



**Women in Mass Media
in *Under the Silver Lake* (2018):
A Saussure's Semiotics Study**

**(Perempuan di Media Massa
dalam *Under the Silver Lake* (2018):
Sebuah Studi Semiotika Saussure)**

Naura Fitri Amanda¹

Mia Fitria Agustina^{2*} 

Ririn Kurnia Trisnawati³ 

^{1,2,3}English Literature Department, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman

^{1,2,3}DR. Soeparno Street No. 60, Purwokerto 53122

^{1,2,3}Te1.: +62(281)625152

*Email: mia.agustina@unsoed.ac.id

Received: 6 October 2023

Revised: 13 July 2024

Published: 31 July 2024

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji penggambaran perempuan dalam media massa yang terdapat dalam film *Under the Silver Lake* (2018). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan teori semiotika Saussure untuk menganalisis karakter perempuan di media massa dalam film tersebut, khususnya penggambaran perempuan dalam media massa dan maknanya berdasarkan konsepsi sosial. Ada dua jenis media massa yang dianalisis dalam film tersebut: iklan cetak dan majalah. Yang pertama berfokus pada iklan cetak Tipalet tahun 1969, dan yang kedua dari majalah *Playboy* tahun 1970. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perempuan di media massa tidak sekadar digambarkan sebagai model atau figur untuk mempromosikan suatu produk, tetapi media massa juga cenderung menggambarkan mereka sebagai alat untuk menyebarkan gagasan yang mengobjektifikasi perempuan. Penggambaran perempuan di media massa sering kali terkesan mengobjektifikasi, mengeksploitasi, dan merendahkan. Perempuan-perempuan ini digambarkan dalam penampilan paling seksual dan tidak merepresentasikan mereka sebagai manusia yang setara. Penggambaran perempuan di media massa konvensional seperti ini merupakan representasi perempuan yang sangat merugikan dan tidak setara.

Kata kunci: iklan cetak, majalah, media massa, objektifikasi, perempuan

Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of women in the mass media in a movie *Under the Silver Lake* (2018). This study used a qualitative method and Saussure's semiotic theory to analyze women in the mass media in the movie, particularly on the connection between the portrayal of women and its meaning based on social conception. There are two types of mass media in the movie that are analyzed: print ads and magazines. The first focuses on the 1969 Tipalet print ads, and



the second is from the 1970 Playboy magazine. The findings indicate that women in mass media are not merely portrayed as models or figures to promote a product. Instead mass media is inclined to use their portrayal as a medium to promote the ideas of women objectification. The portrayal of women in those mass media; thus, they often appear objectified, exploited, and undervalued. They are depicted in their most sexual appearance, which does not account for them as equal human beings. Such portrayals of women in conventional mass media provide the most harmful and unequal representation of women.

Keywords: magazine, mass media, objectification, print ad, women

INTRODUCTION

Mass media, or modes of mass communication, have been one of the most effective forms of expression that sustain the field of film industrialism. It was one of the key features of the emerging modern world (McQuail 2010). Early in the twentieth century, the phrase *mass media* became more popular as broadcast technologies, which included radio and television, had such a grip on the American imagination that newspapers and other print media must adapt to the new media environment. Mass media is used mostly as a particular tool to disseminate information, opinions, and other forms of expression through modes such as newspapers, magazines, advertisements, radio, television broadcasts, film, and so on (McFadden 2016). It denoted that mass media has been recognized as a medium of communicating expression to a broad range of society using several formats that may develop mainly as the scale goes to a wider and more global population.

While the evolution of mankind may have created wide-reaching change in many of the systems and schemes of circulating information in societies, it is believed that the significance of mass media was considerably usable in contemporary society for several reasons, namely, the first reason for the substance of mass media is its capacity to reach the entire population rapidly and with much the same information; the second was to express opinions and propagate information; and the last one was the presumed relation to sources of power in society and the assumption of the great impact and influence they had to shape the social culture (McQuail 2010). Notwithstanding that *Under the Silver Lake* (2018) possesses the quality of being one of the devices to carry the function of mass media, the focus of this study was rather to look at the representation of women in the mass media portrayed within the movie.

Correspondingly, the representation of women in the media was prominent in *Under the Silver Lake* (2018). The mass media in the movie used numerous female characters to provide information and promote their ideas. While bringing women into popular mass media allows them to be seen in society, their depiction is frequently damaging rather than empowering. Women are frequently stereotyped and limited in the media. They are often depicted as sexual objects and are expected to conform to narrow beauty standards. This evident could be found in advertisements for beauty products, fashion, and other consumer goods, where women's bodies are often objectified and used to sell products (Gunter 2014). The media often portrays women as submissive, while men are dominant and powerful. Media like films, TV shows, and news reports often portray women as victims of violence, while men are seen as aggressors (Dill & Thill 2007).

Women's representation in the media also tends to be influenced by society's perceptions on them. According to studies, exposure to objectifying media can lead to unfavorable views about women, such as the notion that women are inferior to men and that they should be regarded

solely for their physical attractiveness (Gentile, Coyne, & Walsh 2010; Ward 2002). In such a manner, women's representation is greatly influenced by society. They are frequently misinterpreted and portrayed as stereotypical and objectified. As a result, the misrepresentation of women can contribute to prejudice and gender-based violence. Concerned with the preceding reasons, David Robert Mitchell, as the director of *Under the Silver Lake*, utilizes several mass media, such as print ads and magazines, in the movie, which are then employed to give certain information and influence beliefs from certain communities to a wider society.

