

Middle Child: Communication Dynamics In The Movie A Long Way To Come Home

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Abstract

Every child has unique characteristics, especially the middle child. Middle children bring their own challenges, they have to balance the desire to be noticed with the role as a mediator. The researcher examines more deeply the communication dynamics of middle children in the movie “Jalan yang Jauh Jangan Lupa Pulang” (A Long Way To Come Home). This research aims to reveal the communication dynamics of middle children in families, friendships, and couples using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Through qualitative methods involving observation and interviews, this research reveals the denotation, connotation, and mythical meanings related to the role of middle children in the family. The results of the analysis show that good family communication is essential for building the middle child's self-confidence, while a lack of attention can lead to feelings of alienation and emotional conflict. In addition, this study also explores the communication dynamics of friendship and couple relationships, emphasizing that jealousy and distrust can damage interpersonal relationships. The importance of even-handed attention from the family to prevent negative impacts on the emotional development of the middle child, as well as the importance of effective communication in all aspects of the relationship, are discussed

Keywords: Middle Child, Communication Dynamic, Film, Conflict, Semiotic

INTRODUCTION

The family forms an important role in individual development and the formation of social values in social life. The family is the smallest unit consisting of husband, wife, and children, where each member has rights, obligations, and responsibilities related to family interests (Maryam et al., 2022). Families have their own roles and rights and responsibilities. If the roles, rights and obligations in the family are fulfilled, it will result in a prosperous family. It is a fact that conflicts in the family that create disharmony, differences and awareness between individuals in the family, and conflicts in the family can lead to a prosperous family (Maryam et al., 2022).

Birth order greatly influences one's personality and behavior. Each child in the family will interpret their unique position, based on their own experiences and perceptions. This then shapes the way they interact with others and live their lives. Understanding birth order can help us understand that each individual has different characteristics. For example, firstborns tend to be more responsible, while youngest children are often more creative. This concept can also explain why someone may be better suited to a certain type of job or adapt easily to different social environments. He or she is the only child who will receive all the attention and truly get undivided parental time. Research shows it makes a big difference in their development (Borba, 2009).

The renowned psychologist Alfred Adler found that middle children are generally more creative and flexible as they strive to be different from their older and younger siblings (Borba, 2009). They are also often more relaxed, independent, diplomatic and resourceful, and more balanced and generous than their siblings. The last child is the jolly one, popular and sociable, risk-taking but prone to psychological disorders. The last child is identical to whatever the parents want. The youngest child will always feel listened to so that the youngest child will be confident in speaking. The first child is a super achiever who is individualistic, demanding, very reliable but tends to be loner, irritable and less forgiving. Since childhood, the independence of an only children has been formed. The undivided affection of their parents makes them brave enough to

speak up and make decisions.

This research takes a closer look at the Middle Child. Many experts say that the Middle Child is a mystery. For example, Bradford Wilson and George Edington recognized that in all birth order positions, “the middle one is the most difficult to define, let alone describe in any precise expression”. The middle child, experiencing pressure from both sides, behaves as if he or she is in a race (Majdi, 2024). The position of the middle child brings its own challenges, as they must balance the desire for attention with the role of mediator.

Movies are an important part of the system used by individuals or groups to send and receive messages. Movies can be communicators or intermediaries in communication. Film also functions as a communication medium that can influence people's values and behavior, by utilizing the visual appeal of images that are interesting to watch (Mahlil, 2020). In a number of certain scenes, movies have not only developed as an entertainment medium, they have also developed as a medium of information and education. In other words, film is a medium for conveying messages from communicators to communicants. Film is not only a medium for delivering messages to one or two communicants, but a wider community (Kurniasih et al., 2023). Barthes emphasizes that signs in films do not stand alone, they are part of a larger system in which meanings are interrelated (Prasetya, 2019).

Many movies are about family. The movie *A Long Way to Come Home* clearly illustrates how Aurora's position as the middle child in the family greatly affects her life. The lack of attention from her parents makes Aurora feel lonely, lost and unheard. As a result, she chooses to stay away from her family and search for herself in London. The conflicts that arise between the three siblings in London further reinforce the idea that the middle child's position in the family can trigger complex emotional problems.

