

Representation of Single Father in the Movie Fatherhood

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REPRESENTATION OF SINGLE FATHER IN THE MOVIE FATHERHOOD

ABSTRACT

Film is one of the media that is still often used by many people to convey a message and have an impact on a wide audience who enjoy it. One of them is the depiction of a person in a film that gives a message of its impression to the audience. Since the Covid-19 pandemic that entered Indonesia in March 2021, many people have died due to exposure to the virus. Not infrequently, some people have also lost their parents during this pandemic, such as losing their mothers and leaving fathers with their children. The phenomenon of single fathers and their stories of defending their families and raising their children eventually became the main attraction for the audience. At the same time, a film called *Fatherhood* was released which tells the story of a single father and his daughter. The author conducted this research because it was deemed to describe how a single father faces the problems that surround him. The purpose of this study was to find out the message of the single father representation conveyed in the media of this film. The method used is Roland Barthes' semiotics. Semiotics Roland Barthes will discuss from 3 points of view, namely denotation, connotation, and also myth. In this study, the theory used is about single-parent problems, Roland Barthes' semiotics, and also films. The findings in this study are that every single father will face several problems such as work, child care, economy, and also social pressure.

Keywords: Representation; Single Father; Film; Fatherhood; Semiotics

INTRODUCTION

One of the phrases used to describe life in a home with one parent (adult) and at least one child is "single parent". This can happen due to several things: divorce, or the death of one of the parents. This is very possible in the current pandemic conditions. Many people have died and divorced due to the impact of this pandemic. As reported by the Covid-19 Handling Task Force, until January 3, 2021, at least 45.55% of the people who died from COVID were women. This also proves that there are several single-parent cases where only a father and child are left behind.

We all know that being a single parent is not an easy thing. This was also expressed by Rio Ferdinand, a football player at the Manchester United club. Revealed by Guardian Sport in 2017, Rio couldn't even make an appointment to see his pediatrician. Rio was left with his three young children after his wife Rebecca died of cancer in 2015. The football midfielder



reveals just how many adjustments have to be made to get the house in the shape it should be in. Starting from preparing food and clothes for their children, even to helping their children accept the situation.

The phenomenon of single fathers and how they come to terms with the existing situation has a message for everyone. not only for people who feel like single fathers, but also for those who live a "normal" life. Some people want to know how they can grieve for the loss of their partner. Some also want to know how they can continue their life with the child they left behind. Many questions arise in people's minds regarding this. Film as a medium to convey messages is one way that can be utilized.

The development of the times that exist today allows us to learn many things. Various kinds of media are also present and have become part of everyday human life. Film is one of the mass media that are used to communicate messages to the audience.

Existing media also have different functions. McQuail in [Nurudin \(2017\)](#) states that there are several main assumptions about the meaning of mass media, including that the media is a changing industry. The media is a source of power because it can be used as a control tool. The media is also a place to display the life of society. Most importantly, the media also plays a role in the development of culture (customs, fashions, lifestyles, and norms).

In short, [Ardianto \(2007\)](#) reveals in his book that the mass media has five main functions, namely: surveillance, interpretation, linkage, the transmission of value, and entertainment. Often, the media combine several of these functions into one to present an impression or piece of material to the public.

Film was first discovered in the 19th century as a medium for communicating messages and serves as a medium of entertainment, such as events, stories, music, drama, and much more. Because of this fact, films are often used by families to fill their spare time with other members. From this, we can all know that, in terms of its phenomenal development, the film has a hidden role in meeting the needs of its audience ([Mc Quail, 1989](#)).

The film has advantages when it comes to conveying messages. Benefiting from the audio and visual elements in it, the film can show characters who can easily influence the viewer's thinking. Another advantage of films is that the message conveyed is easier for the audience to understand. Because of its uniqueness in conveying the message, the film is considered to be able to reach many people in a short time. Public attention can also be more easily directed because of the reality of the film that is formed without losing its credibility ([Andhani & Putri, 2017](#)).

