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Through the eyes of a man: The analysis of female roles in Photocopier's movie (2021)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of Laura Mulvey's male gaze in the Indonesian film *Photocopier* (2021), directed by Wregas Bhanuteja, through the framework of visual pleasure and narrative cinema. Other studies on *Photocopier* have explored semiotic representation, technology-enabled objectification, multimodal communication, critical discourse analysis, and cinematic techniques. However, none of them have systematically disclosed the psychoanalytic mechanisms of scopophilic pleasure and narcissistic identification occurring in the film's narrative structure. This study employs a qualitative approach that combines Mulvey's male gaze theory, Bordwell and Thompson's film analysis method, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, and Rose's visual methodology. This study scrutinizes selected scenes involving sexual harassment, objectification, and male-female interactions. The findings reveal that male characters systematically perform scopophilic violence through digital technology while continuously constructing narcissistic self-images disguised as artistry, paternalism, or economic survival. Notably, the film refuses to reproduce scopophilic pleasure for its audience through its cinematography. The film positions viewers as empathetic witnesses rather than voyeurs. The study further highlights how the copier machine functions as a central metaphor in this narrative, transforming from an instrument of violation into a tool of feminist resistance, as shown in the final scenes. These findings offer a meaningful contribution to the growing psychoanalytic film discourse within Indonesian cinema scholarship. Furthermore, this study proves that Mulvey's concept is not a finished framework but rather a generative one. It requires cultural and technological adaptation when applied beyond its original Western context.

Keywords: Indonesian cinema; Laura Mulvey; male gaze; narcissistic identification; psychoanalytic film theory; scopophilia

1. INTRODUCTION

Cinema holds a very powerful role in reflecting the narrative of a society (Ahmed, 1992). The cinema does not only function as a mirror of reality, struggles, and the dynamics within society, but can also influence public debate, which can lead to social change (Bhati, 2024; Kaur & Gupta, 2021; Pandey & Gaur, 2025). One of these social dynamics is gender representation. The role of cinema explores the possibility of challenging or conforming to gender identities and gender roles (Butler, 1999) and serves as a cultural practice to redefine binary regulation of sexuality (Zhang, 2023). This article examines the portrayal of women and their position in cinematic discourse.

In this modern age, where technology radiates among us, the role of cinema is not limited to theatrical spaces. The content distribution and consumption of film is offered in an extensive movie library through subscription models (Bugela, 2024). The dissemination of streaming services such as Netflix, Disney, and other major services fills the space in our homes. It extends to our mobile phones and other devices, in which watching a movie is even more inseparable from our daily activities. People are nowadays forming the culture of real virtuality, in other words, they create a virtuality as a fundamental dimension of their reality (Chalmers, 2017; Yoh, 2001; Ropolyi, 2015). Consequently, any cultural ideology presented by directors and writers becomes intertwined with our perception of reality. This means that the cinematic representation of gender and social norms influences us, shaping our understanding of these concepts.

The ubiquity of streaming has further blurred the lines between reality and fiction, making viewers susceptible to internalizing cinematic ideologies about gender representation. As Mulvey (1975) states, mainstream films employ a visual structure through a dominant patriarchal order that reinforces the idea that women are objects of the male gaze (8). This incessant exposure from the media naturalizes patriarchal frameworks, perpetuating unrealistic and limiting perception of gender by underrepresenting women, reproducing gender stereotypes, and normalizing violence against women (McLaren, 2019). Therefore, I will analyze whether the movie *Photocopier* reinforces or challenges prevailing societal norms, mainly in the context of Indonesian culture.

Although most people assume that cinema is entirely fictional with no real-world connection, it adeptly reflects our reality in ways we have not yet recognized. Cinema is not restricted to mere imagination but also the actual projection of the mind. Our mind might work as a screen containing a motion picture in both states of the human condition: awake or asleep (Rieber & Kelly, 2014). As I have previously addressed, cinema portrays the condition and culture of a director or writer's environment. Films are social artifacts that capture the reality of a certain period. Hansen would rather call it a 'public sphere', where the audience is expected to have different experiences (Hansen, 1991). Therefore, this study holds great significance in understanding the intersection between cinema and reality. Hopefully, this article will uncover broader implications for Indonesian society by exploring the relationship between women and cinema. What makes this article unique is that it applies Mulvey's psychoanalytic framework alongside Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and Rose's (2016) visual methodology for cinematographic elements, which has not been previously applied to Indonesian cinema. Therefore, it will advance the field's understanding of how the male gaze operates beyond its original context in Western Hollywood cinema.

1.1. A View on Mulvey's Male Gaze

The term male gaze is one of the most prominent issues in the cinematic universe. Through this theory, the dynamics of gender issues shown in cinema would reach beyond the screen. This resonates with our reality. This theory questions what is shown to each character within its narrative and to the audience. The male gaze was first coined by Mulvey (1975) in her seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," a theory that examines the work of filmmakers through their cameras and the perception of the audience. Mulvey (1975) suggested that the interaction among characters on screen eventually extends to the viewer's eyes and their experiences of seeing beauty, agency, and norms.

Mulvey (1975) believes that cinema can either shape or conform to our perception of females through other characters on the screen.

The male gaze means objectifying women by positioning them as passive visual objects through the idea of traditional, restrictive gender roles from multiple cultural domains, enhancing the traditional feminine stereotypes (Collins, 2017; Gill & Baker, 2021; Rabinowitz, 2013). The male gaze further underlines that many films position the audience as heterosexual male perspective that would objectify women's bodies (King, 2020). It is essential to view this male gaze theory as a scalpel for dissecting gender bias in media, especially in films, through the camera. According to Bloom (2017), the implementation of the male gaze theory into films is to identify both visual portrayal of women's bodies and examining the creative aspects carried out by the writers, directors, and artist would reflect gendered perspectives. Therefore, cinematic techniques serve as a critical tool for dissecting gender bias in visual media or films.

