

## Women on the screen: A comparison of gender representation in Indonesian cinema

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The emergence of Indonesian female directors is expected to be able to represent female characters in films based on the perspective of women themselves. However, in one film directed by a female director, a scene was found showing the female lead wearing revealing clothing that is identical to the concept of the male gaze. **Purpose:** This study aims to see whether the director's gender influences the depiction of female characters in the films they direct. **Methods:** Therefore, an analysis was conducted on four films directed by two male directors and two female directors to see how the representation of female characters in films is based on the director's gender using Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis. **Results:** Several contrasting differences were found between male and female directors in depicting female characters in films, especially in the four films analyzed, namely *27 Steps of May*, *Imperfect* (by male directors), and *Marlina si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak*, *Yuni* (by female directors), which can be seen in the aspects of characterization, location setting, explanations regarding the fate of predators, and a number of issues touched upon. **Conclusion:** Based on the comparative results, it was found that the director's gender influences the representation of women in films. **Implications:** Indonesian filmmakers, especially women, are expected to utilize the mass media of film to correct various stigmas and problems that tend to marginalize women in order to create a social and work environment that is free from gender-based discrimination.

**Keywords:** Comparison; director's perspective; gender; Indonesian cinema; women representation

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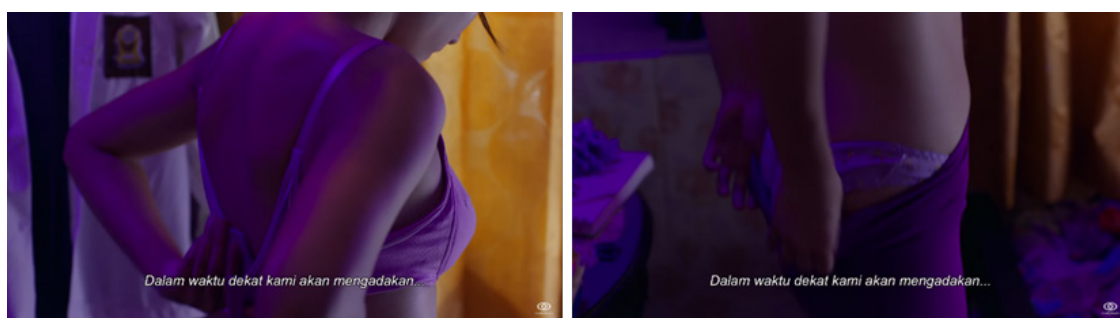
## INTRODUCTION

Most of the people behind the scenes of the Indonesian film industry, especially directors, are dominated by men (Festival Film Indonesia, 2023). It happens because of the stigma that women will not be able to lead a production team, and the equipment or tools used in the filming process are usually large and cannot be operated by women (Dowd et al., 2023). Stigma is an attribute that significantly denigrates or weakens the authority of a person or a particular party so that they are considered different and lower than normal society, which causes the person or party to be ostracized (Andersen et al., 2022; Priandono et al., 2022; Zayts-Spence et al., 2023). Stigma is formed from negative labeling and stereotypes due to an imbalance of power (Andersen et al., 2022).

Male dominance in the creative process results in a male gaze that positions women only as complementary objects or inferior groups (Chambers, 2022; Dowd et al., 2023; Safira, 2020). The emergence of female directors is expected to be able to represent women from the perspective of women themselves. However, in the film directed by a female director, namely

*Yuni* (2021) by Kamila Andini, a scene was found showing the female lead wearing revealing clothes, which can be seen in Figure 1, which is close to the concept of the male gaze (Festival Film Indonesia, 2023). It became one of the initial triggers or reasons for the author to conduct this research. The author wants to see a comparison of how the representation of women is conveyed by films by female and male directors and to see the differences in representation based on the gender of the director who directed them.

This study analyzes the representation of female characters in contemporary Indonesian films that raise the topic of injustice and violence against Indonesian women. Gender inequality is a form of discrimination that refers to the unequal treatment of women and men in terms of rights, opportunities, protection, and obligations in various aspects, resulting in levels of status that affect access, needs, and services for one group (Massay, 2021; Nasikha et al., 2023). Meanwhile, violence is defined as any act of attack on a person that can result in physical, psychological, or sexual suffering or misery, including threats, coercion, and



Source: *Yuni*, 2021

**Figure 1** *Yuni* Movie Trailer

deprivation of a person's rights and freedoms. Violence can occur in public or private life (Is et al., 2023; Khan, 2015; Patrisia & Irma, 2024; Putri et al., 2023; Ulfah & Winata, 2021). Violence has a significant impact on women's health, well-being, and resilience to recover from adversity, so that it can cause feelings of inferiority, fear and justify subordination of women's groups in the distribution of power (Deane, 2018; Patrisia & Irma, 2024). Gender disparities due to historical inequality between men and women in patriarchal ideology are the leading root causes of violence against women (Khan, 2015; Mas'udah et al., 2024; Patrisia & Irma, 2024).