The message in a film is that the audience can take something from the work. When someone watches a film, the meaning conveyed indirectly plays a role in shaping the audience's perception of the meaning of the film. The existing ideas or meanings have been represented by the film's loader in the form of signs and symbols ([Andylala, 2018](#)).

Message, which is also known as a mandate, in the Big Indonesian Dictionary itself means the meaning, content, or idea of a concept or work that is conveyed by one person to another through certain media ([KBBI, 2021](#)). The message in a work in the media exists because it is the main premise for making a work. The message of a work is shown through certain signs, both visible and invisible.

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This message is conveyed in the form of a sign known as semiotics. This sign can be shown in the form of scenes, dialogues, and even story settings. These signs (semiotics) are often the main attraction for the audience to find out more about what the message contains in a work (Alya, 2020).

Fatherhood is a Hollywood film released on June 18, 2021. This film lifts the comedy-drama genre, with a lead role played by well-known actor Kevin Hart. The film, directed by Paul Weitz, has received 6.7 points from IMDb. This drama is also Colombia Pictures' first drama to collaborate directly with Netflix.

The screening, which had been delayed for more than a year due to this pandemic, made preparations for the making of the film Fatherhood even more mature. A week after being released on the Netflix digital platform (except in China), "Fatherhood" became the most-watched film in its first week of release. Netflix also confirmed that Fatherhood has been watched by 61 million subscribers since its first month of release.

It's about the journey of a single father, Matt Logelin (Kevin Hart), who struggles to raise his only daughter, Maddy Logelin (Melody Hurd), after his wife died shortly after giving birth to their daughter. It shows how Matt struggles with raising Maddy as a single parent, despite pressure from his mother-in-law. Many thought that Matt would not be able to take care of Maddy, but that was not proven. They became closer to each other.

Not only in his duties as a father, but here, Matt is also described as someone who works hard. Matt even received a promotion at work at one point, despite the fact that he was also raising his child and working. It didn't stop there. Matt also had a hard time letting his daughter wear a skirt as part of her school uniform. Given that Maddy grew up with lots of boys around her, it wasn't easy for Matt to teach her female habits.

Some of these things are proof of how difficult it is to be a single parent and raise a child by yourself. Despite his busy schedule, Matt makes an effort to spend time with his child and pay attention to him. Researcher are interested in using Matt's role here as a research subject to describe single parents in a family.

The whole story illustrates how, with so many problems that arise, Matt still prioritizes his son above all else. This is a natural thing for parents to do, especially Matt, who is a single parent. His tenacity in all fields for his family shows how Matt can be described as a good single parent figure.

From the explanation above, the writer is interested in knowing how the depiction of a single parent, especially a father, is depicted in the film. The depiction will use the concept of semiotics (signs), both visible and invisible.

The researcher will use Roland Barthes' semiotic theory in conducting this research. This semiotics emphasizes the interaction between text and personal experience so that there is a convention between existing interactions (Kriyantono, 2011). Roland Barthes' semiotics was chosen to dismantle the myths in the film and find meaning that emerges from the signs in the scenes from the film Fatherhood.

Authors also want to see the representation of the the life of single father through the problem they are facing. It is all written by Bronstein & Cowan (1988). They said that there

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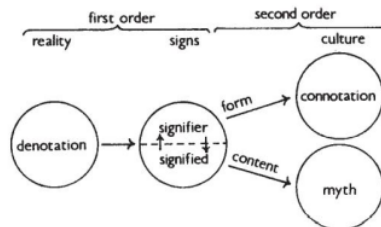
are actually four main problems which usually faced by a single parent, such as: (1) Childcare Problem, (2) Social Pressure Problem, (3) Economic Problem, (4) Work Problem.

