

Representation of Forms of Sexual Harassment in Women Through Film in the Perspective of Muted Group Theory

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is a serious issue that takes many forms, such as exploitation, coercion, or sexual abuse without consent. This type of harassment is a form of gender injustice that can manifest in various forms of marginalization and subordination towards women. Women can feel restricted in their ability to express themselves freely due to the dominance of men in society. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of cases of sexual harassment of women in society. This has prompted film directors to address the issue in their works, such as the film *Virgin the Series*. This research aims to analyze the representation of sexual harassment towards women in this film, which is available on the Disney+Hotstar application, using the perspective of muted group theory. The theoretical framework used in this study includes the concept of representation by Stuart Hall, the concept of sexual abuse, adolescence, and women, as well as Roland Barthes's semiotic theory and the grand theory of silence (The Muted Group Theory). The researchers utilized a qualitative research method and applied Roland Barthes's semiotics approach to analyze the text and visuals in this film. The findings indicate that the film portrays various forms of sexual harassment toward women, such as physical, oral, non-verbal, gestural, visual, and psychological harassment. These depictions further strengthen the position of women as subordinates, as explained by the muted group theory

Keywords: *Representation, Sexual Harassment, The Muted Group Theory, Semiotics.*



A. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of sexual harassment is widely discussed, yet only a fraction is brought to light. Indonesia is currently facing a sexual harassment emergency. Sexual harassment falls under the category of sexual violence. According to the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan), from January to November 2022, there were 3,014 cases of gender-based violence against women, including 899 cases of sexual violence in personal settings and 860 cases in public or community settings (Prameswari, 2023). Sexual harassment against women tends to occur frequently because women are perceived as weak. For instance, in a study on the Representation of Sexual Violence in the film "Penyalin Cahaya," sexual harassment is often seen as a specter, making it difficult for many to perceive the reality of violence against victims and its consequences (Siswanto et al., 2022). Women are the subjects who suffer the consequences of systematic plundering and objectification (Smelik, 1993). Social practices in society are influenced by gender inequality (Caradeux & Salom, 2013). In the Muted Group Theory, Shirley Ardener proposed the concept of Muted Groups, questioning whether individuals or groups should "change their thoughts or anything they want to express as long as they remain

socially acceptable." This theory was further developed by Cheris Kramarae, a speech communication and sociologist at the University of Illinois Chicago. According to this theory, when women attempt to challenge injustice, male control over their communication renders women powerless. The language used is created to help define, degrade, and negate women (Sobur, 2013).

Assumptions in the Muted Group theory include: (1) Women perceive the world differently from men. Men work outside the home, while women manage household chores. (2) Due to their political dominance, men's perception system controls women's expression. According to this assumption, it is difficult for women to say what they want to say. (3) To participate in society, women must adjust their models based on the established norms to be accepted by the male expression system (West, 2010). In other words, according to the Muted Group theory, if someone alters what they want to say just to avoid feeling alienated by their social environment, the group cannot voice anything they truly desire.

Kramarae identified four processes of silencing (West, 2010): a. A Ridicule, belittling women's opinions and ideas. b. Ritual, cultural context involvement in certain activities that position women lower than men. c. Control, researchers argue that men have the power to control society's social dynamics. d. Harassment is when women cannot freely engage in activities due to the threat of sexual violence. In the context of media content, it can represent the portrayal of the reality of sexual harassment affecting teenagers, especially young women. The goodness and badness of the content can be assessed by the audience and can influence them to emulate what they see in the film. The prevalence of sexual harassment cases in society has led film directors to address this topic as a theme in their movies. The issue of harassment is depicted in a film. Films depict the realities of life, including addressing sexual harassment against women. Some films in Indonesia that address sexual harassment include Photocopier, 27 Steps of May, Please Be Quiet, and many more. Disney+ Hotstar is one platform that showcases a series discussing cases of sexual harassment among teenagers titled "Virgin the Series". This web series is directed by Monty Tiwa and features young actresses Adhisty Zara, Lutesha, and Shalom Razade. Out of the many films and series available, the researcher focuses on the web series titled "Virgin the Series." which addresses cases of sexual harassment. The series was produced by Kharisma Starvision Plus in 2022 and premiered on Disney+ Hotstar in January 2022.