The discussion on the male gaze is rooted in psychoanalytic theory. To analyze the visual representation, Mulvey employs a critical tool from that psychoanalytical idea from Lacan and Freud, which includes scopophilia, voyeuristic desire, and sexual difference (Kościelecka, 2019). Chen (2024) confirms that Mulvey's (1975) seminal essay used a psychoanalytic approach to understand how films generate visual pleasure through desire and identification. Based on these underlying concepts of psychology, Mulvey (1975) further delivers two critical lenses of how pleasures are exhibited in films through the analysis of scopophilic and narcissistic pleasures. The first term, scopophilia, according to Freud, is "sexual pleasure in watching rather than looking... to show the intentional nature of the act". Mulvey (1975) added to this idea with her statement that goes, "subjecting them (victims of the scopophilia) to a controlling and curious gaze" (8). John Berger further reasserts how this perversion in cinema has made women succumb to their inferiority. He states that "men act and women appear... Thus she turns herself into an object... of vision: a sight" (47). It is clear how women are often looked at as something less than a sight to be 'enjoyed.' To reduce women as passive objects 'to be enjoyed' indicates the inequity embedded in traditional ways of seeing women. The latter term, narcissistic pleasure, according to Freud, is when a person "begins by taking himself, his own body, as his love-object" (lxxiv). In this context, narcissistic pleasure in cinema occurs when a character sees another character as an ideal reflection of their struggles and ideals.

1.2. Photocopier and the Literature Review

The movie *Photocopier* (2021), locally known as *Penyalin Cahaya*, was directed by Bhanuteja (2021) won the Piala Citra for Best Film. This film invites a deep exploration of female harassment in various spheres, notably the academic, through Suryani's character. Sexual harassment occurs after the r nighthofng a campus party. The film presents the issues of consent, agency, and intrusion of personal space and boundaries in Suryani's life as a university student. The story then sets off with Suryani venturing into a male-dominated society, which s a more intriguing issue beyond the personas in the film.

The dynamics of this Piala Citra-winning movie have attracted many researchers to delve deeper into this film from multiple analytical frameworks. Semiotic analysis has been used in many studies to dissect film representations of sexual violence and resistance. Tuhepaly and Mazaid (2022) used John Fiske's three-level semiotic frameworks, such as encompassing reality, representation, and ideology when examining sexual harassment representation in *Photocopier*. Their analysis draws a conclusion regarding patriarchal ideology and social class dynamics as foundational structures that could trigger sexual violence. Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis was used by Razali and Oktaviana (2023) to investigate types of sexual harassment through the lens of radical feminist representation and social cognition. Their focus was on analyzing characters' processes and responses to sexual violence, in contrast to Suryani's resistance. Suryani, as the movie unfolds, captures her refusal to being silenced and the determination to seek the truth and justice. The other victims, Farah and Rama, initially silent throughout the story, are afraid of serious repercussions if they act like Suryani. This study shows how social cognition works through the main character's storage and management of information about

sexual harassment, finding evidence, and fighting against injustice. In line with the issue of sexual harassment, [Maharani \(2023\)](#) investigated how the movie displays its resistance against sexual harassment through iconic signs, showing that both sexes are hugely affected. It also addresses how perpetrators can silence victims by exploiting their power. [Zahro and Putri \(2025\)](#) further claimed that the film did not only serve as entertainment but also as media that advocates public awareness about supporting survivors within patriarchal society and challenges the victim-blaming culture.

Sexual violence has extended through the use of technology and gained scholarly attention. [Nabila and Winiharti \(2023\)](#) examined the effect of technology-enabled disinformation on sexual objectification victims displayed in *Photocopier*. They used cascading and sexual objectification theories to examine how digital platforms could facilitate harm. They revealed that the technology could impact victims through the rapid transmission of private records, leading to fatal societal judgement. The reason why this technology might cause harm is that it can create disinformation that is purposely distributed by perpetrators in the form of confidential documents related to sexual objectification. This study focuses on the idea that digital infrastructure can be used against contemporary Indonesian society.

Another study viewed through an approach from Andrew Burn's multimodal discourse analysis to identify how *Photocopier* illustrated the sexual violence, and the study was conducted by [Fiardi et al. \(2024\)](#). They classified sign systems in motion media into three types: embodied, visual, and auditory. They called the method the *kineikonic* mode. Their findings revealed that sexual violence in movies can be categorized into four types. The first type is sexual harassment that is displayed through symbolism, such as clothing worn inside out. The second type is sexual exploitation, which refers to a case where victims' private data (videos and photos) are sold to fulfill the perpetrator's sexual desire. The third type is sexual intimidation or harassment. It occurs when victims are completely unaware of their precarious situation, yet society judges them anyway. The final type is sexual control, where perpetrators forcibly collect data or evidence with sexual undertones. This study is crucial for this investigation because it uses a multidimensional approach. Violence is shown to the audience through layered visual and auditory signifiers rather than explicitly addressing it, making the elements in the film sophisticated and challenging to recognize for the audience.

The study of *photocopiers* expands the issue of power relations and cinematic techniques. The power relation was studied by [Ammar et al. \(2024\)](#) using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, combined with the Outrage Management model. The focus was on discovering the power imbalance between victims and perpetrators. Through the analysis of dialogue and visual scenes, they discovered that the abusers dominated their victims through power abuse. Victims' struggles are often ignored and dismissed because of this power imbalance. The dynamics found in the movie are contextualized within Indonesian culture, citing that the patriarchal surroundings are the underlying cause of why this movie was produced. The next section highlights the technical perspective of the camera used in this film. [Haris and Manesah \(2025\)](#) argued that the handheld camera used in *Photocopier* creates a psychological tension that not only establishes realism but also builds a connection between the spectators and the characters. Using qualitative methods, the study revealed that camerawork when tracking the character's movement helped create emotional attachment while strengthening the narrative impact of the film. The outcome of this camerawork further intensifies the audience's experience of a vulnerable protagonist.