Under the Silver Lake is an American neo-noir type of movie that is written, produced, and also directed by David Robert Mitchell. It is one of the A24 movies with a unique and cryptic storyline. The entire movie is unnerving and puzzling, and with its bizarre storyline filled with encrypted messages, it is instigating the people who watch it to take part in solving the mystery. The storyline itself revolves around a 33-year-old man named Sam (Andrew Garfield), who lives in an apartment in Silver Lake, Los Angeles. Sam was an out-of-work actor and full-time pop-culture enthusiast who lived aimlessly and without any earnings to pay his rent. Sam often spends his time creeping on his female neighbors while they are naked or wearing tight-fitting clothes, using binoculars on his dilapidated apartment balcony. Sam's purposeless life begins to escalate as a woman named Sarah (Riley Keough) moves in as his new neighbor. Sarah immediately became Sam's new object of infatuation and later allowed Sam to get more acquainted with her. However, all of a sudden, Sarah disappeared without a trace. The film tells on Sam's efforts to uncover the conspiracy behind Sarah's disappearance. Sam encounters some distorted reality about pop culture and the messages behind his discoveries of mass media, which, in their true nature, serve different purposes than what they appear to serve. Some of Sam's discoveries were how several forms of mass media, such as television, print ads, and magazines, can be a medium to influence the attitude of people and how they think of certain things, using icons and features as a representation of the desires of a particular group in society.

To understand what kind of women's interpretation in the mass media in *Under the Silver Lake*, it is conceivable to study them using semiotic theory. Semiotics studies the signal in human interactions through devices or symbols (Hasanah 2014). It is the study of meaning that offers a valuable perspective applicable to many fields, namely, that of seeing them as a signing process, as a production, and as the interpretation of meaning (Johansen & Larsen 2002). One of the pioneers from Western countries who made significant contributions to this theory was Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure's concept of semiotics was the two-dimensional system, the consensus or conventional system, and the networking relationship between the sign system and the arbitrary system (Yakin & Totu 2014). Saussure's signification theory is a *dyadic*, two-part model, defining a sign as composed of the *signified* as the idea being represented and the *signifier* as the word doing the representing (Chandler 2017). The theory focuses on the cognitive thought process in human minds, persuing on the structure of physical and abstract signs in their environments. It also addresses the structure of linguistic signs in the language system, which enable communication and human functioning (Yakin & Totu 2014). Saussure's semiotics theory suggests *signification* is the relationship between *signifier* and *signified*, with the *sign* being the whole result of association (Chandler 2017).

Moreover, the mass media in *Under the Silver Lake* have some features that are beguiling to study using Saussure's semiotic theory. The study explores the semiotic meanings of women in mass media, such as print ads and magazines. The women in those mass media will be identified using a *dyadic* or two-part model of signs, with the *signifier* (significant) as the form that the sign

takes and the *signified* (signifié) as the concept represents (Chandler 2007). A sign is the whole association of a *signifier* with a *signified*, resulting in a recognizable combination of the signifier and signified that conveys meaning to the viewer or reader (Saussure 1974). A *signifier* can be found in the word *open* that could stand for a different *signifier* if it were on a push-button inside a lift as ‘push to open door’ (Chandler 2007). Furthermore, the signifier is defined as the tangible (or physical) form of the sign, which may be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted. For Saussure, both the *signifier* and the *signified* were purely “psychological” (Saussure 1974). Both were forms rather than substances. Meanwhile, Saussure’s *signified* is not to be identified directly with a referent but is a concept in the mind, not a thing but the notion of a thing (Alisherovna 2023). Additionally, the women contained in the mass media in *Under the Silver Lake* are intended to be the sign that comprises *signifiers* and *signified*, the interpretation of each of which is more than the perceptible concept. They were profoundly associated with pop culture as they were the cases of American mass media. It has served to develop and feed mass crazes, rising celebrities, and pop cultural manias of all kinds in the United States for as long as it has existed (McFadden 2016).

The phenomenon has also been found in one study entitled “Saussure Semiotics of Animals in *Zootopia*” by Haris, Agustina, & Trisnawati (2021), in which the study revealed that *Zootopia* was not only an animated movie that utilized animals for mere entertainment and performance, but the characters also contained signs and meaningful features that later brought upon the idea that related with reality, and with the result of the study itself related to the stereotype of the character, which later got decimated by considering particular features of the character found in the film. Semiotic study was also found in the research entitled “Female Masculinity in Movies (Analysis Study of Semiotics in *Ocean’s 8* Movie)” by Demanty (2019). This study focuses on the understanding that the film contains several issues relating to female masculinity. Based on this research, the author wants to raise awareness about how femininity and masculinity are depicted in movies.

Other semiotic study can be found in Afidah, Agustina, & Trisnawati’s study entitled “Colorful God and Goddess as the representation of modern Greek mythology in *Lore Olympus*” (2022). Using Pierce’s semiotic theory, the study focuses on the representation or significance of colors in each of the characters in the webtoons *Lore Olympus*. The author discovered that the six characters in *Lore Olympus* had six colors, namely blue, pink, green, purple, yellow, and red, each with a general and unique connotation that was utilized to depict their characteristics. The research aimed to provide more insight into color as a factor that can affect human personality. The study revealed that each color of the gods and goddesses in *Lore of Olympus* had a different effect on each character’s emotions, feelings, and behavior, and the meanings of these colors subsequently defined each character’s personality. At last, the study “Making Meaning of Inanimate Objects as Characters in *The Blue Umbrella* (2013)” by Septiadi (2023) explores the deeper meaning of inanimate objects in the short film. The study uses Saussure’s semiotic theory to reveal the distinct and deeper meaning of the inanimate objects, such as black, blue, and red umbrellas. The black umbrellas are depicted as gloomy and depressing, representing the majority of office workers or members of sexual and gender groups. The red and blue umbrellas communicate a more diverse mood and dynamic movement, symbolizing members of sexual and gender minorities. The study reveals that inanimate characters can express emotion and essence while demonstrating the acceptance of being different from the majority. Accordingly, those previous studies can be a confirmation that film is not merely for pleasure and entertainment but for good measures that can lead to a bigger and wider comprehension of the issue and might expand the perspective of people who watch

it. Thus, this research will be oriented toward the purpose of revealing the connection between the mass media contained within *Under the Silver Lake* and their purpose in society, especially in terms of women.

