

Conference Paper

Constructing Single Women in Indonesian Popular Culture: Representation of Single Women in *Kapan Kawin?*

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Abstract

Movie is a representation of social reality, one of them related to gender issue. Discussions about gender and media tend to focus on woman since they are treated as an object. The purpose of this study is to see how a single woman in Indonesia is being represented through popular culture in the film *Kapan Kawin?* This research uses semiotic as a method with text analysis as the primary data collection techniques and interviews, literature studies as secondary data collection techniques to examine the socio-cultural context. The result shows that the audio-visual text in this movie contains myths that indicate symbolic violence against single woman. Single women is constructed as a successful career woman. On the other hand, single women are forced to get married due to their age. In other words, the discourse on women in Indonesia is still dominated by patriarchal culture.

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1. Introduction

Being a woman in Indonesia is a hard thing and quite challenging. This statement is appropriate to describe Dinda's life, the main character in the movie '*Kapan Kawin?*'. Dinda is described as a beautiful woman with a perfect body, good career, and have a nice friend. Though Dinda had a perfect life's, but there is one drawback Dinda who became the causes of all conflicts in this film, Dinda still not married.

Marriage is something that is appreciated by people with a strong belief of Eastern culture in context of traditions and religions such as Indonesia. The people who still not married at the middle age of adulthood is considered as a social fail. This feeling is more often reserved for women instead of men, because Hurlock (1980) states, the age of thirty years as a critical age for unmarried women. Usually their lives are often tinged anxiety that at the age of thirty and still not married (E.B Hurlock. 1998.

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Psikologi Perkembangan Anak. Jakarta: Erlangga). Women who are still single at the age of adulthood is often called 'perawan tua'. The word 'perawan' (virgin woman) in the Dictionary of Indonesian Language (KBBI) is defined as (1) Woman who should marry; (2) have never had sexual relations with men, still pure. Meanwhile, if the word 'perawan' combined with 'tua' (old) words, then interpreted as a woman who is old and still not married (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia).

Social stigma on unmarried women turned out not only happened in Indonesia. In the culture of Malaysia, unmarried women are called 'andartu' or spinster. The fact that they are older but still a virgin is often called the cynical words, such as 'pity/pathetic, she never had sex too, and she unwanted women' [7]. In American stereotypes or social stigma on unmarried women are spinsters or old maids start to be abandoned. Anderson and Stewart, 1994 (quoted from Lewin and Moon, 1997 as cited by Nanik and Wiwin, 2016) wrote that the media portray women who are not married in two views as pathetic leftovers from the marriage market, unhappy and desperate but other views say as powers-obsessed barracudas bent only on greedily acquiring the empty rewards of money and fame.

Most single women in middle age are required to meet the expectations of the family as financially independent and other expectations related to its status as single. Social stigma on unmarried women have a strong role in threatening self-esteem and self-concept single women, especially in the face of the demands of family, culture, and religion to marry. Most people, especially those who were married, single view of life as a social problem. Society does not accept the idea that being a single woman in middle age can be happy and satisfied with his life, because people believe that not married identical with unhappiness or boring life. Why negative stigma about 'being single' is mostly reserved for women than men? This is because the Indonesian culture that embraces the patriarchy, besides that women reproductive age is restrictions and there is menopausal period where women are no longer fertile. So it is important for women to immediate 'sold in marriage market' when she still on reproductive age.

'*Kapan Kawin?*' can be categorized as a chick flick (female movie) because there are some key characteristics found in this film. Joanne Hollows (Feminism, feminity and Popular Culture, 2000) of Maria LaPlace mentions that:

women films distinguished by the protagonist of her, a female perspective, and the narrative that generally revolve around the experiences of women: family, space domestic, romance arena where love, emotions and experiences get a

place of action and events. One of the most important aspects is to put in the highest position in harmony with the relationship between women

According to Johnston, the woman is a message that is communicated in a patriarchal culture. Women are portrayed through the formation of stereotypes and myths that it is a sign that is interchangeable, so finally women to work in the dominant cultural forms. Therefore, in the arts and also in the text of the film, the representation of women is not a theme or sociological issues, as some think, but rather a sign that is being communicated. ([8]: 124)

In the era of technology and information such as the current issue of gender equality has often campaigned. The position of women in the world of work is already equivalent to the men. However, the negative myths about single women remains a dominant discourse in the community. The dominant discourse on single women, this is represented by '*Kapan Kawin?*'.

