



### Representation Analysis of Verbal Sexual Violence in “Trust” Movie

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#### Abstract

*Sexual violence against children and adolescents is a critical issue that demands urgent public and academic attention, particularly in how such violence is represented and interpreted in media. This study aims to concrete the meaning of scenes of sexual violence representation in verbal and visual sign. Trust is notable for its bold and explicit portrayal of sexual violence, making it a relevant text for examining audience reception. The objective of this research is to describe the meaning in such scenes, especially those involving child and adolescent victims. Using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model as the theoretical framework and Barthes's meaning theory, this study employs a qualitative descriptive method, analyzing textual elements through initial-viewing and analysis. The findings show that verbal sexual violence in Trust portrayed through Charlie's expressions and gestures. This study emphasizing how the multifaceted impact of sexual violence on victims, highlighting both psychological and physiological consequences. Moreover, this study offers insight on the audience's role as active interpreters of media texts involving sensitive social issues.*

### INTRODUCTION

Cases of sexual violence against women are increasingly common in society by showing various forms of acts of sexual violence perpetrated by men against women. Based on the linguistic realm, sexual violence can also be defined as the use of language or communication actions that degrade, belittle or sexually harm another individual. These forms of communication fall under the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which reveals how language reinforces power imbalances, making sexual jokes, comments, and manipulative speech forms of violence. These expressions cause real psychological harm. Hadjicharalambous and Sisco (2016) found verbal coercion to trigger significant distress. At Jimma University, harassment caused fear and guilt among victims (Mamaru, Getachew, & Mohammed, 2015), while Canadian research showed non-physical harassment created lasting discomfort and objectification (Albert, Couture-Carron, & Schneiderhan, 2024). The forms of sexual violence experienced by victims of sexual violence are not always in the form of non-verbal but also in the form of verbal. Verbal sexual violence can manifest through sexually explicit jokes, inappropriate comments, catcalling, or coercive language that belittles or intimidates the victim. On the other hand, non-verbal forms include gestures, facial expressions, prolonged staring, displaying sexual content, or suggestive body language. Both forms,

though different in delivery, can have equally harmful psychological impacts, often instilling fear, discomfort, or trauma in the victim. Hence, the symbols used by perpetrators or victims of sexual violence can vary, including the use of language, body movements, or non-verbal communication. As for signs of behaviour that can be a condition for the occurrence of verbal sexual violence are; first, touching the body for sexual purposes without the victim's will, secondly, often making jokes about sex that demean the victim, third, inviting or forcing sex directly or indirectly, fourth is catcalling. While the non-verbal items include, among other things, displaying pictures of sexual nature through Facebook and e-mail, inappropriate eye contact (twinkling) and inappropriate gesture that shows someone's sexual intention.

Until now, society often only considers sexual violence as physical acts like touching or hugging. In reality, it also includes words, gestures, signs, or activities with sexual meaning. Coercion, unwanted experiences, and the emotional impact on victims are also part of it (Rahmawati, 2019). This narrow view causes many non-physical cases to be overlooked. Expanding awareness of verbal and symbolic abuse is crucial so all forms of sexual violence are taken seriously. Another fact that has occurred is that many victims of sexual violence choose to remain silent and not report it. This is motivated by the view of society which always blames the victim because they are deemed unable to take care of themselves. This deep-rooted understanding builds a stigma that the victim is wrong and the perpetrator is right. Even though in various cases what occurs is a violation of individual rights which are taken away and coerced by the perpetrator, resulting in a traumatic impact on the victim, the condition of the community which thinks this makes the victim choose to remain silent because of the fear of being blamed, not supported, ridiculed, and even shunned from the social environment. In response to this, various measures have been taken to increase public education regarding sexual violence. Such is the case in making works that can be consumed easily and digested by the general public. One of them is a movie, in which the movie contains audio, visual, and text aspects that attract the attention of the public to enjoy the work and in which there are also realities that can be seen in real existence. The conveyance of messages in the movie is through many signs in each scene so there are several signs in the scene that must be analyzed more deeply with a study to reveal other meanings that are lost in the scene. In practice, this analysis will look for data in the form of signs such as audio, visual, and text in movies which can be categorized as signifiers and signified. Concretely, this data can be in the form of conversation excerpts and screenshots of scenes in the movie