The findings of this study will contribute most to the attempt to empower women and create change in the representation of women in today's mass media. In a general sense, mass media is a form of mass communication medium that may transmit ideas or messages to a large number of people. The media's messages affect culture, which dissolves into a collection of customs, norms, and principles unique to a community or institution (McFadden 2016). Culture and media impact one another in subtle and nuanced ways. Such misrepresentation, which alludes to discrimination, objectification, and humiliation of women, should not be tolerated continuously as a culture or set of values embedded in society. This research will hopefully raise public knowledge and understanding of how women are portrayed in mainstream mass media, allowing them to take urgent action against the producers, who are the organizations or companies responsible for producing such media, and raise more voices to stop them from continuing to produce any type of mass media that incorporates misrepresentation of women. Moreover, this study will encourage women readers to be more conscious of the misrepresentation or harmful depiction of them that they might find in any kind of mass media. Therefore, they would not easily be influenced by the misleading values or ideas of women in that mass media. Furthermore eventually, the producers of the mainstream product would have a better understanding of how harmful it would be to misrepresent women by inserting the figure of women in a way that supports objectification and degradation of women, and that way they could improve their form of advertising their product by picturing women more appropriately and following the eagerness of women's empowerment.

METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative method to conduct an in-depth understanding and produce a theoretical concept and thought of the movie. Qualitative research explains the meaning of phenomena involving human interaction from a researcher's perspective (Moleong 2017). Qualitative research involves the investigation and gathering of a wide range of empirical materials, including case studies, personal experiences, introspective life stories, interviews, and observational, historical, interactive, and visual texts that describe common and troubling events and meanings in people's lives (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). To provide context and insight for readers, qualitative work requires reflection both before and throughout the examination.

Furthermore, reflexivity involves reflecting on and articulating one's position and subjectivities (worldview, perspectives, and biases). By engaging in reflexivity, readers can understand the filters through which questions were addressed better. Then, data were gathered and analyzed, and findings were reported. It meant being aware of one's own beliefs, biases, and value judgments before, during, and after the actual research process (Jamieson, Govaart, & Pownall 2022). In contrast, reflection was often done retrospectively and typically leads to insights about details that were "missed" in the original research process (Jamieson, Govaart, & Pownall 2022). Finally, the study analyzed and compared the findings using much of the previous research to lay the groundwork for more accurate analysis in terms of supporting the investigating processes.

There were various procedures involved in processing the data from this study. To understand the entire storyline, the first step was to watch and rewatch the film *Under the Silver Lake*. The

second step was choosing which mass media and their elements were acceptable to examine. The third step was to examine the portrayal of women in the movie's selected mass media. The fourth step was to collect secondary data sources about semiotics, women, and other relevant material to support the analysis. The final step was to eliminate irrelevant data that was not required to improve this study.

After collecting all of the necessary data, this study explored the portrayal of women and how it related to society in two types of mass media in *Under the Silver Lake*. Then, based on Saussure semiotic theory, the analysis was focused on determining the meaning of women in the mass media, the representation of women in the mass media, the implied significance of the representation of women within the mass media in society, as well as the *signifier* and *signified*. Lastly, drawing the conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found that there were two kinds of mass media in *Under the Silver Lake* that can be analyzed through their representation of women. The mass media that was analyzed through this study comprised a print ad and a magazine. Each of the mass media outlets contained various findings related to the issue of women that was analyzed and addressed thoroughly. In investigating the meaning of each of the women in the mass media, the theory which was implemented was Saussure's semiotics. This theory was employed to establish an understanding of the sign of women in the mass media based on the *signifier* and the *signified*.

Print Ad: The Woman in Tipalet Print Ad

The first form of mass media that was examined and discussed thoroughly was print advertising. Advertising has become a crucial component in our information age, connecting individuals with all the most recent occurrences and phenomena in their surroundings. The presence of advertising is unavoidably felt all over the globe since it has already become embedded in social practices in all places. Some societal customs and beliefs may be represented in the art of advertising (Ayoola 2013; Ikaria-Maina 2014). The Latin word *advertise*, which means 'to turn to,' is the source of the English word *advertise*. Meanwhile, in the dictionary, *advertise* is defined as 'to give public notice or to announce publicly.' It is also thought that it came from the word *advertere*, which means 'to turn the mind towards.' According to Danesi (2015), the word *advertising* is a derivative of the Medieval Latin verb *advertere*, which means 'to focus one's attention on' an idea, product, or service by making an announcement verbally or in writing in public (Rehman et al. 2019). Advertising, as defined by the American Association of Marketing (AAM), refers to any paid presentation and promotion of concepts, goods, and services by a qualified sponsor. It is the art of creating a unique selling proposition that will appeal to the majority of consumers at the least possible expense (Kasali 1995). In this regard, a printed advertisement was a type of mass media that employed tangible items, such as pamphlets or posters, to convey messages or values to a large public.

In this study, the symbol and sign in the print advertisement was investigated primarily in one print advertisement from the film. The print advertising referred to was created by The Tipalet Cigarette Company and was first published in 1969 (SRITA 2021). Research indicates that sexual material in mainstream advertising has increased since the 1980s, driven by the notion that sex is more effective when it is startling and vivid (Capella et al. 2010). Furthermore, the cigarette brand uses women and men that are deemed to be smoking in amorous manner to promote their cigarettes because the representation itself was prompt to

be shown in the print advertisement below. This analysis employed Saussure's semiotics to investigate the meaning behind the women figure and relevant aspects included in the printed advertising, such as the woman characteristic and the man figure in terms of his influence on the woman figure. Saussure's semiotics was then attempted to reveal the more precise *signifier* and *signified* of those aspects, as well as how they correlate with the topic of gender, which was particularly concerning women.



