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# **GENDER EQUALITY REPRESENTATION IN THE MOVIE AVATAR THE LAST AIRBENDER**

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## **Abstract**

The film industry is often considered as a mere entertainment medium, but the reality is that today's films are a communication medium that contains many representations of real-world life portraits, one of which is the topic of gender equality. Gender equality and the feminist movement have always had a place in the world of film, but there is still a stigma that women who only rely on their appearance or physique will be more dominantly displayed than women with good acting skills in the entertainment world. As the largest animation company in the world, Disney also released a film that also voiced gender equality through the film Avatar the Last Airbender through scenes and Katara characters in the film. The purpose of this study is to determine and understand the representation of the message of gender equality contained in the film Avatar the Last Airbender based on the scalpel approach of Roland Bartes' semiotic theory with 3 elements of meaning, namely denotation, connotation and myth. This study found that in the film Avatar the Last Airbender through dialogues and images there is a message about equality represented by the character Katara both in terms of connotation, denotation and myth. Katara as a female character in the film emphasizes the character of a woman who is brave, intelligent and does not want to be underestimated. Seen through the character of Katara in the scene leading to the practice of voicing and representing the importance of gender equality to be voiced in community life.

**Keyword:** Film; Gender Equality; Semiotics



## Abstrak

Industri perfilman sering dianggap sebagai media hiburan semata, namun realitanya saat ini film merupakan media komunikasi yang memuat banyak representasi potret kehidupan dunia nyata salah satunya topik mengenai kesetaraan gender. Kesetaraan gender dan gerakan feminisme selalu mendapat tempat didunia perfilman namun masih ada stigma bahwa perempuan hanya mengandalkan rupa atau fisik akan lebih dominan sering ditampilkan dibandingkan perempuan yang kemampuan aktingnya baik dalam dunia hiburan. Sebagai perusahaan animasi terbesar di dunia Disney juga merilis film yang ikut menyuarakan mengenai kesetaraan gender melalui film Avatar the Last Airbender melalui adegan-adegan dan tokoh Katara dalam film know know. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui dan memahami representasi pesan kesetaraan gender yang terdapat pada film Avatar the Last Airbender berdasarkan pendekatan pisau bedah teori semiotika Roland Barthes dengan 3 elemen makna yaitu denotasi, konotasi dan mitos. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa dalam film Avatar the Last Airbender melalui dialog-dialog serta gambar adanya pesan mengenai kesetaraan yang diwakili oleh tokoh Katara baik secara konotasi, denotasi dan mitos. Katara sebagai tokoh perempuan dalam film menonjolkan karakter perempuan yang berani, cerdas serta tidak ingin dipandang sebelah mata. Terlihat melalui tokoh katara dalam adegan mengarah kepada praktik pada aksi menyuarakan serta merepresentasikan akan pentingnya kesetaraan gender untuk disuarakan dalam kehidupan bermasyarakat.

**Kata kunci:** Film; Kesetaraan Gender; Semiotika

## I. INTRODUCTION

Film is a modern work of art displaying images, audio and visuals. Film as a visual media conveys messages to the audience by utilizing CGI technology. (Computer Generated Image). According to McQuail, film acts as a new medium used to spread entertainment that has become a previous habit, as well as presenting stories, events, music, drama, comedy, and other technical presentations to the general public Films always influence and shape society based on the message behind it. The power and ability of film to reach many social segments, makes film have the potential to influence its audience (Marie Rose Jane, 2021).

One of the films that has caught the attention and received *the spotlight* from *cinephiles* (people who really like cinema or films) this year, precisely on February 22, 2024, is the Avatar the Last Airbender film series produced by Michael Dante Dimartino and Bryan Konirtzko. This legendary live-action animated series has the opportunity to

air on Netflix by raising various themes and inspired by various folklore, cultures, and legends from indigenous Asian people. Serious topics such as war, colonization, trauma to morals make this series very popular and proven to occupy the top 10 Netflix series. The live-action series from America was watched 21.2 million times during the four days of airing since its release on February 22 (Syaifullah, 2024).

This fantasy genre series is divided into 8 episodes, describing the story of the Avatar's journey to control the elements of fire, earth, water and air, accompanied by two siblings from the southern water tribe Sokka (Ian Ousley) and Katara (Kiawentiio) to save the world from the violent attacks of the Fire Nation. Through several of its characters, this time Avatar brings up interesting sub-themes. However, between the female and male characters in this series, they have the same role in saving the world. Unlike the previous series which still raised issues of patriarchal culture. This film presents the courage and intelligence of women, carrying a strong message about the importance of gender equality in society in general.