Psychology and literature have a deep relationship in human life. Both relate to human behaviour, expression, thinking, and motivation. Psychology can be used to explore and explain things and phenomena in human life by applying psychological principles in literary works. In this way, psychology can be used to explore and explain things and phenomena in human life by applying psychological principles in literary works. The portrayal of characters in literature often reveals psychological conditions such as trauma, fear, anxiety, and emotional suffering, which are closely related to real-life experiences. Therefore, literature does not only function as a means of entertainment but also becomes a medium to understand the psychological aspects of human beings. This connection allows readers to see how certain actions and behaviours are influenced by mental and emotional states, making the story more meaningful and relatable. In the context of the “Trust” movie, the psychological struggles of the victim are depicted through both verbal and visual signs, showing how deeply sexual violence can impact a person's mental health. For some conscious artists, the phenomenon of

violence that often occurs is sexual violence against girls. This is because perpetrators view girls as victims who are innocent and weak so it is easy for perpetrators to commit indecent acts against their victims. The strength of the perpetrator is not proportional to the power of the victim. Sexual violence against children is usually carried out by the closest person who is fully trusted by the child. Therefore, many cases of sexual violence against children occur at home and at school. This article aims to explain the meaning of verbal sexual violence experienced by Annie. By examining the verbal cues, the dialogue reveals the trauma and confusion Annie experiences, while visual elements such as body language, facial expressions, and framing communicate isolation, fear, and a loss of agency. These signs work together to construct a meaning of verbal sexual violence that is intimate and devastating, yet also instructive for audiences. The consequences of these barriers are profound, as they can perpetuate feelings of isolation, shame, and fear, hindering the healing process and preventing survivors from seeking the support they desperately need.

Several studies regarding the term representation of a movie has been reviewed in this research and the process of carrying out this research is very much influenced by previous studies. The previous studies help this research in examining things related to the representation of a movie, in which describe it in the form of sentences or signs of sexual violence. The current research process will greatly benefit from the previous research process. The first review of an article written by Darmawan (2023) used the theory from Bogdan&Biklen (2007:35), and discussed about describe how sexual violence is represented in the novel, while this study, theory from Stuart Hall (2011), Barker (2005), discussed how sexual violence is represented in the movie. The similarities between Darmawan's study and this study is both of them used sexual violence as the topic. The second review an article written by Basuki (2018) used the theory from Semi (1984:46), and discussed the influence of sexual violence in the novel. Theory from Semi (1984:46) only found non-verbal forms in research on novels. From the previous research above, it can be concluded that the most important thing that must be in a movie is the form of signs and meaning to represent a movie. The uniqueness of this research from previous studies is that the data source is taken from a movie entitled "Trust", then This research not only explains the forms of sexual violence but also explains the signs used by perpetrators to commit sexual violence. It emphasizes the need for cultural sensitivity that enables survivors to speak up, end the silence, and get the care and justice they need. We may fight to break down the barriers that keep them from receiving the voice and support they need by sharing their experiences and standing up for their rights. Together, let's break the silence and give young people the support they need to recover, thrive, and reclaim their lives.

The Trust movie is an American thriller film released in 2010. Robert Festinger and Andy Bellin wrote the story and the script. A 14-year-old adolescent's psychology is concerned with trust. Clive Owen, Catherine Keener, and Liana Liberato appear in the Trust movie. In this movie, a teenage girl named Annie experiences sexual harassment from Charlie, a man she knows online and who is over 30 years old. Annie is the victim of Charlie's abuse. The negative values displayed are sexual violence against teenagers by adults. The positive values shown are the courage of the one of victim's relatives to speak up about the sexual abuse to the authority. This movie dares to depict explicit images of sexual violence. The audience as an active audience will create certain impressions and interpretations that indirectly affect their interpretation of the depiction of victims of sexual violence of teenagers shown in the Trust movie. The scenes of sexual assault against teenagers and the speech in the Trust movie will be evaluated by

the audience in according to their understanding and interpretation of historical experience, background, and knowledge.

