

Semiotic Analysis Of Feminine Traits In The Character Cher In Clueless Movie

Dika Widayanti

Universitas Gunadarma, Jawa Barat, Indonesia
Email: dikawidaaja19@gmail.com

Abstrak

Feminitas adalah salah satu stereotip, yang awalnya diusulkan oleh Chafetz (1978). Femininitas adalah konstruksi sosial dan budaya yang menetapkan standar tertentu untuk perilaku, karakteristik, dan penampilan perempuan yang dianggap ideal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui sifat-sifat feminin dalam film yang berjudul *Clueless* dengan menggunakan teori Bartes (1964). Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode kualitatif. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini adalah film *Clueless*, dan data yang digunakan adalah dialog-dialog yang ada di dalam film ini. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat 7 karakteristik sifat feminin dengan total 47 data dalam film *Clueless*. Data tersebut meliputi emosional (10), personal lain (10), intelektual (9), fisik (8), interpersonal (5), fungsional (3), seksual (2). Karakteristik sifat feminin yang dominan dalam film ini adalah karakteristik emosional dan personal lainnya dengan total 10 data.

Kata kunci: Clueless, Feminine Traits, Semiotics

Introduction

In this life, humans are surrounded by signs. Each sign had its meaning. Objects, events, writing, language, actions, and other types of signs are a few examples (Mudjiono, 2011). One of example is the use of branded bags is more than just an aesthetic or fashion accessory; it also conveys a societally accepted message that its owner possesses a certain level of economic power or social position. Signs can also be used to examine aspects of human nature, such as behavior or traits. According to Hoed (2011), semiotics is the science of signs or the study of signs in humans. In this context, human traits can also be seen as signs that have a certain social meaning. One example is feminine traits, which have been socially understood as female characteristics. Semiotics is the study that is appropriate and relevant to classify the signs and examine the meaning behind them.

The importance of this research is so that women are not underestimated in society because of the feminine traits that are bound and



expected in women. In addition, it can cause harm to women such as not being able to express themselves. If the woman does not behave according to feminine traits, then the woman will not be considered an ideal woman. In fact, with the presence of several feminine traits, women can also benefit from the social expectations attached. Many people assume that these feminine traits are innate, when in fact they are the result of social construction. In this context, semiotics is used as an analytical tool because myth, which is part of semiotics according to Barthes (1964) is related to the theory of feminine traits, namely as a “truth” accepted by society that women do naturally have these traits. With this research, it is hoped that this research will cause society to reconsider social expectations that limit women, and feminine traits are not absolutely inherent from birth, but rather something that is constructed by society.

Media portrayals frequently continue stereotypes about femininity through repeating signs such as speech patterns, behavior, and appearance. The signs displayed in the media have deep meanings, which can influence the audience about the perspective of the “ideal woman”. This perspective results in the emergence of myths circulating in society, these myths function to normalize cultural values and social constructions that cannot be changed. The fact that this restricts women’s identities and positions in society makes it problematic. Through semiotic study, these myths can demonstrate how gender standards are perpetuated and how the media contributes to the perpetuation of these ideals.

Barthes (1964) developed Saussure’s semiotic theory, which discussed the concepts of signifier and signified, and expanded it further by introducing the ideas of denotation, connotation, and myth. The myth will be supported by Chafetz’s (1974) feminine traits theory to find out the facts or ideologies that exist in society, especially about women. Through this approach, researchers can reveal the implied meanings behind the representation of women in the media. Thus, this analysis can help understand how the image of women is formed and maintained through social construction that seems natural.

The first previous research was conducted by July Susanti Br Sinurya, Anang Anas Azhar, and Hasan Sazali (2022) entitled Analysis Of semiotic Representation of Feminism in The Molan Film 2020. The objective of that research is to know how the semiotic analysis of the representation of feminism in the film Mulan 2020. The method used is descriptive qualitative. The source of the data is film Mulan 2020. The data is picture of the scene. That research shows that some of parts in the 2020 movie 3 Mulan that indicate how feminism is portrayed have been examined using Roland Barthes' semiotics theory.