In a film, there are many signs that ultimately carry specific meanings. Semiotics studies how signs inherent in a particular object can reveal the meanings they contain. In other words, this semiotic analysis attempts to uncover the meanings behind the signs hidden within a sign, emphasizing the signs related to various forms of sexual harassment present in the film text (Harsono, 2003). Representation in revealing signs of various forms of sexual harassment is crucial to explore because it aims to understand two things: whether someone, a group, or an idea is portrayed as they should be or marginalized through negative depictions, and how this representation is presented by the media (Wahyuningsih, 2014). The sign system is contextual and depends on the user of the sign, influenced by the social construction

in which the sign exists. In film, there are various processes of capturing objects based on their respective goals. The camera shot techniques include Extreme Long Shot, Long Shot, Medium Long Shot, Medium Close Up, Close Up, and Extreme Close Up. Essentially, film is easily manipulated as it requires serious handling and more artificial construction or manipulation compared to other media (McQuail, 2010).

Barthes explains that there are levels in the language system. Language at the first level is language as an object, and language at the second level is what he calls metalinguistic language. This language constitutes a sign system containing signifiers and signifieds. The second sign system is constructed by making the signifiers and signifieds of the first level into new signifiers, which then have new signifieds in a new sign system at a higher level. He terms the first sign system as denotation or the terminological system, while the second-level sign system is called connotation or the rhetorical or mythological system. Therefore, this research delves deeper into the following issue: How are the Representations of Forms of Sexual Harassment in Women Depicted Through Film from the Perspective of the Muted Group Theory?

B. METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach. In qualitative research, it can be assumed that the higher the level of detail and precision in the data, the higher the quality of the research. Qualitative research does not employ statistical analysis methods or other quantification techniques. Qualitative research involves multimethods that require an interpretive and naturalistic approach, including case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life histories, and interactional and visual texts (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Hence, this research focuses on the text. The research method used is semiotic text analysis, an approach to studying how signs function and signify. A text is a construction of sign elements concerning the object of study. Communication is viewed as the mediation or exchange of intersubjective signs in the semiotic tradition. As an interpretive theory, semiotics does not only interpret and treat the text as a text; it makes the text speak about things beyond itself. The semiotics used in this study is Roland Barthes' semiotics. Barthes presents the concept of two stages of signification, with denotation as the primary sign and connotation as the secondary sign. The data collection technique involves observing the text or object from the film. The object of the study is the series "Virgin the Series", and the researcher will observe the representation of sexual harassment from this object. The analysis begins with qualitative content analysis using specific symbols or symbols, then the data obtained will be classified according to certain criteria and predictions made using specific analysis techniques. The main weaknesses of semiotics are its tendency to focus only on the structure of meaning and treat humans as passive elements. Semiotics tends to overlook the fact that humans always create new meanings. The second weakness of semiotics is its deep dependence on the researcher's ability to deepen a topic. This deepening requires high creativity from researchers.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Virgin the Series is an Indonesian web series film in the youth drama genre, directed by Monty Tiwa and produced by Kharisma Starvision Plus. This series is an original series by Disney+ Hotstar which premiered in January 2022 with a total of 10 episodes, this is the fourth original series released by Disney+ Hotstar.

