

REPRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN HEROINE CHARACTER IN HOLLYWOOD AND INDONESIAN MOVIES

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Abstract

The heroine character or female hero is a fictional character who is currently a role model for female beauty around the world. The representation of the heroine character is not only about ideal beauty, but also brings up actual issues of gender and sexual preference. This research was conducted to find out what the concept of identity is related to gender and sexuality of heroine characters appearing in Hollywood and Indonesian films during the period 2008-2021. The research method used is descriptive qualitative method. This research uses Sintactic theory (Charles Morris), data search method uses observation, documentation and interview methods. This study resulted in findings about the concept of "New Woman" identity, especially those related to the representation of gender and sexuality in heroine characters.

Keywords: *heroine, women's studies, hypersemiotics, gender and sexuality*

1. INTRODUCTION

trend of superhero movies for decades is still dominated by male superhero characters, while female superhero characters (heroine) are still limited to supporting characters. As awareness of gender equality in the world of cinema increases, so does the production of heroine movies. There are three reasons why heroine films are in great demand. First (1) heroine films can reach female audience segmentation of all ages, because previously superhero films were only liked by male audiences, then the potential to reach the number of viewers will be greater. second (2) the appearance of the heroine character will make the audience not bored with superhero films which are dominated by male characters. third (3) Demands for gender equality in the global movie industry which gave birth to the emergence of new feminist icons, including heroine characters. Its existence is able to inspire the audience, especially regarding the identity of women. As an icon of feminism, the heroine character also has a certain influence. For example, growing self-confidence, leadership spirit, awareness of taking care of the body and looking beautiful for teenage female audiences

The feminism movement in films moves from universal identity politics to personal identity politics, especially in relation to gender and sexuality. Heroine characters is confronted in a male universal narrative but in a female specificity. The form of identity politics in movies now plays an important role ideologically (Ali, 2017, 66). This research is important because it will reveal how the heroine character as a visual communication medium is able to reconstruct values in society, especially related to gender identity and women's sexuality in the millennial era.

The period 2008-2021 was chosen because that period is considered the golden period for superhero films, when superhero films are produced in abundance and achieve both financial and critical success. Sampling of Hollywood heroine characters is represented by the

characters of Black Widow, Captain Marvel and Scarlet Witch from the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), and the characters Wonder Woman, Queen Hippolyta and Mera from the DC Extended Universe (DCEU), the heroine character from Indonesia is represented by the character Srimaya who appeared in *Valentine* (2017) which is the only stand-alone heroine movie from Indonesia that appeared in the period 2008-2021, and *Sri Asih* who appeared in *Gundala* (2019) which is the best-selling original Indonesian superhero movie in Indonesia.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method which is a type of research that is descriptive and analytical. Process and meaning (subject perspective) are more important in qualitative descriptive research. The theoretical basis is used as a guide so that the focus of research is in accordance with the facts on the ground. Qualitative descriptive studies can touch things related to art, culture and media studies. Qualitative descriptive studies can also answer questions related to what, why and how the culture that exists in society can be formed. For data collection, this study used literature, observation, and documentation methods.

3. RELATED RESEARCH

This study uses the basis of previous research entitled "Superpowering Girls: Female Representation In The Sci-fi/Superhero Genre" by Women's Media Center (WMC) and BBC America in 2018. Female audiences are more influenced by the role models of heroine characters in the film than male audiences. The survey in the study found that 82% of young women under 19 were influenced by the representation of the heroine character they saw in the film. As many as 18% of girls since the age of 5 years have begun to be influenced and compare themselves to the heroine character in the film. 85% of female respondents aged 10-19 years like movies with heroine characters and 39% of them chose Wonder Woman as their favorite heroine character and became their role model (Women's Media Center & BBC America, 2018).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher uses Charles Morris' semiotic theory, which is about the theory of the relation between signs in a syntactic context (similarity). According to Charles Morris, signs can relate to one another if they have similar rules (Siregar & Wulandari, 2020). Syntactic concerns the formal relation between signs, around logical and grammatical rules governing the use of signs, namely about the same and different elements. Syntactic discusses the relationship between signs, where the relationship between signs is tasked with giving meaning (Morris, 1938). The aspect of similarity is a basis (ground) of a representation, so that every depiction of a heroine character will find something that underlies (to ground) a concept of identity from the various indications of the representation. (Piliang, 2018, 52). By using the principle of equality, several representations related to gender and sexuality are found:

4.1 Ideal Beauty Representation

The representation of beauty always appears in the stereotype of heroine characters, namely about the appearance of the face and body. In every appearance, the heroine character is always shown various standards of ideal beauty, for example a thin face, sharp nose, bright white skin, clean and flat white teeth, slim body shape, small belly circumference, having a height of more than 170cm, long hair, wide eyes, does not have eye bags, smooth skin without wrinkles, long legs and relatively large breast size.

