

REPRESENTATION OF SEX EDUCATION IN THE FILM CULTURE SHOCK (ROLAND BARTHES' SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS)

Mohammad Sholikhin^{1*}

¹Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia

*Email Correspondence: solikinsangdewa2@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of sex education in the film Culture Shock using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach which includes three levels of analysis: denotation, connotation, and myth. The development of digital communication technology has changed the way people access and receive information, including in terms of sex education. Film as an audio-visual media has the power to convey messages implicitly and persuasively, including sensitive issues such as sexuality. The study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method through non-participatory observation and documentation of scenes that are in accordance with the research. The results of the analysis show that this film represents sex education through visual symbols that have multiple meanings. At the denotation level, scenes such as physical closeness of teenagers, giving romantic gifts, using contraceptives, and the emergence of sexual aids appear as everyday events. However, at the connotation level, these symbols contain implicit meanings about sexual experimentation, searching for identity, and the normalization of adolescent sexual behavior. These two layers of meaning then form a myth that depicts sex education as something implicit, experienced personally, but still surrounded by social taboos. Thus, this film can be an effective alternative media in encouraging awareness and discussion about sex education, especially among teenagers.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of communication technology is accelerating in line with the advancement of the current digital era. The transformations that have occurred have marked a new milestone, with results that are able to keep pace with the dynamics of the times. One form of this progress is the emergence of various communication tools or media for conveying ideas, messages, and concepts. Communication media itself functions as an intermediary (Firdaus et al., 2025), facilitating the process of conveying messages so that they are received by the wider community. According to the Association of Education and Communication Technology (AECT), media are various types of intermediaries used by individuals to convey information or messages (PERCY, 2024).

The diversity of communication media today has become one of the most effective ways to shape individuals' views and behaviors. Every message conveyed through technological media generally has a persuasive purpose that can influence and change individual attitudes (Pratiwi & Hidayat, 2020). Based on their form, communication media are categorized into three: audio communication media, visual communication media, and audio-visual communication media (Yuwono et al., 2015). In this study, the researchers chose to focus on one of these types of communication media: audio-visual communication media in the form of film.

A film is a series of moving images projected onto a screen, creating the illusion of continuous movement (Pagarra et al., 2022). More than just a collection of visuals, film is a powerful artistic medium for storytelling, conveying emotions, ideas, and human experiences. In today's digital age, the use of film as a means of conveying messages or learning is considered highly effective. One reason is the low public interest in information literacy presented through print media, resulting in print media losing out to audiovisual media (Akbar, 2018). Film itself is considered a mass medium with greater influence than other media because it can have a strong psychological impact on shaping public opinion and character. The film "Culture Shock" is a cinematic artifact that centrally addresses the phenomenon of culture shock. As an object of study, this film can be defined as a multidimensional cultural text that presents a visual narrative representation of the experiences of individuals or groups interacting with a foreign cultural environment that is significantly different from their culture of origin. More than mere entertainment, this film serves as a semiotic arena where meanings related to social adaptation, identity conflicts, cultural stereotypes, and the dynamics of intercultural interactions are constructed and negotiated. In the context of this research, the focus will be on how the film "Culture Shock" specifically represents sex education. According to Indrawati et al. (2024), sex education, often a sensitive and varied topic across cultures, is a crucial element in the formation of individual identity and behavior. Through the lens of Roland Barthes's semiotics, this research will unpack the layers of meaning contained within this representation.

Barthes, with his concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, offers a powerful analytical framework for understanding how this film constructs and conveys messages about sex education (Haq, 2023). Denotation will reveal what the film literally depicts regarding sex education, such as dialogue, visuals, or symbols directly related to this topic. However, deeper and ideological meanings will be discovered through connotation, namely the cultural, emotional, and ideological associations attached to these denotations. For example, the way characters talk about sex, or their reactions to sexual information, will evoke connotations about societal views on sexuality.