These studies provide insightful issues on representation, power dynamics, technological advancement and its negative impact, multimodal communication, cinematic craft, and feminist critique. However, these studies have not touched on the issue of the male gaze by [Mulvey \(1975\)](#), a theory on the psychoanalytic dimension of spectatorship, which was explained in the theoretical framework above. The main reason why this gap is noteworthy is that her theory offers a specific psychoanalytic lens that existing studies have yet to touch.

Furthermore, this study provides an in-depth analysis of the scopophilic and narcissistic pleasures manifested in *Photocopier*. The existing studies have explored semiotic representation ([Tuhepaly & Mazaid, 2022](#); [Razali & Oktaviana, 2023](#); [Maharani, 2023](#)), technology-enable objectification ([Nabila & Winiharti, 2023](#)), multimodal communication ([Fiardi et al., 2024](#)), power relations ([Ammar et al., 2024](#)), and cinematic techniques ([Haris & Manesah, 2025](#)). However, none of the aforementioned studies have

systematically examined how male characters display scopophilic behavior and narcissistic identification in films. This study addresses this substantial gap by examining the psychoanalytic mechanisms that capture how the male gaze operates in the narrative structure.

The film has been analyzed through many lenses, but not the psychoanalytic dimension. [Fiardi's \(2024\)](#) multimodal analysis is the closest study that discusses the visual and auditory signifiers of violence, but it does not approach the movie through gendered dynamics. [Nabila and Winiharti \(2023\)](#) based their main analysis on technology-enabled disinformation. They examined how victims' images are distributed without consent, which causes harmful consequences. However, they did not discuss the underlying psychoanalytic mechanisms that motivate the perpetrators in the first place, which are scopophilic pleasure and narcissistic identification. Similarly, the other two studies conducted by [Tuhepaly and Mazaid \(2022\)](#) in identifying patriarchal ideology and [Razali and Oktaviana \(2023\)](#) in exploring social cognition and feminist representation, did not analyze how this ideology is manifested through the mechanisms of the male gaze that establish visual pleasure in cinema. The urgency of this study lies in the fact that the conversation around objectification and the male gaze in cinema remains limited compared to Western film scholarship.

Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How do male characters in *Photocopier* demonstrate scopophilic pleasure toward female and male victims? (2) How do narcissistic identification processes shape male characters' perceptions of themselves in relation to their victims? By answering these questions, this study explains how Mulvey's male gaze theory works within Indonesian cinema and its implications for understanding gender-based violence on screen. This study also contributes to the existing scholarship on *photocopiers*. This study is significant because it bridges the gap between existing semiotic, multimodal, technological, and critical discourse analyses with psychoanalytic film theory, which will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how visual pleasure and narrative structure perpetuate or challenge patriarchal power dynamics in contemporary Indonesian cinema.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the representations of the male gaze in the film *Photocopier* (2021). This approach is suitable for this study because it explores how films construct and mirror cultural perceptions of gender and social phenomena ([Denzin & Lincoln, 2018](#)). The main analytical framework of this study is based on Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, which was discussed in the previous section. The theory examines how cinema positions women as objects of scopophilic pleasure and how the narrative strengthens the dynamics of patriarchal power through visual pleasure and identification processes.

The study follows a well-known analysis method of [Bordwell and Thompson \(2013\)](#) that focuses on two primary data sources. The initial step of the analysis is to examine the dialogue and verbal interactions using critical discourse analysis to unveil power dynamics and gender relations between male and female characters ([Fairclough, 2003](#)). Discourse analysis provides an in-depth examination of language construction and power relations in the movie. The next step is to analyze cinematic elements such as camera angles, framing, shot composition, lighting, and editing techniques. The study uses ([Rose, 2016](#)) visual methodology in capturing the film's visual construction of the male gaze. These visual elements reveal how scopophilic pleasure and narcissistic identification operate in the film's narrative.

Several scenes that reveal sexual harassment, objectification, and male-female interactions serve as the main components of this analysis. These films were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) direct enactment of the scopophilic behavior carried out by male characters, such as voyeuristic recording and digital cataloging of female bodies); (2) dialogue or interaction that unveils narcissistic self-justification; and (3) cinematographic choices that put the viewers in relation to gender and power. Each selected scene was coded against Mulvey's two analytical constructs of scopophilic pleasure and narcissistic identification, while using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to dissect the dialogue and power relations, and Rose's visual methodology for cinematographic elements. The theoretical lenses were

incorporated during the interpretation, which was done by first identifying the visual or verbal sign, then mapping it to the relevant psychoanalytic mechanism, and finally placing it within the broader patriarchal discourse of the film.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Copier as Cinematic Apparatus: Reframing Scopophilic Pleasure

The copier works as both a literal plot device and a metacinematic sign. In the early scenes of the film, the camera assumes the copier's perspective as Suryani and Amin playfully press their faces and feet against the copier's glass (Photocopier, 2021, 7:50), creating the idea of consensual self-imaging. This harmless moment establishes the copier as a neutral tool that can capture the willing subjects. However, this similar perspective could prove to be painful when Suryani, the main character, tries to verify her birthmark location by pressing herself against the copier glass, which later she identifies as one of the images found in Rama's installation photograph (Photocopier, 2021, 1:16:37). The viewers are positioned through the copier, which implicates them in technological reproduction and surveillance while simultaneously exposing the mechanism of that implication.