The second previous research is conducted by Rima Sarah (2021) entitled Representation of Feminism in The Film of Jane Eyre (2011): Semiotic Analysis study of Charles Sanders Peirce. The objective of that research is to analysis of signs that can be found in a film Jane Eyre and produces an interpretation of the theory. The method used is descriptive qualitative. The source of the data is film Jane Eyre. The data is the scene images of the film. That research shows that Jane Eyre is a powerful example of a feminist who is an independent woman with her own rights and choices.

The third previous research is conducted by Alfi Syahriyani and Maidhotul Kaifa Novikasandra (2022) entitled Feminism in Enola Holmes Film: A Semiotic Lens. The objective of that research is to analyze the potrayal of feminist in Enola Holmes, focusing on the representation of feminist values in the 19th century. The method used is qualitative. The source of the data is film Enola Holmes. The data is scene pictures of the film. That research shows that character Enola is a representation for feminist values including independence intelligence, freedom of choice, and privacy.

In this research, the researcher is interested in analyzing the signs and feminine traits contained in the film Clueless. The main character Cher Horowitz, reflects various feminine traits put forward by Chafetz (1974) such as attention to appearance and affection. In addition, this film has several visual and verbal signs that can be analyzed using Barthes' (1964) semiotic theory. These signs have denotative, connotative, and mythical meanings.

Therefore, the film *Clueless* is a relevant object and has the potential to be analyzed in depth using semiotic theory and feminine traits theory, to see how feminine traits are depicted in popular media.

Method

In this research, the researcher employs a qualitative method as the research approach. Qualitative research is a method that studies the understanding of meaning in individuals or groups in the context of social issues or human problems, such as gender issues, especially feminine traits, producing descriptive data that can explain the meaning of observed speech or behavior (Wijaya et al., 2025). Sources of data in qualitative research typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents. This research uses documents as a source of data. The document is the movie *Clueless*. *Clueless* was released on July 19, 1995. The screen for this movie is 1 hour 37 minutes. This movie is directed by Amy Heckerling. Data is the object that is used as the focus of research obtained from the data source. The data used in this research are scene and dialogue from the main character that contains semiotics aspect of the Barthes theory in *Clueless* movie.

Results and Discussion

A. Results

The results of this research analysis show that there are 35 scene present various semiotic signs that signify the representation of feminine traits in the movie. These signs include signifier, signified, denotative, connotative, and myth. Furthermore, this research found 7 types of feminine traits in the film *Clueless*. These feminine traits include emotional (10), other personal (10), intellectual (9), physical (8), interpersonal (5), functional (3), and sexual (2). The results of this research are depicted in the Table 1 below:

Table 1. Feminine Traits in Film *Clueless*

No	Category	Number of Data
1	Emotional	10

2	Other personal	10
3	Intellectual	9
4	Physical	8
5	Interpersonal	5
6	Functional	3
7	Sexual	2
Total		47

In the Table 1, there are 35 scene data on signs and 47 data on the feminine traits of the character Cher, in the film *Clueless*, which show feminine traits. The type of feminine traits that Cher adheres to most is emotional characteristics (10). The second most are other personal (10), intellectual (9), physical (8), interpersonal (5), functional (3), and sexual (2).

1. Emotional

In this research, 10 data are found to be feminine traits on emotional characteristic. One example of the data found is as follows:



Figure 1.Emotional 1

Minute 0:10:01-0:10:11

The Figure 1 above is data from emotional characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: "I told my P.E. teacher an evil male had broken my heart, so she raised my "C" to a "B". I'm so miserable."

Teacher: "they're horrible."

Cher: "I can't eat, I can't sleep."

Teacher: "don't feel bad. Don't feel bad. I know. And you see, they're all like that."

In this scene reinforces the stereotype of women as naturally emotional beings who seek sympathy and form solidarity through shared struggles. Cher's reaction, which shows sadness and a desire for empathy, reflects this myth. This demonstrates femininity through emotional characteristics, especially sensitivity (sadness and seeking empathy), which is a trait traditionally associated with women and often considered as feminine. Another piece of data that also show feminine traits is as follows:



Figure 2.Emotional 2

Minute 0:16:26-0:16:40

The Figure 2 above is data from emotional characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: "I've contributed many hours helping two lonely teachers find romance."