Albert Kim as the screenwriter revealed that there are several differences between the live action Avatar: The Last Airbender and the cartoon version. Starting from the more dramatically dark mise en scene, the elimination of Sokka's sexist personality, to the elimination of Sozin's Comet for the first season (Herlambang, 2024). Not only that, but several scenes after scenes are interesting to examine further regarding the message of gender equality conveyed through Katara's character. The gender equality movement is still warm and often voiced even though it is still often debated.

The study of gender equality issues can be seen from several previous studies conducted by Christa Aurora Mylinianil, Sabrina Lie, Elissa Christine (Myliniani et al., 2022), with the research title "Analysis of Representation of Gender Equality Messages in the Live Action Version of Mulan" the results of the study show that the message of gender equality conveyed does exist but is not directly conveyed, the film shows the process of how gender equality can occur and there is a message that women and men do not have the right to be treated differently. Mulan, the main character in this film, presents gender equality bravely showing that not only men can bring honor to their families, but women can also play a role in bringing honor to their families.

Gender equality is further discussed in a study conducted by Syafruddin Pohan, Febiola Aditya Yusuf, Febriani Amalia (Syafruddin Pohan, 2024) with the research title

"Gender equality egalitarianism in the narrative of the Barbie film through a constructivist perspective" it was found that the results of the analysis of the Barbie film illustrate the complexity of issues regarding gender equality and trigger critical thinking about gender stereotypes that occur in society, messages in the dialogue also contain injustice faced by women, as well as the role of women is limited unlike the role of men. Furthermore, research conducted by Annisa Anindya, Alna Hanana, Novi Elian (Annisa Anindya, 2021) with the research title "Efforts to Increase Youth Gender Awareness Through Gender Equality Messages on Instagram Social Media" concluded that Instagram social media can be a bridge for young people to access various diverse and actual information, in addition, the Instagram *platform* can be a medium to disseminate messages on gender equality issues that are packaged in an interesting way to become a topic of discussion together. So that young people who use Instagram have a very important role in providing an understanding of the gender equality message.

The issue of gender equality has indeed become a hot topic in discussions in cyberspace and in the public sphere. With the issue of gender equality currently circulating, researchers are interested in further researching how films can convey messages about gender equality through characters in the Avatar the Last Airbender series.

## **II. RESEARCH METHOD**

Research uses a qualitative approach, where descriptive research is research that aims to make descriptive systematically, factual and accurate about the facts and nature of certain objects (Kencana, 2021). The research methodology uses Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis which can explain signs related to the objects and phenomena being studied, including denotative meaning, connotative meaning and mythical meaning. The research method uses Roland Barthes' semiotic scalpel. The 3 elements will be analyzed through a sign system, either language, images displayed or text displayed in the dialogue scene of the film Avatar the Last Airbender. The representation observed and analyzed here can be interpreted as a sign because in essence a representation also requires a sign, a language symbol to capture a certain meaning that can describe another meaning, especially in the object of this research.

**Table 1. Elements and Process of Roland Barthes' Semiotic Sign Analysis**

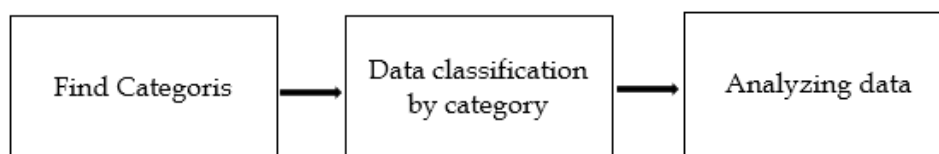
1. Signifier	2. Signified
3. Denotative Sign	
4. Connotative Signifier	5. Connotative Signified
6. Connotative Sign	

Source: Processed by researchers

The table above explains how the process of analyzing the meaning of an observed object. In Roland Barthes' theory, the formation of denotative meaning is emphasized more on physical vision, what is seen and what it looks like. Furthermore, connotative refers more to the advanced form of meaning (Prasetyo, 2023). This study carried out several stages, namely, watching carefully every scene and conversation that occurs in the film "Avatar the Last Airbender" repeatedly, then the researcher identified the signs and texts in the film "Avatar the Last Airbender" which represent a meaning of gender equality, then, the researcher took screenshots of scenes that represent gender equality in the film "Avatar the Last Airbender" and finally, the researcher analyzed the signs or symbols that had been obtained using Roland Barthes' perspective semiotic analysis theory.

