyanto & Putra, 2023).

The act of spreading stories using David's identity can also be said to be cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is often carried out anonymously through the use of technology to humiliate someone and encourage other people to do the same so that the victim finds it difficult to defend themselves. One form commonly experienced in cyberbullying is sexual harassment, such as threats and rape (Trudgett-Klose & McLinton, 2024). Research that has been conducted also discusses whether other people enjoy messages to entertain, appear clever, or be considered involved in the message. (Purwantoro, 2020). Based on the type from the Kemdikbud campaign 'Merdeka dari Kekerasan,' the form of sexual harassment that occurs in this scene is cyber sexual harassment, as it happens through information and communication technology.



Source: (Netflix, 2023)

Figure 2 Female students catcalling David

Figure 2, the visible denotation is that Cahaya High School students are watching soccer practice from the side of the field. The female students are still busy talking about the Dear David story. Some students even made a video containing a compilation of David's photos. When it was the boy named David's turn, many female students cheered him on. Suddenly,

one of the students shouted, *"Take off your clothes!"* David, who heard this, was silent and failed to kick the ball into the goal.

The connotative meaning contained in this scene is shown in the sentence, *"Take off your clothes!"* what one of the students said was catcalling. Catcalling itself is sexual harassment in the form of verbal and non-verbal communication directed at other people in public, often in the form of remarks about appearance or things of a sexual nature (Walton & Pedersen, 2021).

The myth in this scene is that catcalling is a popular form of sexual harassment that only happens to women and that catcalling is just a playful joke and not to be taken seriously. The words or comments telling David to take off his clothes are considered catcalling in the form of verbal sexual harassment. Speech that touches on appearance or body sexually will make the recipient feel uncomfortable. This scene also shows David failing to kick the ball into the goal because this sentence disturbed his focus, and his coach scolded him. Generally, the victims of catcalling that are often found are women. Through this scene, it is shown that men can also experience sexual harassment in the form of catcalling without realizing it because many still consider catcalling to be a joke (Hidayat & Setyanto, 2019).

Catcalling, a form of sexual harassment in public spaces, is often dismissed as trivial or even considered normal. Some people view it as a form of praise or attention, but it can lead to fear and shame for the recipients. While genuine praise is given out of appreciation or kindness, catcalling often involves making sexual comments about someone's body (Erinda et al., 2021).

Research that has been conducted shows how catcalling is a side effect of the patriarchal society we live in (Erinda et al., 2021). Patriarchy plays a role through men's higher power than women so that sometimes men can do anything to women. This is based on the role of power. Therefore, even in this scene, the roles of perpetrator and victim, which generally occur in cases of sexual harassment, are reversed. Figure 3 shows how people with more power can look down on those below them, just like a patriarchal system.



Source: (Netflix, 2023)

Figure 3 David experienced sexual harassment in the men's changing room

The denotational meaning in the third scene is that three students wearing towels approach a student sitting alone. One of the students said, *"Slowly, he stroked David's eggplant, which was growing bigger,"* followed by the sound of laughter from his friends. Meanwhile, the students who sat alone and listened did not laugh. Even when one of the students opened his towel in front of him, he just looked away and did not pay attention. Suddenly, the three students tried to open the student's trousers. The situation in this scene suddenly becomes darker and more tense. The student then looked angry while his friends just laughed.

The connotation of this scene is how the three male students wearing towels, Arya, Gilang, and Dafa, have just finished cleaning themselves after football practice. The three students then disturbed David, who happened to be sitting alone in the changing room. Gilang teases David by reading passages from the story *Dear David* that have sexual overtones. The word *eggplant* in this sentence means a type of vegetable, but in the context of this sentence, the connotation contained in the word *eggplant* refers to the male genitalia. In the era of advances in information and communication technology, the use of emojis or symbols to refer to things of a sexual nature is often done (Wirman et al., 2021). Dafa also opened his towel and showed his private area to compare whose genitals were enormous. The three students were annoyed because David ignored them, so the three of them worked together to hold David's body and forcibly remove David's trousers. The dim lighting also depicts the tense atmosphere and David's feelings of being trapped and helpless.