Film as a mass media text becomes a container for various interests and powers in the battle of ideas, ideologies, perspectives, and certain assumptions to be disseminated and influence society (Danesi, 2010; Sutandio, 2023). Representation in film is not just a depiction of characters shown in the film with specific characteristics; it is also considered a reflection or shadow of reality. Representation includes the use of signs or symbols to reproduce or describe something based on aspects that can be captured by the five senses, imagined, or felt in specific forms or characteristics (Danesi, 2010; Sutandio, 2023). In this study, the author looks at how female characters are represented or depicted based on aspects of visual appearance, location, audio, movement, and interaction, as well as the attitudes shown by female characters in facing the problems

shown in the film (Listiani, 2016).

This study compares four Indonesian films that raise the topic of injustice and violence against Indonesian women. At first glance, films with themes of injustice and violence against Indonesian women can be considered films that are on the side of women and want to deconstruct or criticize the image of women who were previously considered an inferior group. The four films analyzed are the works of the best Indonesian directors, two men and two women. The author categorizes these four directors as the best Indonesian directors because they have succeeded in bringing their films to several nominations and winning the *Piala Citra Festival Film Indonesia 2018-2021*. The *Piala Citra* has now become a symbol of the highest supremacy in Indonesian cinema (Festival Film Indonesia, 2023).

Based on the topics raised in the film, it is likely that the film director is on a feminist ideology that wants to criticize patriarchal ideology. Patriarchy is a system that believes that men are in a higher position than women. It causes the construction of the image of women who are depicted as a subordinate, weak, or inferior group who are represented as feminine individuals who are obedient, responsive or fragile, and open to male sexual advances (Desmawati, 2018; Khan, 2015; Nasikha et al., 2023; Palmer-Mehta, 2018; Panorama et al., 2023; Prasetya, 2019). As passive parties, women are prohibited from expressing and initiating sexual activity. They are only targeted

for sexual exploitation by men (Rachma & Ulya, 2021).

The gender hierarchy formed by patriarchal ideology causes discrimination and injustice in the social order against women. Therefore, the ideology of feminism emerged as a form of criticism and resistance to patriarchy (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023). Feminism is a political project that deconstructs gender-based discrimination with the aim of creating a more just social environment, not only for women but also for all people who experience gender-based discrimination (Jaysawal & Saha, 2023). When discussing ideology and gender, it turns out that the two things have no strong correlation. It is because not all women hold the ideology of feminism, and vice versa; not all men hold the ideology of patriarchy. Wardhana (2013) revealed that there are women with patriarchal ideologies who actually help depict women with a negative image. He concluded that the attitude to fight for gender equality, which is identical to feminism, has no relationship with gender so that both women and men can speak out in rejecting gender-based discrimination by holding the concept of feminism as a form of criticism of patriarchal ideology (Fatihayah & Simanjuntak, 2022; Huang, 2023; Wardhana, 2013; Wicaksana, 2019).

A study comparing several films based on the director's gender was conducted by Marcos-Ramos et al. (2023), who compared gender representation between male and female

directors in Spanish films from 2018 to 2019. This study used a quantitative content analysis method. Through this study, it was found that the representation of female characters in Spanish films is still underrepresented, but this has nothing to do with the gender of the director. In addition, this study also states that female directors tend to include more sensitive elements, such as LGBT, in their films than male directors.

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, there has also been research that analyzes the issue or representation of women in films (Basnapal & Wulan, 2019; Marsya & Mayasari, 2019; Nurussaadah & Yudhawirawan, 2023; Sutandio, 2023). Basnapal and Wulan (2019) conducted an analysis using Barthes' semiotics. They found that in the film, women are depicted as no man's land, merchandise, or producers and can be controlled and exploited. The film also emphasizes that if women are treated improperly, it can bring disaster.

From several studies on women in Indonesian films, no studies have been found that compare or contrast the representation of women in contemporary Indonesian films, nor have they used Sara Mills' critical discourse analysis. Most studies on films in Indonesia only analyze one film (Basnapal & Wulan, 2019; Nurussaadah & Yudhawirawan, 2023). Therefore, through this study, the author wants to compare Indonesian films based on the director's gender.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a comparative descriptive qualitative method with a focused comparative strategy. This method compares data from two or more works with a focus on one thing that can be compared in this study, namely the depiction of women in films based on the gender of the director, which is also the object of this research. The result of this research is an in-depth descriptive description of the representation of women, and the comparison results found (Djiwandono & Yulianto, 2023). Through this qualitative research, the author wants to describe how social situations or symptoms in the depiction of women in several Indonesian films in more depth from qualitative data such as symbols, sentences, images, and so on collected by the author (Djiwandono & Yulianto, 2023). The results of the analysis were grouped based on the gender of the director as a further stage to make comparisons and see how differences in the representation of women in films are based on the gender of the director who directed them.