Sardar & Loon in the burrow (Nasirin & Pithaloka, 2022) says that film has its own language, involving visual and linguistic symbolic forms to encode the message being conveyed. Because film is generally built with many signs, these signs enter as a system that works well together in an effort to achieve the desired effect. Images and sounds are the most important aspects of film, spoken words coupled with other sounds that accompany the images to provide a more lively result.

Thus, to find out the representation of gender equality in the film Avatar the Last Airbender, the author will focus on the entire scene of the film from episode 1 to episode 8 which will later be categorized into several parts. The graph below illustrates how Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis helps make the analysis flow easier to understand:



Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis is used by researchers to find, process, identify, and analyze the entire scene that contains the meaning of gender equality representation in the film *Avatar: The Last Air Bender*.

### **III. DISCUSSION**

Gender equality is a condition in which the status and position of men and women are at an equal and equal stage so that it can create harmony in society (Fadilla & Wijaksono, 2022). The concept of gender equality in question can be applied if men and women have the same opportunity to realize their rights and all their potentials in various aspects of life. However, the existence of gender injustice problems that can still be found in society today is an obstacle to realizing this. The existence of women who are often considered weak is often used as an excuse to give birth to various manifestations of injustice against women.

The injustice that can be felt includes marginalization (economic poverty), subordination of women, negative labeling, violence and the existence of a double burden (Eliastuti et al., 2023). Based on that, gender justice is a driver to reduce inequality between men and women leading to the implementation of gender equality and dividing equally according to the portion of rights, obligations, and roles in life. Generally, currently gender equality is voiced through many media to convey the message of equality, this is because of the development of the level of communication carried out by someone in a wider public reach, the mass media helps someone to voice what is their ideology. Mass media itself is a communication and information media that disseminates information en masse and can be accessed by the public en masse (Rijal Mamdud, 2019).

So the information produced by mass media is called mass information, meaning information that is intended for the public en masse, not information that can only be consumed personally. Mass media functions as information media, agenda media, social media, educational media, persuasive media, and entertainment media. The communication process that takes place on mass media, the message is managed and sent directly from an institutional source to the audience which is mechanical such as using radio, television, internet, newspapers and films. Film is one of the popular mass communication media today. Interesting storylines and good sound effects are one of the reasons why the audience does not get bored of enjoying it and does not need to imagine like reading a book (Ardani et al., 2023). Film is also considered as a powerful mass

communication media for the target masses, because of its audio-visual nature, film is able to tell a lot in a short time. When watching a film, the audience seems to be able to penetrate space and time that can tell life and can even influence the audience.

In addition to being a medium of entertainment, films have many functions as other media, such as information media, educational media and communication media (Rohmah, 2024). Films are one of the means to transmit meaningful messages that communicators want to convey to the mass audience about their thoughts. As technology develops, the film industry also develops. The development of the film industry makes various film companies compete to make various types of quality films with various themes. Various film themes have been produced as a means of entertainment or to convey messages to the audience who watch them. The audio-visual format in films is considered to have the power to touch the feelings and morals of the audience. Therefore, films are often a medium for script writers to convey implicit or explicit moral messages to the audience who are the target audience of the film. Certain messages in a film are communicated in a way to be read, or decoded by the audience, and will then influence the understanding of the individual who watches it. Through films, for example, stories can describe the challenges faced by women in everyday life, or raise inspiring stories about women who have succeeded in fighting stereotypes and discrimination. continuously debated and fought for by humans. The human desire for independence is one of the most basic desires. It is not surprising that in the history of the development of human thought, various opinions have emerged that try to answer this problem (Rio Kurnia Putra Wardanni, 2024).

As in this study, the representation of gender equality in the film Avatar the Last Airbender conveys the message of how society in the story setting views women. In addition, the meaning of representation here refers to the constructionist representation of the semiotic approach, which describes how a sign and meaning are formed through the medium of language. The approach is used to see a phenomenon of gender equality representation from scene episode 1 to episode 8 in the film Avatar the Last Air Bender. Representation will be seen in a language that can ultimately construct a language and give birth to a myth concept (Hermayanthi, 2021). Gender equality in the film represented, explained in detail using language and words. Therefore, this study is very

suitable to use Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis scalpel. Roland Barthes explains that there are two levels to understand semiotics, namely denotation and connotation.

