

SUFFERED, ALIENATED AND DEATH: REPRESENTATION OF HIV/AIDS IN FILM "MIKA" (2013)

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Abstract

Films are often used as a medium to address ongoing issues in society, one of the examples is HIV/AIDS. A "death sentence" as results from "deviant behavior" is still stigmatized and remains a major obstacle in mitigating the spread of the HIV up to the present day, since its first case in Indonesia back in 1987. One of Indonesian films that address the issue of HIV/AIDS is "Mika" (2013) revolves around a girl named Indi who falls in love with Mika, an ex-injectable drug user who suffers and eventually dies from AIDS. This film will be studied from an interdisciplinary perspective by analyzing the content, concepts, and contexts within the framework of visual cultural theories, using descriptive qualitative research methodology. The film "Mika" (2013) should have a close connection to the issues they represent and how they responsibly address the main issue at hand, which is to break the negative stigma associated with HIV/AIDS rather than reinforcing the notion of 'punishment' for 'deviant behavior' by exploiting the tragedy.

Keywords

Film, HIV/AIDS, Content, Concept, Context

Pendahuluan

In addition to being the most popular form of entertainment, the regular presence of movies has made a major contribution to highlighting social issues in society, such as HIV/AIDS.

A "death sentence" as results from "deviant behavior" is still stigmatized and remains a major obstacle in mitigating the spread of HIV up to the present day. The first HIV case was discovered in Indonesia in 1987 and continues to spread mainly among vulnerable groups such as commercial sex workers and men who have sex with men.

In 2023, there is no decrease in the number of cases and even on the rise, according to data from the Indonesian Ministry of Health, the rate of transmission is dominated by housewives at 35 percent, the figure is higher among other groups.

(Kemkes, 2023).

As an ongoing issue in the society, it become inspiration for Indonesian filmmakers to raise the theme of HIV/AIDS in the films, such as *Perempuan Punya Cerita* (2008), *Mika* (2013), *Cinta Dari Wamena* (2013) and *Nada Untuk Asa*. (2015). The stories presented in these films have different themes, from a mother and daughter's love, friendship, to a teenage love story. In these films, characters with HIV/AIDS often become "victims" of the results of other activities or characters that are considered deviant. For example, in the film *Nada Untuk Asa*, the character of Nada is a mom who was infected with HIV from her unfaithful husband. In the movie *Mika*, the character Mika is infected with HIV because he uses injectable drugs and becomes the victim of circumstances that cannot fight his love.

From those examples above, the author sees the tendency of filmmakers to sell tragedy and suffering in films that raised the issue and willing to "kill" the characters with AIDS just to sell tears. When we look at the context of progress in the medical research and practices, that HIV is no longer a death sentence to fear and can be mitigate with early testing and also the help of antiretroviral drugs (ARV) that have been proven to improve the quality of life of people with HIV (PLHIV) (Makarim, 2021). In its own measure of success, ARV treatment has proven to reduce AIDS-related mortality. In 2015, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), antiretroviral therapy was already being utilized by 46% of HIV patients across various countries. The use of ARVs has successfully decreased the HIV/AIDS related death toll from 1.5 million in 2010 to 1.1 million in 2015 (Karyadi, 2017, 1).

Therefore, the research will focus on the film *Mika* (2013), which is an adaptation of the novel *Waktu Lagi Sama Mika* (That Time With Mika). The film directed by Lasja Fauzia Susatyo, which tells the story of Indi, a highschool girl with a scoliosis condition that made her wear a spinal cord. Indi falls in love with Mika, a man who is a former student of the same school as Indi, and also an ex - injection drug user who is also PLHIV.

In this film, Mika as a boy with HIV, is portrayed as one who suffers much, although we can see his struggle to stay alive and fight for his love, the narrative elements in this film kept him struggle and suffered continuously, from the bullying,

the death of his best friend, the disease that rotted his body, until eventually he was put to death and left Indi the lover with deep wounds.

The power of films to address current issues plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and bringing about change in society. Therefore, the representation presented in a film becomes crucial in this research. The approach of this research is to conduct a study using concept analysis, content analysis, and context analysis within the film.