Figure 1. 1969 Tipalet Print Ads

Based on Figure 1, it is apparent that the print advertisement uses women and men to be the models in their maneuver of promotion. The woman in the print ad appears to be an attractive woman who meets the conventional Western beauty standard. The woman is deemed to be embedded in the features that are desirable and adored in such a manner that it will conveniently capture the attention of most of Western society. The desirable features of the woman suggested by the tan skin, long and slightly wavy hair, a sharp-edged nose, a full rose lip, a pair of doe eyes, a pair of dense eyebrows, a lean face, tan-colored skin, and a pair of big breast. Another element that may imply signs is their dynamic or the manner of their interaction in the print ad. Each of the characters often demonstrated body language that contributes to and impacts one another, whether it is their body position, their facial expression, or even how they act toward one another. To illustrate, the woman appeared to occupy a larger proportion compared to the male counterpart in the poster. Her body was assumed to be more forward-facing; hence, her facial and body features were more exposed to the viewers. Moreover, the woman was portrayed to be smiling and showing a keen expression as the man blows smoke right into her face. The man, on the other hand, was portrayed intensely staring down at the woman in front of him with a confident look while blowing smoke from the cigarette that the company produces. The symmetrical arrangement between them is shown as unbalanced, as seen by the man standing higher and appearing to tower over the woman. Meanwhile, the woman is seen standing lower, or rather stooping and pressing forward, admiringly staring up at the man.

Using Saussure's semiotics, the woman can be considered a *signifier* that may have interpretations that correspondingly convey the *signified*. According to the figure, the woman is following the Western beauty. In line with that, a standard paper published by Harvard University stated that Western beauty ideals include being thin and tall, having long hair,

having light or tanned skin, having big breasts, large eyes, a small nose, and high cheekbones (Chen et al. 2020). In this regard, it can be perceived that the woman is more prominent by having a more proportionate appearance in the picture than the man, which may implicate how this print ad attempts to emphasize the representation of the beauty standard that existed at that time. It appears that the viewer can focus more on the woman for the woman's face is perceptible, making her features easier to observe and study. The poster suggests that such features perceived in the female figure's face or body were the ideal qualities that abounded at that time, which they must acquire for them to be desirable at that time, as indicated by how the man deemed to be looking at the woman's face with an attitude of being drawn and therefore seeking to entice the woman by his action of blowing smoke. The portrayal of the woman in the poster appeared to fit society's beauty standard, hence the company might possibly taken advantage of how easily it could grab society's attention to market its product. Therefore, the woman can be identified as the *signifier*, and the interpretation can be assumed that the woman matches the prevailing beauty standard and thus may influence the minds of other women in terms of how they are compelled to look.

Furthermore, the woman's attributes, such as her long hair and white clothing, might similarly imply societal implications. The woman's long hair could be suggested as the *signifier*, and the conception into which the features were brought was that they indicated femininity may occurred as the *signified*. According to experts, men are more attracted to women with long hair since they are perceived as more feminine. Certain Native American tribes believe that the source of their power and wisdom is concealed within their hair. According to this study, higher testosterone levels make men lose their hair more quickly and extensively than women. Thus, long hair has historically been connected to the traditional idea of femininity (Vujic 2023). **Moreover, a study suggest that long hair significantly enhanced the perceived femininity of female subjects, possibly because it concealed less desirable (masculine) facial features. (Mesko & Bereczkei 2004).** The conception implies that the woman was inclined to be depicted for the male-oriented convenience.

Meanwhile, the white clothing that the woman donned may also be considered a *signifier*. It is universally understood that a white item can be stained easily and must remain untouched for purity. This is why it has become a widespread practice for women to wear white on their wedding day. The white dress signifies not only physical purity, but also moral purity (Sherman & Clore 2009). The white color, which perceived as a sign of innocence, is suggested to be the *signifier*. For centuries, there has been this double standard that has been applied to women when it comes to sexual behavior. These standards cause women to be punished for sexual activity, whereas males are rewarded and encouraged to participate in numerous sexual scenarios (Paul 2014). Women are praised and glorified for their virginity, as they are considered to be pure and something to be protected. However, when they try to embrace their sexuality and lose their virginity or their image of purity, they tend to be humiliated for it. The purity movement is the current social movement that controls female sexuality. Celebrities are portrayed as "pure" in the media and popular culture as part of the purity movement, which makes virginity appear desirable (Valenti 2009). As a result, the "purity" that conceivably reinforced in the way women dressed in the magazine is a depiction of how women are frequently considered something valuable when they do not conduct any sexual enactment, which in this case can be suggested as sexism and double standards. It may implied that women's worth appears not to be determined by their decision to acknowledge their sexualities and bodies. Nevertheless, it seems that men are the ones to decide whether women are valuable

or not, based on a norm of purity that occurred to teach them that virginity is the entire thing about women's existence.

Moreover, the figures might also imply the objectification of women, especially in the case of heterosexual relationships. The print advertisement highlights their target audience by featuring two opposite-sex individuals who seem romantically or sexually attracted to each other, implying that they are, on what appears to be, a heterosexual pair. The American Psychological Association (2008) defines heterosexual sexual orientation as having an emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of the opposite sex. The print advertisement, which appeared as not utilizing a pair of women or men as the figures to carry out the promotion, is enacted as a model of a heterosexual relationship. The existence of the female and male figures in the image eventually designated as a *signifier*. They are considered to be the *signified*, serving as role models for heterosexual viewers, by demonstrating appropriate treatment of partners and interactions within a relationship. However, their interaction in the poster is perceived as depicting the heterosexual relationship from a male-centric perspective, suggesting that the connection between the pair primarily serves male interests and needs. According to Mille & McIlvenny (2000), traditional linguistics primarily focuses on men, is conducted by men, for men, and about men, with men's language practices as the invisible norm (Kimbrow 2013).