1. Synopsis of the film Virgin the Series

Keke (Arla Ailani), who is the most famous girl at school, throws her 17th birthday party. Keke invites her school friends, whom she deems worthy, to a party to improve her social status. Apart from that, Keke invited David (or Rangga Nattrra), her boyfriend who is now a social media celebrity. Unbeknownst to Keke, David also invited Raya (or Lutesha), Keke's school friend whom Keke and her friends don't like. There was no problem with Keke's birthday party. However, when Keke's family was waiting for breakfast the next morning, they found Keke suddenly fell from the second floor of their house, covered in blood. The school is shocked by the news that Keke has died; it was suspected he committed suicide, but no one told them. They research every detail about Keke and her family to help them find answers to the cases they study. Everyone is shocked by the video Keke uploaded after her death on social media as they investigate. In the video, Keke is shown with bruises on her face and states that she is not the popular girl her friends know. He tells people that the scars on his face are from his father, and that their life is not as perfect as people see. This makes Talita and other people suspicious of Keke's father. After this incident, the school held counseling with child psychologists to help children who were experiencing problems and found it difficult to express them to others.

Many people believe Lukman, a famous young psychologist. After the incident at school, Lukman often talked to Bee and his friends if there were problems. However, Bee, who doesn't like him because he has been dating her mother, always rejects Lukman's offers and avoids him. Talita continues to investigate until she finally meets a hacker named Banyu (Abun Sungkar). Banyu said Keke once asked for his help to find an illegal location where young women's virginity was being sold. Keke did it because she found inappropriate photos on her father's phone, and she believed that her father had ties to the dark web. After that, Hiro (Alzi Markers), who heard Talita and her friends talking about the site, asked for their help in finding her brother. Hiro asks for their help because he believes Senja has a boyfriend who is much older than her. Banyu investigated Senja's social media accounts and found conversations between him and his girlfriend where his identity was deliberately kept secret. Finally, Talita and her friends discovered that Senja's boyfriend who kidnapped her was Lukman, a famous person. Everyone was shocked and couldn't believe it. They still didn't just give up. They plan to trap Lukman by using the attractiveness of young women to make him show his true evil nature, as he has been doing behind his mask.

2. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis

In this research on the representation of sexual harassment of teenage girls in the Virgin the Series series which uses Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, there are 5 forms of sexual harassment that will be analyzed and the author will show the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth contained in the scene.

a. Physical Abuse

Table 1. Physical Harassment: Women as objects of jokes for men

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 1, Episode 2, 2:55 minutes	The sound of music and people cheering inside the club without dialogue.	<i>Close Up</i>
Denotation	Hiro kisses one of his female friends at the club.	
Connotation	Hiro deliberately kissed his friend without permission to be photographed by Faris and used as content, with the connotation that Hiro committed physical abuse as if the item was used as content for a joke	
Myth	Women's physical bodies become objects for sexual acts that become the subject of jokes.	

From the table above, it can be seen that there is an element of physical harassment which can be seen from the signs, namely the denotation sign, which is Hiro is kissing his girlfriend without permission. This scene can be connoted as an act of physical sexual harassment because Hiro deliberately kissed his friend in front of the camera without the permission of the woman being kissed. The myth that emerged was that women were used as sexual objects for men to joke about. Based on the muted group theory, it can be seen that the woman has no choice but to remain silent and accept the sexual acts that Hiro performs on her. The form of sexual harassment contained in the findings above can be seen in the presence of a symbol of movement where a man forcibly kisses a woman. The man named Hiro told his friend (Faris) before he kissed the woman to take a photo of them and use it as content material. In muted theory, women are seen dealing with people who have greater social power, which makes it difficult for women to express rejection or disapproval of their actions. Women become the targets of men's jokes.

Table 2. Physical Harassment: Women as men's sexual objects

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
	Music sounds in the background without dialogue Close Up	<i>Close Up</i>

Scene 2, Episode 7, at minutes 31:25		
Denotation	Lukman kissed the forehead of Senja who was lying asleep.	
Connotation	Lukman took advantage of the opportunity when Senja was unconscious and abused Senja.	
Myth	Women who become sexual objects for men	

The table above shows the denotation that Lukman came to Senja's room and kissed her while she was asleep. The connotation of this action is physical sexual harassment with (sexual) women while they are unconscious, this proves the existence of the muted group theory because Senja cannot speak out about the harassment. Myths that make powerless women into sexual objects for men. In the scene found above, a form of harassment is shown by kissing when the woman is unconscious. The movement of a man kissing a woman without the woman's permission proves that this action constitutes physical sexual harassment so that the woman becomes the sexual object of the man.

