



## Decoding the Denotative and Connotative Elements in Sony Pictures Animation's Short Film "Hair Love" (2019)

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### ABSTRACT

*The current era has witnessed significant developments in the realms of digital and technology, which have impacted every aspect of our lives, including the art of filmmaking. Not only has technology empowered actors to portray characters, but it has also given rise to animated films to give a message. A prominent scholar, Roland Barthes, proposed that the concept of semiotics could be used as a tool to uncover hidden meanings in various forms of media. The objective of this paper is to examine the denotative elements in Sony Pictures Animation's Hair Love using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The purpose of this study is to discuss and explain the nonverbal signs or symbols that appear in the film. The denotative elements present in Hair Love are identified and analyzed using qualitative analysis in this study. The findings of this study reveal the presence of 23 denotative and connotative elements in the movie. Overall, this study contributes to the field of semiotics by analyzing the denotative elements in a contemporary animated film using Barthes' theory. This study's findings can provide useful insights into the use of nonverbal symbols in animated films and how they can be used to convey hidden meanings to the audience.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Digital Developments and Filmmaking

Nowadays, entertainment can be seek in many ways and many platforms such as magazines, e-book, music, and films. With the help of technology, it is no longer difficult to access those entertainment. They all can be accessed through gadgets which allows its user to have multiple applications such as YouTube, Netflix, Instagram, Amazon Prime, Twitter, Spotify, and many more (Cunningham & Craig, 2019). The YouTube application user for allows its to watch and even to upload their videos on the platform. Over thousands of people rely on YouTube as their living due to the big amount of money they can received per one video. The people who post content on their YouTube channel is called a YouTuber or Content Creator. Many YouTuber works individually, as a team, organization, news media, and many more. The videos uploaded on YouTube by them are all different, depend on what YouTube channel provides.

Sony Pictures Animation is a well-known YouTube channel that produces a variety of animated entertainment for audiences around the world. Since its inception in 2011, Sony Pictures Animation has been actively uploading videos to its channel, with a total of 487 videos currently available. The studio's most recent releases include critically acclaimed films such as "The Mitchells vs. The Machines," a visually groundbreaking masterpiece, "Vivo," a musical adventure featuring original songs by Lin-Manuel Miranda, and "Hotel Transylvania: Transformania," the fourth installment in the beloved monster movie franchise. Further, the Sony Pictures Animation YouTube channel predominantly showcases short animated videos and compilations of animation videos. This channel aims to provide entertaining content for viewers of all ages,

leveraging the power of animation to create engaging and visually stunning works. By using YouTube as a platform, Sony Pictures Animation can reach a wider audience and engage with fans through comments, likes, and shares.

Animated videos are a dynamic and versatile form of media that employ computer-generated graphics, illustrations, and other visual elements to convey movement and change over time (Busch et al., 2020). There are several techniques that can be used to create animated videos, including traditional hand-drawn animation, stop-motion animation, and computer-generated imagery (Amini et al., 2018). Such videos serve multiple purposes, including entertainment, education, marketing, and storytelling, and can be produced in a range of styles, such as 2D or 3D animation. Filmmakers typically use a variety of tools and software programs to create animated videos, from simple and user-friendly options for beginners to more sophisticated tools for professionals. Some common software programs used for this purpose include Adobe Animate, Blender, and Toon Boom Harmony.

The proliferation of online video platforms and mobile devices has contributed to the growing popularity of animated videos in recent years (Gurvitch & Lund, 2014; Pate et al., 2020; Karakolidis, O'Leary & Scully, 2021). These videos can be easily accessed, viewed, and shared across various digital platforms. One notable example of a short animated film produced by Sony Pictures Animation is "Hair Love," which was uploaded on YouTube on December 5, 2019, with a duration of 6 minutes and 48 seconds.