Denotation can be interpreted as a level of signification that explains the relationship between the signifier and the signified, or between the sign and its referent. In a reality that produces explicit, direct and definite meaning. Denotation is more associated with the closedness of meaning. The next sign meaning is the second level meaning system, namely connotative (experiencing an expansion of meaning), which exists based on the first level meaning system or denotative that existed previously. Connotative can be interpreted as cultural meanings that are attached to a terminology. (Sultanatta & Maryam, 2018). Next, the second stage of significance related to content, shows that signs work through myths. Myths in semiotics can be interpreted as a culture that can explain or understand several aspects of reality or natural phenomena (Handayani, 2019).

### **Representation of Gender Equality in the Film Avatar the Last Air Bender**

From the results of data analysis in the film, there are scenes in each episode that represent the representation of gender equality in this film. Analysis using Roland Barthes' Semiotics looks at three elements of denotation, connotation and myth as below:

#### **Episode 1**

**Figure 1.1 Scene of Sokka Telling Katara About Katara's Assignment**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

Viewed from the denotative aspect of *Scene* above shows a dialogue between a man (Sokka) and a woman (Katara) on a boat while rowing and shows Katara's expression after hearing Sokka say "you just focus on helping take care of the village". Figure 1.1.



above is taken from a scene where an older brother tells his younger sister to focus on helping take care of the village and leave other matters to Sokka as the leader because he was asked by his late father. The connotative meaning is an older brother who tries to protect his younger sister and the villagers and does not like it if his younger sister practices waterbending because it is dangerous. Sokka as an older brother and a man is trusted to lead the village in the Water village and can be interpreted as a symbol or sign that patriarchal culture in a culture still exists where men do not believe in women's abilities and ask women to only focus on taking care of the village but not to join the war. The scene above is a portrait that is still practiced and has become a stereotype that is developing in society or culture where men are leaders while women are only allowed to contribute but not become leaders.

**Figure 1.2 Aang Watches Katara Train Her Abilities**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the image in 1.2 above shows that the female figure wearing a blue dress is the character Katara and the little boy looking at her is Aang. The connotative meaning that can be interpreted as a woman, Katara, is training her ability to control water and Ang indirectly salutes Katara's ability. It can be seen from Ang's indirect expression to Katara and is reinforced by Katara's statement "*I am a knight I can contribute more to the village*" which is full of confidence that she is able to contribute more to her village with her ability to control water.

Looking at the mythical elements, it is interpreted that the image above carries the theme of gender equality where the character Katara believes and wants to prove that women can also be knights. In general, most knights are men, but this film shows that

women can also be knights. Currently, gender inequality is still a relevant issue in the world, including Indonesia. Ironically, the World Economic Forum (WEF) stated that no country has achieved full gender equality. In fact, it is projected to achieve full gender equality between men and women. Katara in this scene represents that women have the same equality as men. In line with that, the principle of gender equality is marked by conditions for men and women to obtain opportunities and their rights as human beings, so that they are able to play a role and participate in political, legal, economic, socio-cultural, educational and national defense and security activities as well as equality in enjoying the results of development. Gender equality also includes the elimination of discrimination and structural injustice, both against men and women (Bangun, 2020).

**Figure 1.3 Shows the Representation of Gender Equality Through Sokka**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The scene above contains dialogue between Katara and Sokka, Katara “*Sokka, I want*” and Sokka said “*Katara, hide*” the denotative meaning of image 1.3 above shows the expression of a man talking to the woman in front of him. The meaning that can be obtained from the picture above is that a man and a woman who is his sister, Katara, are talking. Katara expressed that she wanted to contribute to protecting the village, but judging from their conversation, Sokka as an older brother and a man asked Katara to hide with the sentence “Katara, hide.” The connotation of the word Hide can be interpreted here that a woman is considered weak and does not need to be involved in war because men can lead. Women are often considered weak creatures compared to men. From the picture above, it can be seen that Katara wants to contribute to helping in facing the water tribe. However, there is the sentence “Hide”. In the real world, it is the same that women are not fully trusted to be able to take part in war.

**Figure 1.4 Katara Hugs Ang**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

Figure 1.4 above shows 2 people embracing each other, a boy and a girl, Katara, on the ground. The meaning contained in the picture above does not only show two people embracing each other but it can be interpreted that the woman or Katara here understands what Aang feels. Katara doesn't ask much, just hugs Aang when Aang is sad. When analyzed using the meaning of myth, women are known to be more sensitive to feelings and men are more logical. However, it does not mean that men cannot be sad. The role of women is very large in understanding men's feelings as seen from the scene above that men can be sad and need a hug. Through this film scene, Katara dispels the myth that only women are weak. Because, in essence, men also have feelings like women so they can be sad and need warmth. Gender inequality creates stigma and unreasonable social expectations for both women and men.