Meanwhile, the subject of this study is contemporary Indonesian feature films that raise topics about injustice and violence against Indonesian women, which are available

on streaming platforms as the author's data source. The subjects to be analyzed are limited to films that have been nominated and have been winners of the *Piala Citra Festival Film Indonesia*. The author has collected four works by great Indonesian directors that meet these criteria, which are attached in Table 1.

The four films were nominated in several categories for the *Piala Citra Festival Film Indonesia*. The film *Marlina si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak* won 10 categories at the *Festival Film Indonesia 2018*, Including Best Film, Best Director, Best Female Lead Actor, Best Female Supporting Actor, Best Original Screenplay, Best Music Director, Best Sound Director, Best Artistic Director, Best Cinematography Director, and Best Picture Editor. In addition, this film was also nominated in other categories, namely Best-Supporting Actor, Best Makeup Artist, Best Costume Designer, and Best Visual Effects Designer. Then, the film *27 Steps of May* won the Best Female Lead Actor category at the *Festival Film Indonesia 2019* and was nominated in several other categories, namely Best Film, Best Director, Best Male Lead Actor, Best Male Supporting Actor, Best Original Screenplay writer, Best Music Director, Best Artistic Director, and Best Picture Editor. Next,

**Table 1 Research Subject**

No	Title	Year	Director	Source
1	Marlina si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak	2017	Mouly Surya (F)	Netflix
2	27 Steps of May	2018	Ravi Bharwani (M)	Netflix
3	Imperfect: Karir, Cinta & Timbangan	2019	Ernest Prakasa (M)	Netflix, Disney+
4	Yuni	2021	Kamila Andini (F)	Disney+

\*Information: F = Female, M = Male

Source: Researcher, 2024



the film *Imperfect: Karir, Cinta & Timbangan* won the Best-Adapted Screenplay category at the *Festival Film Indonesia 2020*. In addition, this film was also nominated for several other categories, namely Best Film, Best Female Lead Actor, Best Male Lead Actor, Best Supporting Female Actor, Best Sound Designer, Best Theme Song Creator, Best Music Director, Best Makeup Artist, Best Costume Designer, and Best Picture Editor. Finally, the film *Yuni* won the Best Female Lead Actor category at the *Festival Film Indonesia 2021*. It was nominated in several other categories, namely Best Feature Film, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay Writer, Best Visual Effects Designer, Best Picture Editor, Best Sound Designer, Best Music Designer, Best Theme Song Creator, Best Art Director, Best Costume Designer, Best Makeup Artist, Best Male Supporting Actor, and Best Female Supporting Actor (Festival Film Indonesia, 2023).

These films were analyzed using Sara Mills' Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with a word and sentence level analysis system through subject-object position and discourse level through audience position analysis (Pasaribu, 2023; Putri et al., 2023). The subject-object position looks at how a text presents a party, person, group, or idea in a particular discourse. Mills looks at how the actor's position is presented in the text by looking for who the storyteller (subject) is and who is positioned as the object told in the text. Then, in the audience position, Mills looks at how the

author positions the reader in the text or what kind of audience the author imagines in the text's storytelling. This position will determine which group the audience's identity is led to, which will affect the audience's understanding of the text (Pasaribu, 2023; Putri et al., 2023).

Sara Mills' CDA was chosen as the theoretical basis for the study to see the discursiveness of power, authority, inequality, injustice, and prejudice in media texts, especially regarding women in mass media films. It is because Mills' analysis model uses a feminist perspective, so it is suitable for this study, which discusses the representation of women in media texts, especially films (Pasaribu, 2023; Putri et al., 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, this study looks at the male director stereotype of two films by male directors. Based on Sara Mills' CDA, the male director positions two characters in the film as subject positions, namely the female and male main characters. However, in this study, the analysis will focus on the main subject in the film, namely the female main character in each film, namely May in the film *27 Steps of May*, and Rara in the film *Imperfect: Karir, Cinta & Timbangan*. Meanwhile, the object position is filled by several other supporting characters who have direct interaction with the subject.

In two films by male directors, the female protagonist is presented. May's character is depicted as a good child or can also be

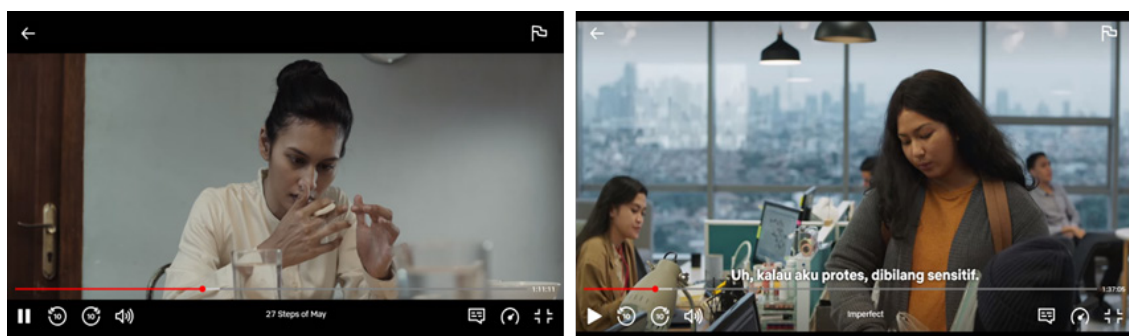
categorized as weak. She does not do bad things and is very concerned about her “purity.” Purity, in this case, refers to the concept of virginity, which is understood as a condition of women who have never had sexual intercourse. The concept of virginity in Indonesia is the result of construction and a form of social control over women based on a patriarchal culture that forms erroneous moral standards in society (Andani, 2023; Raihana & Ghufon, 2023).