Josh: "which, I'll bet, serves your interest more than theirs. Tell you what, if I ever saw you do anything that wasn't 90% selfish, I die for shock."

Cher: "oh, that'd be reason enough for me."

In this scene highlights the stereotype of women as emotionally sensitive individuals who are easily affected by personal remarks and tend to express their feelings openly. Cher's sarcastic reaction to Josh's criticism shows she feels offended and chooses to express it rather than suppress it. This behaviour reflects feminine traits, particularly emotional and expressiveness characteristic.

2. Other personal

In this research, 10 data are found to be feminine traits on other personal characteristic. One example of the data found is as follows:



Figure 3.Other personal 1

Minute 0:18:07-0:18:17

The Figure 3 above is data from other personal characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: “you have such pretty eyes. Don’t hide them. And these clips are so cute.”

In this scene highlights the stereotype that women should appear fashionable and display their beauty to meet societal standards. Cher removes her teacher’s glasses and hair clips to help her achieve a more stylish and attractive appearance. This reflects femininity through other personal characteristics, particularly vain and self-conscious, as she emphasizes external beauty and appearance, a trait traditionally associated with women. Another piece of data that also show feminine traits is as follows:



Figure 4.Other personal 2

1:01:39-1:02:00

The Figure 4 above is data from other personal characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: “Dee and I had to design a lighting concept. And costume decisions. I don’t rely on mirrors, so I always take polaroids.”

In this scene highlights the stereotype that women are expected to constantly perfect their appearance in order to meet societal beauty standards. Cher tries on several satin dresses and takes polaroid photos of herself instead of using a mirror, implying that traditional reflection is

not enough to evaluate her looks. Her focus on appearance, especially in preparation for a man's visit, reinforces the belief that a woman's value lies in how attractive she appears. This reflects femininity through other personal characteristics, particularly vain, as she pays a lot of attention to her appearance, a trait traditionally associated with women.

3. Intellectual

In this research, 9 data are found to be feminine traits on intellectual characteristic. One example of the data found is as follows:

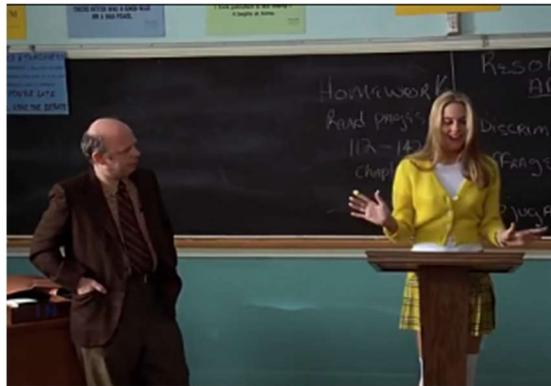


Figure 5.Intellectual 1

Minute 0:04:17-0:04:30

The Figure 5 above is data from intellectual characteristics with the following dialogue:

Mr. Hall: "should all oppressed people be allowed refuge in America?"

Cher: "so okay. Like right now, for example, the Haitians need to come to America. But some people are all, 'what about the strain on our resources?' but it's like when I had this garden party for my father's birthday, right? I said RSVP because it was a sit-down dinner. But people came that, like, did not RSVP."

This scene highlights the stereotype that women are less intelligent academically. Instead of discussing the refugee situation wisely, she compares it to her father's party problems. This reflects femininity through intellectual characteristics, particularly scatterbrained and impractical, traits traditionally associated with women. Another piece of data that also show feminine traits is as follows:



Figure 6.Intellectual 2

Minute: 1:17:51-1:18:12

The Figure 6 above is data from intellectual characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: "I mean, what was my problem? Tai is my pal. I don't begrudge her a boyfriend. I really- Oh I wonder if they have that in my size."