In this scene, many myths refer to forms of sexual harassment against men. First, when Gilang disturbed David by reading a fragment of the story *Dear David*, which had a sexual nuance regarding David's body parts, and Dafa, who asked to see David's private area, was also a form of verbal sexual harassment. This form of non-physical sexual harassment was aimed when Dafa opened the towel and showed his private area without being asked. Lastly, there was a form of physical sexual harassment, namely when the three male students forced David to open his trousers. These three forms of sexual harassment have been defined in Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia Nomor 30 Tahun 2021 about Pencegahan dan Penanganan Kekerasan Seksual di Lingkungan Perguruan Tinggi. Based on the types of sexual harassment by Kemendikbud, the form of sexual harassment shown in this scene is considered a physical type.

Forcibly pulling someone's towel away is often seen as funny and harmless, with the myth being that it is a joke among adults to show friendship. However, this act cannot be justified, especially when someone is in a situation that is not the time to joke or is burdened in their mind. It is essential now as people have been objectifying David since the story of *Dear David* was released.

A prevalent myth regarding sexual harassment is the belief that it can be avoided if the victim does not dress in a way that "invites" harassment, such as wearing revealing clothes. This myth is refuted by the case of David, who was dressed modestly in a sports uniform when he was harassed. In 2018, the Safe Public Spaces Coalition (KRPA) surveyed sexual harassment in public spaces involving 62,224 respondents. The survey results revealed that 17% of the

respondents who wore long skirts or trousers and a hijab experienced the most instances of sexual harassment. This indicates that the type of clothing worn does not cause sexual harassment.

In the next scene, it is shown how David experienced the impact or side effects of the sexual harassment he experienced, namely panic attacks and difficulty breathing. This is under the explanation of the impact of sexual harassment according to O'Donohue, namely that the impact can be divided into physical, psychological, and work impacts (Lubis, 2013). In the scene after the harassment in the dressing room, it is clear that the impact that David is experiencing is psychological because panic attacks are a characteristic of an anxiety disorder.

Sexual harassment does not only impact the victim's psychological side, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, stress, and trauma. Victims can also feel academic impacts such as skipping school, decreased academic achievement, reduced interest in education or extra-curricular activities, and lack of dedication to academic life (Konlan & Dangah, 2023). David also experienced this when the coach of his football club complained that David's enthusiasm was decreasing and he was often unfocused.



Source: (Netflix, 2023)

Figure 4 Students harass David in the school hallway

The denotational meaning in Figure 4, female and male students talk and laugh about something they see on their cell phones. A female student commented, "*David is big, really,*" while laughing when she saw her friend's cell phone screen. Meanwhile, male students commented in the Sundanese language, "*Aing juga mau euy jadi budak nafsu.*" When a male student passed them and wanted to open his locker, one student approached him, read the sentence he had read on his cell phone, and then laughed at him. The male student was silent and did not respond.

The connotation of this scene is that the students are reading and discussing sexual fantasy stories about David that are spread. Most of the female students grew to like David and sexually objectified David based on this story. Meanwhile, male students thought the story was funny and positioned themselves as the character David. This can be seen from the Sundanese language comments, "*Aing juga mau euy jadi budak nafsu,*" which means the

student does not mind serving the sexual desires of the characters in the story. Many made David a target for bullying by disturbing David, such as reading fragments of the story Dear David.

The myth in this scene is that what the students did by reading and discussing the story Dear David is behavior that constitutes sexual harassment (RAINN, 2023). This is because the story Dear David is a sexual fantasy story that is not appropriate to read or discuss in a school environment or place of learning. Lack of sexual education in schools is also one of the factors that makes students less able to differentiate between things that need to be done in private and what is appropriate to do in public.

The act of sharing embarrassing stories in public is generally seen as a normal behavior reserved for close friends, indicating a level of trust and openness in the friendship. On the other hand, making comments about someone's physical appearance is often seen as a form of praise, but it can also be viewed as an insult to the individual and their natural traits. Despite being commonly done among peers, research emphasizes that any form of unwelcome sexual attention, including jokes or inappropriate comments about someone's appearance, constitutes sexual harassment (Boyle et al., 2007).

Apart from that, verbal sexual harassment was also carried out by male students who read fragments of the story Dear David because it aimed to humiliate and degrade David's dignity as the object in the story. David's attitude of remaining silent when receiving this treatment is also under previous research, which states that most victims of verbal sexual harassment prefer to remain silent and ignore the perpetrator (Mughni & Faridah, 2023).

What this group of male students did can also be said to be a form of bullying or bullying where there is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim so that the perpetrator feels more potent by giving aggressive treatment through physical, psychological, or social aspects repeatedly (Espino et al., 2022). As in the previous scene, this group of men often disturbs David by making fun of the Dear David story, which leads to sexual harassment.



