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Conflicting Opinions and Emotions in Students' Responses to Feminist Resistance in the Film Photocopier

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ABSTRACT

The film Photocopier depicts how its main character, a victim of sexual harassment, exercised her feminist resistance toward hegemonic and patriarchal power in society. Studies have been conducted in the past to examine feminist resistance in this film and a few other films. Yet, none have looked closely into students' responses to feminist resistance in those films. Engaging students in responding to film contents is important because films have the potential to provoke students' critical thinking and emotions toward various issues in society, such as issues related to the victimization of women. To address the gap in research, this study aimed to examine how students express their opinions and emotions toward the female main character's resistance in the film Photocopier. It also aimed to analyze how those opinions and emotions may influence students' potential actions when faced with sexual harassment issues in real life. Using an audience response method, data were collected through observations that included film viewing, a classroom discussion, and an open-ended questionnaire. The study involved eleven female and two male graduate students in a literature teaching and appreciation course. The results showed that each student experienced conflicting opinions and emotions with regard to the main character's resistance. After watching the film, students felt motivated and inspired to advocate for victims of sexual harassment in real life. The researcher argues that conflicting opinions and emotions were inevitable consequences of students' critical thinking and emotional processes while responding to the film. The negative opinions and emotions that even led to victim blaming did not hinder them from supporting the main character's efforts to obtain justice. Furthermore, the researcher argues for the necessity of developing audience responses to films as a powerful strategy in critical literature pedagogy.

Keywords: Reader Response; Feminist Resistance; Opinions; Emotions; Photocopier (Penyalin Cahaya)

INTRODUCTION

Photocopier is originally entitled *Penyalin Cahaya*, a film that is also subtitled and dubbed in English. It is an Indonesian drama-thriller film directed by Wregas Bhanuteja that won 12 Citra Awards (Indonesian awards for motion pictures) in 2021 (Camelia, 2022). The film depicts a sexual harassment issue experienced by Suryani, a female college student who came from a lower-class family. The harassment she experienced happened one night, after the main character consumed alcohol at a party. Suryani was touched, stripped of her clothing, and had pictures of her body captured without her consent. She was also portrayed as a disgraceful woman when her selfie images while intoxicated were spread on social media. As a result of her seemingly inappropriate behavior, Suryani lost her scholarship, potentially forcing her to drop out of college. In addition, Suryani's father expelled her from the family home due to his anger toward her. With the help of her friend, who worked in a

photocopy shop, Suryani sought to find evidence and the perpetrator of the crime. In her efforts to fight for justice, Suryani exercised resistance toward the hegemonic power of campus authorities and the patriarchal culture in society. However, her efforts were in vain. The perpetrator came from an upper-class family that, due to their donations to the institution, had significant influence on campus authorities. Furthermore, Suryani's father also prevented her from obtaining justice and asked her to apologize to campus authorities for her actions. At the end of the film, Suryani was still struggling. However, she had gained the support of fellow students, including two other victims, and her mother. Suryani's struggles had become a light of inspiration that was duplicated and spread to give hope of justice for victims of sexual harassment (Bhanuteja, 2021). Etymologically, the word "photocopier" is made up of two parts, namely "photo" (light) and "copier" (a tool for duplicating). Its Indonesian equivalent is "penyalin cahaya," which is also constructed of two parts: "penyalin" (a copier) and "cahaya" (light). Bearing in mind its etymologic origin and the message delivered in the film, the title *Photocopier* is a fitting representation of Suryani's pursuit of justice.

The issue depicted in *Photocopier* is a representation of many similar cases that have happened on Indonesian campuses. As an example, campus authorities at a university in West Sumatera found that 12 cases of sexual harassment happened at their institution (Sastra, 2023). With regard to victims' difficulty in obtaining justice, in a case at a university in Riau, a lecturer who sexually harassed a student was acquitted and was only subjected to administrative sanction (BBC News Indonesia, 2022). To overcome these issues, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture has stipulated regulations to prevent and handle sexual violence on campus. Many sexual harassment victims, however, lack the courage to come forward and disclose their experiences (Napitupulu, 2023). Consequently, there is a need to support victims and increase public awareness of sexual harassment issues.