Bhanuteja's *Photocopier* (2021) employs a unique visual approach that challenges the conventional implementation of Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory within the Indonesian context. The film resists creating a scopophilic pleasure for viewers through its cinematic techniques even when the narrative is imbued with systematic scopophilic violence, contradicting to Mulvey's (1975) seminal work that highlights "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto female figure, which is styled accordingly". The film's main metaphor, the photocopier, becomes a mirror of how cinema itself works. The machine captures and reproduces images of people, raising questions about the authenticity and copying of the human experience.

The function of this copier could be both a violation and an investigative tool. This is in line with Rose (2016), visual methodology, highlighting how the technology might structure and mediate visual perception. The copier makes visible what Mulvey proclaims as cinema's function: an apparatus that captures, reproduces, and distributes bodies. However, unlike most Hollywood cinemas addressed by Mulvey, *Photocopier* makes this apparatus visible rather than naturalized or hidden. This forces viewers to question the ethics of reproducing bodies through technology.

3.2. Scopophilic Violence: Technology as Instrument of the Male Gaze

3.2.1. Male Characters' Scopophilic Practices

The character's systematic voyeurism is evident throughout the narrative, providing extensive evidence of scopophilic pleasure within the diegesis. Rama, the most powerful character in the narrative that happens to be the photographer of the theater crew, embodies what Mulvey believes as a scopophilia existing "as a perversion, producing pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through a sight" (Mulvey, 1975). Rama distorts his predatory voyeurism through his "Milky Way" installation. In his defense during the confrontation with Suryani, he claims that he was only trying to capture the celestial beauty of the starry night (Photocopier, 2021, 1:33:24). However, as it turns out, he takes the photographs of the unconscious female bodies. He later inverted the image to create the illusion of starry nights. This type of deception reflects Williams's (1990) observation that "cinema often glorifies the female body while depriving agency". In this case, Rama's photographs beautify the violation of female agency and transform trauma into art. This represents scopophilia in Mulvey's exact sense: the controlling gaze is not simply a passive observation but an active appropriation of the female body as raw material for male pleasure and self-expression. Rama's camera functions as the apparatus of this control, converting the unconscious and non-consenting female bodies into an aesthetic object, the very mechanism Mulvey identifies as cinema's foundational patriarchal operation (Mulvey, 1975).

The film highlights Rama's scopophilic mechanism through Suryani's investigation. Her definitive answer is through Amin's hard drive containing folders labelled with women's names: Ana, Anita,

Annisa, Farah, Patricia, Rina, Rika, Riri, Windy, Stella, Yemima, and Yuli (*Photocopier*, 2021, 1:16:37). These women are systematically catalogued, showing how badly they have been abused and stripped of their agency. The folder represents women to be reduced to digital data and sold for only Rp.500.000 per person by Amin to Rama (*Photocopier*, 2021, 1:24:46). This digital organization resonances Nabila and Winiharti (2023) findings on technology-enabled sexual objectification. The digital platform is used to facilitate harm by spreading private images.

The film's main critique happens during the Suryani's breakthrough of color inversion scene (*Photocopier*, 2021, 1:16:37). Instead of simply jumping into the realization, the camera 'invites' viewers to follow Suryani's investigative eyes: the audience witnesses as Suryani stores Rama's "Milky Way" image, converts the image into black and white, and then inverts the color to see the parts of human skin. These processes of deconstructing images position the audience from passive viewers to active investigators. This leads to a major discovery that proves that Rama disguises unconscious bodies as celestial art. This technique aligns with Fiardi et al.'s (2024) multimodal analysis that examines how *Photocopier* displays sexual violence through layered visual and auditory symbols rather than explicit illustration.

Rama's network in executing his scopophilic violence extends to other male characters in the film. Aminsky or Amin, who works in copier shop, steals private digital information from their customer's phone and drives (*Photocopier*, 2021, 1:24:40). Regardless of what Amin says about the alibi, his action of accessing and storing the digital privacy of those women is voyeuristic. He transforms common technologies into tools of exploitation. Another complicit character that might surprise the audience is Burhan. This elderly driver, who seems harmless and weak, lures his victim into his vehicle (*Photocopier*, 2021, 1:52:06) enabling Rama to execute his plan. Burhan then takes a photograph of Rama's victim, Suryani, for his personal pleasure. This cross-generational complicity illustrates that scopophilic violence permeates all male positions within the film's social hierarchy, regardless of age and social status.

The recording of the sexual assault (1:52:29) provides a clear example of the intersection of scopophilia and technology. The scene displays the entire phone supported by a vase, as if Suryani invites the audience to directly experience the trauma by looking at the video. The handheld film technique, which Haris and Manesah (2025) claim creates psychological tension and realism, forces viewers to witness the abuse through the perpetrator's recording device. This moment manifests the workings of contemporary scopophilia through digital reproduction. Assault is not limited to physical acts. It also takes place through the act of recording and the possibility that the images may be shared later.

3.2.2. The Film's Refusal of Scopophilic Pleasure for Viewers

The film critically employs cinematographic techniques that refuse to create scopophilic pleasure for the audience despite showing scopophilic violence. The use of mid-shots and close-ups instead of full-body scans that might fragment or eroticize female bodies (*Bordwell & Thompson*, 2013). Suryani is filmed during her investigation to be looked natural and unglamorous with her oily face, no makeup, and visible exhaustion. It denies the beautification that generally accompanies female protagonists in the mainstream cinema. The camerawork in many ways contradicts the traditional "to-be-looked-at-ness" that Mulvey identifies in Hollywood movies, where 'women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact' (*Mulvey*, 1975).