4.2 Intelligence/Intellectual Representation

All heroine characters are described as having above average intelligence. In the movies *Justice League* (2017), *Wonder Woman* (2018 & 2021) and *Zack Snyder's Justice League* (2021) Diana Prince is described as fluent in English, Russian and German. Diana also works as an anthropologist and senior archaeologist at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC. Then the character Black Widow in the film *Iron Man 2* (2010) is also described as mastering more than 5 languages. while *Valentine* characters are also described as having Indonesian and

English language skills in the film *Valentine* (2017). In addition to being multi-lingual, the heroine character also has cognitive intelligence. This can be seen from the characters of Queen Hippolyta and Mera who are experts in strategy and politics. Queen Hippolyta is the queen of the Amazons, while Mera is the Queen of Atlantis. The Black Widow character also has cognitive intelligence because she is an expert in computers and technology (Setyanto & Haryadi, 2020).

4.3 Representation of Physical Strength

All heroine characters have abilities above the average normal human. Wonder Woman who has the ability to live forever, can fly, fight ability, is bulletproof, very strong, and has incredible speed. Queen Hippolyta has the ability to live forever and the ability to fight. Mera has the ability to control water, the ability to breathe in water, and swim at high speed. Black Widow masters martial arts and espionage techniques, has the ability to use various weapons, can manipulate opponents, and is capable of acrobatics. Valentine character, even though he doesn't have super abilities, Valentine is equipped with martial arts skills and the ability to use various weapons so that he can defeat dozens of adult men. While the character Sri is an incarnation of a god who has super strength, super speed, eternal life and can fly.

4.4 Representation of heroic values and patriotism

The value of heroism is one of the main values that drives the story in superhero movies. That is about how good fights evil, struggles in battle with evil entities. The stories in the film are also full of distinctive values of patriotism such as the importance of building teamwork, leadership, fighting spirit, active, always being brave, fighting fear, never giving up and being willing to sacrifice for humanity.

4.5 Representation of Hyper-Sexuality and Voyeurism

Heroine character as a form of sexuality commodity, because visually every representation of heroine also emphasizes sexual attraction. Each heroine actor is chosen because he has an ideal body shape, a beautiful face and young age. The costumes worn by heroine characters are made to support this sexual attraction because they have designs that show body shape. Because heroine is a fictional character, then as a sexual object that appears on the screen the object is only a pseudo pleasure or fantasy. Heroine as a sexual object eventually develops into an exaggerated form of sexuality (hyper-sexuality). Each heroine representation is made in such a way with choreography, shooting angles, lighting and certain cinematic techniques to facilitate the sexual side. Artists who play heroine characters in real life also all have model backgrounds, so their sexy photos are relatively easy to find on the internet. heroine character not only acts as a trigger for a sexual relation, but also has the potential to evoke something libidinal in the subconscious.

4.6 Representation of Fetishism

Found several representations of fetishism on heroine characters. Fetish is a sexual disorder experienced by a person against a non-sexual object (Spitzer et al., 1980). Fetishes are also often associated with sexual deviations from something unusual, for example pleasure when the body feels pain (masochistic). the scene in *Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), during the battle between Diana/Wonder Woman against Doomsday. Diana's character is described as smiling and enjoying the battle even though her opponent is very strong and repeatedly repels Diana.

Wonder Woman has a love interest named Steve Trevor. In the Zack Snyder's *Justice League* (2021) it is revealed that Diana's age has actually reached more than 5000 years, even though her body and face are not aging. Diana was actually someone who was extremely old. Compare that to Steve Trevor who is 40 years old. From a psychological point of view, this fetish is called gerontophilia or sexual attraction to people who are much older/younger (Ley, 2015). The representation of agalmatophilia appears in the character of Scarlet Witch. In several MCU films, Wanda's character has a relationship with Vision's character. Another fetish that emerged

was agalmatophilia, which is a sexual deviation in the form of attraction to inanimate objects that have human-like forms such as dolls, mannequins, statues and robots. Vision was originally an artificial intelligence program called Jarvis, then was given a non-organic body and eventually turned into Vision. Physically resembling humans but not living beings because Vision is a robot.

In the story in the film Avenger: Age of Ultron (2015) Natasha is told to have a special relationship with Hulk. Even Natasha is the only character who can calm Hulk from anger so that Hulk can shrink back and turn into Bruce Banner. Natasha and Bruce's relationship is a representation of a fetish called Anasteemaphilia, which is a sexual tendency or attraction to people who have bodies with extreme sizes (bigger or smaller).