Indeed, the lack of courage to resist hegemonic power in society still widely exists among victims of sexual harassment. For victimized women, such a lack of courage also exists when having to resist patriarchal power. In many societies in Indonesia, women are still very much subjected to the subordination of men, including their fathers, husbands, and uncles (Nurhayati, 2014). Nevertheless, feminist resistance toward hegemonic and patriarchal power has risen over the years. Such resistance has been depicted in several films, which have been analyzed by several researchers, such as *For Sama* (Maghfiroh & Zawawi, 2020), *Kartini* (Mustofa et al., 2019), *Marlina Si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak* (Pohan & Sembiring, 2022), *Photocopier (Penyalin Cahaya)* (Utami et al., 2022), *Secret Superstar* (Indriani & Zulhazmi, 2021), and *Yuni* (Dzulfikar, 2023). Some of these films were adapted from the experiences of women in real life. Feminist resistance was conceptualized by Berglund et al. (2023) as a learning process where women become more aware and assertive of their voices in order to overcome challenges. Women's resistance toward hegemonic and patriarchal power may be influenced by feminism, which Wolf (1993) divided into two categories (i.e., victim feminism and power feminism). According to Wolf, victim feminism views women as fragile individuals who need protection, while power feminism views women as individuals who have the ability to empower themselves. She argues that women need to exercise power feminism to establish long-lasting changes.

In order to encourage bravery to fight for justice in relation to sexual harassment issues on campuses, it is necessary to raise students' awareness of the issues. Such awareness can potentially be raised by engaging them in critical thinking and involving their emotions toward those issues. An approach that can be taken is to involve students in responding to literary works that contain sexual harassment issues. In literary criticism, reader response strategies are commonly used to explore literature that involve readers in constructing meaning by engaging their emotions (Rosenblatt, 1995) and cognition (Beach & Marshall, 1991). In their study, Iskhak et al. (2020) found that readers' cognitive abilities and emotions

were embraced when reader response strategies were applied. Furthermore, Inderawati (2013) stated that students' responses to a literary work can lead toward their character development. In this regard, enhanced knowledge and concern for issues of sexual harassment may become part of students' character development, which can be obtained by applying literary criticism through response strategies.

Despite films having unique features and distinct terminology, literary criticism can be used to analyze films because film criticism is closely tied to conventional textual studies approaches (Klarer, 2004). Therefore, it is reasonable to apply reader response strategies when responding to films and frame them as audience response strategies. Existing studies have shown that using films as a learning medium could encourage students' critical thinking (Abbas & Salih, 2019; Lanta et al., 2019; Nushur & Astutie, 2021; Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023). However, these studies did not examine and discuss conflicting opinions and emotions in audience responses. In addition, as previously mentioned, several studies have examined feminist resistance in films (Annatasya & Saksono, 2021; Dzulfikar, 2023; Indriani & Zulhazmi, 2021; Maghfiroh & Zawawi, 2020; Mustofa et al., 2019; Pohan & Sembiring, 2022). These studies have analyzed feminist resistance in movies other than *Photocopier*. Furthermore, researchers in those studies did not involve audience responses to the films. With regard to *Photocopier*, several studies have also been conducted on the film. Tuhepaly and Sardini (2022) examined the semiotic representation of sexual harassment in the film. Permatasari and Amalia (2022) analyzed the difficulty faced by Indonesian women in standing against powerful authorities. Utami et al. (2022) examined symbols in *Photocopier* that depicted hegemonic power and a victim's resistance toward such power. These studies have shed light on the representation of women's struggles in resisting powerful authorities who victimize them. Yet, these studies did not involve looking into audience opinions and emotions toward the main character of the film, who became a victim of sexual harassment.

In addressing the gap in research, this study aimed to answer the following questions: 1) How are opinions and emotions expressed in students' responses to the main character in *Photocopier*? 2) How do students' opinions and emotions affect the potential course of action they might take when they come across instances of sexual harassment in the real world? The objective is to provoke students' critical thinking and emotions toward issues of sexual harassment that may happen on campuses. The study contributes to expanding the audience/reader response method for responding to literature by specifically examining elements of opinions and emotions. Furthermore, this study enhances students' ability to think critically and explore their feelings on social issues, which adds significance to literature learning.