The visual tone is dominated by dark green and yellow, creating the idea of confinement, institutional oppression, and economic struggle, rather than visual pleasure. These colors evoke claustrophobia and entrapment, positioning viewers in emphatic discomfort rather than voyeuristic enjoyment. When one of the ethic committee members dismisses Suryani's statements while continuing to eat his food (*Photocopier*, 2021, 54:22), the camera focuses on his food instead of her facial distress, showing how her words are treated insignificantly. This camera technique is in line with Fairclough's (2003) critical discourse analysis approach, highlighting power imbalance through shots composition.

It can be concluded that the film operates on two registers: showing scopophilic pleasure within the narrative of the male character's voyeurism while refusing to produce that pleasure for viewers through cinematographic technique. These two strategies allow *Photocopier* to criticize the male gaze without becoming complicit. It is a tension that Collins (2017) identifies as the main issue in a feminist visual culture, which seeks to "express and disrupts" patriarchal representation.

3.3. Narcissistic Identification and Male Self-Perception

Sigmund Freud describes narcissism as the attitude of a person who "treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily treated" (Freud, 1957). In cinematic terms, narcissistic identification appears when characters see others as reflections of their idealized selves, struggles, and desires. The film shows how male characters' narcissistic identification processes build their perceptions of morality, power, and entitlement in relation to their victims.

3.3.1. Rama: The Artist as Narcissistic Visionary

Rama's narcissistic identification emerges in the way he sees himself as a visionary artist, a self-image that reveals his own narcissism. He believes that the images he captures contain aesthetic value or nature. At that moment, Rama positions himself as an artist rather than a predator. His self-image allows him to transform violence into beauty, reflected in his work that he calls the "Milky Way." The installation mirrors his idealized self-image as cultured, artistic, and sophisticated.

This narcissistic change from violence into aesthetics resonates with Mulvey's (1975) statement in her "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," where she proclaims that in classical Hollywood cinema, "the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normative narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of the story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation." Rama switches the dynamics from women's presence being frozen in the narrative flow to literally freezing their violated bodies within artistic frames. He asserts his control through aesthetic domination.

3.3.2. Rama: The Exhibitor as Narcissistic Display

The most sophisticated and disturbing form of narcissistic identification is embodied in Rama. Throughout the film, Rama is shown to be calm and composed even when confronted by Suryani. She brings solid evidence of him being the main evil in the story, but he can vehemently deny those allegations and turn them into Suryani's disadvantages. He trains himself to be in full control of himself and that makes him the superior to those around him (*Photocopier*, 2021, 1:21:30 – 1:21:59). When the lights go out, Rama remains unnervingly composed, casually asking Aminsky, "Haven't paid the electricity bill, huh?" (*Photocopier*, 2021, 1:20:10). His silhouette fills the dark frames. At this moment, the surveillance dynamics shift. Suryani now observes from the second floor. However, this moment only lasts a few seconds as Rama is aware that his phone is being compromised. He received double notifications of attempted logins, by which he took precautionary actions by taking screenshots of the evidence. His attempt to maintain control through documentation reflects his narcissistic self-image as somewhat untouchable, even when the power dynamic inverts against him.

Rama's installation of the "Milky Way" functions as a symbol of a narcissistic display, where he can showcase his power and control for the public to witness. Rama asserts his dominance as an exhibitor of people's trauma by displaying violated bodies as art in the theatre space. He transforms private violations into public spectacles. This is in line with Ammar et al.'s (2014) observation that perpetrators in *photocopiers* dominate victims through power abuse, exploiting institutions, and social hierarchies. This is reflected through Rama's father's protection and the complicity of the campus' staff in silencing Suryani's testimony, further strengthening his narcissistic self-perception as privileged and protected.

The ending of this film offers final critical remarks on Rama's narcissistic identification and his structural resilience. When the victims gather on the rooftop of a campus building, they throw copies of their bodily evidence and Rama's crimes into public view. The act is a symbol of power reversal, where

the victims are literally and metaphorically “above” their abusers. The victims seize control of the reproduction and distribution, the one that Rama used to violate his victims, as tools of justice and testimony. Despite all these events, and despite being taken down by a woman who punches him until he collapses into a fetal position, Rama grins.

The fetal position, a posture where he could finally be seen as vulnerable, signifies complete humiliation. The fetal position works as what Butler claims as a “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1999), carrying meaning as a symbol of powerlessness because medical texts and psychology have all marked curling inward and protecting yourself as signs of submission and weakness. In other words, when Rama is positioned this way, he performs defeat through Butler’s identification of “the disciplinary production” of bodily meanings (184). However, his grin reveals something more sinister. Butler (1999) claims that identity and meaning are “socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (p.23), and Rama’s grin shows that these norms can persist even when the body contradicts them. His posture might signify defeat, but his face does not. This is the film’s most devastating point, where patriarchal narcissism runs deep. It survives even in the face of total physical and symbolic defeat. His body may be curled in the fetal position, defeated, but his self-image remains untouched.

The reason for this may lie in the fact that, despite public humiliation and physical violence that force him to defeat, Rama’s narcissistic self-image remains inviolable because it is not grounded in him as an individual but is structurally sustained. The image is embedded in institutions where he studies, his family, and the broader social system in which a victim-blaming culture persists. Those are the values that, according to Zahro and Putri (2025), is crucial to understand sexual violence in Indonesian society.

Rama’s grin in the final scene indicates patriarchal narcissism, even when individual patriarchs are being taken down. It echoes what (Hooks, 2015) claimed as the “oppositional gaze”, which means that challenging male visual dominance requires dismantling structures of domination, not simply exposing individual perpetrators. hook highlights that while “the ability to manipulate one’s gaze “can” open the possibility of agency, “true transformation demands more than momentary reversals of power (p. 116). The victim’s empowerment and Rama’s physical collapse (curled in the fetal position) do not simply mean that the real system will change. The structure that produces people like Rama remains unchanged. The persistence of his grin becomes the film’s symbol of the refusal of an easy resolution, its acknowledgement that patriarchal structures outlive patriarchal individuals.