## **METHOD AND THEORY**

### **Research Method**

This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method with reception analysis approach. Descriptive qualitative examples are the least theoretical, and the objective is to choose highly informative cases to saturate the data. The data is present using descriptive qualitative approaches and fact-based descriptions. According to Lambert (2012: 255), descriptive qualitative examples are the least theoretical, and the objective is to choose highly informative cases to saturate the data. The *Trust* movie is used as the main data source because it contains many scenes that show signs of sexual violence, especially involving minors. Data are fragment from the movie scenes and dialogue performed by the characters in the movie *Trust*. This research employed the initial-viewing method, utilizing the note-taking technique for data collection. Data collection involved watching the movies multiple times and marking scenes that were identified as data and important for the analysis. To maintain objectivity and consistency throughout the analysis, the researcher applied specific criteria for selecting data. In this study, data refers to scenes or dialogues in the movie scene that illustrate verbal sexual violence that perpetrated against child and adolescent victims from Barthes (1968) verbal and visual signs perspective. Where this observation is carried out in order to obtain and collect data by observing an activity carefully, recording phenomena that arise and considering the relationship between aspects of these phenomena, collecting as much data as possible from documentation and literature from Stuart Hall (2011) and Barker (2005, p. 9). as well as analysing representation by using a qualitative descriptive method. Furthermore, each signs identified as data will be referenced with page number to ensure traceability and accuracy. Finally, the collected data is organized according to the requirements of the analysis.

A descriptive qualitative method, combined with textual analysis, is used to analyze the data to understood each signs in the movie scenes. To achieve the research goals, the analysis in this research is done in two steps. The first is using Barthes' (1968) theory of meaning to interpret the verbal and visual signs in the film. This theory is used to find the denotative and connotative meanings of the signs. The verbal and visual signs are then connected to findings from previous studies to answer the second research question. To obtained the understanding of the emotional and mental impact of sexual violence experienced by the victim in the film, Finkelhor's theory (in Sakalasastra & Herdiana, 2012) is used in the second step. This theory is used to understand The use of both theories is intended to help describe the signs and effects of sexual violence as shown in the film.

## **THEORETICAL**

### **Stuart Hall's theory of Representation**

Here is a theory from Stuart Hall's comprehensive. The main understanding of representation theory is the use of language to convey something meaningful to others. Representation is an important part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It involves using language, signs, and images that stand to represent something. This representation is important for everyday life.

how we understand our environment and each other. Understanding is generated through a complex mix of backgrounds, tastes, concerns, training, tendencies, and experiences, all made real to us through the principles and processes of representation that frame our experience of being in the world.

According to Hall (2005: 18-20), representation is the ability to describe or imagine. Representation is important considering that culture is always shaped through meaning and language, in this case, language is a form of symbol or a form of representation. There are four stages to processing the representation which are encoding, circulation, decoding, and reproduction. In the encoding stage, creators shape messages using signs and symbols based on their own ideas and intentions. These messages then circulate through various forms, like media or visual texts. Once received by an audience, the decoding stage begins when people interpret the message through their own experiences, culture, and perspective, which may align with, slightly adjust, or even oppose the original meaning. Finally, reproduction is where these interpretations influence how meaning is accepted, challenged, or reinforced in society. Hall's idea shows how meaning is constantly shaped by interaction, rather than simply passed from one person to another. From here, Hall stated the importance of representation as a means of communication and social interaction, and he even emphasized representation as a necessity the basis of communication without which humans cannot interact.

### **Barthes's theory of Meaning**

This research adopted Roland Barthes' (1968) semiotic theory, which distinguishes between two levels of meaning: denotation and connotation. Denotation, the first order of signification, refers to the literal or surface meaning of a sign, representing a stable relationship between the signifier (form) and the signified (concept). Connotation, the second order of signification, builds upon this by adding cultural, emotional, or ideological associations to the sign, shaped by the viewer's background and social context. In the context of analyzing sexual violence in film, Barthes' framework is particularly valuable for decoding how both verbal and non-verbal elements, such as dialogue, gestures, expressions, and visual imagery. The function is not only to depict explicit acts but also to reveal underlying messages about power, objectification, and trauma. This study uses Barthes' model to explore how these signs operate simultaneously at both levels to construct deeper meanings within media representations of sexual violence.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The marker in the scene at picture 1, Charlie finally asks Annie to meet after they had known each other through internet. Annie was so excited because she finally could see the man that she had crush on. But when they met, Annie's smile dropped after saw that the man who said his age was around 25 years old was actually around her father's age. But then he assured Annie that age does not matter for love. From a Barthesian perspective, this moment signifies a clear shift in denotation and connotation. Denotatively, the moment is simply a meeting between two people, but connotatively, it marks the beginning of emotional manipulation and grooming in where Charlie, the perpetrator, encodes reassurance as affection, masking his predatory intent.