b. Verbal Harassment

Table 3. Verbal Harassment: Women as objects to be bought and sold

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 3, Episode 3, at at minutes 44:20	Faris, who had just woken up from sleep, asked Talita, "Ta, how much did you bid?" Talita: "You're rude with your mouth, you're bargaining for it. What do you think I am?"	<i>Long Shot</i>
Denotation	Talita and Faris were sitting together in the living room looking at something on Talita's laptop.	
Connotation	Faris asked what price bids were coming in for Talita on the teenage prostitution site called Virginity Giveaway which they were currently opening.	
Myth	Women are seen as objects that can be bought and sold for money.	

The table above shows the denotational meaning where Talita and Faris are together in the living room playing on their laptop. The connotation means that they are opening an online prostitution site, and Faris' words constitute an act of verbal harassment. Myths make women into objects that can be sold and bought. The scene in the table above can be stated as a representation of sexual harassment because of the language symbols and image symbols in the scene. The language symbol is marked by the dialogue spoken by Faris which is related to the picture symbol showing a prostitution site. These two symbols prove that verbal sexual harassment

occurred. On the muted theory side, women's groups become objects to be bought and sold, their physical bodies are exchanged for money, and women are like objects.

Table 4: Verbal Harassment: Women as objects of sexual comments by men

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 4, Episode 9, at minutes 20:24	Lukman said to Senja, "You're still sexy in this state, aren't you...do you miss me?"	<i>Long Shot</i>
Denotation	Lukman was sitting on the terrace of the house, glancing at Senja.	
Connotation	Lukman looks at Senja with a sexual gaze and makes sexual comments about Senja's body.	
Myth	Men view women's bodies as objects to satisfy their lust.	

From the table above you can see the denotation of Lukman sitting with Senja on the terrace of Senja's house. The connotation is that Lukman gives Senja a sexual look and also makes indecent comments to Senja which can be interpreted as a form of sexual harassment. When Senja receives sexual comments about her body, she remains silent with fear, which proves the existence of the muted group theory in this scene. The myth is that women are objects to satisfy men's lust. The sexual dialogue uttered by Lukman about Senja's body is an unexpected sign of sound, and the symbol of movement is marked by Lukman's facial expression, which looks at her with lust and makes Senja uncomfortable. These two symbols indicate that there is a form of sexual harassment being carried out.

Table 5: Verbal Harassment: Women as objects of sexual desire by men

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 5, Episode 10, at minutes 8:47	Lukman: "What can you do without me?" Lukman: "Yes, you are beautiful, I have to admit it, otherwise I wouldn't be aroused"	Full Shot
Denotation	Lukman and Senja are seen together in the bedroom.	
Connotation	Lukman poses indecently in front of Senja and thinks that Senja is just a woman who can't do anything.	
Myth	Women are considered weak and only used as objects of sexual desire for men.	

The table above shows the denotation of Senja and Lukman being together in the room, with the connotation of Lukman verbally abusing him when he commented on Senja's physical appearance, which aroused him. The existence of the muted group theory can be seen from Senja who did not reply or fight against Lukman for making comments like that about himself. The myth is that women are considered weak sexual objects and can only depend on men. This form of sexual harassment is characterized by movement symbols and language symbols. The symbol of movement is seen in Lukman's movement which makes his hips sway and point toward Senja, and the symbol of language is shown in the dialogue spoken by Lukman.

c. Non-verbal harassment

Table 6: Non-verbal harassment: Women as objects of sexual gaze by men

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 6, Episode 3, at minutes 0:24	Music background.	Full Shoot
Denotation	Faris was photographing Talita who was only wearing a tank top.	
Connotation	Faris lost his concentration on taking photos because he was looking at Talita with lustful eyes.	
Myth	Women are seen as objects that can pamper men's gaze.	