The stigma where women do not need to be too highly educated, women do not need to have important roles and positions in the world of work, this gradually hinders a woman from developing until it hinders a generation from developing. Men should not express their feelings because being sensitive is a characteristic of women, which brings us to the percentage of data from WHO where it is recorded that male deaths are dominated by deaths due to suicide (Reinata Satriani, 2022).

## Episode 2

Figure 2.1 Shows Katara and Ang Talking



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

Seen from the connotation analysis of the scene above shows a woman wearing blue clothes with a smiling facial expression in front of a man. If seen from the connotation analysis the extension of the meaning of the image above shows that Katara smiled after practicing waterbending and received praise from Ang with the dialogue "*You're so fast. You're a true waterbender, Katara*". Through Ang's sentence, it can be interpreted that Ang really supports and appreciates Katara's increased ability to control water. From the myth in some patriarchal societies, women are often considered weak and more emotional than men. On the other hand, men are considered superior. Patriarchy has also developed in Indonesia since ancient times, as experienced by RA Kartini. Kartini criticized the many limitations of women's rights that were confined to customs in society, especially in obtaining education. The representation found in the scene above is a form of appreciation for women for improving their learning outcomes. Ang's dialogue with Katara indirectly shows equality because gender equality is not only in the form of actions, but also in the form of attitudes, actions and appreciation. Katara, as a woman here, is still given a place to continue learning and contributing to the mission of protecting the world from division towards peace.

### Episode 3

**Figure 3.1 Katara Controls Water to Extinguish the Fire**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

Denotative meaning, it shows a woman with her hair tied back and extinguishing a fire with water. While the meaning is connotative if seen from the expansion of the connotative meaning of the image above shows a woman named Katara trying to use her ability to control water to extinguish the flames right in front of her carefully. In addition, there is a dialogue of a child who was saved by Katara saying "and you are a water controller". From mythical elements women seem to be bound by customs and limited in their movements to contribute more than household chores is a common thing to hear, practiced in life before the echo of gender equality. However, currently gender equality is still one of the things that must be voiced and considered because women can do more than just household chores or just stay at home. The Avatar film in the picture above also indirectly highlights the actions of a brave woman and participates in contributing to war. Katara in this scene shows that strength does not only come from physical but also from a brave mentality. In addition, Equality in supporting state sovereignty can also be seen in how women during the Prophet's time were also involved in warfare. This shows that there is no gender separation in military matters as long as the person concerned is capable and agrees (M. Anzaikhan, 2023).

#### Episode 4

**Figure 4.1 Katara and Sokka Have A Dialogue**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in showing a man and woman in the darkness with a little light illuminating them. Figure 4.1 depicts the characters Sokka and Katara talking to each other in the darkness with minimal light to find the right direction. The expansion of meaning can be seen from the dialogue *"I don't like you keep underestimating me"*. As a younger sister, Katara realizes that Sokka is her older brother, but when Sokka acts rashly just because he relies on his feelings when guiding the way in a dark cave. Katara asks Sokka to seriously determine the path carefully, but Sokka does not listen to Katara and continues to walk as he pleases. Finally, Sokka reveals that he does not like being underestimated. Mythical elements men dominating is not a new thing in society so that various stigmas and stereotypes arise that women must submit to men, even proven in the 2013 UN survey.

Although it has been echoed by Kartini and followed by modern women's movements, in fact until now patriarchal cultural practices still exist and develop in Indonesian society. This can be seen from the relationship between men and women which still looks unequal, where women are still positioned as part of men, marginalized, and even discriminated against. This causes women's freedom to be restricted and disrupts women's rights (Itsram, 2020). However, along with the development of the era, technology is very helpful and makes it easier for people to gain knowledge and improve their thinking skills that are relevant to the era, especially regarding gender equality. The film Avatar is one of the works that represents gender equality, showing that women and men can do work, tasks, discussions together without distinguishing gender.