The relationship between film and semiotic perspectives, through the thinking of Roland Barthes, offers an in-depth look at how meaning is constructed in visual media. Barthes, influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure, divides semiotics into two main aspects: denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to the literal meaning of the sign, while connotation describes a more complex meaning related to the emotions, and cultural values of the user. Barthes said in 'Myth Today', Barthes explained that myth functions as a way to understand and conceptualize cultural reality (Prasetya, 2019).

The power of movies lies in their ability to influence audience perceptions through storylines, characters, and directing techniques. As such, Barthes' semiotic analysis becomes an important tool for understanding how films shape meaning and ideology within a broader cultural context (Prasetya, 2019).

The first previous research from (Fahida, 2021) with the title *Roland Barthes Semiotics Analysis on the Film “Nanti Kita Cerita Hari” (NKCTHI)* by Angga Dwimas Sasongko. Based on the results of the research that has been done, the researcher concludes that the audience knows the meaning of the film as a whole, but when the film is analyzed, there are not a few denotation, connotation, and mythical meanings. For example, from the five scenes used as Based on the results of the research that has been done, the researcher concludes that generally the audience only understands the meaning of the film as a whole. However, when the film is analyzed, there are many denotation, connotation, and mythical meanings that appear. For example, from the five scenes used as the object of research, there is a direct meaning of each scene, followed by the connotation meaning which is the indirect meaning of each scene, as well as the myth contained in the five scenes as a research sample.

The second research is research from (Purba et al., 2023) with the title *Dynamics of Parent-Child Relationships: The Role of Family Counseling in Improving Communication*. The results of this study indicate that family counseling can support family members in achieving harmony. In the counseling process, efforts are made to understand, recognize, pay attention to, and accept each family member, and try to maintain a harmonious relationship. Thus, family

counseling plays a role in preventing and overcoming problems that arise, so as to maintain harmony in the family.

The third study entitled “The interpretation of Generation Z Middle Children Regarding Middle Child Syndrome” by (Pradiaswari, 2023) The results of this study indicate that the average middle child claims to experience middle child syndrome. Children can attract parents’ attention if they show their uniqueness. Therefore, parents need to provide balanced attention and take a personal approach of each child.

Based on the previous research above, it shows that middle children need communication and harmony between family members, and equal attention from parents to children, especially middle children, can help overcome middle child syndrome, so that overall previous research highlights the importance of effective communication and attention in building healthy and meaningful relationships. In the researcher's study, analyzing the “Middle Child: Communication Dynamics in the movie *A Long Way to Come Home*”. While previous research shows that middle children often experience greater psychological pressure than first-born and youngest children. However, there is still a lack of how communication dynamics in the family affect the middle child. The movie “*A Long Way to Come Home*” offers new insights into this issue by depicting the journey of Aurora, a middle child who migrates to London. The movie explores how a lack of parental support can affect one's confidence and ability to face challenges.

Aurora struggles with her parents' expectations and the reality of her life, reflecting the importance of healthy communication within the family. Through Aurora's character, the movie showcases different forms of communication, both positive and negative, and their impact on her psychological development. Openness in communication can help the middle child feel more accepted, while miscommunication can exacerbate feelings of alienation and increase psychological distress.

The researcher focuses on the character of Aurora (the middle child) in the movie “*A Long Way to Come Home*”. As the middle child, Aurora often feels neglected and unnoticed by her family. The word “middle child” denotatively refers to her position as the second child in the family. However, this word also has a deeper implied meaning (connotation). Aurora experiences feelings of loneliness and confusion in finding her identity. She feels pressured to fulfill her parents' expectations, but at the same time wants to pursue her dreams as an artist in London. In addition, the Myth of the “Middle Child” illustrates that the middle child is often the mediator in family conflicts. In this film, Aurora tries to maintain a good relationship with her brother and sister despite feeling marginalized.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used in this study is qualitative, which emphasizes in- depth understanding of a problem rather than generalization. This method relies on in-depth analysis with a focus on cases, because each problem has a different nature. The approach used is deductive qualitative, which means that the researcher can identify a small number of themes that seem relevant to the theme of his research. Ideas, informative, interesting and relevant objects of study in the interview narrative are useful for improving the quality of the external validity of the data, where the data narrative that emerges from the narrative becomes valuable data to be analyzed (Nuriman, 2021). The subject in this study, namely Aurora's role as the middle child, while the object of this research is *A Long Way to Come Home* movie. This research uses *A Long Way to Come Home* movie as the main informant.