This may be evidenced by how they are depicted in the printed advertisement. In the case of the female figure, she is appeared to be compliant or showing no objection to the treatment that the man carried out on her, as evidenced by how her facial expression was constructed in a way that indicates acceptance, or rather, captivation. In addition to her facial expressions, her body posture was inclined forward, giving the appearance that she responded approvingly to his lead and accepted the man's action, which was conducted in such a manner that he believed could make her more obedient. Meanwhile, the man was carrying out the action of blowing smoke on the woman's face. While the action carried out by the man seemed to be demeaning, their scheme appear as something "normal" in a most heterosexual partner. The concept of how men are always more centered and ameliorated the most from heterosexual relationships has also correlated to hegemonic masculinity. The idea of hegemonic masculinity rose to prominence through the work of Connell (1987; 1995) and Connell & Messerschmidt (2005). According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity has become the most dominant and socially valued form of masculinity for men (McVittie, Hepworth, & Goodall 2017). Hegemonic masculinity is often regarded as "macho," assertive, aggressive, courageous, and stoic in the face of adversity, they also perpetuate the act of refusing emotions and disregarding any kind of vulnerability (McVittie, Hepworth, & Goodall 2017). In heterosexual relationships, hegemonic masculinity results in disproportionate power for men and subordination for women (Mkhize & Njawala 2016). Males are often viewed as the superior sex, especially in patriarchal discourse, while women are viewed as the "second [inferior] sex" (Beauvoir 2012). In consequence, males are frequently presented as protectors, providers, and superiors, whereas women are portrayed as submissive, inferior, and dependent, and hence as men's objects to possess (Mkhize & Njawala 2016).

Finally, their standing position may be epitomized as a *signifier*, and the *signifier* was depicted as having an imbalance of power. This idea comes from the fact that the man in this print ad seemed towering, gazing down at the woman as he blew the smoke right into her face. The woman was positioned below the man and thus let the man blow smoke without questioning if she was being disrespected or not. The core of patriarchal ideas is the privilege of power. It is a pattern of power conflicts when both sexes in a relationship are more concerned with being

strong, in control, and right, which prevents love from developing (Hooks 2000). When these power dynamics are at work, the desire for control is at the forefront of relational behavior. Hooks continues to describe these dynamics in her discussion by stating that partners are forced to decide between being “one-up or one-down” and that they are engaged in a “struggle for dominance” (Hooks 2000). Power imbalance is the phrase used to conceptualize the situation. In this regard, the “one-down” position is the relational dynamic where one is in a position of power over another, consequently creating mutual empowerment and genuine equality (Kimbrow 2008). It could be illustrated by their unbalanced standing position, which shows that the woman was more at below, and the man was shown more upward. This suggests the idea that women are depicted to be more submissive. According to the American Psychological Association (2018), submissiveness is the willingness to conform to the needs or commands of others. Despite that the man was acting impudently towards her, the woman seemed to be complying with the action. The action socializes the preservation of power disparities between men and women by encouraging women’s submission to men (Miller 1986). The figure shows how the woman is suggested to believe that she voluntarily submits to what the man does to her. In this context, believing that women submit voluntarily is sexist. It assumes a difference in nature between men and women, based on which women are inferior to men (Garcia 2021). The print ad, thus, suggested the idea that women are not supposed to react in a manner of defying or resisting the behavior that they receive from men. Eventually enforcing a harmful idea that it was normal for men to disrespect and objectify women in terms of being dominant and masculine.

Magazine: The Woman in *Playboy* Magazine

The second form of mass media that will be examined is the magazine. One of the earliest forms of media is the magazine, which is frequently regarded as the most successful media form to have ever existed (Holmes & Nice 2012). A magazine is part of a series, an ongoing project that gets published under a single banner. The interval between issues might be weekly, monthly, quarterly, annual, or irregular. Publishers depend on periodic publications to increase reader loyalty and ongoing sales because it helps them develop a lasting relationship with the magazine’s publications (Leslie 2009). It is one of the printed mass media that is read by millions of people. Moreover, magazine is also said to be a piece of content that is unique, specialized, regularly produced, has a consistent voice, was created by journalistic principles and ethical standards, has undergone a formalized editorial process, and tells an interesting story to a specific audience (Jain et al. 2017). A magazine is metered, edited, and designed with content intended to be periodically delivered to the reader in a date-stamped and permanent format (Renard 2008).

In this study, the symbol and sign in the magazine will be investigated solely in one magazine from the film, which is *Playboy*, founded in 1953 by Hugh Hefner, is frequently criticized for its portrayal of gender and sexuality. The magazine significantly influenced popular culture by bringing private, censored images into the public sphere and shaping modern masculinity with feminine traits. Feminist critiques are mixed, with some viewing posing for *Playboy* as empowering and others seeing it as reinforcing male-dominated sexuality. Studies show *Playboy* impacted young men’s sexual self-concept and encouraged integrating feminine attitudes into masculine identities, while visual analyses reveal it often reflects the male gaze and promotes the idea that women should focus on attracting and satisfying men (Regan, 2021).

The *Playboy* magazine that would be investigated in this study was from 1970. This research will also employ Saussure’s semiotics to investigate the significance behind the visual aspects

included in the magazine, mainly the female figure and her overall characteristics. Saussure's semiotics will then seek to expose the more exact *signifier* and *signified* of those visual characteristics, as well as how they link with the theme of gender, which is particularly relevant to women.