3.3.3. The Father: Paternalism as Narcissistic Authority

Suryani’s father symbolizes narcissistic identification through religion and patriarchal authority. In the beginning of the movie, Suryani’s father serves as an imam during family prayers (Photocopier, 2021, 05:27), presenting himself as the moral guardian of the family. Yet, this pious façade disguises narcissistic domination, in which his protection becomes a guise for control. His constant surveillance and control of his daughter, Suryani, such as questioning her lateness (4:27), demanding that she help her mother whenever she can instead of chasing her dreams and career opportunities (9:40), criticizing her clothes (10:02), and expelling her from the house because of drinking alcohol. The actions exhibited by her father refers to the idea of paternalism, where a person substitutes their judgement for another’s, claiming this will improve the target’s welfare (Penrose & Geisler, 1994).

However, as it turns out, the father’s paternalism serves his own narcissistic self-image rather than Suryani’s welfare. His concern with family reputation and social standing surpasses his concerns for his daughter’s safety and autonomy. The father blamed his wife for Suryani’s drinking incident, “It is because you gave her permission!” (Photocopier, 2021, 18:24), when the truth is that he is the one who allows her to go out that day. The most devastating moment is when he kneels before the predator of his daughter, Rama. He begs for Rama’s mercy, “My daughter is out of line, I’ll punish her myself!” (1:34:23). This act of supplication to his daughter’s abuser exhibits the hollowness of his protective patriarchal identity. His concern lies in preserving a moral social image of being moral as part of his narcissistic investment, not in his daughter’s well-being.

The father’s narcissism is revealed through several contradictions in the novel. He presents himself as a pious protector of his family, yet mostly stays at home, doing almost nothing except playing with his

phone. However, his employment status has not been clearly explained. At the same time, he prevents Suryani from having a decent job that matches her skillset. It is intriguing to hear from Suryani's mother that the father "has no right to get me out of the house" (Photocopier, 2021, 1:40:45), suggesting a deeper dynamic within that family. This indicates that the father's authority is performative rather than substantive. He could only control through violence or verbal abuse rather than through actual economic or moral leadership.

This paternalistic narcissism is connected to Indonesian culture. Tuhepaly and Mazaid (2022) identify through semiotic analysis that patriarchal ideology and social class dynamics work as underlying structures that triggers sexual violence. His behavior exemplifies how men maintain narcissistic self-images by controlling women's bodies and autonomy. His religious façade becomes another mask for justifying his narcissistic power, illustrating how patriarchal structures deploy morality to justify domination.

3.3.4. Aminsky: The Protector as Narcissistic Betrayer

Amin's narcissistic identification works through his self-perception as a loyal friend and protector. For most of the film, Suryani confides in Amin. He looks after her by accompanying her to the party (7:59), providing shelter in his shop while giving her personal space, and helping her investigate the selfie incident and the assault. However, this idealized self-image collapses when the truth reveals that it was Amin who provides Rama access to the women's private folders (Photocopier, 2021, 1:23:03). By giving Rama what he wants, Amin justifies his actions. He is desperate to get the money to pay for medical bills (Photocopier, 2021, 1:24:46) for his brother, who happens to have dengue fever. He attempts to preserve his narcissistic self-image by portraying himself as the savior of his family rather than a collaborator in sexual exploitation. The price he puts on commercializing women's bodies for 500,000 rupiah per victim reveals the violation. He views them as commodified data points in economic transactions.

Amin's narcissistic identification as a protector-savior allows him to separate his actions. He continuously helped Suryani investigate her assault while facilitating Rama's assault. The reason for this is economic justification. He can still maintain his boundary when he was drinking with Suryani (Photocopier, 2021, 1:09:31). Amin is almost unable to restrain himself from making any sexual advances toward Suryani, but he still manages to have self-control and is labelled as a "good guy" despite his obvious betrayal. His narcissism is evident when he sees himself as moral but weaponizes perpetrators like Rama to execute his plan.

Amin's photocopy shop carries significant symbolic meaning in this narrative. Amin literally commands the means of reproduction—the technology that copies and distributes information. His position as technological gatekeeper allows him to have a full control in which he exploits for profit, connecting to Nabila and Winiharti (2023) analysis of how much digital infrastructure facilitates contemporary sexual objectification. Amin's narcissistic self-image as both protector and friend distorts his actual role as a mediator of violence, the friendly face of systemic exploitation.

3.4. The Photocopier as Liberation: Reclaiming the Apparatus and Reclaiming Identity

The film's final sequences perform a powerful inversion of the photocopier's symbolic function, articulated through two linked acts of reclaiming agency: It is when the victims gather on the rooftop, and they throw copied evidence of their violated bodies to the public below (Photocopier, 2021, 2:02:56). They transform the technology that would enable violations into a tool of liberation and statement. The same apparatus that mechanically reproduced their bodies without consent now reproduces their voices and agency. The spatial and symbolic positioning, which is from ground level (subordination) to rooftop (elevation) and from objects of reproduction to agents of distribution, represents a form of resistance against patriarchal structures. This case is analyzed in Razali and Oktaviana's (2023) study, in which they used framework of radical feminist representation and social cognition.

The scene in which the victims throw copies of their bodies invokes multiple symbolic registers. First, the seizure of reproductive means: victims now control what gets copied and distributed, inverting the power dynamics that characterized their violation. Second, public testimony and private violations become public evidence, challenging educational institutions regarding their cover-ups and complicity. Third, material abundance and multiple copies ensure that evidence cannot be destroyed by those in power. Fourth, vertical power: physical height represents intellectual and ethical superiority, literally looking down upon the system that failed them. This moment echoes Maharani's (2023) semiotic analysis of resistance in *Photocopier*, in which the copier machine operates as a powerful symbol of transformation, converting what was once used to silence and violate victims into a tool for public testimony and collective resistance.

