

## **Constructing Gender Through Popular Culture : Semiotic Perspective**

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**Abstrak** - Gender merupakan permasalahan yang kompleks karena merupakan identitas sosial yang bersifat dinamis. Ia ada berdasarkan budaya yang dimiliki suatu masyarakat dan tidak tetap. Film sebagai media populer seringkali menyampaikan pesan-pesan mengenai isu gender dan bersifat implisit. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi konstruksi gender dalam *Purple Heart Original Netflix*. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan semiotika Rolland Barthes. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa film *Purple Heart* merepresentasikan bagaimana gender dikonstruksi melalui hubungan intens antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Lebih lanjut, film *Purple Hearts* mengkonstruksi identitas gender secara tidak setara, khususnya terkait peran laki-laki dan perempuan serta perlakuan terhadap perempuan  
**Kata kunci:** Gender, Semiotic Analysis, Purple Heart

**Abstract** - Gender is a complex issue because it is a social identity that is dynamic in nature. It exists according to the culture to which a society belongs and is not fixed. Films, as a popular medium, often convey messages about gender issues and are implicit in their nature. This research explores the construction of gender in Original Netflix's *Purple Heart*. This research is qualitative descriptive research with the semiotic approach of Rolland Barthes. The result of the study showed that the film shows how gender is constructed through the intense relationship between men and women. Furthermore, the film *Purple Hearts* constructs gender identity unequally, in particular regarding the roles of men and women and the treatment of women.

**Key words:** Gender, Semiotic Analysis, Purple Heart

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender is a topic that is often discussed quite sensitively in society. Gender issues that started in 19th-century France are still ongoing today. This issue continues to emerge and even the problem of gender occurs in various countries in the world (Qomariah, 2019, p. 53). Many things can trigger gender issues. So that many efforts are made in order to make changes about this matter. Gender primarily refers to the characteristics and existence of women and men. When gender interacts with other identity characteristics, such as race or class, it can catalyze conflict and influence the dynamics of those interactions. Gender is always related to social, political, economic, and cultural aspects (Tridewiyanti, 2012, p. 75). Conflict over gender is often triggered by injustices done to women or men based on their sex, such as when certain groups of both women and men have the ability to increase their influence. While it is true that conflicts are not always about gender, it is important to know and understand gender.

Gender construction aims to explain injustice between women and men in society as an order related to differences in positions, roles and relationships between women and men (Ardiyani, 2015, p. 199). In this case, the *Purple Hearts* movie touches on feminism in its scenes. The goal of feminism is to build a society where people are not limited by their gender and where all genders have equal access to resources and opportunities. Efforts to fight for feminism, which is part of gender construction, are carried out and depicted through various forms. Some are depicted through movies, songs, novels, comics, poems and many more. As is known, that in the current era the most popular thing among social circles is movies, , no matter if it is through television or through online networks or often referred to as mobile video, it certainly makes it easier for people to access (Feng, 2021). So now there are a lot of movies that include elements of gender construction and feminism in it.

Movie is a series of moving images that are projected sequentially onto a screen through light and because movie is a popular public media, of course movie is an effective media for conveying something or evoking emotions (Manvell, Andrew, & Sklar, 2023). There are many online platforms that people can use to watch movies, such as Netflix. Netflix is an online media service that rents subscription movies within a certain period of time for a fee and also maintains a movie queue list (Bennett & Lanning, 2007). *Purple Hearts* is one of the movies that contains genre construction as feminism elements. *Purple Hearts* is an adaptation of a novel written by Tess Wakefield (Wakefield, 2017), then later became a movie released in 2022 ,was directed by Elizabeth Allen Rosenbaum which tells the story of the love affair between a marine named Luke with a waitress and bar singer, Cassie. Starting from an accidental meeting at Cassie's workplace to deciding to marry for money. However, their marriage is only to get spousal benefits from the military where the male character works. A love contract relationship that takes place when conditions are in a war situation. The *Purple Hearts* movie has many scenes or images related to



feminism, whether shown directly or indirectly. This research endeavors to reveal what kind of gender construction in this movie.

Semiotics is a science or method of analysis that is usually used to study the signs contained in an object in order to find out what is the meaning in the object of study (Hasana, 2014, p. 4). Roland Barthes also known as the pioneer in developing Saussure semiotic theory. According to Barthes, he divided semiotic theory in to two parts, the first one is denotation and the second one is connotation. Denotation, is the first level of meaning. In general, denotation is defined as the literal or basic meaning of a visual sign and the immediate meaning that will automatically make us have an understanding or image of something (Zuhdah & Alfain, 2020, p. 105). An example is the word "green table". The denotation meaning of a green table is a green piece of furniture with a flat surface and has a support underneath and is used to put various objects on it. While connotation is another meaning of the word and is rich or full of suggestion (Nuryadi, 2021, p. 51). For example, "green table". Green table here means court and can also be interpreted as a match. Based on the various explanations above, this research aims to analyze the elements of gender construction in the movie. Furthermore, this research also reveals how gender equality is displayed and how it is made so that it can lead to Feminism in Elizabeth Allen Rosenbaum's movie entitled "Purple Hearts".