METHOD

This article used an audience response method that adapted Beach & Marshall's (1991) reader response strategies, which involved conceiving, connecting, and engaging to raise students' critical thinking and emotions in responding to a film. Within the setting of a graduate school at a private university in Palembang, Indonesia, the study involved 13 graduate (magister) students, comprised of 11 female and two male students. These students were in-service and pre-service English teachers. For ethical purposes, all of the participants in this study are given pseudonyms.

Data were collected through several activities. The researcher conducted observations over two meetings that included watching the film in the classroom. During the observations, the researcher noted reactions from the students, especially those in the forms of facial reactions and meaningful utterances. In order to enhance students' understanding of the film, the students were encouraged to watch it again at home. Data were also collected through a classroom discussion about students' responses toward the film and the main character.

Additionally, a written questionnaire with open-ended questions was administered to ask three main questions: 1) What do you think about the main character (Suryani) and her actions? 2) How did you feel when you saw the film? 3) What will you do if you know that someone in your community has experienced sexual harassment? Those data collection activities are part of the course "Literature Teaching and Appreciation" in an English Education graduate program, in which the researcher was also the participants' lecturer. Thus, they were conducted within a teaching-learning process where English was used as the main medium of instruction.

The trustworthiness of the data was obtained through triangulation of the three types of data (i.e., observations, classroom discussion, and written questionnaire). Questions in the written questionnaire were also asked during the classroom discussion to ensure that the answers obtained from the students were credible. The data obtained from each student were checked for consistency across the two data collection methods to ensure their credibility. Their reactions toward the film were also observed during film viewing, in which the students showed facial and gestural reactions and occasionally uttered meaningful speeches of reaction.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach with methods commonly used in grounded theory by applying Strauss and Corbin's (1998) three-step coding. Coding is a technique that allows researchers to categorize and arrange data that has been similarly coded (Saldana, 2013). The first step in data analysis involved open coding. In the stage of open coding, the researcher labeled the data based on students' responses to the main character's personality and actions. For example, "intelligent," "careless," "sympathy," and "angry." The second step was axial coding, in which the researcher identified relationships across data and assigned codes, namely "positive opinions," "negative opinions," "positive emotions," and "negative emotions." The last step of the coding process was selective coding. During this step, the researcher connected core categories (i.e., "opinions," "emotions," and "potential actions"). The data analysis framework was drawn upon existing theories and studies on reader/audience response (e.g., Beach & Marshal, 1991; Harold, 2010; Li et al., 2020; Mart, 2019; Rosenblatt, 1995) and feminist resistance (e.g., Berglund et al., 2023; Utami et al., 2022; Wolf, 1993).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The film *Photocopier* was successful in raising students' interest in understanding the message it conveyed. The following results and discussion present aspects related to issues of sexual harassment and a woman's resistance toward hegemonic and patriarchal power.

Results

The results are presented based on the data collection methods used in the study (observations, discussion, and an open-ended written questionnaire).

1. Observation Data

During the observations, the researcher noted some of the students expressing the following short utterances during the viewing:

1. *Menarik film ini.*
This movie is interesting
(Observation, 24 June 2023)
2. *Dia harusnya gak pergi.*
She shouldn't have gone.
(Observation, 24 June 2023)
3. *Harusnya dia nurut sama orangtua.*
She should have obeyed her parents.
(Observation, 24 June 2023)

The researcher also noted the students' facial and gestural reactions, which she perceived as fear, anger, disgust, sadness, or happiness, through various parts of the film. Although those reactions to the film were seen throughout the observations, it was challenging to interpret what they meant. Thus, data from the discussions and the open-ended questionnaire played a significant role in understanding students' responses to the film.