Furthermore, this analysis will explore the myths that the film "Culture Shock" may construct or perpetuate around sex education. According to (Rifiansyah, 2020), myths are systems of connotations that have become naturalized, becoming "truths" that are accepted without question. The film may reinforce myths that sex education is taboo, should only be discussed implicitly, or even dangerous. Conversely, the film can also challenge existing myths, presenting a more open or critical view of how sex education is delivered or understood in various cultures. Thus, a semiotic analysis of Roland Barthes will enable us not only to identify representations of sex education in the film "Culture Shock" but also to understand how these representations function as tools for shaping meaning and ideology related to sexuality in a cross-cultural context. This research will identify signs that represent sex education, from the denotative level to the actual level.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to provide an in-depth and detailed overview of the phenomenon under study. According to Mappasere & Suyuti (2019), descriptive qualitative methods aim to explore theories. The purpose of this

descriptive qualitative research is to explain data clearly, systematically, and in detail to answer the research questions. The method applied in this research is Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, which encompasses three main elements: denotative meaning (literal meaning), connotative meaning (interpretation of denotative meaning containing implied messages), and myth (a combination of connotative meaning and cultural context) (Azzahra et al., 2025). The subjects of this research are the characters in the film "Culture Shock," while the objects of this research are signs or symbols related to sex education that appear in the scenes, dialogue, and characters in the film. This object selection is based on the representation of the impact of a lack of sex education on adolescents and the role of communication between parents and children in sex education as depicted in the film.

During the data collection process, the researcher used several techniques to enrich and support the research findings. The techniques used include non-participatory observation by observing symbols and signs in the film, a literature study of the film *Culture Shock*. In addition, documentation in the form of taking screenshots of film scenes was carried out for in-depth analysis. This approach is in accordance with the principles of communication science that researchers learned during the study period, especially in the field of advertising that emphasizes the aspect of persuasion, which is also an important part of the message conveyed by the film to its audience. Data collection techniques used for this study, namely: Observation, Documentation, and Literature Study.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following are the results and discussion of data findings related to the representation of sex education in the film *Culture Shock*. Figure 1 Episode 1, Minute 11:04.

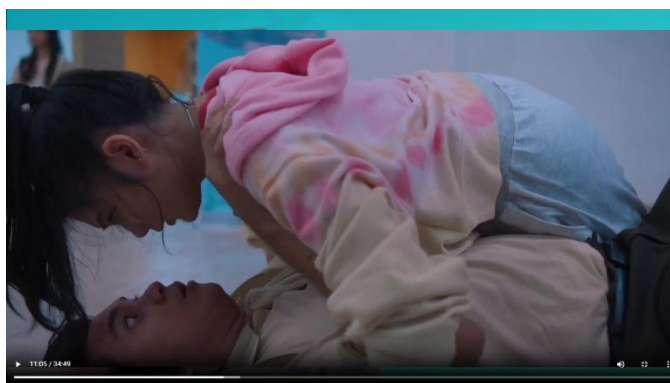


Figure 1. Scene of Riko and Sabrina embracing

This scene takes place in a closed room away from adult supervision, creating an intimate and relaxed atmosphere filled only by two teenagers engaged in a private moment. This quiet and isolated room seems to provide a safe and secret space for them to express their feelings, experiment with physical intimacy, and explore their growing emotions. The absence of other people in the room not only symbolizes freedom but also emphasizes vulnerability, as both are still in the process of discovering their identities (Jannah & Firdaus, 2025). Thus, this private situation demonstrates how personal space is often a place where teenagers learn to understand their boundaries, channel their curiosity, and discover the meaning of emotional and physical closeness in a relationship.

- a. Denotative Meaning: The image shows a teenage girl and boy in a very close position. The girl is on top of the boy's body, who is lying on the floor. They gaze into each other's eyes from a close distance. This scene takes place in a relaxed atmosphere indoors, suggesting a physical interaction without other people around them.
- b. Connotative Meaning: This position indicates a fairly intense physical and emotional closeness between the two. The eye contact and physical contact suggest a romantic moment, but also create tension because both are still teenagers. This situation illustrates the exploration of emotions and attraction between the opposite sex, which can create a dilemma between curiosity and social boundaries. Their presence without adult supervision also reinforces both a sense of freedom and vulnerability.
- c. Myth: In popular culture, scenes like this are often interpreted as a romantic and normal expression of love among teenagers. However, this can also reinforce the myth that physical intimacy is a way to show affection (Setyalisti et al., 2022). Many teenagers may believe that such actions are normal in relationships. However, without proper understanding of sex education, this can lead to risks and misperceptions about relationships and consent in physical interactions. Figure 2. Episode 1, Minute 11:49.