## DATA 1

Table 1. Representation from data 1

Number	Audio	Representation
1	<i>Charlie: I can't tell you how many times I've thought about you in it</i>	This scene is about the meeting of Annie and Charlie and Charlie gives Annie a gift. But it turned out the gift is a pair of bikini and Annie looks uncomfortable with it.
2	<i>Charlie : You look ridiculously sexy</i>	Charlie also asked Annie to wear his gift in a room. When Annie shows up with only a bra and panty, Charlie responds with praise but Annie feels uncomfortable showing herself almost naked.



Picture 1. Visual scene from data 1

Annie trusted him and followed him to the car. In the car, Charlie gave her a gift, and the gift was a set of bikinis. Giving gifts is one way that someone does for attracts someone. Not even a perpetrator. It is the abuser's action to give gifts or favourite items to the victim so that the victim is willing to obey his lust. Then this sign is a way of rewarding. In Barthes' terms, the gift functions as a signifier to denoting a gesture of generosity but connoting a form of control or grooming, especially in the context of an older man giving lingerie to a minor. Hall's encoding/decoding model becomes visible here where Charlie encodes the act of giving bikinis as something affectionate or flirtatious, while Annie may decode this in a negotiated way, partially accepting the gift but visibly uncomfortable with its sexual implications.

As Annie looks uncomfortable as she never thought about wearing a bra. But Charlie asked her to wear it, and Annie granted his wish. Annie's plan is only to show him how she looks in a bikini just to make him happy but later, Charlie asks him to sit beside him and that is when the sexual abuse starts to happen. The encoding here intensifies that Charlie encodes dominance under the veil of kindness and romantic interest, while Annie's non-verbal signs where her facial expressions of discomfort and reluctance signalized resistance and a growing sense of coercion. Her smile dropping, her body language, and hesitation all form connotative signs that indicate unease.

In this data, the verbal sign made by the perpetrator was giving a gift to the victim with the meaning that the victim wanted to fulfil his desires. The perpetrators of sexual violence usually persuade victims by luring them with something, for example giving

gifts or items that the victim wants. This validates that what the perpetrator showed was giving gifts to the victim to fulfil his desires. While the non-verbal sign marked by the victim is a facial expression that feels uncomfortable because it must be forced to follow the will of the perpetrator. In Barthes’ terms, these signs function on a connotative level those are the gift, the forced smile, the obedience which all serve as symbolic cues of power imbalance and exploitation. According to Susilawati (2001:22), sexual violence refers to acts by which the victim feels uncomfortable or unpleasant feelings because the act is intimidating. This statement validates the fit shown by the victim with an uncomfortable facial expression. Ultimately, the layering of verbal and non-verbal signs reveals how sexual violence operates not only through physical contact but also through encoded linguistic and symbolic cues that manipulate meaning and silence resistance.

DATA 2

Table 2. Representation from data 2

Number	Audio	Representation
1	<i>Charlie: Can I just?</i>	In this scene, Charlie started to touch Annie’s body. Even though he asked her first, but Annie did not say yes or allowing him, and yet he still roaming his hands over her body.
2	<i>Annie: No, wait. Charlie, wait. Hold on.</i>	And the next scene is when it was given a camera POV of them, which means Charlie already intended to record his action to Annie. Annie asked him to stop too, but he did not stop kissing her and laid her to the bed.



Picture 2. Visual scene from data 2

This scene shows how sexual abuse happens to Annie, starting when Charlie touches and forces a kiss on her. Annie looks clearly uncomfortable and even tries to resist, but Charlie ignores her refusal. This act is considered rape, as there is no consent. Unbeknownst to Annie, Charlie also records the act using a hidden camera. According to Barthes, the denotative meaning here is the physical touch and kiss, while the connotative meaning reveals abuse, manipulation, and power imbalance. Charlie encodes his actions as affection, but Annie and the audience decode them as coercion and assault. The verbal sign is Charlie’s physical act of touching and kissing without consent, supported by Luhulima’s (2000) definition of sexual violence as forced



physical contact. The non-verbal sign is Annie’s uneasy facial expression, which reflects her discomfort and resistance. Her expression connotes fear and intimidation, aligning with Hall’s idea that messages are not always received the way they are intended, especially when power and consent are in conflict.