2. Discussion and Questionnaire Data

Similar questions were asked during the discussion and through the open-ended questionnaire to obtain credible responses from the students. Data were obtained through a classroom discussion on June 24, 2023, and an open-ended questionnaire administered on July 8, 2023. Their responses to the questions were analyzed and categorized into three main themes: opinions, emotions, and potential actions. Students' opinions and emotions were expressed in both positive and negative lights. These opinions and emotions led students to think about possible actions they might take to advocate for sexual harassment victims.

a. Opinions

Students' positive opinions were directed toward Suryani's inherent qualities. They admired Suryani for her intelligence, education, charm, talents, bravery, perseverance, creativity, and consistency. The students observed these traits in Suryani's character and her efforts to seek justice for the harassment she suffered. The students' negative opinion was directed toward Suryani's impulsive actions that caused her to experience sexual harassment. They criticized Suryani's poor judgment for taking alcoholic drinks and defying her parents, who had asked her to stay home and concentrate on maintaining her scholarship. They also criticized Suryani's carelessness in choosing friends and easily trusting them. Conflicting opinions are found across students' responses, examples of which are presented in the following excerpts:

Student 1 (Anas, Male):

Suryani is a smart girl because she can enter college through the scholarship. She is also a woman who struggles because she never gave up to find someone who did a bad thing to her... She shouldn't go to the party at Rama's home, drink alcohol, and come home late so there won't be sexual harassment to her and she should listen to her parents' advice to take the test for her scholarship at the campus.

Student 2 (Dewi, Female):

Suryani is a smart, charming, and talented girl, but sometimes she is so impulsive. Because of her high solidarity and friendship she can't escape the crime of her friend and becomes the victim of sexual harassment (sexual abuse). As a good girl, she should consider the negative impact of drinking wine or whiskey. She should refuse the offer of drinking wine and go home early, or she may not go to the midnight party.

Student 2 (Vera, Female):

Suryani, often called Sur, is a smart and critical woman. Sur is also a woman who is devoted to her parents by still helping her mother sell food on the sidelines of her busy life and theater events on campus. When she feels sexually harassed, Sur dares to speak her mind and is very idealistic. Even though it was not an easy path, Sur persisted in collecting evidence so that his scholarship would not be revoked.

Sur should bring evidence of campus harassment to the police and Komnas Perempuan to seek legal assistance. If she only reports to the internal campus, then the case will continue to be covered up and considered not to exist. The worst is when the one who

reports becomes the one who is cornered and harms other people. Besides that, Sur should consult with his parents to find a solution to the case that happened to her. Besides that, Sur must be able to refrain from being carried away by a bad environment and from staying at the house of a friend of the opposite sex.

The excerpts confirm the existence of conflicting opinions in each of the students' responses. Although they praised Suryani's positive traits, such as her intelligence, education, charm, talents, and courage, the students disapproved of Suryani's poor judgment for defying her parents, taking alcoholic drinks, staying out late at night, and too easily putting trust in her friends. Suryani was also criticized for not seeking legal assistance from the police and the National Women Commission (*Komnas Perempuan*) and for not consulting with her parents. The data showed that victim blaming existed across the opinions of most of the students.

In addition to the students' negative opinions about Suryani, there was a negative opinion about the film from the male students. Despite their support for Suryani's resistance, the male students critiqued the film as portraying men in a very negative light. The following excerpt was retrieved from the data:

Student 4 (Beni, male):

In my opinion, the film is very good. A film that shows the issue of sexual violence, but it is conveyed in a subtle way. *Namun disisi lain, menurut saya film ini terlalu menyudutkan kaum laki-laki seakan-akan lelaki adalah seorang monster yang sangat jahat* (However, on the other hand, in my opinion, this film targets men too much as if men are very evil monsters).

It is interesting to note that none of the female students expressed a similar critique of the portrayal of men in the film. Hence, the data showed that gendered perspectives emerged from students' responses to the film.

b. Emotions

The positive emotions felt by the audience are empathy for the events that Suryani experienced and sympathy for her struggles. The negative emotions felt by the students were anger, disappointment, annoyance, and fear of patriarchal and hegemonic abuse by perpetrators who have high social status. The students were also disappointed or dissatisfied with Suryani for not taking any precautions to shield herself from sexual harassment. Furthermore, the students expressed emotions of disappointment because, at the end of the story, Suryani's efforts were actually not completed. She was still struggling to obtain justice. Students' disappointment was also due to the fact that Suryani had not informed her parents about the incident sooner and had not reported her case to the police. Examples of students' emotions are shown in the following excerpts:

Student 5 (Tina, female):

As a viewer, I feel the anger, sadness, and the injustice that Suryani and several characters in the film feel.