Analysis of the scene, the stereotype that women are emotionally unstable or volatile is highlighted. Cher is quickly distracted by fashion spontaneously. This reflects femininity through intellectual characteristics, specifically scatterbrained, frivolous, shallow, inconsistent, and intuitive, traits traditionally associated with women.

4. Physical

In this research, 8 data are found to be feminine traits on physical characteristics. One example of the data found is as follows:



Figure 7.Physical 1

Minute: 0:01:16-0:01:26

The Figure 7 above is data from physical characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: "I mean, I get up, I brush my teeth, and I pick out my outfit school clothes."

Analysis of this scene highlights the stereotype that women are often concerned with their appearance and have a desire to look attractive and youthful. Cher demonstrates a high degree of attentiveness in her fashion

choices, even relying on a computer program to select her outfit and coordinate the colors. This action reflects femininity through physical characteristics, particularly the trait of worrying about appearance and aging, an attribute traditionally associated with women. Another piece of data that also show feminine traits is as follows:



Figure 8.Physical 2

Minute: 0:07:39-0:08:00

The Figure 8 above is data from physical characteristics

Analysis of this scene highlights the stereotype that women must always be beautiful and well-dressed at all times. Cher's act of putting on makeup and dressing up demonstrates her desire to look attractive even while at home. This action reflects femininity through physical characteristics, particularly the concern with appearance and aging, an attribute traditionally associated with women.

5. Interpersonal

In this research, 5 data are found to be feminine traits on interpersonal characteristic. One example of the data found is as follows:



Figure 9.Interpersonal 1

Minute 0:02:15-0:02:46

The Figure 9 above is data from interpersonal characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: “and I must give her snaps for her courageous fashion efforts.”

Analysis of this scene highlights the stereotype that women have social sensitivity. Cher’s complimenting of her friend demonstrates her ability to respond quickly and positively to others’ appearances. This action reflects femininity through interpersonal characteristics, particularly responsive behaviour, a trait traditionally associated with women. Another piece of data that also show feminine traits is as follows:



Figure 10.Interpersonal 2

Minute: 0:55:25-0:55:45

The Figure 10 above is data from interpersonal characteristics with the following dialogue:

Tai: “Do you think she’s pretty?”

Cher: “No. she’s a full-on monet.”

Tai: “What’s a monet?”

Cher: “It’s like the paintings, see? From far away it’s okay, but up close it’s a big, old mess. let’s ask a guy. Christian, what do you think of Amber?”

Christian: “Hagsville”

Cher: “See?”

Analysis of this scene highlights the stereotype that women like to talk about others, especially their appearance. Cher’s actions here show how Cher evaluates her friend’s party outfit. This scene reflects femininity through interpersonal characteristics, especially petty and gossipy, traits traditionally associated with women.

6. Functional

In this research, 3 data are found to be feminine traits on functional characteristic. One example of the data found is as follows:



Figure 11.Functional 1

Minute: 0:01:35-0:01:55

The Figure 11 above is data from interpersonal characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: “daddy.”

Cher’s dad: “Cher, please don’t start with the juice again.”

Cher: “daddy, you need vitamin C.”

Analysis of this scene highlights the stereotype that women have the responsibility to maintain the family’s health. Cher gives her father a glass of orange juice to keep him healthy. This action reflects femininity through functional characteristics, particularly affectionate and maternalism, traits traditionally associated with women. Another piece of data that also show feminine traits is as follows:



Figure 12.Functional 2

Minute: 0:59:00-0:59:18

The Figure 12 above is data from interpersonal characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: “the midnight snack totally revived the lawyers, and daddy was way grateful.”

Cher’s dad: “mm, meat.”

Cher: “eat oranges, you get a lot of vitamin C.”

Analysis of this scene highlights the stereotype that women have the responsibility to maintain the family's health. Cher gives her father an orange to keep him healthy. This action reflects femininity through functional characteristics, particularly domesticity and maternalism, traits traditionally associated with women.