It can be seen from May's behavior, which is that she only wears clothes and eats white food, which can be represented as a form of May's effort to restore her purity. It is because, after the rape, May felt that she was despicable. Meanwhile, Rara's character is depicted as a patient figure when her physical appearance is mocked by people around her. She is also kind and generous because she helps teach street children voluntarily. Visualization of the characters May and Rara can be seen in Figure 2.

From the explanation above, male directors tend to see female characters as weak and pitiable. This phenomenon was discussed by Olayiwola (2023) in her research, which

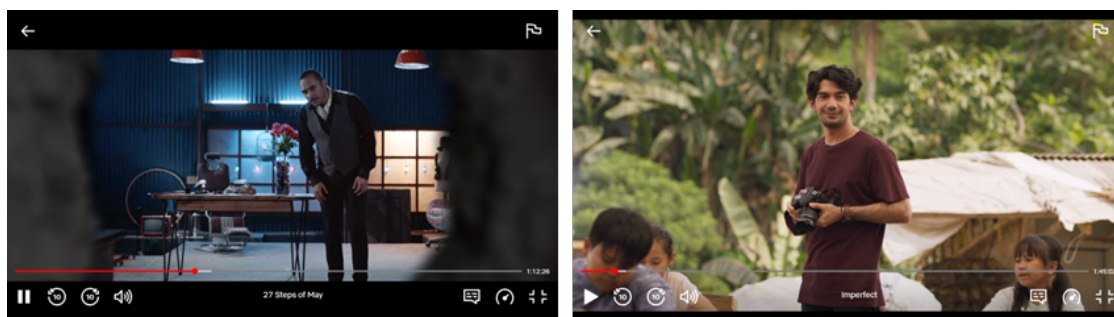
showed that when male filmmakers raise topics about women's issues in their films, they are often not really on the side of women. It is because the phallocentric command from male filmmakers tends to present women in their films as demeaned, pitied, and weak subjects.

Still, in the characterization category, the male director shows a character transition in the female character. Based on the analysis that has been done, the author found that the transition is shown to include a male character who becomes an opinion leader and helps the main female character solve her problems. In the film *27 Steps of May*, the director presents the character of the Magician who gives hope and understanding that not all men are evil or sex-hungry to May. Then, in the film *Imperfect*, the director presents the character of Dika as a gift for Rara because he can accept her physical condition and love Rara for who she is. Apart from that, it was Dika who made Rara carry out a campaign that rejected the existence of a single beauty standard for women. The construction of patriarchal culture can also be found in the issue of beauty standards, which require women to follow a single beauty standard with



Source: *27 Steps of May*, 2018; *Imperfect*, 2019

**Figure 2 May (left) and Rara (right)**



Source: *27 Steps of May*, 2018; *Imperfect*, 2019

**Figure 3 Magician (left) and Dika (right)**

the aim of getting male attention and as a form of male power in controlling women (Safitri & Musfiroh, 2022). Visualization of the Magician and Dika characters can be seen in Figure 3.

If we go back to the beginning of the film, it is known that all the troublemakers in the films analyzed are men. The antagonists in the film *27 Steps of May* are three adult men who rape May, while in the film *Imperfect*, there is a character named Kelvin who treats Rara unfairly and sexistly because Rara's physical appearance is considered not in accordance with beauty standards. Sexism is prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination on the basis of gender, usually against women (Mukhopadhyay & Banerjee, 2021). However, in a director film, another male character appears who directs the main female character to find a turning point in solving the problem. The discourse presented by the male director shows that not all men are evil and that women cannot solve their problems without the help of men. Male directors use films as mass media for their interests and power to influence society in improving their image and strengthening their position as a group that is considered noble (Zamroni, 2022).

Furthermore, in choosing the location setting, male directors use urban locations and Indonesian in the film dialogue, which, according to the author, is used for the commercial interests of the film. It is because Indonesia and the location setting in urban areas, especially Jakarta, will make production costs relatively cheap because the majority of production houses are in Jakarta, and it is also easier to attract Indonesian audiences. It is related to film as an industry and business that is designed to be simple, engaging, and entertaining in order to gain economic benefits (Puspitasari et al., 2024).