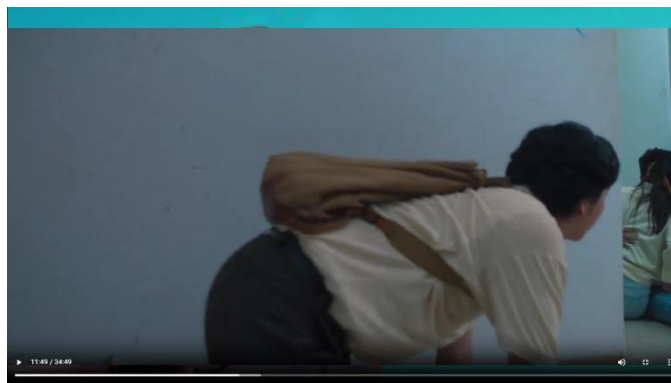


Figure 2. kissing scene between two teenagers in the corner of the room

This scene takes place in a closed room, with the presence of a mirror reflection emphasizing the sense of "secrecy," a situation often experienced by teenagers in intimate relationships. Intimacy is not displayed openly, but rather hidden from public view, as if there is a boundary that must not be crossed in the wider social space. The presence of the mirror as a reflection conveys symbolic meaning: the relationship can only be seen indirectly, hidden behind shadows, and not to be publicly displayed. This reflects the dilemma often faced by teenagers: on the one hand, there is a strong urge to express affection and physical closeness, but on the other, fear, guilt, or a desire to protect the relationship from the judgment of others (Jannah & Firdaus, 2025). Thus, the closed room and the mirror reflection in this scene are not merely visual backdrops, but symbols of secrecy, prohibition, and the search for a safe space for teenagers to experience love privately.

- a. Denotative Meaning: The image shows a teenage boy peeking into the corner of the room where a couple is kissing. The reflection in the mirror clearly shows a teenage girl and boy sitting facing each other, kissing and embracing. The scene takes place in a seemingly quiet and enclosed room.

- b. **Connotative Meaning:** This scene depicts a private physical interaction between two teenagers. The hug and kiss in a hidden location symbolize a relationship that is beginning to enter a more intimate stage. It also indicates a need for privacy as well as strong emotional and physical urges. The angle of the shot, through the mirror reflection, suggests that this moment is something they do not want to reveal publicly, suggesting an element of secrecy or guilt.
- c. **Myth:** This scene reflects the myth prevalent among teenagers that hiding a relationship or showing love through physical contact is normal. In the media, kissing is often associated as proof of true love (Khaerani, 2025). However, without a proper understanding of boundaries, healthy relationships, and the importance of consent, scenes like this can reinforce the misconception that teenage love always requires physical intimacy. This demonstrates the importance of sex education for teenagers in understanding the meaning of relationships, not only from a romantic perspective but also from a responsible and ethical perspective. Figure 3. Episode 5, Minute 19:56.



Figure 3. giving a gift in the form of a necklace with the initials "M"

This scene depicts a typical teenage romance, depicted through the gift of an emotionally valuable object as a symbol of love and care. The heart-shaped box containing a necklace with a specific initial is not simply a gift, but rather a representation of feelings that are intended to be immortalized in physical form. The dramatic presence of blue lighting further emphasizes the sacredness of the moment, as if the gift-giving were an important ritual marking a special bond between the two characters. The lighting creates a powerful emotional atmosphere, making the gift not only material but also deeply symbolic. For teenagers, moments like this often mark important milestones in a relationship, when feelings are expressed not through long words, but through simple, meaningful symbols. Thus, this scene demonstrates how popular culture constructs teenage love as something sweet, full of symbolism, and worthy of being demonstrated through the gift of an object deemed capable of representing the depth of feeling.

- a. **Denotative Meaning:** The image shows a red heart-shaped box being opened by someone. Inside is a necklace with an "M" pendant illuminated by blue light from within the box. This scene depicts a gift-giving moment that seems special and romantic.
- b. **Connotative Meaning:** A necklace with the initials "M" in a heart-shaped box signifies a person's attention and affection for their loved one. This type of gift-giving is often associated with important moments in teenage relationships, such as confessions of love

or declarations of seriousness. The blue light adds drama and heightens the emotional atmosphere of the moment, reinforcing the necklace's symbolic meaning as a sign of ownership or commitment.