The concept analysis focuses on examining how elements of film form, such as themes, the issues addressed, formal expectations influencing the viewing experience, conventions and experiences, form, and feelings presented through the film, and how the meaning it conveys (Bordwell et al., 2019, 65-73). The content analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the plot and narrative elements presented. Narrative concepts in a fictional film refer to the form in which we, as viewers, engage with a sequence of events that have cause-and-effect relations occurring in a particular time and place (Bordwell et al., 2019, 89-90). Furthermore, the meaning derived from the concepts and content in the film will be studied in relation to the social context outside the film world (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2008, 23, 25, 311), which will be analyzed through accurate data and news sources. Based on the theories mentioned above, the aim is to answer the research question, which is to examine how characters in the film *'Mika'* (2013) is represented?.

Metode Penelitian

The methodology of this research will be qualitative descriptive, with an analysis approach that groups together three theoretical variables: concepts, contents, and context analysis. Qualitative and descriptive research methods have been very common procedures for conducting research in many disciplines, including education, psychology, and the social sciences. The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015, 129).

As for the stages of data collection and analysis, there are several stages, one of which is to observe the film *Mika* by watching it several times, then selecting each scene and shot to be discussed, recording the timecode, transcribing, and summarizing the dialogue and the scenes.

And the last step is to differentiate the sample with the three variables above and analyze it by following scenes and dialogues that are tailored to the story so that the facts can be presented and answer the research questions.

Pembahasan

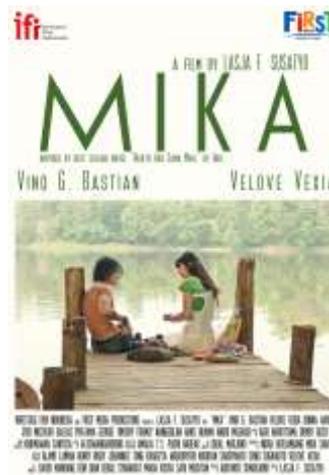


Figure 1: Poster Film *Mika*
(Source: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2773610/>)

"Mika" (2013). Appears to revolve around the perspective of its main character, Indi, a 15-year-old girl about to enter high school. Indi has scoliosis, a condition that requires her to wear a back brace, which makes her feel self-conscious about her disability. Her life takes a turn when she meets Mika, a slim boy with tattoos all over his body. Indi is immediately drawn to Mika, particularly because of his eccentric appearance with the long hair, explosive speech, and mismatched flip-flops.



Figure 2: Perkenalan pertama Indi dan Mika - 10:56
(Source: Screenshot Film)

In the scene Figure 2 above, Mika is not at all disturbed by Indi's appearance using a spinal cord, and it just makes Indi confused and increasingly distrustful about her appearances, especially when Indi says she's going to high school and definitely no one wants to be friends with her because she is weird. Listening to that, Mika immediately felt upset, and tried to make Indi happy again.



Figure 3: Mika mengaku dia AIDS - 13:21
(Source: Screenshot Film)

In Figure 3, Mika tries to get Indi to accept her deficiency by saying out loud about his HIV status to help Indi accept her own imperfections and regain her happiness. The dialogue spoken by Mika is, "*Aku AIDS, ya, HIV/AIDS*" which is translated as "I'm having AIDS, yes it's HIV/AIDS". What's noteworthy in this section is how Mika immediately opens up about his HIV status to someone he has just met, all in an effort to comfort Indi, who has scoliosis and sees herself as "weird". Therefore in social contexts this action reinforces the concept of "otherness".

The concept of otherness is not just about black and white, good and evil; rather, it's about how one group is separated from another because of their differences. Otherness happens when a powerful in-group (like "Us" or "the Self") creates one or more controlled out-groups (like "Them" or "Other") by stigmatizing a difference, whether it's real or imagined, as a threat to identity and a reason to discriminate. The uneven distribution of power is a key part of how otherness is created. Only the ruling group can put a high value on its uniqueness (its identity) and a low value on the uniqueness of others (their otherness), while also enforcing discriminatory rules. So, if Woman is the Other of Man and Black Man is the Other of White Man, then the opposite is not true (Beauvoir, 1952; Fanon, 1963 in Staszak, 2009).