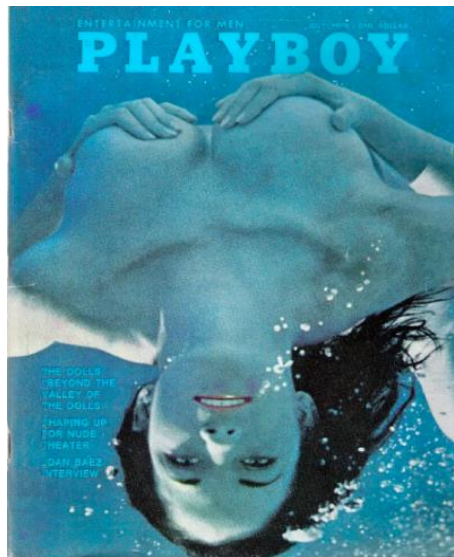


Figure 2. The 1970s Playboy Magazine

Figure 2 illustrates how the magazine only features one notable figure, who is a woman. The body of the woman was portrayed only in half proportion, which was depicted solely on her upper body, especially from her head to her breast. Although the magazine's headline and little elements are designed so that readers may read them in a straight line, the woman's body is rotated the opposite way. Her hair was hoisted up to her shoulder due to her head being pushed downward. The woman was portrayed as having bluish-pale skin and shoulder-length black hair. Her bluish and pale skin color correlates with how she was engulfed in water, for the water might have reflected the blue tinge to her body and thus made her skin appear to be bluish. Along with those features, the woman's eyes appear to be wide open, staring vacantly and fixedly at one spot; her mouth is slightly open; and her lips are pale but still tinged with pink. The woman's expression appears perplexed yet serene in the sense that she keeps her eyes wide open while her body shows no signs of being shocked, as if she were struck by some substance, but chooses to accept whatever she has to endure. The woman's hand placement was particularly striking since she was firmly gripping her breast and not signaling that she would use her hand to keep her balance or perform any type of swimming movement. Another noteworthy aspect of the woman in this magazine is that she is portrayed naked. While she is seen to be underwater, it is unclear whether she is swimming or drowning. People often swim while wearing a swimsuit; therefore, having this woman not wearing any clothes indicates that she was shown in a manner that goes beyond swimming.

Using Saussure's semiotics, the woman in this magazine is the *signifier*, and the mental concept in the *signifier* presented is addressed as *signified*. Based on the magazine, the woman was depicted as a major composition that filled almost the entire space of the magazine's cover. There are no additional figures to balance out the woman's presence, whether a man or another woman. It suggests how the magazine attempts to narrow the viewer's attention to the woman's appearance. Since the magazine was from *Playboy*, it added the implication that they profited off of women's appearances by having their market dominated by men.

According to Statista's statistics on the consumption of *Playboy* in the United States (2017), the audience of *Playboy* is dominated by men aged 18 and older. Therefore, the inclusion of women in this magazine was suggested to be predominantly consumed by men rather than women.

Moreover, how the woman was portrayed in half proportion also had the quality of being a *signifier*. The depiction of the woman's body merely represents her upper part, this could be perceived as dramatizing the whole occurrence that happened around those areas of her body, which is the woman grasping her breast. The magazine functioned as the mass media that directed how people would view this part of women's bodies. Women often get sexualized for their breasts. In modern Western societies, women's breasts are mainly regarded as symbols of femininity and objects of sexual desire, even though they are not scientifically considered sexual organs. Unlike reproductive organs, breasts do not play a role in reproduction. This tendency to objectify and sexualize breasts has made them the most displayed, flaunted, measured, scrutinized, augmented, and sexted part of the female body (Sharik 2020). Rather than seeing them as a place where newborns can nurse, viewers are supposed to see them as shameful, sexual, huge, upright, and only existing for the pleasure of men.

Another *signifier* that may be identified from the visual components is that the woman was holding her breast, and thus the interpretation of the occurrence was *signified*. The way the woman holds her breast might indicate that she is relaxed. It is also known that when the hand meets the breast, it stimulates nerves that trigger the brain's pituitary gland to release oxytocin, a feel-good hormone associated with snuggling and such (Lardiere 2019). The concept may suggest that the woman depicted in the print advertisement is experiencing a moment of relaxation, characterized by actions associated with comfort. This comfort is akin to the interactions observed between mothers and infants during nursing, as well as between couples during sexual intimacy, both of which involve breast stimulation and touching that trigger the release of oxytocin (Uvnäs-Moberg, Handlin, & Petersson 2015). Nevertheless, the argument is flawed as it equates the context of breastfeeding and sexual intimacy with the woman in a print ad promoting a product, which are two completely different situations. In this regard, the figure was portrayed to grasp her breast in the middle of submerging in the water. The circumstances in which the woman was situated is presumed to not demonstrate securement for the woman to conduct such activities. Instead, the representation in the figure appears to emphasize how the woman gets aroused by her hand gripping her breast, without deliberately considering her condition being drowned underwater. It implies that the woman's conduct was stressed as an entity that can be seen sexually by the targeted viewers, who are men. This conception consequently suggests the objectification of women. Especially in a way that does not portray women's experiences with bodily functions as a humane and appropriate manifestation of human activities.

Moreover, the water that surrounds the woman can be recognized as a *signifier*. Water is an ancient form of movement, and crossing any body of water was typically considered a change in consciousness or even an initiation. It is frequently associated with dew, rain, seas, oceans, rivers, lakes, ponds, ice, and many other forms. The sea, viewed as the primal source of life in many cultures—formless, unlimited, inexhaustible, and full of possibilities—is a maternal image that also signifies transformation and rebirth (Kraus 2017). In a general sense, water embodies rich purposes and is one of the most substantial components in this world.

Meanwhile, deep water, wide oceans, seas, and large lakes symbolize the collective unconscious, and smaller volumes of water symbolize the personal unconscious (Arikan 2014). In a *Dictionary of Symbols*, the ocean symbolizes the collective unconscious, where the sun of the spirit emerges. Meanwhile, the stormy sea symbolizes a deep experience in the affective unconscious, and the translucent calm represents reflective tranquility (Cirlot 1971). In this sense, the water surrounding the woman implies that she is fully submerged, but she does not strive to assist herself, allowing herself to be unconscious or calmly consenting to the present situation that she must endure. She has no feelings of rejection or objections to her circumstances, whether she appears uncovered or not, or that she is in a dangerous situation that might lead to her death if she does not strive to balance her body in water. It suggests how the woman could be subjugated, or rather, consenting, to the belief that she only serves as a sexual object for men.