### DATA 3

Table 3. Representation from data 3

Number	Audio	Representation
1	<i>/soft metallic clinking of belt/</i>	This scene shows Annie who cannot do anything except let Charlie done with his work. The sound of belt that clinking means Charlie take off his pants and start to do his abuse to Annie.
2	<i>/kissing and gentle sobbing/</i>	The next scene, we can hear sound of kissing by Charli and gentle sobbing from Annie.



Picture 3. Visual scene from data 3

In this scene, Charlie rapes Annie, who passively endures it, believing his actions stem from love. But his sudden disappearance afterward reveals the manipulation. Annie lies still, avoids eye contact, and her crying signals deep discomfort which is clear signs she did not consent or enjoy what happened. Barthes’ denotative meaning appears in direct signs: the sound of the belt clinking and Charlie undressing. The connotative meaning, however, reveals sexual violence masked as affection. Charlie encodes the act as intimacy, while Annie and the audience decode it as coercion and trauma. The verbal sign is the sound of the belt, a cue for the impending assault. The non-verbal sign is Annie’s withdrawn expression and lack of eye contact, expressing emotional detachment and distress. Her silent resistance and visible discomfort align with Hall’s idea that meaning is shaped by context, experience, and power dynamics, not just intent.

From the data above, it can be seen that one of the difficulties for victims of sexual violence is to have the courage to speak up and admit the inappropriate treatment they have received. Some victims of sexual violence feel uncomfortable when discussing the violence they experienced, because they think it is a disgrace that is more comfortable to hide. In fact, crimes of sexual violence can be investigated and stopped if the victim dares to testify and state who the perpetrators were who abused him. Especially in the



film Trust, the perpetrator is someone who is known online and deceives the victim about his age. Viewers can understand the message conveyed by this film that we must be careful with someone we know through the internet.

However, by overall, the structure of violent scenes sex represented through movie displayed explicitly interpreted by all informants as not vulgar because it is interpreted as a form knowledge for the audience. Informants' meaning of attitude children or teenager victims of violence sexual dare to speak regarding sexual crimes there is a difference in meaning. However, informants argue that victims of sexual violence usually hard open to tell experience, let alone like children or teenager. However, this openness can indeed appear if there is an interpersonal approach. Informant interpret that the victim can develop a sense of trust someone who genuinely wants to help and fight for their justice if this approach is carried out continuously and long lasting. But it needs more attention extra especially for children or teenager with no knowledge about sexual violence. In the victim behaviour analysis unit sexual violence committed crime, the informant refused and did not consent to acts of violence done by the victim, but the informant define victims of sexual violence shown in the film that did crime is a form of disappointment, trauma and also lack empowerment and protection given to victims of violence sexual. Thus it can be concluded that the four informants were quite capable interpret the message conveyed by the film Trust well and interpret it based on experience and their respective social backgrounds.

## CONSLUSION

The findings of the study demonstrate how informants use their personal experiences to create diverse meanings. According to research objectives, viewers are able to interpret scenes of sexual aggression against children or teenagers in the movie Trust. The main purpose of creating this movie was to demonstrate how horrible things will evolve along with society and the law, so we should use technology and the internet with responsibility. Problems depicted in the film such as sexual abuse of teenagers, the lack of parental guidance of children, and the possible impacts to victims of violent sex can be seen regularly in the news. The director of the film hopes to increase public awareness of the potential for child abuse. This movie was also created to demonstrate that victims must also receive justice from society and the legal system. The main interpretation of the interpreter is that sexual assault often ends in an imbalance of power between the victim and the perpetrator since the criminal frequently targets the victim's closest friends and family. As for the solutions that can be done, namely, Psychological Support, victims need psychological support to overcome trauma. Individual or group therapy can help them feel better. Notification to Authorities, it is important to report such disclosures to the appropriate authorities. This can help stop the abuser and prevent it from happening to someone else. Legal Aid, consulting cases with lawyers who express themselves in sexual ways can help victims understand their legal rights. It can regenerate trauma and also the victim's reluctance to speak up.

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