The table above shows the denotation of Faris helping Talita take her photo shoot. And the connotation that is obtained is that Faris cannot control his lust when he sees Talita who is only wearing a tank top, thus causing a sexual gaze. The myth of women being objects that pamper men's eyes. The muted group theory of this scene is proven by Talita who was just silent and did not restrain Faris from stopping her from giving him a sexual look. In this scene, there is a symbol of movement which is marked by Faris' facial gestures when photographing Talita. When she saw Talita who was only wearing a tank top, Faris' gaze changed to a sexual glance that Talita did not expect. These signs of movement or gaze prove that there has been a non-verbal act of sexual harassment.

d. Visual Harassment

Table 7. Visual Harassment: images of women used as objects for sexual transactions

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 8, Episode 2, at minutes 12:43	Talita: "#Sweet17thGiveaway, I'm sure this hashtag is not all about Virginity Giveaway. It could be something else." Faris: "What do you think is something else?" Talita: "Yeah, I don't know, it could be prostitution"	<i>Close Up</i>
Denotation	A collection of images of women in sexy poses and clothing posted on the media	
Connotation	Women who follow the Virginity Giveaway trend are tantamount to prostitution.	
Myth	Women work as objects of sexual transactions to fulfill one's desires.	

The table above shows the denotation of a collection of images of sexy women displayed on social media. The connotation is that these women are victims of sexual harassment because pornographic photos are widely distributed. The myth is that women are considered sexual objects to fulfill lust. The connection between the table above and the muted group theory is because the women were silenced so they would not refuse and say anything about the harassment they experienced.

An image symbol appears showing a site full of photos of women dressed and posing in sexy poses allegedly for men's satisfaction. Supported by language symbols in Talita and Faris' conversation which stated that these women were being used as prostitutes. The signs of these two communication symbols indicate acts of sexual harassment against women who are considered goods that are traded as sexual objects.

Table 8. Visual Harassment: images of women used as sexual viewing objects

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 9, Episode 5 at minutes 30:42	Keke: "My father is crazy. He used to say I was crazy and an embarrassment to the family. But he likes it like this."	<i>Close Up</i>
Denotation	Image of a young woman in a sexy pose and clothes. Women as sexual objects for men to watch and satisfy.	
Connotation	Keke's father keeps a collection of photos of young women posing and dressed in sexy clothes on his cell phone.	

Myth	Women as sexual objects for men to watch and satisfy.
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The denotation of the table above shows photos of women in sexy poses and clothes. The connotation means that this photo is one of the many photos of sexy teenagers that Keke's father has. However, the woman cannot do anything and must accept being treated like a sexual object. This proves the existence of the muted group theory in this scene. The myth of women as sexual objects for men to view sexually. These findings can be proven by the presence of pictorial symbols and language. The image symbol indicates that there are photos of women in sexy clothes on a man's cell phone, which is supported by dialogue stating that these photos are used by men to satisfy their desires as a sexual spectacle.

e. Psychological Abuse

Table 9. Psychological Harassment: Women as objects of men's sexual desire

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 11, Episode 7 at minutes 12:52		Close up
Denotation	Senja was lying on the bed wearing a sexy nightdress while posing in front of her cellphone..	
Connotation	Lukman takes advantage of Senja's affection and manipulates Senja to make a sexy video.	
Myth	The feeling of a woman being made an object of sexual desire by a man.	

From the table above, it can be seen that Senja is lying on the bed wearing sexy nightwear while posing in front of the camera. The connotation of this scene is that Lukman deliberately takes advantage of Senja's feelings to be harassed and used as a means to satisfy his lust. The myth of women as sexual objects for men, where love must be proven by sexual acts. This is related to the muted group theory, Senja, who was unable to deny Lukman's request to carry out sexual acts because he was manipulated by affection. The form of sexual harassment in finding 4.12 is characterized by symbols of movement, sound and language. The movement symbol is marked by Senja moving following Lukman's orders via video call. Lukman's dialogue over the telephone is a sign of the symbol of sound and language.