In a film by a male director that raises the topic of rape, namely *27 Steps of May*, there is one unfortunate thing because the male director does not explain the punishment received by May's rapists. It is as if the perpetrators disappeared after the incident, while May suffered a lot, such as feelings of humiliation, self-harm, and withdrawal from the social environment.

In the audience's position, the film *27 Steps of May* positions the audience on the identities of all genders, while the film *Imperfect: Karir*,



*Cinta & Timbangan* positions the audience on the identities of women only, especially women who feel insecure due to their body shape not being in accordance with the standards of beauty in society. In general, male directors in their films insert messages about “not all men are bad,” specifically for female audiences, and motivation, information, and invitations for all audiences to fight against several sexist issues that harm women. It can be seen from the emergence of other male characters who are kind and help the main female character solve her problems.

Furthermore, the author also looked at female director stereotypes in two other films in this study. According to Sara Mills’ CDA, the female director positions the main female characters as subject positions, namely Marlina and Yuni. In the object position, several other characters interact with the subject. In two films directed by female directors, complexity is found in the depiction of female characters as protagonists. It can be seen from the depiction of the character Marlina in the film *Marlina si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak* and the character Yuni in the film entitled *Yuni*. In the two films, the main female characters are shown doing activities with negative connotations. Marlina commits murder, while Yuni drinks alcohol, smokes, visits discos, masturbates, and has premarital sex.

Even so, both characters are still categorized as protagonists because Marlina was murdered in self-defense. At the same time,

Yuni only explored new things due to the many prohibitions that restricted her as a woman. The complex actions displayed by this female director are a form of utilizing film mass media as a medium to convey messages and ideas in deconstructing the image of women who are weak, fearful, and unable to be independent (Basnapal & Wulan, 2019; Dean & Nordahl-Hansen, 2022; Fatihayah & Simanjuntak, 2022; Listiani, 2016; Restianty et al., 2024; Sintowoko, 2022; Wicaksana, 2019).

The two female directors in this study consistently, from the beginning to the end of the film, depict the character of Marlina as a strong, intelligent, and brave widow. In fact, there is a stigma or negative assumption about widows or married women who no longer have a husband because he died or divorced (Salsabila & Budhi, 2024; Shofi, 2022). The stigma about widows tends to be directed at young widows who are considered weak, dependent, and struggling economically, as well as seducers of men in an effort to find a new partner (Salsabila & Budhi, 2024; Shofi, 2022; Sutandio, 2023). Meanwhile, Yuni’s character is described as an intelligent, critical, and explorative figure. In addition, the two films by female directors in this study positioned most of the male characters as antagonists or predators. Although there are one or two good male supporting characters, these characters do not have a significant influence on the decision-making of the main female character. Therefore, it can be said that the main female characters in films directed by

female directors are able to solve their problems without the help of male characters. It is directly proportional to the concept of “the final girls” in Sutandio’s (2023) research, which shows female characters who can save and protect themselves without the help of male characters.

Then, in the selection of locations, female directors take the setting of sub-urban and remote areas, complete with local language narration or dialect. The selection of locations by female directors can be seen as a representation of women who are still alienated/marginalized during patriarchal dominance. This can be seen in Marlina’s environment, namely Markus and his friends, who have strong patriarchal thoughts by demeaning women and feel entitled to rape Marlina because of the patriarchal assumption that women are sexual objects that are open to male sexual advances (Karunianingsih, 2016). Meanwhile, in Yuni’s case, her environment does not support girls’ higher education. The figure of Yuni represents the thoughts of Raden Ajeng Kartini, who was very concerned and fought for educational rights, especially for women, because this is the key to a better life and can free humans from discrimination and oppression (Fatihayah & Simanjuntak, 2022; Wicaksana, 2019).

In the film *Marlina si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak*, which raises the issue of sexual violence and rape, Mouly Surya shows the punishment or impact received by the predators. Because Markus and his friends robbed and threatened to rape Marlina, causing 6 of the

seven perpetrators to lose their lives.

Female directors position the audience in the identities of all genders. Female directors convey a message to female audiences by inviting and convincing them to dare to fight and speak out against gender-based discrimination and to leave behind old stereotypes that make women an inferior group. Especially for male audiences, female directors convey a special message in the form of an experience of reversing the situation (objectification) and a warning not to discriminate and belittle women.

After conducting a comparison of the comparative analysis of gender-based stereotypes in directorship, differences, and similarities were found in several things presented by gender-based directors in their films. The author attaches the comparative results of this study in Table 2.

There are four main points of contrasting differences found, including characterization, location setting, the fate of the “predator,” and the number of issues in the film. In this case, Sintowoko (2022) shows that this aspect is part of the mise-en-scene as well as an important element in the narrative aspect of the film. The mise-en-scene element is able to show the audience the director’s gender-based motivation because of the visual appearance of the narrative and cinematic construction.