Student 6 (Emilia, female):

When I watched the movie, the first feeling I had was anger towards the inability or poverty that silenced the truth. It seemed to be a tradition in real life in this country, where the wealthy have power, while the poor, regardless of their valid reasons, must remain silent.

Student 7 (Christie, female):

I felt sorry to see Suryani can't get her scholarship and becomes a victim of the case. She also did not get justice for the actions of Rama who was the mastermind behind all these problems. I also feel disappointed with the person who has the authority to handle the Suryani case, but that person is not firm in carrying out his duties.

Students' responses, as presented above, described their positive emotion of empathy toward Suryani. They felt the anger, sadness, and injustice that Suryani experienced. They also sympathized with her endeavors to seek justice. Nevertheless, the students also expressed negative emotions, such as anger and disappointment toward people with authoritative power who did not give Suryani rights to justice.

c. Potential Actions

The students felt inspired by Suryani's resistance and became motivated to provide advice and take action if, in the real world, they encounter victims of sexual harassment in their communities. The advice may be in the form of a suggestion to report the case to the Human Rights and Child Protection Commissions (Komnas HAM dan Perlindungan Anak). Actions that students could potentially take were to help the victims speak up and look for evidence that could entrap the perpetrator. The following excerpts show examples of students' responses:

Student 8 (Aisah, female):

Of course, I will be a friend who is always ready to look for evidence so that the perpetrator is punished according to his mistake.

Student 2 (Dewi, female):

I would help them speak up. I would suggest and support them to make a report to Komnas Ham dan Perlindungan Anak, complain to the police, and also share the case on social media.

Student 9 (Farah, female):

I will help them. First, by peaceful means. Then, with legal steps, and finally, if it still doesn't find a solution, the best way is to make it "viral" in order to get social punishment.

Even the male student who objected to the film's negative portrayal of men said he would take action to support women who are sexually harassed.

Student 4 (Beni, male):

Seek and store the evidences of crime and report it to the authorities.

The excerpts confirm students' responses with regard to potential actions they might take if they encountered sexual harassment victims. They mentioned that they were willing to support the victims through actions, such as helping victims provide evidence that can be used to take legal action, helping them speak up and file reports with legal authorities and activists, and obtaining support from netizens through social media platforms.

Discussion

The film *Photocopier* tells the story of the resistance of a woman who was a victim of sexual harassment named Suryani to the hegemony of the powerful and patriarchal culture, which hindered her from seeking justice. Suryani's character and actions in this film caused

conflicting opinions and emotions in the audience's individual responses. For example, a student expressed conflicting opinions that "Suryani is a smart, charming, and talented girl, but sometimes she is so impulsive." Another student expressed conflicting feelings: "I feel the anger, sadness, and the injustice that Suryani and several characters in the film feel." Theoretically, responses to literary works involve analytical power (Mart, 2019) and emotions (Rosenblatt, 1995) in constructing an understanding of the work. This notion was confirmed by Iskhak et al. (2020), who stated that responses to literary works can involve both intellect and emotion. In line with those ideas, Beach & Marshall (1991) also argued that responses to literary works involve cognitive and affective strategies. Emotional conflict that arises in the audience's reaction to a film is beneficial since it prevents the audience from blindly accepting the film's message, such as who should be admired or despised (Harold, 2010). Emotional expression is a link between an individual and a literary work and can create resonance between the reader (or, in this case, the audience) and the creator of the literary work (A. Li et al., 2020). Various opinions of experts and previous researchers show that it is natural that readers' and audience's responses can give rise to various opinions and emotions, as also shown in the study.

Each student had positive and negative opinions regarding Suryani's resistance. Based on Wolf's (1993) category of feminism, Suryani exercised her power feminism, in which she developed an ability to empower herself and acted agentively to voice her demand for justice. Students' positive opinions were related to Suryani's favorable traits, such as being intelligent, educated, brave, persistent, creative, and consistent. They support Suryani's resistance to hegemonic power and the patriarchal culture that exists in society. In contrast, their negative opinions were directed toward Suryani's unwise and careless actions. Students perceived that Suryani was not careful when choosing friends to hang out with. Additionally, they considered Suryani to be foolish because she drank alcohol and did not follow her parents' advice not to leave the house and focus on her studies. Suryani's actions were considered contrary to religious and cultural norms in society. Students believed that Suryani's defiance of religious and cultural norms had caused her to experience sexual harassment. Another point to note was the emergence of gendered perspectives. Although the male participants gave a positive opinion toward Suryani and her resistance, they considered that the film portrayed men too negatively. On the other hand, no female participants expressed a similar critique of the film. The film leans significantly toward supporting a woman's resistance, which explains why gendered perspectives surfaced in the data.