- c. Myth: Gift-giving jewelry, especially in teenage relationships, is often seen as a symbol of true love and a form of emotional bonding. In popular culture, this act reinforces the myth that love must be demonstrated with valuable objects or items. This necklace, with initials, also signifies that one "belongs" to their partner, which can foster the perception that love is closely linked to ownership. However, in healthy sex education, love should be built on mutual trust and respect, not solely on symbols of physical possession. Figure 4. Episode 6, Minute 14:19.

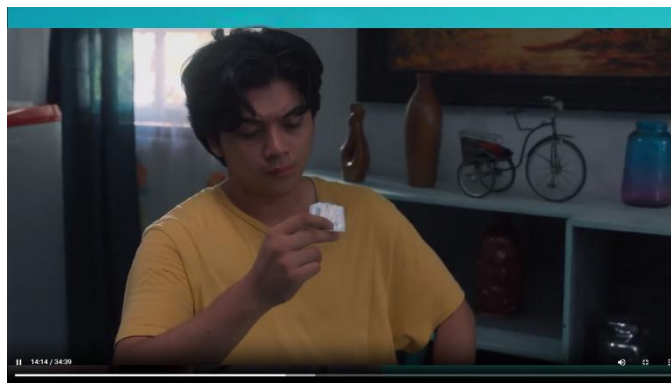


Figure 4. teenage boy holding a condom

This scene takes place inside a home, a space typically associated with comfort and intimacy, but in this context, it displays a reflective, doubtful atmosphere. A teenage boy is depicted sitting, looking at a condom in his hand, with a serious and thoughtful expression. His body language and gaze convey a sense of hesitation, reflecting the inner conflict often experienced by teenagers when confronted with issues of sexuality. On the one hand, the presence of a condom symbolizes knowledge and preparedness for the possibility of sexual intercourse, but on the other hand, it evokes fear, guilt, or doubt about whether the decision is the right one. This situation emphasizes that sexuality for teenagers is not only biological but also involves emotional, social, and moral issues fraught with dilemmas. With the calm setting of the home, the contrast between the intimacy of personal space and the character's inner turmoil further emphasizes that sex education encompasses more than just technical information, but also a learning process for self-understanding, boundaries, and the responsibilities that accompany each choice.

- a. Denotative Meaning: The image shows a teenage boy sitting and looking at an object in his hand. The object appears to be a condom in a package. Her facial expression is serious and thoughtful. The background shows a tidy room, with natural light from the window.
- b. Connotation: This scene indicates a moment of reflection or serious consideration regarding a sexual decision. The character's expression suggests she is thinking, perhaps considering whether to use or keep the condom. This suggests that sexual intercourse is no longer unfamiliar to teenagers, but remains shrouded in doubt, curiosity, or fear. This image also implies that issues of sexuality are beginning to become part of teenagers' daily lives, both directly and indirectly.

- c. Myth: In popular culture and society at large, carrying or handling a condom is often associated with maturity or readiness for sexual intercourse. On the other hand, there is also a growing myth that discussing or carrying condoms is taboo or shameful. This scene highlights the importance of sex education that goes beyond contraceptives and emphasizes the value of responsibility, understanding the risks, and the importance of making informed decisions. Such education is crucial so that teenagers not only know "what a condom is," but also understand when, why, and how to make healthy and safe decisions. Figure 5. Episode 7, Minute 5:56.



Figure 5. Strawberry Lubricant Scene Analysis

This scene can be considered quite daring because it explicitly depicts a sexual product, something that is usually rare in films dealing with teenage life. A tube of lubricant labeled "Strawberry Lubricant" is prominently displayed in striking, bright red packaging. This color, combined with the strawberry-flavored label, creates a cheerful, lighthearted, and even playful impression, thus obscuring its true function as a sexual aid. With this packaging, the lubricant, which should be viewed seriously, appears friendly, accessible, and seemingly non-taboo, even as if it were on par with everyday products familiar to teenagers. The presence of this product in the storyline demonstrates the film's courage in addressing the issue of sexuality explicitly, while still being packaged in light visual language to avoid appearing frightening or vulgar. This reflects how media can subtly normalize sexual symbols, allowing audiences, especially teenagers, to accept them without feeling alienated, even though they often convey important messages about health, understanding, and responsibility.