There are several previous studies that also use semiotic analysis on films with the theory of Roland Barthes, by Ayu Famila Putri, Arin Inayah, and Wageyono which is published in 2022, entitled A Semiotic Analysis of Aladdin Movie by Using Roland Barthes Theory (Putri, Inayah, & Wageyono, 2023, pp. 376- 386). This research aims to determine the type and meaning of Barthes' semiotic in Aladdin Movie. Another previous studies is by Elok Nuriyatur Rosyidah and Akhmad Rifa'i in 2022, is Semiotic Analysis of Feminism in Joko Anwar's Movie "Perempuan Tanah Jahanam" (Rosyidah & Rifa'i, 2022, pp. 51-64) which aims to explore the value of feminism and uses Roland Barthes' semiotics to analyze Perempuan Tanah Jahanam movie. The last research is *Body Size on Cinema: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Contemporary Indonesian* by Afifulloh and Wijayanti (2023). The research delves gender through critical discourse analysis lenses specifically gender and body size construction in Indonesian movies. As mentioned before that research on gender in popular media such film is being developed and each of the research has their perspective and basic theory. Barthes' semiotic theory is popular in media studies, but the different object or material makes different results. However, even with the same approach but with different movies, there will be apparently be different results. Research on Purple Hearts movies is still rare, so this research can also help the academic field by becoming a reference for further research on gender studies, Barthes semiotics, and Purple Hearts movies.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative methodology. John Creswell defined qualitative research as an approach to investigation where researchers interpret what they observe, hear, and comprehend (Creswell, 2018, p. 39). Roland Barthes' instrument used in this research is to use semiotic theory known as the two orders of signification denotation (actual meaning) and connotation (implied meaning) (Allen, 2004, pp. 50-51). Data is taken from various sources such as watching movies, reading some related journals, and others to be processed and analyzed based on several scenes in the *Purple Hearts* film as material in finding evidence and the existence of gender construction in the scene.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

Based on the results below, the scene in the Purple Hearts Movie is analyzed using Barthes semiotics theory. Hence, the discussion were held to described or understand more the scenes about gender construction in the Purple Hearts Movie.

Table 1. Barthes semiotics theory analysis

no	Sign in the movie	Roland Barthes Semiotics Theory	
		Denotation	Conotation
1.	Marines	Marines refer to a country's naval forces, which are generally practiced for operations on land and sea.	Refer to the strength, courage and discipline associated with the marine corps or specialized naval forces. The term can carry positive associations regarding the professionalism and valor of marine personnel.
2.	Harassment	Harassment refers to actions that involve humiliating or mistreating	Harassment refers to aspects of power, gender inequality, racial

		someone verbally, physically or emotionally.	discrimination and human rights violations.
3.	Misogyny	Misogyny is a behavior that hatred of women, usually shown to feminists.	Misogyny is a behavior that is degraded and insult women because of man hatred.
4.	Purple Heart	Purple Heart is a love or heart with purple color.	The Purple Heart is a symbol or award of appreciation given to military members who are injured and killed in the course of their service. Purple Heart also represent love and support.
5.	Rainbow Flag	The rainbow flag is a flag consisting of seven colors which symbolizes diversity and equal rights for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender).	The rainbow flag in America is often associated with the LGBT rights movement and solidarity with sexual minorities.
6.	Marriage Contract	A marriage that is entered into with a written contract and has a certain time limit	A marriage carried out for economic reasons or other interests, not because of love or the desire to form a legitimate family.
7.	Feminism	Feminism is An attitude or movement that supports women's rights in demanding gender equality.	Feminism is a movement for women with independence and abilities that can match men.

### Discussion

Based on the findings above, the scene that has been analyzed based on Barthes semiotic theory discussed and described as follows:

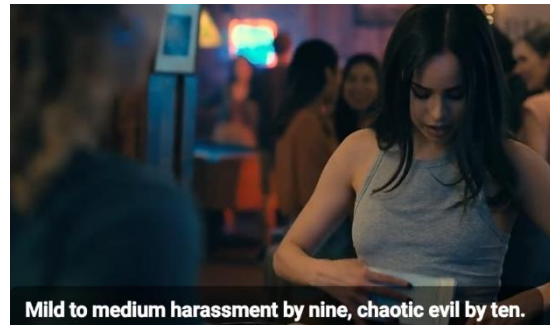
a.) Marines



Picture 1. Marines

In the Purple Hearts movie, there is a scene in minute 01.19 where the movie shows the marines calling out that they continue to work all the time and must keep their spirits up, “we are working, marines. We’re working the whole time! Let’s go!”. Marines usually refer to a country's naval forces, which are generally practiced for operations on land and sea. On the other hand, U.S. Armed Forces is one of the largest military powers in terms of personnel. In 1973, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, argued that the Marine Corps should be allowed to refuse to recruit women from certain assignments because mixed-gender units were not as effective as all-male troops. In the film Purple Hearts, the only soldiers shown are men. This shows the existence of gender construction in the Purple Hearts film scene, which is masculinity. Masculinity is what men are supposed to do. Masculinity refers to traits, characteristics, or behaviors that are considered to be associated with men in a particular culture or region of society (Connell, 2005, p. 69). Women are perceived as not having the courage of men, not having the strength, shrewdness, strategic skills, and so on that they think only men have and as a result women are not qualified to join the Marines or the military. But in 2013 women were able to play increasingly important roles in all branches of the US military, with other milestones such as driving tanks, firing mortars and leading infantry soldiers in battle (BBC, 2015).