The first point regarding characterization, in general, is that the grouping of protagonist and antagonist characters in the four films analyzed has similarities, namely, women as

**Table 2 Movie Comparison**

Comparison	Differences	
	Female	Male
Characterization	Complex, consistent	Simple, there are transitions
Location	Sub-urban	Urban
The fate of the "predator."	Get the consequences	Not told
Number of issues	10 of 14*	5 of 14
<b>Similarity</b>		
Female main characters as Subject Position and protagonist		
Male characters as villains, predators, or antagonists		
Concepts regarding the causes of rape cases		

Source: Researcher, 2024

protagonists and men as antagonists. However, if we look deeper and have also discussed in the previous sub-chapter, it was found that female directors in characterization display complexity but are consistent. In contrast, male directors' characterization is more straightforward and displays character transitions in the main characters. Then the second point is the difference in the location settings used by male and female directors. The choice of location in a film can convey information about the economic level, socio-cultural, and atmosphere of the character's environment (Listiani, 2016; Prasetya, 2019). Female directors choose rural and small-town locations, while male directors in their films use big-city locations. The next difference found in this comparative study is that female directors show the consequences or punishments received by male "predator" characters, while male directors do not. The final contrasting difference is the number of issues addressed in each film, with female directors addressing an average of 10 out of 14 issues, while male directors average only five issues. The author has summarized a more detailed

explanation of this issue in Table 3.

The more issues are touched upon, the more criticism the directors will give regarding the issues in the films they direct. This issue section is important to discuss in this study to see how female characters react and face problems so that it will indirectly represent female characters in the film.

The problems experienced by the main female character cannot be separated from the dominance of patriarchal ideology that has existed for a long time, so there is a discourse that this dominance is natural (Fatihayah & Simanjuntak, 2022; Wicaksana, 2019). In general, the four films in this study reject the image of women based on patriarchal ideology that depicts women as feminine creatures who are weak, obedient, responsive or fragile, open to male sexual advances, experience objectification, and are used as sexual objects (Karunianingsih, 2016; Safira, 2020). Resistance or criticism of the issues raised can be seen from the actions of the main female characters, namely Marlina, who resists Markus and his friends, May who manages to get out of

**Table 3 Issue Comparison**

No	Issues/Problems	Female		Male	
		Marlina...	Yuni	27 Steps...	Imperfect...
1	Injustice against women	√	√	√	√
2	Physical violence against women	√	x	√	x
3	Verbal violence against women	√	√	x	√
4	Widow stigma	√	x	x	x
5	Virginity stigma	x	√	√	x
6	Beauty standard	√	x	x	√
7	Women's sexual rights	√	√	√	x
8	Women's Health	√	√	x	√
9	Mental health	x	√	√	√
10	Domestic Violence	√	√	x	x
11	Fertility	x	√	x	x
12	Socio-cultural economy	√	√	x	x
13	Non-Heteronormative	x	√	x	x
14	State apparatus	√	x	x	x
Total		10	10	5	5

Source: Researcher, 2024

a traumatic period, Rara who manages to voice her rejection of a single beauty standard for women, and Yuni who dares to take and choose her path in life and free herself from the myths and customs of the local community that restrict women.

Based on the comparative results, although in general, all films in this study rejected the image of women based on patriarchal ideology, the author saw that male directors did not wholly reject it because there were still several images of female characters who were still considered weak in the character of May, as well as figures who needed men in the characters of May and Rara. Films that are identical to the masculine industry cause female characters to tend to be depicted or given roles as weak groups who need men (Basnapal & Wulan, 2019). This action can be categorized as an attempt by male

directors to build an image as if they support or are on the side of women. However, on the other hand, they have a mission to rebuild a good image of men after all the problems in the films in this study were caused by male characters. It cannot be separated from the power of the media, especially films, which have been discussed previously, namely as an effort to re-establish a position, in this case, the male side (Zamroni, 2022). If associated with the idea of R.A. Kartini, different from male directors, female directors are clearly in line with Kartini, namely by eliminating the old understanding that women are weak, fearful, and unable to be independent and forming a new representation with the characteristics of women who have self-confidence, commitment, cheerfulness, strength, progressive thinking, and strong determination to show their existence, and can

be helpful for others (Fatihayah & Simanjuntak, 2022; Wicaksana, 2019).