Childcare problem is a challenge that will be faced by all single parents, especially single fathers. Some of the problems surrounding this parenting are how to adjust to the changes that occur between children and parents, such as: a sense of loss, sexual identification, adjustment. Social Pressure problem are talking about environmental reaction to the notion of a single parent. There is pressure and expectations from the surrounding environment about a 'complete' family. This is all further supported by the assumption around the existence of doubts for a father to take care of children. A father who is usually considered a hero because of their willingness to take care of their children, but also doubts their ability to take care of their own children.

Economic problem usually faced by a mother, because a father is considered to have a more stable financial situation. However, this does not rule out the possibility that the father's financial situation is also sometimes not good. Last, work problem shows how As a father who is responsible for the financial problems in the family, it is proper and proper that they will work. One of the problems that arise in working parents, especially fathers, is balancing their work life with their family's household. They are expected to have a fulfilling career that is sufficient to meet the needs of the family, but also to be involved in child care and household management.

A number of previous research titles have been discovered. There is a study entitled "Analysis of Semiotics of Moral Messages in the Film Parasite" by Rifa Alya from the University of North Sumatra. In this study, researchers used Roland Barthes' semiotics to examine a Korean film entitled "Parasite." Another title found was "Representation of Single Father Masculinity in Film," written by Umaroh Anisa Zuma from Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. This study discusses the representation of single fathers in two films with the semiotics of Roland Barthes. I will conduct this research using a qualitative descriptive method with Roland Barthes' semiotic theory as the previous author, but with a different research subject, namely the film Fatherhood.

METHOD



Picture 1. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Map

Source: Fiske, 2002

This research used a semiotics method by Roland Barthes which divided into 3 parts, such as (Kusuma, 2017):

1. Denotation, system of meaning in the first level. This expresses the meaning that is clearly displayed in the existing display.
2. Connotation, second level of meaning. This meaning sees what is not visible to the naked eye. They interpret something based on the existing signs.
3. Myth, beliefs that exist and develop in society. This is because of the influence of society in viewing something (social, cultural). They interpret something by interpreting the relationship between what is seen in real and what is implied.

The kind of research used at this time is descriptive research. Descriptive research is research by explaining phenomena that occur in a community group or society at large. This research is included in the qualitative approach model.

A qualitative approach is also research that intends to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perception, and motivation. This is caused by the existence of evidence in the object of research. Researchers look at how the film Fatherhood plays the role of a single father in several scenes and also the subtitles they do in the film.

The subject of this research would be the Fatherhood Movie itself that released in the digital platform Netflix. Whereas the object of this research is the single father representation on the movie. To analyze, the writers used Roland Barthes' semiotics where we chose scene from the movie that represent the problems he's facing as a single father.

There are several steps that the writers do during this research: define the object of analysis, collect text and images, describe text and images, interpret text and images, generalize concepts and draw conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION



1. Social Pressure Problem



Picture 2. Social pressure problem faced by Single Fathers
Source: Netflix

From the meaning of denotation seen in the picture above, We can see that the long shot technique is used to capture the object as well as its surroundings, including additional supporting objects. Three people dressed in black are standing opposite each other. They were seen standing on the back porch of the house, discussing and looking in a certain direction. In the second picture, it can be seen that what the three previous people were paying attention to was a man in black formal clothes who was holding a baby. It was obvious from his expression that he was sad. Everyone in the picture above (except the baby) are dressed in black, which indicates a family in mourning after a death.

It is told that Matt, a man holding a baby, is grieving the loss of his wife who has just given birth. This event is usually carried out by the family left at home by providing several meals. Consequently, Matt, who had lost, was put to plenty of indirect assumptions about his life. People around him doubt his ability to care for his sole child, who is still a baby, and even his closest friends urge him to return to his homeland.

His ability to manage a newborn as a single father who has just had his first child who is still a baby is in doubt. It's because many people believe that a "whole" family consists of a father, mother, and child. In contrast to Matt's family, which mainly consists of father and child. This is also in line with the [Big Indonesian Dictionary \(2021\)](#), which defines the family as the mother and father, as well as their children. [Santrock \(2002\)](#) also points out that a single father must be able to take on that responsibility and roles of a mother whilst still working as a parent to continue making money to fulfill his daily life. In this film, many friends and family of Matt himself doubted Matt's ability to take care of all these things at the same time.