The last *signifier* of this figure was how the woman was portrayed naked, correspondingly creating the mental conception that was suggested as a signifier. The woman was depicted submerged in her naked body, deep underwater. Nevertheless, the woman's situation could hardly be described as a typical act of swimming. Sometimes people swim with clothes on, and the reasons for this are for protection from sunburn or religious aspects. In countries with colder climates, water temperatures in outdoor water settings can create limitations for swimming. There can be a close relationship between swimwear and these two factors (Potapova 2015). It implies that, while people do wear swimsuits or other swim equipment when they are underwater, the magazine chooses not to depict the woman wearing a swimsuit to protect her body. The portrayal eventually suggests that the magazine does not regard the woman's action of swimming as what a typical person would do. They tend to see women's behaviors as sexual rather than ordinary and everyday. This implies that the magazine does not attribute what women do suitably in terms of them doing the activity equivalent to how men would behave. Instead of depicting the women in a way that emphasizes the conduct as an activity that represents hobby, profession, or in other words, ordinary, their actions might be perceived more as an object to men's sexual fantasies.

CONCLUSION

Under the Silver Lake (2018) is an American neo-noir type of movie that contains mass media in its way of conveying a message to the audience. Two types of mass media were employed in the movie, and each of them has its own function in delivering messages. The mass media, which were print ads and magazines, used Saussure's semiotics. The *signifier* of both figures consisted of women and other relevant objects, while the *signified* could be observed by researchers through the analysis. The significant aspect that the findings have in common is the depiction of women. In the print advertising, the position of the woman and man shows a inequality of power. This is because the man in this print ad seemed gazing down at the woman blowing his cigarette. Besides, the statement on ads highlight, one more time, that the woman has no choice but to follow the man. In the magazine, the woman's action is perceived likely to be an object to men's sexual fantasies. The women often becomes a media for men's fantasy. This conception consequently suggests the objectification of women.

Therefore, according to the findings in both figures, it denotes that women in mass media are not merely portrayed as models or figures to promote a product, rather mass media are inclined to use their portrayal as a medium to promote the ideas of women objectification. Moreover, mass media often portrays women in a way that objectifies them, where they are seen to be exploited in their most sexual appearance and do not account for them as equal

human beings. The discernment of how women seem in the gaze of society stems from the patriarchal system that is established in society, in which women still appear to be lower than men in their position in society as a whole. Such portrayals of women provide the most harmful and unequal representation of women in the conventional mass media. Therefore, this study hopefully contributes to future research that wants to study about how women are represented in mass media, as well as to empower women and create change in how women are depicted in today's mass media.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to extend the gratitude to Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat Universitas Jenderal Soedirman for funding this research of Riset Dasar Unsoed (RDU) under the contract number 1218/UN23/PT.01.02/2023 and 27.169/UN23.37/PT.01.03/II/2023.

REFERENCES

- Afidah, A., M. F. Agustina, & R. K. Trisnawati, R. K. 2022. "Colorful God and Goddess as the Representation of Modern Greek Mythology in Lore Olympus." *Diksi* 30 (2), 160–169. DOI: 10.21831/diksi.v30i2.49223.
- Alisherovna, S. N. 2023. "The Models of Signs and the Process of Semiosis." *PEDAGOGS International Research Journal* 34 (3), 28–34.
- American Psychological Association. 2008. "Understanding Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality." *American Psychological Association*, <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation>, October 29.
- . 2018. "Submissiveness." In *APA Dictionary*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association Publishing.
- Arikan, S. 2014. "Salvation or Catastrophe: Symbolism Of Water in Literature/Kurtuluş Ya Da Felaket: Edebîyatta Su Sembolizmi." *Turkish Studies, International Periodical for the Language, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic* 9 (9), 207–216. DOI: 10.7827/TurkishStudies.7071.
- Ayoola M. O. 2013. "An Interpersonal Metafunction Analysis of Some Selected Political Advertisements in Some Nigerian Newspapers." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3 (8), 165–178.
- Beauvoir, S. de. 2012. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Capella, M. L., R. P. Hill, J. M. Rapp, & J. Kees. 2010. "The Impact of Violence Against Women in Advertisements." *Journal of Advertising* 39 (4), 37–52. DOI: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367390403.
- Chandler, Daniel. 2007. *Semiotics, The Basics*. New York: Routledge
- . 2017. *Semiotics: The Basics*. London: Routledge.
- Chen, T., L. Kristina, D. Lorenzana, N. Shahzad, & R. Wong. 2020. "Occidentalisation of

- Beauty Standards: Eurocentrism in Asia.” *International Socioeconomics Laboratory* 1 (2), 1–11. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4325856.
- Cirlot, J. E. 1971. *A Dictionary of Symbols*, translated by. Jack Sage). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & society*, 19(6), 829-859.
- Demanty, H. Z. 2019. “Female Masculinity in Movie: Analysis Study of Semiotics in. Ocean’s 8 Movie.” Bachelor Thesis. Surakarta: Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. <http://eprints.ums.ac.id/id/eprint/78504>.
- Denzin, N. K. & Y. S. Lincoln. (2005). “Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research. In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dill, K. E. & K. P. Thill, K. P. 2007. “Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People’s Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions.” *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 57 (11–12), 851–864. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-007-9278-1.
- Garcia, M. 2021. *We Are Not Born Submissive: How Patriarchy Shapes Women’s Lives*. Princeton University Press. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctv16rdchd.
- Gentile, D. A., S. Coyne, & D. A. Walsh, D. A. 2010. “Media Violence, Physical Aggression, and Relational Aggression in School-Age Children: A Short-Term Longitudinal Study.” *Aggressive Behavior* 37 (2), 193–206. DOI: 10.1002/ab.20380.
- Gunter, B. 2014. *Media Sexploitation*. Routledge.
- Haris, K. N., M. F. Agustina, & R. K. Trisnawati. 2021. “Saussure Semiotic of Animals in *Zootopia* (2016).” *Leksika* 15 (2), 77–83. DOI: 10.30595/lks.v15i2.10713.
- Hasanah, H. U. 2014). A Study of Signs: The Political Advertisements in Presidential Election Campaign of Indonesia 2014 Based on the Peirce’s Theory. *OKARA: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra* 8 (1), 1–14. DOI: 10.19105/ojbs.v8i1.452.
- Holmes, T. & L. Nice. 2012. *Magazine Journalism*. SAGE Publications Ltd. DOI: 10.4135/9781446288597.
- Hooks, B. 2000. *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Ikaria-Maina, N. 2014. “Discourse of Advertising: Reference to Kiswahili and English Adverts in Kenyan Media.” *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 3 (11), 1562–1568.
- Jain, P., Miller, G., Staub, C., & Lerner, K. (2017). What is Magazine Media? Expanding the Scope of Magazine Research. *the Journal of Magazine Media*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmm.2017.0003>