b.) Harassment



Picture 2. Harrassment

The Purple Hearts movie at minute 03.55, shows a scene where Cassie is talking to her friend, Cassie says "Mild to medium harassment by nine, chaotic evil by ten". The meaning of the word harassment said by Cassie usually refers to actions that involve humiliation or mistreatment of someone verbally, physically, or emotionally. On the other hand, harassment refers to aspects of power, gender inequality, racial discrimination, and human rights violations. Harassment is a significant problem in America especially harassment of women, as women are perceived as weak and lacking excellence.

c.) Misogyny



Picture 3. Misogyny

In the Purple Hearts Movie, researchers found a scene where Cassie was humiliated by the marines because she refused the request of the marines who tried to harass her by touching her butt as a form of self-protection, "I got It, but, uh, not really an excuse for casual misogyny though". Misogyny is a behavior that demeans and insults women out which is one of gender construction that many happened in society. On the other hand, there is same statement about misogyny is an attitude that shows hatred towards women (Eksanti & Merry Fridha Tri Palupi, 2023, p. 2)

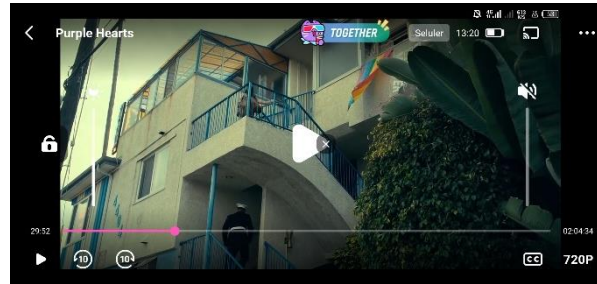
d.) Purple Hearts



Picture 4. Purple Hearts

Purple Hearts Movie is a film about the love contact between a marine and a singer. In gender construction Purple Hearts represent love and support where Luke and Cassie started love each other and giving support to their dream. In addition, Purple Hearts may be a symbol appreciation that given to military members who are risk their life in duty.

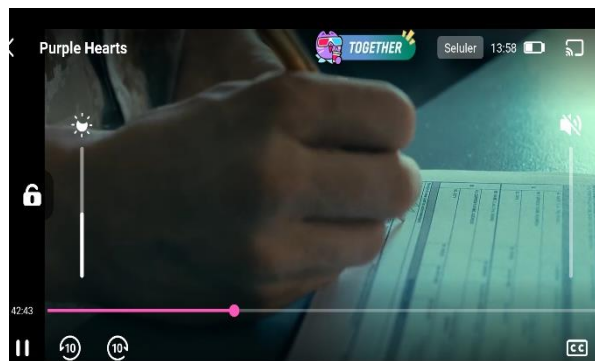
e.) Rainbow Flag



Picture 4. Rainbow Flag

The rainbow flag has strong ties to American society, especially in the context of the LGBT pride movement and the struggle for individual rights within that community. The rainbow flag has come to symbolize LGBTQ+ pride and has been used at LGBTQ+ rights events worldwide, including being lit up at the White House to commemorate the legalization of same-sex marriage in all 50 U.S. states.

f.) Marriage Contract



Picture 5. Marriage Contract

In everyday life in America, there is the term "contract marriage" where the contract partner is free to date anyone. If they have found a soul mate, they can enter into a contract marriage. Thus, there is a connection between contract marriage and American society in the context of the process of entering America, contract marriage, and marriage agreements which regulate the principle of freedom of contract.

g.) Feminism



Picture 6. Feminism

At 01.20. 09 there is a dialogue of Cessie who says "I'd rather have a broken knob than have you lecture me on feminism" which shows that Cessie, who is a woman, tries to fix the broken door knob herself rather than having to ask for help from Luke, who is a man, this indirectly presents that Cessie is an independent woman who does not need the help of men to do work that is generally done by men. This is an illustration of an example of the feminism movement that usually exists in America and this is in line with the understanding of the principles of feminism which include equality, independence, and the right to make choices that suit women without gender pressure (Hannam, 2007, p. 206).



## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis carried out by researchers on the movie Purple Hearts using Barthes's semiotic theory, the researchers can conclude that gender construction has a big role in life. Gender constructions that are often found in Purple Hearts are sexual harassment, misogyny, equality between women and men, demeaning women, independent women, and feminism. This study reveals that gender between men and women is constructed unequally and women are more often victims of gender construction. They experience various injustices and even humiliation. The impact of gender construction in the Purple Hearts Movie provides an overview of gender, especially how women are treated. However, the main character Cassie, who is a victim of gender construction in this movie, is finally able to prove that women can be whatever they want to be.

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