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2. Economic Problem



Picture 3. Economic problem faced by Single Fathers
Source: Netflix

The denotation in the image above is that there are two men working in an office, each dressed properly. They were both in the same room talking about something. They were seen sitting across from one other in a private area, indicating that this was a conversation between superior and employee. The process of shooting begins with a long shot to capture the ambience of the scene. Then use a medium shot to capture the subject's detailed expressions and facial expressions.

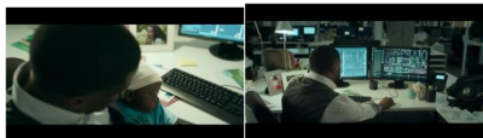
It was Matt's first day back at work after having time off, which triggered the interaction between the two. His boss called for him to give some offers and negotiate about his job at the time. Matt, who was frightened of losing his job, revealed how much he needed his job.

Economic difficulties are frequently faced by a woman who is responsible for her own child (single mother). According to a survey conducted by Sholikhah in 2016, economics is one of the most difficult issues that single mothers will face. However, this does not indicate that a single mother is the only one who is affected; some single fathers are also affected.

It is not mentioned in this film how severe Matt's financial situation is. However, the dialogue in the image depicts Matt's concern if he gets dismissed and remains in the position of having to raise a child, which we all know is expensive.

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3. Work Problem



Picture 4. Work problem faced by Single Fathers
Source: Netflix

We can see a man sitting at his desk with a baby in his arms. This man is seen working in a well-dressed suit. This dad is spotted bringing his baby to work and accomplishing two activities at once: babysitting and working in the office.



To show the atmosphere around the main subject, a medium shot was chosen as the shooting approach. The man is seated at his desk, which includes a monitor and laptop, and is holding his child with one hand while typing with the other.



Picture 5. Work problem faced by Single Fathers
Source: Netflix

In the footage, a guy can be seen trying to quiet his crying baby while wearing a partially exposed office attire. While presenting a project to a customer, this father holds his daughter.

The long shot technique was applied in this scene. Not only the main subject is displayed, but also additional subjects who are happy with their employees' accomplishments. This filming method also depicts the setting and time of the incident, which took place in a meeting room during the day.

In the image above, a father is represented who is unable to let go of his daughter while also fulfilling his responsibilities as a father and earning a living. Matt appears to be preoccupied with his child on several occasions, and he neglects to complete his professional commitments.

According to Bronstein and Cowan (1988) in their book, being a single father requires more than just having a really good job. This is represented clearly in the film. While Matt's profession is gratifying, it will ultimately come at the cost of his family. That's why, as a single father, being able to maintain work and personal life journey is essential. Even if it has to run at the same time, there are still distinct limits that must be emphasized.

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4. Childcare Problem

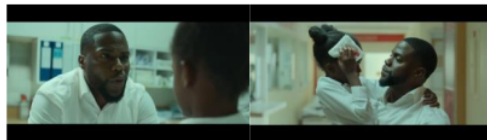


Picture 6. Childcare problem faced by Single Fathers
Source: Netflix

A woman and a man are seated across from each other in this snapshot. Matt, dressed as a parent, arrived in nice work clothes, while the woman in front of him was dressed as a nun which also a principal. They appeared to be arguing in this woman's workplace about a problem. To illustrate all that happened, a long shot was used as the shooting style. In this example, the subject, the setting, and the activities they engage in.



The woman sitting in front of Matt was dressed neatly and covered her hair. As Maddy's School principal, the attire worn are those of a Catholic nun. Catholic schools appear to be highly strict and have a lot of rules. One of the existing rules, which regulates school uniforms, is absolute. Maddy is a student who breaks the dress code at school, prompting the principal to summon her father, Matt.