- Jamieson, M. K., G. H. Govaart, & M. Pownall. 2022. "Reflexivity in Quantitative Research: a Rationale and Beginner's Guide." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 17 (3). DOI: 10.31234/osf.io/xvrhm.
- Johansen, J. D. & S. E. Larsen. 2002. *Sign In Use: An Introduction to Semiotics*. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
- Kasali, R. 1995. *Manajemen Periklanan*. Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti.
- Kimbro, W. 2013. "He's Just a Man: Power Imbalance Between Female and Male Characters in American Sitcoms." *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal* 7 (1). DOI: 10.15760/mcnair.2013.44.
- Kraus, M. 2017. "Contact With Water," <https://www.mariankrausphotography.com/2017/06/26/meaning-of-water/>, June 26.
- Lardiere, M. 2019. "Here's Why Holding Your Own Boob Is the Best Thing Ever." *Cosmopolitan*, <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/health-fitness/a29444654/why-do-i-hold-my-own-boob/>, October 28.
- Lerner, Kevin. 2017. "What is Magazine Media? Expanding the Scope of Magazine Research." *Journal of Magazine Media* 18 (1), 1–26. DOI: 10.1353/jmm.2017.0003.
- Leslie, J. 2009. "The Lack of Surprise in Mainstream Titles." *Creative Review*, <http://longshotmag.com/>.
- McFadden, J. B. 2016. "Understanding Media and Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication." <https://www.palomar.edu/users/lpayn/115/GC115-Understanding-Media-and-Culture-An-Introduction-to-Mass-Communication.pdf>.
- McQuail, D. 2012. "The Influence and Effects of Mass Media." <https://www.csub.edu/~mault/the%20influence%20and%20effects%20o.pdf>.
- Mcvittie, C., Hepworth, J., & Goodall, K. 2017. "Masculinities and Health: Whose Identities, Whose Constructions?" In *The Psychology of Gender and Health*. DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-12-803864-2.00004-3.
- Mesko, N., & Bereczkei, T. 2004. "Hairstyle as an adaptive means of displaying phenotypic quality". *Human Nature*, 15, 251-270.
- Mille, K. W. & P. McIlvenny. 2000. "Gender and Spoken Interaction: A Survey of Feminist Theories and Sociolinguistic Research in the United States and Britain." In *Kieli, Diskurssi & Yhteisö [Language, Discourse and Community]*, edited by K. Sajavaara & A. Piirainen-Marsh. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University Press. https://www.academia.edu/3187323/Gender_and_Spoken_Interaction_A_Survey_of_Feminist_Theories_and_Sociolinguistic_Research_in_the_United_States_and_Britain.
- Miller, J. B. 1986. *Toward a New Psychology of Women*. Boston: Beacon.

- Mkhize, G. & L. Njawala. 2016. "Rethinking Hegemonic Masculinity and Patriarchal Privilege Within Heterosexual Interpersonal Relationships." *The Oriental Anthropologist* 16 (2), 379–397. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0976343020160211>.
- Moleong, L. J. 2017. *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Paul, A. 2014. "The Negative Implications of the Purity Movement on Young Women." *The Review: A Journal of Undergraduate Student Research* 15, 9–18.
- Potapova, J. 2015. "Swimming is Life Reducing Drowning Risk for Children." <http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/7863088>.
- Regan, H. 2021. "Playboy and pornification: 65 years of the playboy centerfold". *Sexuality & Culture*, 25(3), 1058-1075.
- Rehman, F., Javed, F., Yusoff, R. M., Harun, A., Khan, A., & Ismail, F. (2019). What is advertising? A short review of historical development. *Academic Research International*, 10(4).
- Renard, D. 2008. "The Definition of a Print and Digital Magazine," http://issuu.com/mediaideas/docs/definition_of_a_magazine.
- Saussure, F. de. 1974. *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by Wade Baskin. London: Fontana/Collins.
- Saptiadi, N. A. P., M. F. Agustina, & R. K. Trisnawati. 2023. "Making Meaning of Inanimate Objects as Characters in *The Blue Umbrella* (2013)." *Mozaik Humaniora* 23 (1), 140–149. DOI: 10.20473/mozaik.v21i1.40313.
- Sharik, L. 2020. Breasts: In *Demeter Press eBooks* (pp. 33–42). <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxhrj3z.4>
- Sherman, G. D. & G. L. Clore. 2009. "The Color of Sin: White and Black Are Perceptual Symbols of Moral Purity and Pollution." *Psychological Science* 20 (8), 1019–1025. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02403.x.
- SRITA. 2021. Objectifying Women Tipalet Cigarette. <https://tobacco.stanford.edu/cigarette/img0742/>
- Statista. 2017. "Have You Ever Read An Article From Playboy Magazine? Playboy Consumption in the U. S. 2017, by Gender," <https://www.statista.com/statistics/758296/playboy-readership-gender/>.
- Uvnäs-Moberg, K., L. Handlin, & M. Petersson. 2014. "Self-Soothing Behaviors with Particular Reference to Oxytocin Release Induced by Non-Noxious Sensory Stimulation." *Frontiers in Psychology* 5. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01529.
- Valenti, J. 2009. *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women*. Berkeley, CA. Seal Press.

- Vujic, T. 2023. March 28. "Is Long Hair Truly a Prerequisite for Femininity?" *Fashion is Psychology*, <https://fashionispsychology.com/is-long-hair-truly-a-prerequisite-for-femininity/>, March 28.
- Ward, L. M. 2002. "Does Television Exposure Affect Emerging Adults' Attitudes and Assumptions about Sexual Relationships? Correlational and Experimental Confirmation." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 31 (1), 1–15.