This research collects primary data by direct observation of the movie “*A Long Way to Come Home*”. The main focus of observation is to analyze the communication patterns of middle child characters in interacting with family, friends and partners in the film *A Long Way to Come*

Home. The raw data obtained from observation then the researcher reduces the data through the process of filtering and organizing to facilitate further analysis.

After making observations, researchers conducted interview with informants who had watched the movie, positioned as the middle child in their family and conducted documentation. This research also collected secondary data by collecting from documents, previous reports, and published resources. (Sugiyono, 2013).

To increase the validity of qualitative research, (Hellaludin & Wijaya, 2019) suggests ten strategies applied by researchers. First, relatively long data collection allows gradual analysis, so that the findings are more in line with reality. Second, the multi-method strategy allows the use of various data collection techniques such as interviews and observations for more comprehensive information. Third, the use of verbatim participant language helps to obtain detailed quotations. Fourth, it is

important to record low inference descriptors, i.e. details about the source situations and individuals. Fifth, involving multiple researchers increases descriptive accuracy. Sixth, using mechanical data recorders such as photo and audio recorders supports accurate documentation. Seventh, involving participants as researchers with their notes enriches the data. Eighth, conducting member checks during data collection and analysis ensures the validity of the information. Ninth, conducting reviews by participants to review the synthesis of interviews and observations increases the accuracy of the findings, and tenth, finding and analyzing negative cases provides a broader perspective in the research. By applying these strategies, researchers can significantly increase the validity of the results of this qualitative research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The dynamics of the “Middle Child's” communication with family, friends and partners is highly dependent on the communication established by the parents. Good communication from parents can help Aurora feel more supported and understood, while less effective communication can add pressure on Aurora to balance the attention between Angkasa and Awan. In the movie “A Long Way to Come Home” the main character Aurora, acts as the middle child between her brother Angkasa, and her sister Awan. This research takes scenes that have messages related to Aurora's life as a middle child, who often feels pressured to balance the attention between Angkasa and Awan, as well as establish relationships with her friends, such as Honey and her partner, Jem. Aurora's complex life and her interactions with those around her have been analyzed using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, as follows:

Family Communication Dynamics

Conveying your true feelings to your family is not an easy step, especially when overshadowed by differing views or fear of rejection. However, the courage to be honest is often key in strengthening family relationships. Aurora, who had been bottling up her emotions for a long time, finally took the big step of opening her heart to her family.



Figure 1. Part 2: Aurora conveyed what she had been holding in all this time.

Source: Researcher

Denotation Meaning: The denotation of this situation refers to the fact that Aurora had disappeared for two months and then returned to share her feelings with her family members, namely brother and sister. Space and clouds know that one of the factors for Aurora's delay in graduating from college is Jem, her boyfriend. Jem often asks Aurora for help, both in giving advice and helping her prepare paintings that will be exhibited in Jem's art exhibition, so that more time is used to fulfill Jem's wishes.

In addition, another obstacle that delayed Aurora's graduation was Aurora's cellphone which was damaged because it was thrown by Jem during an argument. In addition to throwing Aurora's cellphone, Jem damaged Aurora's final project painting. This made it difficult for Aurora to access lecture materials and crucially, she could not submit her final project on time.

Angkasa was upset and yelled at Aurora in a loud voice until all the cafe visitors heard it. Not only that, Angkasa planned to meet Jem secretly and hit Jem suddenly until he was injured and Angkasa had to go to jail. This left Aurora devastated and said to Angkasa while crying.