7. Sexual

In this research, 2 data are found to be feminine traits on sexual characteristic. One example of the data found is as follows:



Figure 13.Sexual 1

Minute: 0:50:31-0:50:51

The Figure 13 above is data from interpersonal characteristics with the following dialogue:

Cher: "sometimes, you have to show a little skin. This reminds guys of being naked, and then they think of sex!"

Analysis of this scene highlights the stereotype that women possess sexual beauty to attract men. Cher exposes her shoulders and acts flirtatiously to attract a man. This action reflects femininity through sexual characteristics, specifically, women are expected to "catch" a spouse, be seductive, and flirtatious. A trait traditionally associated with women. Another piece of data that also show feminine traits is as follows:



Figure 14.Sexual 2

1:31:11-1:31:32

The Figure 14 above is data from interpersonal characteristics with the following dialogue:

Tai: "I know that when I have my own wedding, I want this like whole entire floral motif, like very floral garlands."

Dee: "when I get married, I'm gonna have a sailor dress but it's gonna be a gown."

Cher: "oh that sounds good."

Analysis of this scene highlights the stereotype that women are passionate about marriage. Cher demonstrates this through her interest in discussing her wedding dreams with her friends. This scene reflects femininity through sexual characteristics, particularly must be married, a trait traditionally associated with women.

B. Discussion

In this research, the most dominant feminine traits are emotional with 10 data findings, and other personal characteristics with 10 data findings out of 47 data. This occurs because this film movie about a story of women's lives in America. In the year of its release, *Clueless* movie portrayed women with feminine energy, such as a penchant for makeup, attention to appearance, and displays of emotional displays. This depiction demonstrates how the media, through film, shapes certain representations of femininity. These traits are presented as natural for women, thus portraying the ideal woman as one who meets the feminine standards portrayed on screen.

Conclusion

The results of this research analysis show that there are 7 feminine traits in the film *Clueless*. These feminine traits include emotional (10), other personal (10), intellectual (9), physical (8), interpersonal (5), functional (3), and sexual (2). Thus, it can be concluded that the most frequently appearing feminine traits are emotional characteristics and other personal characteristics. Meanwhile, the least frequently appearing feminine traits are those derived from sexual characteristics.

The feminine traits displayed by Cher in the film *Clueless* are the result of social construction reflected through signs in her behavior and dialogue. Through Barthes's semiotics, Cher's actions, especially her emotional nature, can be interpreted as signs that carry connotations of the ideal woman in popular culture. Environmental factors, such as her social status as a wealthy only child, the absence of a mother, and abundance of affection from her father, shape Cher's character into an emotional person. Thus, Cher's feminine traits are shaped by social and cultural contexts.

References

- Barthes, R. (1964). *Elements of Semiology*. New York: Hill And Wang.
- Chafetz, J. S. (1978). *Masculine Feminine Or Human?* Illinois: Wadsworth
- Hoed, B. H. (2011). *Semiotik & Dinamika Sosial Budaya*. Depok: Komunitas Bambu.
- Mudjiono, Y. (2011). Kajian Semiotika Dalam Film. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 1(1), 125–138. <https://doi.org/10.15642/jik.2011.1.1.125-138>.
- Sarah, R. (2021). Representation of Feminism in the Film of Jane Eyre (2011): Semiotics Analysis Study of Charles Sanders Peirce. *Titian: Jurnal Ilmu Humaniora*, 5(2), 196-210. <https://doi.org/10.22437/titian.v5i2.15283>
- Sinuraya, J. S. B., Azhar, A. A., & Sazali, H. (2022). Analysis of semiotics representation of feminism in the mulan film 2020. *International Journal of Cultural and Social Science*, 3(1), 94–105. <https://doi.org/10.53806/ijcss.v3i1.349>
- Syahriyani, A., & Novikasandra, M. K. (2022). Feminism in enola holmes film: a semiotic lens. *Elite : English and Literature Journal*, 9(2), 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.24252/elite.v9i2.32298>
- Wijaya, M., Pratomo, B., Citta, A. B., & Efendi, S. (2025). *Metodologi Penelitian: Kombinasi Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan Mixed Methods*. PT. Media Penerbit Indonesia.