As with other communication media, the movie will be full of symbols. Verbal and nonverbal symbols in a film work together to support a great message. This study tries to analyze a Romantic Comedy genre film titled '*Kapan Kawin?*', The film is interesting and worth to be studied because it lifts the reality of Indonesian women who often asked 'when will you get married?'. Dinda/Didi, a 33 years old single woman who hired an actor to pretend to become her boyfriend. Conflict started when Dinda was celebrating her 33rd birthday. Her mother called and asked her to come home for their wedding anniversary party. She also asked Dinda to bring her partner. This request becomes a burden for Dinda since she doesn't have a boyfriend. Finally, to please her parents, Dinda hire a paid actor, Satrio, to pretend to be her boyfriend. Dinda's Parents who still adhere to the Javanese culture, conducted a series of tests to assess Satrio's *sbibit, bobot and bebet* (background). The climax is when the Dinda's parents finally know that Satrio only a paid actor. This film ends with a happy ending, where Dinda's parent finally let her choose her husband.

The function of mass communication, according to Harold D. Laswell, is to give information, to educate and medium transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next generation. Transmission of social heritage focuses on the communication of knowledge, values and social norms from one generation to another or from members of a group at the new arrivals. According to J. P. Mayer (1971: 72), the film gives more direct influence in all probability than the effects caused by the press or radio. However, this study is not focused on how the media affects the society's perspective toward something. The research looked at film as a medium of mass communication that tries to construct realities that exist in the society and raise it to the big screen. As

Alex Sobur said in his book, *Communication Semiotics*, that film is a portrait of a society where the film was made ([11]: 127).

Representation of single women can be studied through a symbol—a symbol that appears in some scenes in this film. Semiotic analysis is used as method to determine the meaning of the above the symbol. Therefore, this study was conducted to find the denotation, what connotations and myths that make up the meaning of single women in the movie ‘Kapan Kawin?’.

2. Method

This research used semiotic analysis of Roland Barthes as a knife to dissect the audio-visual text of the film ‘Kapan Kawin?’. In semiotic analysis, Barthes introduces a two-stage system of marking as illustrated by the following figure:



Figure 1: Source: Barthes, Roland. 1991. *Mythologies*. New York: The Noonday Press.

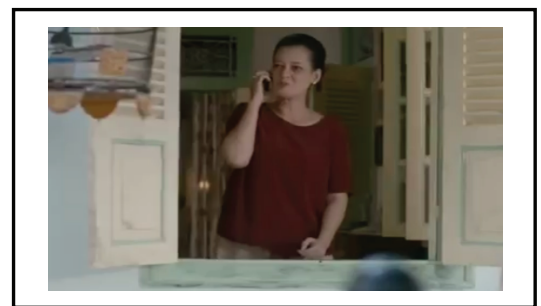
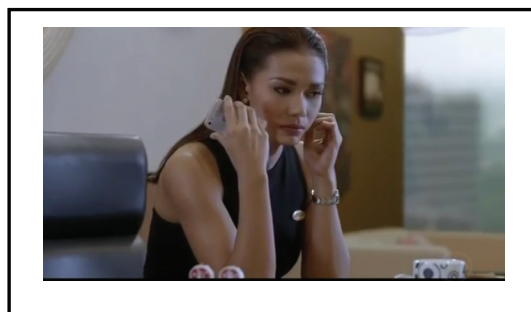
For Barthes, according to Sunardi (2004) the signification can be understood as a process that binds the signifier and signified. In marking the first stage, formed the meaning of denotation or meaning of the lines, what looks from a text. While in the second stage, the relationship between the signifier and signified generate a connotation (connotations). Connotation is implied meaning, in which there are socio-cultural aspects.

Signs denotation and connotation obtained by dissecting the audiovisual text in the movie ‘Kapan Kawin?’. Researchers chose scenes that represent single women. From scenes are then analyzed at the level of the signifier and signified the first level tagging to determine denotative. Denotative signifier and signified is the one which marked the second-level tagging system. At this stage, researchers are using the relevant literature regarding women’s studies especially single women as a reference to find and analyze the connotations and myths reproduced by this film.