Picture 7. Childcare problem faced by Single Fathers

Source: Netflix

A man dressed neatly like an office worker is seen in this film in a white room with a girl. This dad is talking to his daughter and comforting her crying toddler. Her daughter was observed by a doctor with a head wound that was bandaged with a thick towel to halt the bleeding. The chosen shot approach is a medium shot that focuses solely on the subject at hand.

The hospital room is represented in the illustration with an all room. Maddy had just fell at school after being teased by her classmates because of the clothes she was wearing. Matt, who arrived late, hugged Maddy and checked to see if she was okay.

This is a father's instinct when it comes to defending his daughter. This is one of Matt's methods for educating his children to be tough and not easily affected by societal changes.

In each and every condition, a parent will remain responsible and defend his child. This is in line with the way society has developed. However, this is frequently a problem because, as a single father, there are additional concerns about providing protection and care to their children (Febriyani, 2012). On the one hand, they feel bound when they are given the task of raising children. But, alas, the catastrophe occurred, and they were left alone to survive and care for their children by their partners. Some of these are fathers who are single. Matt, as a single father, defends his daughter to the utmost extent possible because he believes the situation is minor. This is relevant for parents to do when their child makes a mistake, which is to be responsible for their child.

This raises the expectation that a single father will be involved in his child's growth and development. In their children's anxious moments, they offer their complete attention to them. They make every effort to be by their children's sides, accompanying and supporting them through any difficulties or traumatic events they might face.

CONCLUSION

From the data and analysis that has been done by the writers, it is found that the film *Fatherhood* describes how the life of a single father is in his daily life. Such as:

1. Men as single fathers with parenting problems

The film *Fatherhood* depicts the difficulties of parenting based on the information provided above. Matt views everything he does as a man to be logical,

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which demonstrates his lack of tolerance with his daughter. His kid becomes a free individual as a result of his upbringing and refuses to follow the existing rules.

Maddy grows up to be a stubborn person as a result of the lack of patience shown to children. Matt, on the other hand, demonstrated as a single father that his daughter could grow up to be a happy girl who brought happiness to everyone around him.

2. Men with social pressure issues as single fathers

Matt is also under pressure because he is a single father. People frequently put unrealistically high expectations on him, correlating his role as both a father and a mother figure. When his wife died, everyone doubted his ability to care for his child because of the pressure he would be under.

The pressure on this demand comes not only from his family, but also from everyone around him. Starting with his boss, Maddy's schoolteacher, and his own pals. People he didn't recognize in the park gave him odd stares and asked him questions about being a single father.

3. Men as single fathers facing financial difficulties

The economy is not one of Matt's major concerns in this film. According to Bronstein & Cowan, single moms are more likely to confront this challenge, yet this does not rule out alternative explanations. The author discovers one of the discussions that refers to Matt's and his family's financial status. Because usually there are a husband and wife who both work, his wife's death will have an immediate impact on the family's finances.

From here, it's clear that Matt is terrified of being fired and losing his job. As a result, he was able to speak with his employer. This discussion leads to Matt, who is frightened about losing his job where he says that he really needs this job for his daily needs.

4. Men in the role of single fathers with work issues

Matt has trouble allocating his time between job and child care, as depicted in this movie. He even brought Maddy to work when she was a baby, causing chaos in the office. Conclusively demonstrated to be a single father will still be confronted with the same problem, namely work.

On the one hand, a parent needs a job, but they also need to be a father and a mother at the same time in order to care for their children. Work was remained a concern in this little household even when Maddy grew up and went to school.

One of the most visible depictions and one of the big problems here is about work. Without realizing it, a single father experiences the same thing, namely the difficulty of dividing time between work and household. This causes a lot of problems that arise afterward. Not only that, but Matt here also experiences some other serious problems that also describe the lives of most single fathers. These problems, such as social pressure problems, parenting problems, and economic problems are not visible in this film.

Overall, the film *Fatherhood*, which tells the story of a family consisting of only a father and son, successfully depicts the life of a single father realistically. Starting from the ups and downs to the problems that arise when you become a single father.



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