Although it has been echoed by Kartini and followed by modern women's movements, in fact, until now patriarchal cultural practices still exist and develop in Indonesian society. This can be seen from the relationship between men and women which still looks unequal, where women are still positioned as part of men, marginalized, and even discriminated against. This causes women's freedom to be restricted and interferes with women's rights. Supported by research that Patriarchal culture often has a significant impact on several things in women, such as in the scope of Balinese society. Several areas in Bali still adhere to patriarchal culture, where the lineage system in Bali falls to the son. The system in force in Bali requires women to follow the orders and rules of men in meeting all their daily needs. In the view of Balinese society, this is considered common and is considered to be the nature of women in doing so (Swari, 2023).

#### Episode 5

**Figure 5.1 Mother Talks to Katara That One Day Katara Will Be Able to Control the Water Element**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 5.1 above is the presence of a female character who is in the house of the northern water tribe showing a disappointed facial expression, with the dialogue text "one day I will definitely be able to. I am sure." The image above, if interpreted connotatively, shows that the female character named Katara is a little disappointed with herself, because she still cannot control the water element to help the tribe where she lives. However, her mother said that "one day she will be able to. I'm sure."

When analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that it is not only men who can control the water element to help the water tribe from the evil that comes. The avatar film in this case shows a symbol of gender equality that women can also control the elements and contribute to helping their tribe and protecting those closest to them. Because basically helping the family and protecting the family is not only a man's job, but women can play a role in protecting and helping the comfort of the family from existing disturbances. It is proven that currently women are not only trusted by the family to protect, but the role of women in the midst of society has undergone a significant shift. In the past, women were considered taboo to appear in public, but now there are many women involved in social and organizational fields, women are starting to appear and fill public spaces (Arnoldus Ajung, 2021).

**Figure 5.2 Scenes in The Film Avatar the Last Airbender That Represent the Issue Of Gender Equality**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 5.2 above is that there is a female character who is in the house of the southern water tribe showing a blushing facial expression, with the dialogue text "One day, the world will know how strong you are." The image above, if interpreted connotatively, means that the female character named Katara finally blushes and has a fighting spirit to be able to establish herself to be able to continue controlling the water element to be able to help the people closest to her where she lives, this spirit comes from her conversation with her mother, her mother said that "In the future, the world will know how strong you are." From this dialogue, Katara is enthusiastic again to be able to study harder to control the water element.

When analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that the definition of strong is not only owned by the male soul, so far men are considered stronger than



women, physically strong and strong in other things. The avatar film in this case shows gender equality that women are no less great than men, women are not weak social creatures and are easily intimidated, women have their own strength from within their souls. This means that women who are strong mentally, in mind, and have principles can also help protect their families.

Moral support given by close people such as family greatly influences a person to become stronger psychologically. This is in accordance with research which states that if social support is an important factor that can predict physical health and individual well-being, such as the good or bad physical and mental condition of a person (Arfifi, 2023).

**Figure 5.3 Scenes in the film Avatar the Last Airbender that represent the issue of gender equality**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 5.3 above is the presence of a female character, the mother of the actor Katara herself, showing a facial expression full of hope and confidence with the dialogue text "You will protect us all." The image above, if interpreted connotatively, means that the female character, mother Katara, has faith in her child, Katara, that Katara can protect her family and her tribe in the future if she diligently learns about various aspects of life science. The faith and words that come out of a mother's mouth have tremendous power for her own child, the universe and its contents support all of that. Analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that to protect the family completely is not only the task of men or heads of families. The film avatar the Last Airbender shows gender equality that women also play a role in protecting their families and tribes. The task of protecting loved ones is not only done by

one party, namely men, but working together between men and women to protect loved ones is a shared responsibility. So that the peace between the two parties and the extended family lasts until the end of life. There are no more unilateral limitations to working together to protect the family.

### Episode 7

**Figure 7.1 Scene of Katara in Dialogue with Mother About the Desire to Practice**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 7.1 above is the presence of a female character who is presenting her argument to her teacher, showing a face full of confidence, with the dialogue text "So, if I may, I want to practice fighting techniques." The image above, if interpreted connotatively, shows that the female character named Katara is confident in herself that if she learns fighting techniques, she can help many people around her. She realizes that the water control element knowledge she has is not yet fully maximized, so she wants to learn again from her teacher who comes from the northern tribe. The northern tribe itself is believed to be the greatest water controller that has ever existed.

When analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that fighting against evil is not only the task of men who act as battle knights. So far, if physical contact or bloodshed occurs to defend himself and his family, it is only focused on the figure of a man who can take over the conflict, then here in the Avatar film shows a symbol of gender equality through the character of Katara that women must also learn fighting techniques to help eradicate crime on earth, by learning fighting techniques it means that he can anticipate the dangers that come to himself or his family and tribe. Women do not always rely on men to protect themselves, but women can also learn several ways to be

able to protect themselves, so that they do not always depend on others. In line with research on the leadership of a woman named Moana proves that leadership can also be possessed by women with courage and confidence. In addition, the film Avatar the Last Airbender represents the issue of leadership, the rights of men and women are equal including war training regardless of local culture (Jaeka, 2020).

**Figure 7.2 Scenes in The Film Avatar the Last Airbender That Represent the Issue of Gender Equality**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 7.2 above is that the female character is arguing with her teacher, showing a face full of anxiety and anger, with the dialogue text "Silly and wrong tradition." The image above, if interpreted connotatively, shows that the female character named Katara tries to convince her teacher or elder from the northern water tribe that carrying out the traditions and customs that have been left behind by her ancestors is indeed our way of appreciating their struggle. However, she realizes that as time progresses, traditions and customs will slowly change the way they are carried out, but they are not free from the elements that have been established.

Analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that the culture and traditions that have been rooted for centuries that limit the movement of women must continue to be fought for so as to change the existing structure of society. Culture can influence public perception, it does not mean that all cultures are wrong, however, there are times when society must look at the situation and conditions. In line with that, Hermawati said that Javanese culture has many terms that place women in a lower

position than men and that is deeply embedded in society, so it is understood and accepted as such (Alycia Putri, 2020).

In the film *Avatar the Last Airbender*, gender equality is voiced through the character Katara who tries to erase the stigma about women, both in decision making, challenging the implementation of patriarchy, social rights, fighting to obtain their rights, and changing the views of society. Because tradition as a form of a system that has been patterned in the life of society has the power to force and regulate relationships between individuals. One form of tradition and socio-cultural value system that is coercive is patriarchal culture. In Figure 7.2, the character of a woman named Katara is more vocal in trying to improve the stigma of patriarchal culture, because it is not only men who play a greater role in life, but men and women both take many roles in life.

**Figure 7.3 Scenes in The Film Avatar the Last Airbender That Represent the Issue Of Gender Equality**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 7.3 above is that the female character is arguing with her teacher, showing a confident face, with the dialogue text "Because you are afraid of being proven wrong."

The image above, if interpreted connotatively, shows that the female character named Katara tries to prove to her teacher/elder from the northern water tribe that the tradition that her teacher has believed in regarding women's rights is no longer relevant to the present, the tradition that her teacher believed in in the past can change its application in the future, that's what Katara feels. Here Katara wants to prove that the role of women is not limited by past traditions that make women limited, but Katara's goal is

to prove that women can help and play a greater role than before. Katara looks brave through her expressions and sentences. This shows Katara's side of rejecting the culture that considers women unable to do more, especially in the context of the film Avatar the Last Airbender.

When analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that culture if proven to be wrong then it can be changed as long as it does not violate applicable laws and does not oppose its creator. In the film avatar the Last Airbender represents that gender equality to fulfill women's rights in life and tries to correct the mistakes that have occurred so far regarding the limitations faced by women. This means that as long as women can help more than they should, they are welcome and proven, not immediately their rights are limited. Indonesian women are now in an era of cultural transition, they have a dual role that is not easy.

They must be able to carefully determine their position and role, so that in carrying out their activities they should not become victims of various individual or group interests, private or bureaucratic. Must always be in the ethical and moral corridor, provide them with proper legal protection. Because Indonesian women will make an important contribution to the welfare of their families, nation, state and religion. These social norms have become gender stereotypes today, including the idea that women universally have caring and nurturing characters, and that men are basically rough and suitable for war (Saini, 2023).

### Episode 8

**Figure 8.1 Scenes in The Film Avatar the Last Airbender That Represent the Issue of Gender Equality**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 8.1 above is that the female character is conveying an idea to her friends, showing a confident and very certain face, with the dialogue text "Increasing opportunities."

The image above if interpreted connotatively that the female character named Katara tries to convince her friends, namely Aang and Sokka who are in the northern water tribe to be able to help them face the attack from the fire nation. Here Katara wants to prove that women can help in everything that exists.

When analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that women have been known by the wider community that they depend on men, women who do housework or kitchen work every day, help as a form of support system from behind, while men struggle in front of everything. In the film avatar the Last Airbender represents that gender equality to change the stigma about women's work whose role is blocked by men. This means that women are actually creatures who are very sensitive to seeing and feeling about the current situation, if women want to help men, men are expected not to feel that their self-esteem is being competed with or even stepped on, but helping each other between men and women without thinking about gender labeling will make life easier.

**Figure 8.2 Scenes in The Film Avatar the Last Airbender That Represent the Issue of Gender Equality**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 8.2 above is that the female character is presenting an argument regarding understanding tradition, with the dialogue text "I have proven that it is a stupid tradition, put your ego aside."

The image above, if interpreted connotatively, shows that the female character named Katara is giving a warning to her teacher or elder who is in the northern water

tribe. We may believe in our traditions as long as these traditions are relevant and help us in living our lives on earth, however, if there are traditions that are detrimental to some people, then the tradition can be put aside first. Gender equality and women's empowerment are believed to be able to end women's poverty. One of the causes of women's poverty is because of the patriarchal culture that limits women's access to participation in public life. As a result, women do not get the same opportunities as men in various areas of life (L Halizah, 2023).

Analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that tradition is built from the philosophy of life of the local community which is processed based on views and values of life that are recognized as true and useful. As time goes by, the mindset of the existing community also develops, the results of the development of human mindsets make them critical of things related to their lives, such as tradition. In the film avatar the Last Airbender presents that gender equality is to change old traditions that limit women to move, this is proven by the existence of actions that today women cannot be considered as weak creatures and always obey orders from others, because the previous life cycle certainly cannot be equated in the present or even the future. This means that tradition helps us to give meaning to life, but traditions that exploit a particular gender need to be considered to apply it.

**Figure 8.3 Scenes in The Film Avatar the Last Airbender That Represent the Issue of Gender Equality**



Source: Avatar Film the Last Airbender

The denotative meaning of the scene excerpt in image 8.3 above is that the female character is delivering a message that represents her personality and represents all the

feelings of other women to the elders of the northern water tribe, with the dialogue text "Their wishes are the same as yours. Protecting their home."

The image above, if interpreted connotatively, means that the female character named Katara conveys her wishes and the wishes of the women in the northern water tribe that their wishes are the same as the wishes of men, namely to be able to protect their homes in their entirety. The house here can be a building and also their extended family.

When analyzed using the meaning of myth, it can be interpreted that gender equality in the family is a demand that cannot be ignored. The reason is that gender equality in the family or tribe to protect the family will foster harmony later. In the film avatar the Last Airbender presents that gender equality in the family by sharing roles and respecting each other's roles even shoulder to shoulder between the two will make the situation more harmonious and happy. This makes both women and men not feel pressured, get too much burden beyond their capacity and ability, so that it will worsen the situation. Therefore, gender equality to protect the family applies to women too. Supported by the results of research on the film Captain Marvel which refutes that female superheroes cannot become true superheroes who can independently defeat their enemies.

The myth that women cannot do many things and are considered weak is broken by the scene in the film Avatar the Last Airbender, especially with the character Katara. Because, the current reality is that women are increasingly accepted in the workplace and occupy high positions in the workplace. According to the report of the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), there was an increase in the number of female workers from 2018 to 2019. In 2018, 47.95 million women were recorded as working. The number increased a year later to 48.75 million people (Naurissa Biasini, 2021).

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the analysis conducted by researchers regarding the representation of gender equality in the film Avatar the Last Airbender, it was found that there were messages and scenes of gender equality messages represented by the role of the character Katara. The perception of modern society towards women is far different from the past, the object of women in the film industry is no longer considered insignificant as the aesthetics of the film itself. The female character named Katara in the film Avatar the Last Airbender erases all these negative stigmas, this is evidenced by the findings of



gender equality message symbols analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotics from episodes 1 to 8, in episode 6 the researcher did not find a gender equality message. The message is a denotative, connotative and mythical meaning.

Denotative meaning can be seen from the dialogue, expressions displayed in the scenes of the film avatar the Last Airbender episodes 1-8, while the connotative meaning can be seen from the expansion of the meaning of the dialogue and expressions and the ongoing conditions, and the meaning of the myth can be seen from the messages of gender equality conveyed by the character of a woman named Katara, The courage and intelligence of the character Katara to face social norms that limit women in various fields in everyday life is a strong statement about the importance of breaking down these boundaries in order to create gender equality in society, with the message breaking down and shifting traditions regarding rights and obligations that limit women's space for movement.

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