3. Result and Discussion

There are some scenes that selected to be the object of sign analysis in this study. From those scenes, we may examine how single women are being represented through a movie. Result shows that there are some myths of single women that perpetuated by audio visual texts in *Kapan Kawin?* Those myths are: (1) being a single woman in 30s is not normal and considered as social problem, (2) single woman has a bright career (3) single woman is desperate (4) Woman remains single because they have to find a perfect husband.

Being single for a woman at certain age is considered as not normal. This myth can be analyzed by the dialogue that takes place between Dinda and her mother through a phone call:



Dinda's mother: "Your sister, Nana, already have a child when she was 24 years old, just like a normal woman's schedule"

The aforementioned dialogue indicates that being married and have a child at 24 is normal. This is reinforced by the survey that conducted by the Population and the National Family Planning (BKKBN) in 2010, the average age of first marriage for women was 22.3 years in Indonesia. Therefore, Dinda, whose age is already 33, is not a normal woman because she's still single. Dinda's condition considered as a problem that needs to be solved. There is a social pressure on mature single woman, especially in Indonesia because society sees them as a problem. This is also related with woman's reproduction system. Unlike man, woman will face menopause, a condition where their reproduction system finally stops.

Second myth is single women usually have a bright career. This also shows by the dialogue in a phone call scene between Dinda and her mother. When her mother said that Nana could become a professional model but she chose to focus on her marriage, actually indicate that basically women have to choose between career and marriage (love). They can't conquer both of them at one time. In patriarchal culture, woman who

pursues her career usually seen as a threat by a man. This is because, in such culture, men have to be more successful than woman.



The third myth in this movie is that single woman is desperate. This myth concluded from connotation meaning on a fight scene between Satrio and Dinda's brother in law (Jerry). Jerry said that Dinda was desperate-old-virgin, that's why she will accept any guy to be her partner. This statement indicates that being single makes woman depressed and desperate. It means that they are no longer having self-esteem and lack of self-concept.



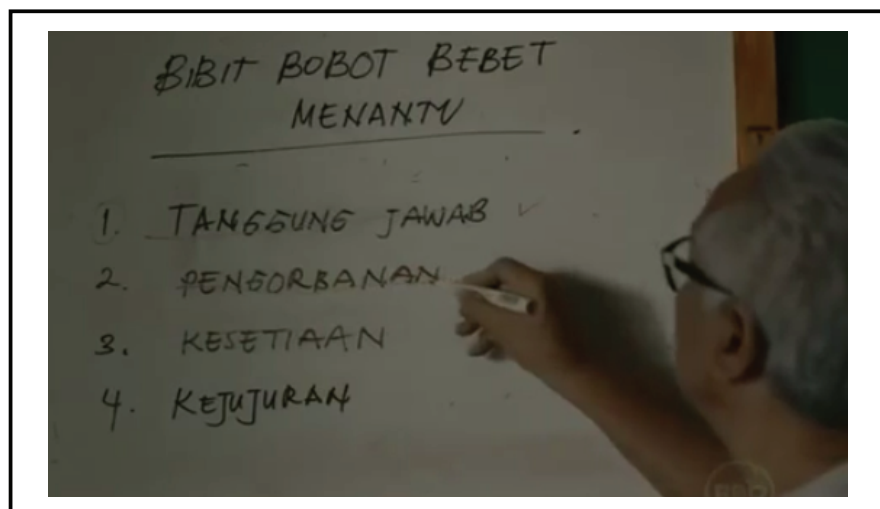
The fourth myth is woman remains single because they have to find a perfect guy to be her husband. This can be analyzed from connotation meaning on the scene where Dinda and her friend, Eva, discuss Eva's plan to match Dinda with some guy.

Eva: "This time is different because Aldi is a high quality single"

Dinda: "If he has high quality then it's not possible that he's still single. If he's single then he's not high qualified (paused)... Except me"

Eva: (smiling)

This sentence implied that a person who has high quality won't remain single. In other words, single associated with bad thing. People, especially women, still haven't got married because they are not qualified enough. For women, there are some qualifications that they have to meet, in order to be wanted or desired by man. These qualifications are socially and culturally constructed. In the other hand, women also have to find a perfect guy. Perfect guy in this movie defined as nice, responsible, descent, willing to sacrifice devoted, and honest.



4. Conclusion

Popular cultures play an important role in naturalizing myth about women, especially single women. From the result of this study we can see how a representation of single woman in a movie still constructed based on patriarchal ideology. Even though it seems like there is an effort to portrait single woman in a positive way, there are still some myths that support dominant discourse about woman.

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