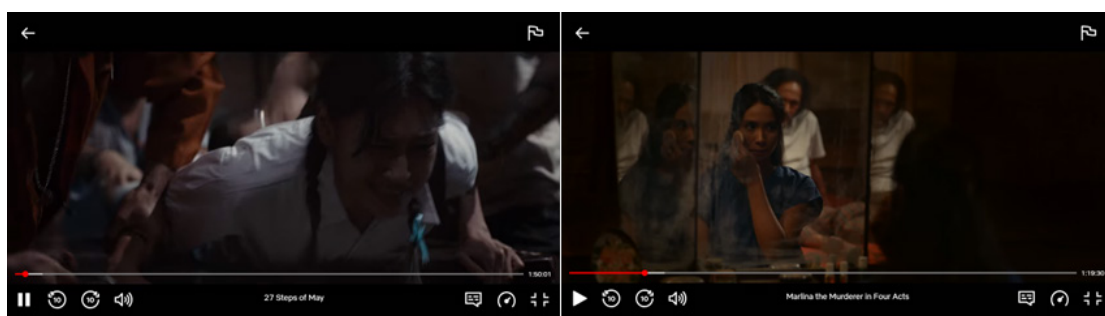
The next step is to look at the similarities found in this comparative study. All directors positioned the female main character as the subject position based on Sara Mills' CDA with the protagonist characterization and made the male character an antagonist who is a villain or predator for the female main character. In general, characterization in films is divided into two parts: the protagonist is a good character, and the antagonist is an evil character and an opponent of the protagonist (Prasetya, 2019).

The next similarity is regarding the causes of rape expressed indirectly by both male and female directors. They indirectly reject the assumption that rape cases are caused by women who provoke men's lust by wearing sexy/revealing clothes, being weak because they cannot fight back, and other reasons that tend to blame women. It can be seen from the rape scenes in the two films in this study (*Marlina Si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak* and *27 Steps of May*), which show two female characters not wearing revealing clothing; excerpts of the scenes can be seen in Figure 4. May was

wearing a school uniform during the rape, while Marlina was wearing home clothes in the form of a sleeveless blouse with a long cloth bottom. Worse, in Marlina's case, the rape occurred at her home.

Home, which is considered a safe place and private area for everyone, is no longer a safe place for women. BBC News Indonesia (2024) revealed that cases of rape against women in the home or family environment have occurred repeatedly. The latest case related to this statement is the rape committed by a biological father in Pati, Indonesia. An 18-year-old woman was raped "repeatedly" by her biological father, which was carried out in hotels and homes (BBC News Indonesia, 2024). Responding to other possible causes of rape, namely the reason that blames women for not resisting when rape occurs. In the two films mentioned earlier, the directors also reject this argument by depicting cases of rape in each film carried out by a group of men, making it very unlikely for women to resist physically.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that cases of sexual violence and rape occur not because women provoke men's



Source: *27 Steps of May*, 2018; *Marlina Si Pembunuh dalam Empat Babak*, 2017

**Figure 4 May's and Marlina's clothes in the rape scene**



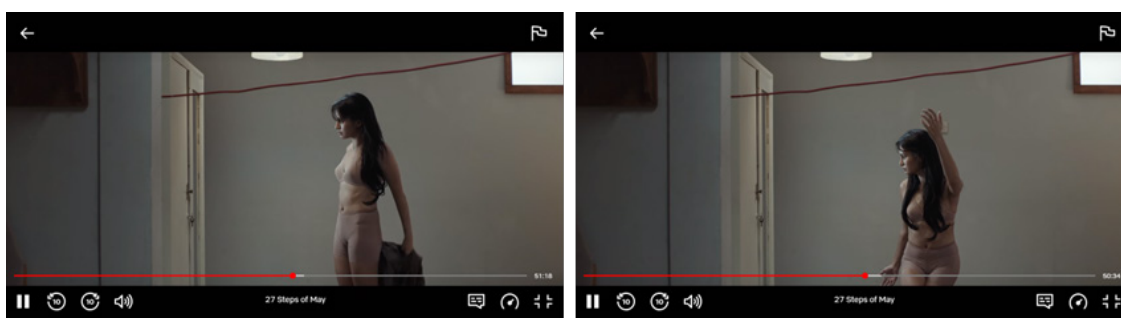
lust and are weak, but rape occurs because male perpetrators cannot control their lust/libido and their actions. The emergence of evil thoughts and discourses about women and rape is also inseparable from the patriarchal view that views women as sexual objects and a weak group compared to men. The hierarchy created by the dominance of one ideology is what causes marginalization and violence against women (Prasetya, 2019; Wardhana, 2013).

Apart from the differences and similarities above, the author also found several interesting things in the four films that have been analyzed. Of the four films analyzed, the author found two films that featured female main characters in revealing clothing, namely the film *27 Steps of May* by a male director and *Yuni* by a female director. Openness or nudity, in some opinions, leads to immoral acts. According to Danesi (2010), nudity has a negative connotation; we all know that all humans are born naked, but over time, humans will definitely continue to learn - in this case, covering the body with clothing. However, the two films in this study cannot be categorized as immoral acts because the two main female characters are shown

wearing revealing clothing in a private area and in a situation where they are alone.

The character May wears underwear in the bedroom while looking in the mirror in a long shot, and the camera is still; a cut of this scene can be seen in Figure 5. Through the long shot, the director shows the character's body in its entirety and a wide frame so that the audience's focus is not only directed to the character's body parts but also to the activities being carried out by the character (Karunianingsih, 2016). In the scene, May is shown looking in the mirror looking at her body while only wearing underwear, which can be interpreted as a form of women's efforts to recognize and understand their bodies. May's activities can be categorized as positive because previously, due to patriarchal dominance, especially in films, the image of women was depicted as passive objects who were not even able to represent themselves. After all, they were used to following the reality that had been formed and was accustomed to the pressure and suffering given (Fatihayah & Simanjuntak, 2022; Safira, 2020; Wicaksana, 2019; Wulan, 2019).