However, the film's most radical act of reclaiming agency exists in its final scene where every victim puts their faces, their violated bodily parts or dairies against the photocopier's glass, willingly reproducing their own image and experience for public visibility (*Photocopier*, 2021, 2:02:56). This collective act reverses the film's playful scene in which Suryani and Amin consensually copy their body parts. Now, that same consensual self-imaging becomes a political testimony. They are no longer objects whose bodies are photographed and exploited. They are now subjects who opt to be seen and claim their stories publicly.

Suryani's face which is captured in the last sequence fills the frame with wide eyes that emits rage rather than shame or fear. This visual choice is critical. Her eyes, as the organs of seeing/gazing, become the focal point of where scopophilic pleasure reduces women to being objects or to be looked at. Suryani's wide-eyed rage asserts her position as a subject who "looks back". She confronts the viewer and everyone who fails her, including the institution. This aligns with what Hooks (2015) means by 'oppositional gaze.' The theory was originally conceived in relation to Black female spectatorship, but it can be applied to any marginalized subject's refusal to passively accept being objectified by returning the look with critical awareness and anger.

The victims move from Mulvey (1975) "to-be-looked-at-ness" of captured bodies while unconscious, inverted to Milky Way stars "to-be-recognized-ness" faces and bodily parts that consciously copied, claimed, and distributed. Victims shift from being objects of desire to subjects that demand justice. The copier machine enables this transformation; the same tool that initially dehumanized them now restores their agency through conscious self-identification.

The film refuses to provide an easy resolution. The victims seized the copier machines and then distributed the evidence, yet Rama still finds the situation favorable by showing the audience his demonic grin. This juxtaposition suggests that individual resistance, however dominant, does not automatically dismantle larger structural oppression. The copier machine can literally be reclaimed, but patriarchal narcissism persists in the institutions and cultures that protect sexual predators.

The ending illustrates the film's understanding of resistance: liberation is neither impossible nor complete, but a process. The copier's transformation from violation to testimony suggests that technology is not inherently oppressive, depending on who controls it. However, reclaiming power does not undo the harm that has already occurred or stop perpetrators like Rama from emerging. It creates possibilities for new ways of seeing, speaking out, and standing together, while reminding us that possibility is not the same as certainty.

Suryani's final statement through her wide-eyed rage suggests that victims can reclaim their images and stories, but they should not have to fight for what should already theirs. Her rage is justified not just at certain perpetrators but at the systems that fail to protect the victim's rights. Her eyes push us, the audience, to acknowledge not only her suffering but also the forces or people that made resistance necessary.

3.5. Theoretical Implications: Indonesian Cinema and the Male Gaze

Photocopier demonstrates that Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, originally formulated for analyzing Hollywood cinema, needs cultural and technological adaptation when applied to Indonesian film. The film does not simply employ the conventional scopophilic cinematography that Mulvey

identifies, such as lingering camera movements, fragmented body shots and eroticized lighting. However, the film still provides a sophisticated analysis of how scopophilic pleasure and narcissistic identification operate in Indonesia's contemporary context through digital technology, institutional complicity, and patriarchal domestic structures.

The film is distinctive in how it presents the male character's voyeuristic desire while holding the camera back so that the audience does not share in that pleasure. Through this strategy, the film can question voyeurism without becoming voyeuristic at the same time. By making the apparatus visible to the audience, which is literally positioning the camera as a photocopier, the film turns attention to the act of reproduction itself, reflecting on the surveillance and technological mediation of bodies.

The copier functions as an updated metaphor for the cinematic apparatus in the digital age. If Mulvey's concern was how images were mechanically reproduced on film, this film deals with a digital era in which images can be copied, shared, and commercialized in seconds. The shift from the traditional film camera to photocopier/phone camera reflects today's reality, where almost everyone holds reproductive technology, and where violations can be instantly copied and distributed. In this context, evidence and exploitation travel through the same digital networks.

The film critically examines the Indonesian cultural context that shapes the functioning of the male gaze. Suryani's father religious authority, the university ethics committee's institutional power, the economic aspect that drives Amin to become complicit, and the class dynamics between Rama's powerful family and Suryani's struggling household all contextualize scopophilic violence within Indonesian social structure. These aspects are in line with Tuhepaly and Mazaid's (2022) semiotic analysis in identifying patriarchal ideology and social class as foundational to sexual violence representation in the film *Photocopier*.

Furthermore, the film's final sequence, which displays victims copying their faces and body parts and ends with Suryani's rage-filled eyes, introduces what might be called the "returned gaze" within Indonesian feminist cinema. While Mulvey's male gaze theory focuses on how cinema positions women as passive objects of the male gaze, the film explores how women can reclaim visual technologies to highlight subjectivity, testimony, and anger.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how the film *Photocopier* (2021) employs and transforms Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory within Indonesia's contemporary cinematic context through sophisticated engagement with technology, visual apparatus, and narrative structure. In answering the first research question "How do male characters demonstrate scopophilic pleasure towards victim?" The response would be that the film reveals systematic voyeurism operating through male characters' use of technology, such as cameras, photocopiers, phones, and computers, to surveil, capture, and commodify violated bodies. Several male characters (Rama, Amin, and Burhan) employ scopophilic mechanisms, converting everyday technologies into sexual violence tools. The film exposes how scopophilic pleasure functions through aesthetic disguise in a form of art (Rama's "Milky Way"), economic transaction (Amin's asking price of Rp. 500.000 for each private data point), and intergenerational complicity (Burhan).