Source: (Netflix, 2023)

Figure 5 The Principal looks at David with a sexual look

The denotational meaning depicted in Figure 5, the female teacher's expression or body movements when asking a male student. In this scene, the female teacher is seen daydreaming with her eyes fixed on the body of the person she is talking to. The male student looked confused as he glanced to the right and left. Not long after, the female teacher woke up from her reverie and swallowed hard before looking into the male student's eyes and asking a question.

The connotative meaning behind Mrs. Indah's attitude and gestures as the Principal of Cahaya High School when asking David is a form of objectification of David through sexually nuanced gazes. Mrs. Indah's gaze did not blink, indicating that she was daydreaming and imagining something in her mind based on the story *Dear David* that she had read. As the victim, David also looked uncomfortable and felt awkward looking to the right and left.

The myth in this scene is that Mrs. Indah's gaze with sexual nuances is a form of non-physical sexual harassment. Sexual harassment can take the form of gestures such as staring with sexual overtones that cause the victim to feel disturbed or uncomfortable (Komnas Perempuan, 2022). Generally, when talking to the person you are talking to, your eyes will be focused on the other person's eyes or facial area. However, in this scene, Mrs. Indah's eyes, when daydreaming, are focused on David's body, so it can be categorized as a gaze with sexual nuances.

Another common myth about sexual harassment is that only men are the perpetrators. This scene highlights that perpetrators of sexual harassment can be both men and women. It demonstrates that sexual harassment is not solely determined by gender but by the power dynamics at play. For example, in this particular scenario, Mrs. Indah, the school's principal, holds a higher position of power compared to David, a student at the school. Staring with sexual overtones and for quite a long time is included in the category of visual sexual harassment that most often occurs in research conducted in Bogota. Even though it is not too dangerous, sexual gazes certainly make the victim feel uncomfortable (Quinones, 2020). As in the previous scene, David sits still and does nothing. Besides saying no and avoiding the situation, doing nothing is one of the most common strategies used when experiencing sexual harassment (Bruschini et al., 2023).



Source: Netflix, 2023

Figure 6 Many stories similar to *Dear David* have been uploaded online

The denotational meaning of Figure 6 shown by recent posts on social media regarding sexual fantasy stories about David. One is a story with a shirtless man on the cover titled "Quenching My Thirst on the Football Field." The sentence "Dear David KW super" is added with a laughing emoji. The upload's connotation shows that many people wrote sexual fantasy stories about David after the Dear David story went viral. This is shown through the sentence "Dear David KW super," where the term KW refers to counterfeit goods. So, in the context of this upload, the story entitled "Quenching My Thirst on the Football Field" is an imitation or story similar to the Dear David story.

The myth contained in this sixth scene is that the actions of people who write sexual fantasy stories like Dear David and deliberately spread them on social media are a form of sexual harassment. Moreover, using other people's photos without permission to create content that contains sexual content is not a good thing to do. This action is included in the form of cyber sexual harassment. Namely, harassment carried out using information and communication technology. This is under Undang Undang No 12 Tahun 2022 about Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual "taking pictures or screenshots that are sexually charged against the will or without the consent of the person who is the object of the image as well as transmitting electronic information and electronic documents that are sexually charged against the will of the recipient aimed at sexual desires."



Source: (Netflix, 2023)

Figure 7 Female students discussing the story Dear David

The denotational meaning in Figure 7 shows the situation during break time when female students are preparing merchandise for sports matches. While folding t-shirts depicting shirtless men, they discussed the contents of the story Dear David. Some female students cried when reading the story Dear David because the storyline carried them away, but some students did not like it because they felt they could not relate. Suddenly, one of the students said that the only exciting part of the story was when David's character was tied to the goalpost and stripped naked. While saying this, the student also demonstrated her hand on a t-shirt with a picture of a shirtless man.

The connotation in the scene above is that the students discussing the Dear David story are David fans. This can also be seen in the many knick-knacks that contain pictures of David. The story Dear David, written by Laras, also made readers aware of David's charm through Laras' writing, even to the point that their feelings carried some away. The camera angle that zooms in on the student's hand gesture tracing the t-shirt with a picture of a shirtless David indicates that the student is making movements as if touching David's body.