- a. Denotative Meaning: The image shows a person holding a tube of lubricant labeled "Strawberry Lubricant" and bright red packaging. The hand holding the packaging is in focus, and the subtitles that appear read "STRUBBISH LUBRICANT." This object is clearly a lubricant product commonly used for sexual purposes.
- b. Connotative Meaning: The lubricant in this scene demonstrates the film's bold depiction of sexual aids explicitly, despite its packaging in a playful and lighthearted color and design. The use of strawberry flavoring creates a "teen-friendly" or non-scary impression, thus disguising the product's true function. This suggests that sexual exploration has entered the narrative of adolescent life in the film, and sexual aids are beginning to be seen as part of "normal" or "casual" sexual activity, even though this still requires understanding and responsibility.

- c. Myth: The myth constructed through this scene is that using lubricants is a common part of sexual activity, and can even be fun and lighthearted (Nugraha & OG, 2024). The film removes the taboo surrounding sexual products and makes them part of adolescent exploration. However, this can also create an unbalanced perception if not accompanied by proper education. Lubricants are not simply a "replacement" in relationships; they also involve aspects of health, consent, and understanding of their function, which should be addressed in sex education. This type of communication needs to be addressed critically so that adolescents are not only exposed to information but also equipped with healthy and responsible knowledge. Figure 6 Episode 8, Minute 34:40



Figure 6. teenagers walking together holding hands

This scene takes place on a quiet street in the afternoon, when the sunlight creates a warm and peaceful atmosphere. A teenage couple is seen walking side by side, holding hands, with calm expressions and smiles at each other. The empty street conveys a sense of freedom and personal space, allowing them to enjoy each other's company without outside interference. The simple gesture of holding hands evokes profound emotional meaning: a sense of trust, comfort, and intimacy that is built without the need for intense physical expression. This scene represents innocent and simple teenage love, free from conflict or excessive drama, and emphasizes that affection can exist in gentle and serene forms. The simplicity of the atmosphere and the symbol of togetherness demonstrate that teenage relationships do not always have to be defined through physical aspects, but also through the ability to provide each other with a sense of security, share happiness, and build healthy emotional bonds.

- a. Denotative Meaning: This image shows a teenage boy and girl walking together on a quiet street, holding hands. Both are wearing bags and casual clothes reminiscent of school uniforms. They appear calm and gaze at each other with smiles, in the warm and peaceful afternoon atmosphere.
- b. Connotative Meaning: This scene symbolizes the emotional closeness between two teenagers in a relationship. The gesture of holding hands and walking side by side on a quiet street conveys comfort, trust, and hope for togetherness. It also suggests that teenage love can manifest in calm and simple forms, not always physical or conflict-ridden. The empty street symbolizes the freedom and personal space they experience when together.
- c. Myth: Scenes like this often reinforce the myth that teenage love is something sweet, innocent, and full of hope, like the ideal "first love." In many films, walking hand-in-hand

symbolizes a healthy and romantic relationship. However, it is important to remember that while it may seem beautiful, teenage love still requires an understanding of responsibility, healthy communication, and relationship education. Sex education, in this context, is not only about the body, but also about building healthy emotional and social closeness (Aziz & Pd, 2017).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis of the film "Culture Shock," it can be concluded that the film conveys an implicit yet powerful representation of sex education through various symbols, scenes, and interactions between characters. The film features numerous visual and narrative cues depicting the physical intimacy of teenagers, the use of contraceptives, and the emotional dynamics of romantic relationships. Through the approaches of denotation, connotation, and myth, we can see that each scene is not merely entertainment but also carries a hidden message about how teenagers understand and deal with issues of sexuality.

In general, "Culture Shock" does not directly teach viewers about sex education, but rather opens up a space for discussion about the importance of healthy, open, and responsible sex education. The film reflects the reality that teenagers today live in an environment where they are exposed to a variety of sexual information and experiences, but this is not necessarily supported by a correct understanding. Some scenes even reinforce certain myths, such as that love must be proven through physical intimacy or that contraceptives are a symbol of sexual maturity.

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