Meanwhile, the character Yuni is shown



Source: *27 Steps of May*, 2018

**Figure 5** May's scene is of looking in the mirror with revealing clothes

wearing clothes after taking a shower, showing Yuni's body in underwear with close-up shots of several body parts (back, hips). The use of close-up shots of body parts such as the chest, stomach, hips, and thighs aims to show details and intimacy (Karunianingsih, 2016; Sintowoko, 2022). At first glance, the scene of Yuni in underwear is very close to the concept of the male gaze, namely when women are used as objects of the male gaze and fantasy with explicit shots that point to parts of the woman's body such as breasts, stomach, and hips and can be categorized as an act of exploitation of women's sexual activity (Jose, 2017; Rachma & Ulya, 2021). However, when this film is watched further, in another part, the audience is presented with a scene when the situation is reversed. Namely, Mr. Damar is used as a sexual object. In this scene, Yuni comments on Mr. Damar's body while teaching, followed by a close-up shot of Mr. Damar's waist and hips. A cut of these two scenes can be seen in Figure 6. The top part is the objectification of Yuni's body, and the bottom part is the objectification

of Mr. Damar.

When male audiences feel uncomfortable seeing the objectification scene of the male body, then so do women. The way the director treats this scene is not included in the concept of the female gaze because the female gaze does not reverse the objectification of the male body but rather shows the audience the feelings and emotions felt by women when experiencing objectification (Safira, 2020). The objectification scene in Mr. Damar is Kamila Andini's brave action, which treats the concept of the male gaze but only on male characters. Kamila Andini's decision to apply the concept of the male gaze to female and male characters is not a practical choice in conveying the message. However, it is a form of intelligent criticism. The reversal of the concept of the male gaze on male characters does not apply or does not have the same power when applied to female characters. It is because the male gaze is not only about seeing female characters as objects but also about the control and power that men are considered to have over female figures; this power is not possessed by



Source: *Yuni*, 2021

**Figure 6 Objectification Reversal**

the female gaze if the male gaze is applied to male characters (Olayiwola, 2023).

Kamila Andini also shows Yuni in revealing clothes while on the beach. This scene can be interpreted as a symbolic form of expression of freedom that Yuni wants to convey. Sigmund Freud, a psychoanalyst, stated that nudity is a form of disobedience. In addition, openness or nudity can also be understood as a form of expression of sexual emotions and satisfaction, as well as a symbol of strength (Danesi, 2010). This concept emphasizes that the openness shown in the two films in this study is not an immoral act but rather a form of expression of the character towards sexual emotions. Then, in the case of the openness shown by Yuni on the beach, in addition to being a form of sexual expression, this is also a form of expression of disobedience or Yuni's resistance to patriarchal domination that is detrimental to women and also a symbol of strength shown by women (Palmer-Mehta, 2018; Rachma & Ulya, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the comparative results, it is concluded that the director's gender influences the representation of female characters. Although all films in this study raise issues about women, there are several contrasting differences in the representation of female characters based on the director's gender. In terms of characterization, female directors have complexity in depicting the main female character as a protagonist, in contrast to male directors who present the

protagonist's characterization more simply. However, on the other hand, female directors tend to depict the characteristics of female characters consistently, in contrast to male directors, who show several character transitions in the main female character from the beginning to the end of the film. The character transitions shown by male directors are used to bring out male characters who help and guide the main female character in solving problems. This treatment can be interpreted as an attempt by male directors to strengthen the image of men as good and noble figures and to present the discourse that although some cases of women's problems are caused by men, not all men are like that (evil). In terms of location settings, female directors choose sub-urban or remote areas as a representation of marginalized women.

In contrast, male directors choose urban areas (big cities), most likely for business reasons and the commercialization of their films. The next difference is that male directors do not explain and show the impact or punishment received by the antagonist due to their crimes, unlike female directors, who show the punishment received by the antagonist or predator. Finally, regarding the number of issues touched on in each film, male directors present fewer issues about women they want to fight in their films than female directors. The author hopes that more Indonesian female filmmakers will release their best films and make the best use of this film mass media to straighten out the various stigmas and problems

that tend to marginalize women and create a social and work environment that is free from gender-based discrimination. To the readers of this study, the author hopes and invites them to jointly eliminate gender-based discrimination by fostering an attitude of mutual respect to achieve peace and prosperity while supporting the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs), namely Gender Equality. Then, to see the public perception regarding the image of women, further research is needed that discusses the perception of Indonesian society regarding the image or impression of Indonesian women today to find out whether Indonesian society is still fixated on patriarchal depictions that consider women as an inferior group or vice versa.

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