4.7 Representation of Love (romanticism) and Motherhood

Although the heroine characters are described as strong, tough and like to fight, their traits are also described as having strong elements of love and affection. There are several scenes that show the closeness of women with identical traits of love and affection. One of the strong representations of love and motherhood is in the figures of Queen Hippolyta, Black Widow and Wanda Maximoff. Through a series of flashbacks in Wonder Woman (2017), the audience is invited to get to know how Diana Prince was when she was little. As a single mother, Queen Hippolyta really loves Diana. Queen Hippolyta forbade her sister Antiope to train Diana because she didn't want Diana to get hurt. Queen Hippolyta was also protective of her child and helped Diana several times as a child.

The representation of love is also found in the film Black Widow (2021), which tells the story of Natasha Romanoff's childhood with her family. In the film we finally know that it turns out that the family is a fake family formed by Redroom to carry out a secret mission. Adult Natasha finally formed a team containing the fake family "reunion" consisting of Natasha Romanoff, Yelena Belova, Milena Vostokova and Alexei Shostakov/Red Guardian. when the scene of eating together at Milena's house shows the strong chemistry between them. Which shows that they all miss and want the status of "family".

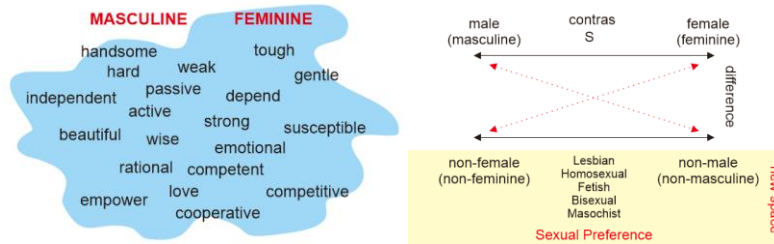
The character of Scarlet Witch is also described as a heroine character who really wants love in her life. In the WandaVision (2020) series which takes place after the events of Avengers End Game (2019), we are shown that Vision comes back to life. As the episodes pass, it is revealed that the Vision figure is actually a "fake" Vision that Wanda created herself in an alternate reality. In this alternate reality, Wanda also creates 2 children named Billy and Tommy with her magical powers. That's all Wanda did to be able to experience life as a complete family even if only in a fake/artificial reality.

5. CONCLUSION

Traditional gender preferences always identify women's characteristics as being weak, passive, dependent, and vulnerable, thus placing women in a position that needs to be helped, assisted and led (Damsel in Distress). In the concept of traditional gender preferences, it is clear that the gender barrier that draws the line between femininity and masculinity is clear. Whereas in the representation of heroine characters, women are often depicted on the contrary, namely having traits that are identical to masculinity such as strong, hard, active, tough, rational, competitive, empowered and able to lead.

Despite having the traits of masculinity, women in heroine characters do not necessarily eliminate positive traditional feminine values such as wise, sympathetic, kind, sensual and compassionate traits adapted from the figure of a mother (motherhood). Every representation of the character of heroine proves that the barriers of femininity and masculinity have melted, mingled, and overlapped. It also proves that the traditional concept of femininity is considered to have collapsed and is irrelevant in showing today's women.

Table 1. Gender & Preference on Heroine Characters



Regarding the representation of sexuality in heroine characters, new spaces are found for the male and female paradoxes. The new space is a binary opposition that can be described as the terms “non-male” and “non-female”, or “non-feminine” and “non-masculine”. The representation of sexuality represented by heroine characters is not based on reproductive organs, but rather on the sexual orientation of the characters. related to the representation of sexuality, the sexuality stereotypes of men and women have also melted away, thus giving new space to sub-identities “outside” of men and women. This representation is shown through several heroine characters who have "deviant" sexuality preferences or fetishes. so that it proves that the depiction of the concept of sexuality increasingly opens up space for the diversity of sexual choices.

beyond gender or sexuality. Through the representation of the heroine character, she proves that beauty is still an absolute requirement for women. Beauty remains part of female sexuality. In addition to a beautiful face, the ideal body shape is also a category that cannot be separated from a beauty requirement. This category of beauty and ideal body shape is a universal and global requirement. Although in particular cases the specific categories of beauty and the ideal body differ in each context of a particular region and time, a beautiful face and a slim body are strongly influenced by the interests of the industry and popular products of today. Like Baudrillard's opinion that women's beauty is not just a value related to spirituality and culture, but also a commodity .

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