"Alright, if I did something wrong, I didn't give you any news, I randomly disappeared, I made you anxious, okay. I apologize."

The above sentence was spoken by Aurora while crying in front of her brother. Her tears fell one by one, wetting her cheeks. Her voice trembled, but she tried to keep her eyes fixed on her brother's.

This condition Aurora expresses regret and apologizes for the actions she has taken. By admitting her mistake, Aurora is trying to repair the relationship with her brother that may have been disrupted by her disappearing act.

Connotation Meaning: Connotatively, Aurora's disappearance for two months can be interpreted as evidence of deep inner conflict. Her decision to reveal her feelings after all this time is a brave step that shows the importance of open communication in building healthy family relationships. By sharing thoughts, feelings, and concerns without fear of judgment, each family member can feel valued and understood. Honest and open communication also prevents misunderstandings, resolves conflicts more effectively, and strengthens mutual trust. When family members feel comfortable talking and being listened to, relationships become more harmonious, supportive, and grow in understanding of each other.

The loud tone conveyed by Angkasa shows his annoyance because Aurora just left. Angkasa's beating of Jem indicates that his frustration made Angkasa unable to think clearly. The sentence delivered by Aurora while crying to Angkasa, Aurora said:

"Alright, if I did something wrong, I didn't give you any news, I randomly

disappeared, I made you anxious, okay. I apologize."

The sentence was spoken by Aurora in a low tone full of regret while holding Angkasa's hand. The purpose of Angkasa's speech is to admit mistakes and apologize for his attitude that makes his family anxious. With this sentence, Aurora tries to show that her attitude has been wrong without arguing and defending herself.

Myth: Middle children often feel unnoticed and caught between their older and younger siblings. Aurora disappeared for two months because she felt depressed and unheard. Her decision to speak up finally shows her courage to face her problems and seek family support. Aurora's disappearance can be interpreted as a symbol of the inner struggle that middle children often experience to find their identity and place in the family.

In the equality pattern, each individual is involved in communication in an equal way, where everyone has the same opportunity to contribute and express opinions. In this context, the roles played by each individual are equal, with no hierarchy or domination of one party over another. This creates an inclusive communication environment, where all voices are heard and valued. As such, interactions take place collaboratively, allowing for a richer and more diverse exchange of ideas and information. This pattern of equality is essential in building respectful relationships and strengthening communication (DeVito, 2016).

In this movie, the dynamics of communication in the family are seen through the role of parents towards Aurora, the middle child. The greater attention given to older siblings causes disharmony in Aurora's relationship with her parents and siblings. The role assigned to the middle child often makes Aurora feel neglected. Recognition of parental responsibility to provide balanced attention is essential. Effective communication within the family creates a supportive environment for individual growth and development. It is crucial to build a strong foundation for each family member, including Aurora, to feel safe and accepted within the family structure.

When parents respect Aurora's position, the family atmosphere becomes more harmonious. Openness in communication is also crucial, by creating a space to express feelings, each family member can understand each other. This reduces Aurora's awkwardness and strengthens family bonds, allowing Aurora to find her place in the family structure.

Couple Communication Dynamics

In a relationship, communication is the foundation that determines whether differences can be resolved with maturity or if they lead to discord. Aurora, who is struggling with her feelings, confronts her boyfriend in an emotionally charged situation.



Figure 2. Part 3: Aurora and Jem get involved in an argument

Source: Reearcher

Denotation Meaning: In this situation, the denotation refers to the fact that Aurora and her boyfriend, Jem, were involved in a huge fight caused by jealousy. Jem, was upset with Aurora because Aurora was busy replying to messages from her parents. Out of jealousy, Jem threw Aurora's cell phone and broke it. Aurora was angry and cried over Jem's action of throwing her only cellphone while saying:

“I just ask you to take your own time first, take a shower, do something else, when you're a little calmer, we can talk nicely.”