However, the film refuses to reproduce scopophilic pleasure for the audience through its cinematographic choices. The film employs mid-shots, natural aesthetics, and claustrophobic institutional darkness, which is dominated by dark green and yellow tones. *Photocopier* positions the viewers as empathetic witnesses rather than voyeurs. The camerawork's refusal to fragment, eroticize, or beautify female bodies challenges the "to-be-looked-at-ness" that Mulvey discovers in Hollywood cinema. However, an ethical question remains present in the film. Through Suryani's investigative eyes, the audience is often met with violated images of women, raising the question of whether critique can ever fully avoid complicity in what it criticizes.

To answer the second research question of "How do narcissistic identification processes shape male characters' perception of themselves in relation to victims?" This study identifies distinct forms of narcissistic self-imaging among perpetrators. Rama, who sees himself as an artist, transforms violation

into celestial beauty and exercises his power through public installation. Suryani's father, a moral/religious person, controls Suryani's autonomy under the guise of protection. Amin, Suryani's loyal protector, justifies his betrayal through economic necessity. Narcissistic identification facilitates violence by reframing exploitation as creativity, privilege, paternalism, or survival.

The most significant is Rama's final scene grin. Despite being punched and collapsing in the fetal position, Rama smirks, crystallizing the film's most devastating insight about patriarchal narcissism. The contrast between ultimate bodily vulnerability (marked by fetal regression to infancy) and persistent psychological invulnerability (marked by a self-satisfied smirk) illustrates that narcissistic identification is structural rather than individual. Patriarchal dominance is embedded in institutions, families, and cultural systems that survive exposure, and the defeat of an individual (symbolized by Rama) could never dismantle the patriarchal structure. Rama's grin suggests that the system will ultimately protect him. His status remains intact despite momentary physical abasement. Patriarchy operates as a self-reproducing system that cannot be reduced to individual accountability issues.

The photocopier itself works as a central and multidimensional metaphor in the film. It operates as an apparatus that can reproduce consensually or violate without permission, document trauma or distribute evidence, serve patriarchal power, or enable feminist resistance. When the victims snatch this tool in the final scene, throw the copied evidence from the top of the building, and place their bodily parts on the copier machine for self-identification, they enact a symbolic and material reclamation of reproductive means. The progression from violated unconscious bodies, which are captured, distributed, and then inverted in art) to conscious self-identified faces and notes of the revelation of the assault, which are willingly copied and distributed, represents a transformation within the visual economy. It goes from male objects, to be looked at, to subjects demanding recognition.

Suryani's face in the film's final image, her wide eyes filled with rage rather than shame embodies the "oppositional gaze" that (Hooks, 2015) calls the "oppositional gaze". She confronts the audience, perpetrators, and institutions that failed her, refusing to passively accept being objectified and instead returning the look with critical awareness and fury. Her eyes transform the copier from an instrument of violation into a platform for her testimony, from the technology that strips consent into a tool that highlights her agency. However, the film ultimately refuses a triumphant resolution. Suryani's empowerment coexists with Rama's persistent smirk, suggesting that individual resistance, however powerful as it may be, does not guarantee a dismantlement of structural oppression.

This study contributes to the existing scholarship on *photocopiers* by bridging semiotics, multimodal, and Critical Discourse Analysis with psychoanalytic film theory. This study explores how visual pleasure and narrative structure challenge patriarchal power dynamics in contemporary Indonesian cinema. The film's sophisticated engagement with technology, refusal of conventional scopophilic cinematography, unwavering examination of narcissistic identification processes, and exploration of resistance through technological reclamation illustrate that Indonesian cinema can critically examine the male gaze while remaining culturally specific and technologically relevant.

The photocopier serves as a central metaphor and updates Mulvey's (1975) theory for the digital age, in which reproductive technology is ubiquitous. The age where violations and evidence travel through the same networks, and the apparatus itself becomes a site of struggle. *Photocopier* argues that liberation requires not abandoning technology but reclaiming it, transforming machines of violation into platforms for testimony, mechanical reproduction into political speech, and passivity into rage.

Future research should extend this analysis by examining how the victim's gaze operates throughout the movie. They might need to see how Suryani, Farah, and other survivors look, investigate, and testify beyond the final scene of the film. In addition, others should conduct a comparative analysis with other Southeast Asian films; addressing sexual violence could illuminate regional variations in how cinema represents, criticizes, or even reproduces the male gaze. Future research could develop a cross-cultural comparative framework to investigate how diverse cinematic traditions reinterpret or contest Mulvey's theory. This approach may uncover transnational patterns of visual objectification and culturally specific modes of resistance. Therefore, deepening our understanding of how gaze operates across diverse contexts.

The discussion around objectification and the male gaze in Indonesian cinema remains limited compared to Western film scholarship. This article represents one step toward expanding that critical discourse, demonstrating that theories in one context can be productively adapted and transformed when applied to different cultural, technological, and cinematic traditions. *The photocopier* does not simply apply Mulvey's theory but also challenges, complicates, and finally enriches it. The film insists that the apparatus of seeing can be reclaimed, that the victims can become witnesses, and that wide-eyed, unwavering rage is a legitimate response to systemic violations.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study as it is a systematic review of previously published literature and does not involve the collection of new data from human or animal subjects.

Informed Consent Statement

All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic research purposes.

Authors' Contributions

AIS was primarily responsible for conceptualizing the research framework, designing the methodological approach, and conducting the formal analysis of the film through the lenses of male gaze theory, critical discourse analysis, and visual methodology. AIS also led the main investigation process, interpreted the findings, and prepared the original draft of the manuscript. MEI contributed to the investigation by supporting the analytical process and providing essential resources relevant to the study. MEI also played a central role in reviewing and refining the manuscript, strengthening the overall argument, improving the clarity of the discussion, and supervising the development of the paper. Both authors contributed to the interpretation of the findings, provided critical input throughout the writing process, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

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