In his book "The AIDS Movie," Hart (2013) draws on the tradition of "the otherness" in cinema, which is a binary opposition concept in film, such as hero versus villain, strength versus weakness, garden versus desert. This concept of "the otherness" is incorporated into AIDS-themed films, positioning characters with HIV/AIDS as the opposition to those without HIV, for example, good/ evil, innocent/ guilty, contamination/ purity. Indi, who alienates herself because she feels different due to her scoliosis, finds comfort in Mika, who also feels like he has a deficiency because of his HIV. The filmmaker put Mika, who is

"contaminated," becomes part of the same category as Indi, who is "weak."

The second aspect to consider in the context of the dialogue "*Aku AIDS... HIV/AIDS*" is the repetition of the word "AIDS" throughout dialogues along the film, which may give the impression that the filmmakers didn't do their homework properly. AIDS is a condition that develops when the body has lost its defenses due to the HIV virus's gradual weakening of the immune system, leading to opportunistic infections. Essentially, HIV and AIDS are two different things (Bella, 2023). Therefore, in the context of content analysis of the dialogue, it would be considered inaccurate to use "*Aku AIDS... HIV/AIDS*."



Figure 4: Mika menyatakan cinta kepada Indi AIDS - 32:16
(Source: Screenshot Film)

In Figure 4 above, it's shown that Mika affectionately holds Indi's hand, which ultimately led Mika to confess his love. In the dialogue in that scene, Mika says, "Will you be my girlfriend?". Indi, upon hearing these words, can only remain silent while smiling. Moving on to the next scene, which has shifted to a new day, this marks the first time that Mika and Indi are taking their relationship in a more serious direction.



Figure 5: Alarm jam Mika berbunyi - 33:45
(Source: Screenshot Film)

During their date, while enjoying their meal, Mika's alarm suddenly rings, and he quickly takes his medication. The medication Mika takes is antiretroviral therapy (ARV). This therapy is taken for a lifetime by people living with HIV (PLHIV) and has been proven effective in suppressing the HIV virus to

undetectable levels and preventing transmission to partners, allowing PLHIV to live full and healthy lives when taken consistently (WHO, 2023). In this scene, after Mika takes his medication, Indi looks at him with confusion. Then, Mika reminds Indi once again that he has "AIDS" and tries to convince her not to be in a relationship with him. In a character content analysis, it's evident that there is inconsistency in how the filmmaker portrays Mika's character. It appears as if Mika is depicted as a somewhat indecisive character. In the character that is represented in the film, Mika still feels uncertain about himself and alienates himself from Indi, who does not have HIV.



Figure 6: Indi dan Ibu di toko buku - 36:43
(Source: Screenshot Film)

In the social context and how HIV/AIDS has been constructed by society in America since the 1990s, it is observed that HIV/AIDS is considered an "other" disease, where the "other" here refers to individuals who are deemed deserving of punishment due to their use of intravenous drugs and deviant sexual behavior (Hart, 2013:5).

In the film "Mika," in Figure 6 above, there is a scene where Indi holds a book about HIV and asks her mother what HIV is. Her mother responds firmly that it's a severe disease and a curse from God. Initially, at the concept analysis level, this scene may appear harmless, as it suggests that Indi's mother may also lack knowledge about HIV/AIDS. However, when we look into content analysis, this scene takes on another scene below.



Figure 7: Mika dan Indi Menjenguk Fred - 38:57
(Source: Screenshot Film)

In Figure 7 above, there is a scene where Mika visits his friend Fred, accompanied by Indi. Fred appears to be lying weak, and occasionally he coughs. Fred is portrayed as a former intravenous drug user like Mika, and at this stage, Fred has already contracted AIDS, where his immune system is no longer able to fight infections and diseases. The filmmaker's impartiality becomes even less clear in this scene. The social construct that views HIV/AIDS as a curse and an inevitable fate (Hart, 2013:5) is vividly portrayed in this scene. Furthermore, the film, as a mass media medium, represents the growing negative stigma associated with PLHIV (People Living with HIV).