Every student in the study also experienced positive and negative emotions towards Suryani. The positive emotions they felt were empathy and sympathy for Suryani's resistance to fighting for justice. The negative emotions they felt were anger, sadness, annoyance, and disappointment because of the ruthless attitudes of those in power that caused Suryani's efforts to seek justice to be unsuccessful. Some students expressed fear about what happened to the main character. Suryani was also portrayed as a disgraceful woman, which resulted in her losing a scholarship to continue her studies. Apart from that, Suryani experienced pressure from the powerful (campus officials and the perpetrator's family) when fighting for justice. In fact, her own father also blamed her. This fact was a result of a patriarchal culture that limits women's movements and considers women to be under men's control (Nurhayati, 2014). Students also felt disappointed because Suryani did not speak openly about what happened to her parents soon after the incident and did not file a complaint with the police or seek assistance from the National Women Commission (Komnas Perempuan).

In line with Inderawati (2013), the data in this study suggest that activities related to responding to literary works can have potential contributions toward character development. In responding to the film *Photocopier*, students' critical thinking and emotional processing provided a powerful contribution to increasing their awareness of issues and victims of sexual

harassment. The results of the study support earlier research that found films as a form of literature encourage students to think critically (Abbas & Salih, 2019; Lanta et al., 2019; Nushur & Astutie, 2021; Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023). The results also demonstrate the notion that emotional conflict hinders students from blindly accepting the film's message (Harold, 2010) and establishes the audience's relationship to the film (Li, 2022). Students supported a woman's resistance, which Berglund et al. (2023) conceptualized as the process of finding and strengthening her voice and beliefs. Their negative opinions included victim blaming that occurred because Suryani did not take preventive measures. However, such an opinion does not mean they did not support Suryani's struggle to resist hegemonic and patriarchal power. The researcher argues that it is inevitable for conflicting opinions and emotions to occur as a result of critical thinking and emotional engagement when responding to a literary work, such as a film. With that in mind, it is reasonable to argue that responding to films, such as shown in this study, can be used as a powerful strategy in critical literature pedagogy. Furthermore, in addition to their useful contribution to education, films also provide joyful entertainment for students. Therefore, films bring *utile et dulce* in literature learning.

CONCLUSION

Through her resistance, Suryani developed the ability to use her voice to speak out against the person who committed the act for which she was a victim. Students who participated in the study expressed positive opinions and emotions towards Suryani's resistance against the hegemonic power and the patriarchal culture in society that affected her unfavorably. However, they also expressed negative opinions and emotions towards Suryani, who did not take preventive actions to protect herself from sexual harassment. The students made connections between her behavior and societal norms surrounding what is expected of a religious woman. Even though there were emotions of disappointment and victim blaming towards Suryani, the audience also expressed negative emotions towards hegemony and patriarchy that hindered Suryani's resistance. Conflicting opinions and emotions are inevitable results of students' use of both their intellectual and emotional capabilities while responding to a film. Despite their conflicting opinions and emotions, the students in the study were motivated and inspired to take action to support and advocate for sexual harassment victims. Hence, audience response activities, like those described in this study, have the potential to contribute to developing students' characters, especially in terms of building awareness of sexual harassment issues. For this reason, the researcher argues that audience response strategies need to be increasingly developed as a powerful form of critical literature pedagogy.

Taking into account that participants in this research are in-service and pre-service teachers of English, they have the potential to apply response strategies to films in their own language classrooms. Consequently, applications of audience response strategies in the language classroom are open to further research. Researchers can work together with teachers to involve students in responding to films by engaging them in critical thinking, exploration of emotions, and discussions of various issues in society depicted in the films. Such research is necessary to increase the insights of researchers and practitioners in the field of education into the significance of responses to films in literature pedagogy.

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