Table 10. Psychological Harassment: Women as objects for fulfilling sexual desires and being bought and sold by men

Visual	Dialogue	Camera Technique
 Scene 13, Episode 10 at minutes 32:33	Senja: "I was framed...he made me believe that I was the person he loved. Because I believe he loves me, I want to be asked to make a video for him..." Talita: "What do the photos and videos contain? Can I say sexual activity?" Senja: "...Yes...but it turns out the video was shared and made into paid content by him..."	Close up
Denotation	Talita and Senja were sitting together in the living room and Talita was seen calming Senja.	
Connotation	Senja explained that she was a victim of manipulation and harassment by Lukman.	
Myth	Women are used as objects of sexual desire who are bought and sold for one-sided gain.	

From the table above you can see the denotation of Talita sitting with Senja who looks like she is crying. The connotation of this scene, Senja explains that all this time she was trapped and harassed by Lukman for sexual content to be bought and sold. And his psychology was very disturbed. Senja told in front of the camera that was recording about her relationship with Lukman which was full of coercion and threats, the myth of women being considered sexual objects by men and men considering love as something that is proven by sexual acts. Senja is a victim of psychological sexual harassment by Lukman

From the findings contained in the Virgin the Series series, there are 5 types of sexual harassment categories, namely:

1. Physical sexual harassment which is characterized by unwanted sexual touching. In this category there is a representation of women as objects of jokes for men and physical objects as sexual objects that are bought and sold
2. Verbal sexual harassment, words or comments directed at someone regarding their body or life of a sexual nature, in this category women are the object of sexual comments and the object of men's sexual desire.
3. Non-verbal sexual harassment, indirect harassment characterized by a person's body movements, in this category women are the object of sexual gaze for men.
4. Visual sexual harassment, a form of harassment characterized by images, photos, videos, SMS messages, or other media, and there is. From the findings of this category, there is a representation of women who are used as objects of sexual spectacle and objects of sexual transactions

5. Psychological sexual harassment, namely sexual acts that are unexpected and cause psychological pressure for the victim. From the findings, there is a representation that women are objects of men's sexual desires and as objects of fulfilling sexual desires and being bought and sold by men

In this case, the men in this series also consider women to be weak figures who cannot do anything other than fulfill men's desires. This shows the myth that women must serve men and men always have control over women. Apart from that, men consider themselves superior and look down on women as fulfilling their desires. The injustice that affects women already exists in our culture, in this research it is in films. Women considered second-class citizens are still often viewed negatively, humiliated, harassed, and do not receive adequate rights. Muted Group Theory is a communication and gender theory that reinforces that language is created by male structures. In this film, researchers see the silencing of women created by men. In this film, silencing is a clear example of how women are still degraded and have no existence in front of men. Women in the media depiction of this film place objectification on women and their bodies to become sexual objects for men in various forms.

D. CONCLUSION

From the results of the research described above, researchers found representations of sexual harassment depicted in 13 scenes which represent 5 forms of sexual harassment against teenagers in the series *Virgin the Series*. The five forms of harassment are represented in each scene in various forms, such as character movements, character dialogue, and others, namely (1) physical sexual harassment which is characterized by unwanted sexual touching, and (2) verbal, verbal or verbal sexual harassment. comments directed at someone about their body or life of a sexual nature, (3) non-verbal sexual harassment, indirect harassment marked by a person's body movements, (4) visual sexual harassment, a form of harassment marked by drawings, photos, videos, SMS messages or other media, and finally (5) psychological sexual harassment, namely sexual acts that are unexpected and cause psychological pressure for the victim. Researchers have identified the meaning of denotation, connotation, and myth from scenes depicting the five forms of sexual harassment. Representation is described by identifying denotational signs that indicate contact or sexual acts carried out between the characters in the series. Then it is interpreted with the connotation that the action carried out is a form of harassment because it is only carried out by one party and without any conceptualization on the part of the woman who is treated sexually. So overall it can be concluded that the myth that has emerged is that women are used as sexual objects to fulfill a man's sexual desires. In the context of muted theory or silence is obtained.

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