The above sentence was spoken by Aurora in a trembling voice, full of sadness, emotion, and annoyance. Aurora looks at Jem with teary eyes, as if hoping Jem understands her feelings. Although her chest was tight with emotion, Aurora still tried to speak calmly, showing that Aurora didn't want to make things worse. Aurora just wanted everything to be discussed when both of them were more in control of their emotions. But instead of calming down, Jem exploded with emotion. His voice raised, his eyes filled with anger. Aurora, who had been calm without wanting to make things worse, was finally provoked and said: *“We're over.”*

Aurora felt a broken heart, Aurora said in a high tone full of anger and disappointment, Aurora said while carrying her things while leaving Jem who was still full of emotion and anger. The use of strong language and a high tone of voice caused this argument to culminate in Aurora's decision to leave Jem, which is the real and immediate action of their separation.

Connotation Meaning: The fight between Aurora and Jem can be interpreted as evidence of an underlying emotional tension, such as jealousy, that damages the relationship. Jem's action of throwing Aurora's cell phone reflects the uncontrollable emotional outburst of jealousy. This incident triggers an increasingly heated argument, until Aurora loses her temper and utters the phrase “we're breaking up”, which is not just an ordinary statement, but an expression of disappointment and anger that has peaked.

Aurora saying the words “we're breaking up” is not only a spontaneous act but also a form of resistance to a relationship that she feels is unhealthy. Aurora's decision to end the relationship is not just a physical piercing, but also a symbol of an attempt to protect herself from unhealthy relationship dynamics. It highlights the importance of trust and effective communication in building sustainable relationships.

Myth: This myth states that jealousy with true love is often used to justify possessive behavior in relationships. However, in Aurora and Jem's case, excessive jealousy was the trigger for conflict and relationship breakdown. The distrust and insecurity underlying jealousy can erode the foundation of trust in a relationship. Aurora's decision to end the relationship confirms that true love should not be based on jealousy.

One has a heightened awareness of what to say or avoid when communicating with loved ones. It understands how to give appreciation as well as reprimand when necessary. In short, one knows how to act to get the expected response (DeVito, 2016). The movie *A Long Way to Come Home* illustrates that the dynamics of communication in a couple's relationship depend on how they deal with conflict. The pressure Aurora feels leads to confusion, and hurtful remarks reflect an inability to manage emotions. As the middle child, Aurora often plays the role of a mature figure, trying to balance the existing dynamics. Feelings of discomfort at home make her partner a comfortable place to come home to. However, selfish and possessive behavior can undermine that comfort, creating unhealthy tension. Selfishness in relationships ignores individual needs, creating an oppressive atmosphere.

The key to keeping love and affection a strong foundation in a couple's relationship is effective communication. Through open and understanding communication, couples can maintain harmony, build trust, and together face various challenges in the relationship with more maturity and wisdom. Therefore, the ability to communicate well is essential for creating a healthy, happy relationship.

When relationships are no longer based on love, the potential for them to become toxic increases. A relationship that should support each other can turn into a source of stress. Therefore, it is important for couples to manage emotions wisely and communicate openly, so that affection is maintained and the relationship does not become toxic. The ability to understand and appreciate each other is key to ensuring that love remains a strong foundation.

Friendship Communication Dynamics

In everyday life, communication is often the bridge that connects feelings and thoughts between individuals. But communication often doesn't go smoothly. Sometimes words spoken without consideration can be a source of conflict, especially in relationships that involve deep emotions. Two friends, Aurora and Honey, had a conversation that led to different points of view and hurt feelings. Aurora's words have a huge impact on the dynamics of their relationship.



Figure 3. Part 3: Conflict Dynamics of Friendship Communication

Source: Researcher

Denotation Meaning: This scene shows the conflict of communication dynamics in friendship. The denotation refers to the fact that Aurora makes decisions without asking for opinions from others, including Honey, who has actually helped her recovery process after the conflict with Jem. In the scene above Aurora bluntly says “*Someone like you wouldn’t understand*”.