The myth in this scene is that verbal sexual harassment occurred, which was characterized by the behavior of discussing sexual fantasy stories at school and non-physical harassment through female students' gestures on t-shirts with pictures of David's body. The activity of reading and discussing vulgar stories or sexual fantasies such as Dear David is certainly inappropriate at school because school is a place to gain knowledge, and schools in Indonesia still consider sexual matters to be taboo. Moreover, the object in the story, Dear David, is a natural person who is also in the school environment, so it will disturb and make David uncomfortable. The act of reading and discussing sexual relations, stories, or sexual fantasies at work, school, or any other inappropriate place is considered a form of verbal sexual harassment (Rainn, 2023).

A female student mentioned that her favorite part in the story Dear David was when David was tied to the goalpost and stripped naked, and she also made hand gestures that traced the image of a shirtless David on the t-shirt she was holding. It can be seen that the student's hand gestures are meaningful in the movement of touching and feeling David's body. This is certainly not appropriate because it can trigger the person concerned to become embarrassed or disturbed. This action is also in line with the explanation that making gestures or gestures of a sexual nature is a form of sexual harassment (Komnas Perempuan, 2022).

Based on Frederickson & Roberts's Objectification Theory, in Western culture, the female body is often constructed to be looked at, evaluated based on appearance, and assessed sexually (Prichard et al., 2023). That is why Western films often exploit women's bodies sexually. The film Dear David shows how men can also be used as sexual objects. This is shown through photos of David's body, which are used as t-shirt designs for female students and the main characters in sexual fantasy stories.

From the start of the film to the end, David's character, who experienced sexual harassment, is never shown reporting or telling what happened. However, as the story progresses, David's character continues to experience panic attacks or anxiety disorders, which is an example of the impact of sexual harassment. David's anxiety finally peaked when he relapsed and was unable to continue the match. At the film's end, David is shown visiting the hospital to see a psychiatrist.



Source: (Netflix, 2023)

Figure 8 David Visits a Psychiatrist

Figure 8 show David visits a psychiatrist can be interpreted as David's attempt to heal the trauma from the sexual abuse he experienced. David's attitude indicates that even though the victim of sexual harassment does not respond or remains silent as if he did not fight back and did not report the harassment he experienced, this does not mean that the victim wants to accept or does not object to the action.

Male victims of sexual harassment also tend to receive more ridicule for the suffering they experience than female victims, such as being seen as dishonest or suffering less than women (Cesario, 2020). There is a myth about men being at the top of the cultural hierarchy because they are physically and mentally strong, so signs that indicate male weakness, such as victims of sexual harassment, are considered detrimental to these values (Langdrige et al., 2023). Moreover, the patriarchal culture in Indonesia, which views men as strong creatures and should not appear weak, is still very high. This assumption increasingly makes victims of sexual harassment, especially men, prefer to bury and keep the harassment they experience secret by not telling or reporting it.

The film *Dear David* displays representations related to sexual harassment from a different perspective compared to Indonesian films with the theme of sexual harassment that were previously broadcast, such as *Marlina si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak* (2017), *27 Steps of May* (2018), dan *Like & Share* (2022) often depicts how women are very vulnerable to becoming victims. The film *Dear David* appeared with the message that men can also become victims because of social awareness about this issue in recent years.

CONCLUSION

The film *Dear David*, as a form of mass media, represents a phenomenon or issue that occurs in society, especially regarding sexual harassment against men. Seven scenes depict various forms of sexual harassment based on semiotic analysis in the aspects of denotation, connotation, and myth. In the seven scenes analyzed, the denotational meaning depicted in the film *Dear David* can be interpreted as behavior that is unpleasant and detrimental to David. The connotative meaning contained in the seven scenes of the film illustrates that these

behaviors are a form of bullying and intimidation towards David, which can be categorized as sexual harassment. The film shows various forms of sexual harassment perpetrated by both men and women against David, including verbal, physical, gestural, and cyber sexual harassment.

The denotational and connotative meanings obtained are then matched with the myths that exist in society regarding sexual harassment. The meaning of the myth in this film shows that sexual harassment can occur in various forms. It happens not only against women but also against men as perpetrators of harassment. This is because sexual harassment occurs due to an imbalance of power. The still inherent patriarchal culture also causes victims of sexual harassment to struggle against acts of sexual harassment. Both women and men find it difficult to get out of this situation. The film *Dear David* tries to convey the message that men can also be victims of sexual harassment and how the issue of sexual harassment itself does not look at gender but is a behavior that can be carried out by anyone and from different relationships, such as peers, the opposite sex, and others, including a more mature person or respected figure.

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