Figure 8: Indi Kecewa dengan Mika - 43:57
(Source: Screenshot Film)

Mika's adherence to taking ARV medication, as shown in Figure 5 above, should ideally lead the audience to believe that Mika is healthy and well. However, what is depicted in Figure 8 is Indi's disappointment when Mika rejects her kiss. In content analysis, we can see Mika's sense of responsibility in not wanting to transmit HIV to Indi. But in the context, once again, the filmmaker introduces a conflict that doesn't align with reality because the likelihood of transmitting HIV through kissing is very low, even almost impossible (Rini, 2022), especially for PLHIV who regularly take ARV medication. Adherence to taking antiviral medication has been proven to suppress the virus to undetectable levels and prevent the transmission of the virus to others.

Antiretrovirals, other than medication for antivirals, are also useful in preventing the transmission of HIV to sexual partners and preventing the transmission of HIV from mother to child. Ultimately, it is hoped that this will reduce the number of new HIV infections in various countries (Karyadi, 2017:1). Instead of bringing happiness to Mika and Indi, the filmmaker introduces unnecessary tension to Mika's character.



Figure 9: Mika Batuk Darah - 57:59
(Source: Screenshot Film)

In Figure 9 above, we see Mika wrapping a birthday gift for Indi but being interrupted by a severe coughing fit, which leads to him coughing up blood. Mika becomes increasingly disappointed with his condition. This starkly contrasts with Mika's initial introduction in the film, where he was full of enthusiasm for life and passionately pursuing his love for Indi. It appears that the light is dimming from Mika's life.



Figure 10: Ibu Mika Pergi Melayat Fred - 01:10
(Source: Screenshot Film)

In Figure 10 above, Mika's mother is seen saying goodbye to Mika and Indi as she is about to attend a funeral. Fred, Mika's friend, has passed away. The mortality rate for AIDS patients who do not receive treatment (ARV therapy) is indeed as high as 90 percent (Rini, 2022), which emphasizes that the struggle against this issue is still very much ongoing. Various parties, especially filmmakers addressing this issue, need to be involved in this fight.

The fear of getting tested for HIV due to stigma and the perception that an HIV diagnosis means certain death are major obstacles to early testing and the prevention of new transmissions. The death of Fred is ultimately followed by Mika's own demise.



Figure 11: Kematian Mika - 01:32
(Source: Screenshot Film)

In a narrative analysis, it's clear that the film's depiction of Mika's journey from meeting Indi to his eventual death unfolds very rapidly. The transitions in space and time within the narrative development of the film are not well explained. The filmmaker appears to be in a hurry and overly focused on the successive sufferings faced by Mika and Indi, which ultimately lead to the "deaths" of both characters. The time span from infection to eventual death is highly variable and can range from eight to ten years or even longer, depending on various factors like medication adherence and other considerations (Rini, 2022).

If we look at successful examples, we can take the case of a well-known figure like Magic Johnson, who was diagnosed with HIV in 1991 and is currently over 60 years old, making him one of the well-known figures who has lived with HIV for more than 30 years (Nariswari, 2021). In contrast, Mika's character in the film experiences a relatively short journey and ultimately dies, seemingly for the purpose of evoking tragedy and tears from the audience.

The findings of the research indicate that the representation provided by this film still offers a very negative portrayal and legitimizes negative stigma and fears associated with an HIV diagnosis. The research focuses on concept analysis, content analysis, and contextual analysis, with an emphasis on narrative elements and characters.

Of course, this research has its limitations. The film is an adaptation of a novel, and future research could explore intertextuality by comparing the story and plot between the novel and the film. Additionally, the author hopes to map out all films and other moving image products that address the issue of HIV/AIDS. This could serve as a reference for creating works that address this topic in a more accurate and sensitive manner.

Kesimpulan

This research found that the representation in this film depicts characters living with HIV as enduring significant suffering. It's not just physical suffering; it's also how they have to face the harsh stigma from society. In the stage of alienation, Mika and Indi's love story is a form of alienation created by the filmmaker because both characters are the result of the concepts of the otherness, the weak, and the contaminated. After the suffering and alienation experienced by the characters, a happy ending is not an option in this film. Instead, the filmmaker

chooses to give death to both characters, leaving their lovers in mourning.

The issues and topics that are the core concepts of the film ultimately do not seem to advocate for the real problems being faced. The content focuses too much on selling tragedy and tears, which ultimately deviates far from the social context that is currently happening and should be addressed.

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