Aurora sighed, trying to hold back the tears. Aurora felt exhausted, not only by the circumstances, but also Honey's incomprehension of what Aurora was feeling. In a high tone, Aurora turned her face to Honey. Aurora's words contained deep disappointment. Hearing these words, Honey felt disappointed and offended because Aurora did not appreciate Honey's efforts in providing support. Honey has spent a lot of time understanding Aurora, listening to her complaints, and trying to calm and help her rise from adversity. However, when Aurora conveyed her decision emotionally without considering Honey's input, Honey felt that her efforts were not appreciated by Aurora.

Connotation Meaning: The connotation meaning in this scene can be seen from Honey's feelings. Aurora presumptuously conveyed Honey's incomprehension of her feelings. Aurora's unilateral decision-making shows that Aurora doesn't realize Honey's role in her healing process after the conflict with Jem. Honey, who has been trying to calm Aurora down and help her get back on her feet, feels unappreciated. Honey has spent a lot of time supporting Aurora, listening to her complaints, and giving advice so that Aurora does not sink into sadness. However, when Aurora emotionally conveyed her final decision without considering Honey's input, Honey felt her efforts were not appreciated. The disappointment intensified when Aurora, in a high and emotional tone of voice, uttered the phrase “*Someone like you wouldn’t understand.*”

The sentence was spoken with emotion and anger, reflecting Aurora's frustration that Honey never understood. However, for Honey, Aurora's words were hurtful and dismissive of her feelings. Honey felt that her good intentions were ignored just because she didn't understand Aurora's current situation.

Honey, who initially tried to remain calm, finally replied in a high and emotional tone, that Honey only wanted to help but was always treated as if she didn't really understand Aurora's suffering. These words made the atmosphere even more tense, with Aurora still carried away by her emotions. The argument ends with tension between Aurora and Honey, reflecting how poor communication and assumptions without understanding can ruin a long-standing friendship.

Myth: Myths about friendship often idealize wordless understanding between friends. However, in the relationship dynamics between Aurora and Honey, the researcher sees that the expectation of instant understanding can lead to deep misunderstandings. Aurora's hurtful statements to Honey reflect a lack of effective communication. While there is a strong bond of friendship, open and honest communication is key to maintaining a healthy relationship.

Friendships start from initial contact and simple introductions, which then develop into deeper and more intimate friendships. Over time, this relationship can transform into a close friendship, where both parties understand and support each other. In this process, effective interpersonal communication becomes more binding, allowing for a more open exchange of thoughts, feelings and experiences. With good communication, trust and closeness between friends will be established, strengthening the bonds of friendship that have been built. This creates a positive and supportive environment for individuals to grow and develop together. (DeVito, 2016).

In this movie, poor interpersonal communication is seen in Aurora's emotions, where friendship conflicts arise due to her actions that hurt Honey. As a middle child, Aurora's lack of closeness with her family makes her seek comfort in friendships. Good friendships should provide support for the ego and feelings, creating a space where individuals feel valued and safe. Strong emotional support in friendships helps the middle child feel confident and valuable. Effective communication in friendships not only strengthens relationships, but also creates a safe and supportive environment for each individual. With open, honest, and empathetic communication, friendships can grow into strong bonds, strengthen each other, and be able to face challenges together

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been done, the researcher concludes that the dynamics of communication in families, partner relationships and friendships are strongly influenced by openness in conveying feelings. In the movie *A Long Way to Come Home*, there are denotation meanings in certain scenes that directly describe the interpersonal conflict experienced by the main character, Aurora. The connotation meaning that emerges shows deeper things, such as emotional struggles due to an imbalance of attention in the family, tension in a relationship filled with jealousy, and feelings of disrespect in friendship. Meanwhile, the myths built in the film's narrative reinforce and simultaneously dismantle stereotypes, such as the notion that middle children are often neglected. In reality, the middle child is able to be the mediator in the problem of family dynamics.

In addition, in the dynamics of romance, the jealousy of the middle child can be considered a sign of true love. However, excessive jealousy can reduce the sense of trust in the relationship. In the dynamics of friendship, it is necessary to understand communication between individuals, this is important in order to understand and appreciate each other's feelings.

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