The story of "Hair Love" revolves around a little girl who is learning how to style her hair while her mother, who is hospitalized due to cancer, is unable to do so. The girl stays with her father, who is also inexperienced in hair styling, and watches her mother's instructional hairdo videos on YouTube to learn how to do it herself. This short film is a poignant exploration of the power of familial love, determination, and resilience, presented through the medium of animation.

### **Semiotics: Symbols and Meaning in Film Studies**

Saussure (1916) posited that semiotics applies to any system of signs, regardless of their substance and limits, including images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex relationships among them that constitute the substance of customs, traditions, or public entertainment. Building on this idea, Barthes (1977) emphasized the interplay between the content of a sign and the individual and cultural experiences of its users, as well as the interaction between the content's cultural context and the cultural contexts experienced and anticipated by its users.

Barthes's concept of signification includes both denotation (the lexical meaning) and connotation (the secondary meaning that emerges from social and individual experiences). Although Barthes still employs the term signifier-signified, he also introduces another aspect of signs, myths, which are signs that have become naturalized in society. According to Barthes, the concept of connotation in semiotics can be used to uncover hidden meanings. Roland Barthes was a French literary theorist, philosopher, and critic who had a significant impact on the fields of literary and cultural studies. One of his most famous theories is the "death of the author," which posits that the meaning of a text should not be determined by the author's intentions or biographical context, but rather by the way it is interpreted by the reader. Barthes believes that a text's meaning is not predetermined but rather emerges from the reader's interpretation process. In other words, the reader is an active participant in creating meaning rather than being a passive recipient of the author's intended message.

Further, Scholes (1982:35) notes that many semioticians argue that the meaning of any sign or word is entirely a function of its use in a paradigmatic context and a syntagmatic context. Sillars (1991:110) defines

semiotics as the study of signs, arguing that a sign is a physical object that refers to something other than itself and depends on recognition by a user that it could be a sign.

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and their meanings, has had an impact on many disciplines, including literature, cultural studies, and film studies (Withalm, 2002; Thwaites, Davis & Mules, 2018; Rutsyamsun & Sakinah, 2023). Saussure and Roland Barthes are seminal figures in semiotics. Saussure's concept of semiology emphasizes the importance of signs in any framework of communication, whereas Barthes expands on this idea by emphasizing the interaction between a sign's content and the cultural and individual experiences of its users. In addition, Barthes introduces the concept of connotation, which refers to the additional meanings that a sign may have in addition to its literal or denotative meaning. He contends that connotative meanings can reveal hidden cultural values and beliefs.

Bordwell and Thompson define several types of films in the context of animated films, including animated films, which are composed of a series of images that create the illusion of movement. One such film is Sony Pictures Animation's "Hair Love," which was released on YouTube in 2019. In this study, researcher intends to analyze the denotations and connotations of the music video in this short animated film, drawing on semiotic concepts and the contributions of scholars such as Saussure and Barthes. The study seeks to shed light on the cultural values and beliefs (Erlidawati & Rahmah, 2022), that are reflected and communicated through this animated work by examining the various layers of meaning in the film.

## METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative approach and descriptive analysis to provide a thorough explanation and description of the data. According to Sugiyono (2014:207), qualitative research is holistic in the sense that it investigates the entirety of the social context under investigation, including the space, actors, and activities that interact synergistically. In qualitative research, the interpretation of the text under investigation is subjective because, as Karl Erik postulated, the process of meaning cannot be divorced from the subjective aspect that gives it significance. According to Hamad, Sudibyo, and Qodar (2001:15), such theories permit researchers to read a book subjectively due to the effect of their personal life experiences.

The analysis of a 2019-uploaded file including a short animation of Love Hair served as the primary source of research data for this study. The analysis also utilized secondary data in the form of theoretical frameworks, statistics, and information. This secondary data was collected from many sources, such as books, journals, and the internet. According to Sugiyono, data gathering procedures are a crucial phase in research because they serve the fundamental objective of data collection (2014:224). The research included two data collection methods: documentation and literature review. Documentation included watching and attentively monitoring the brief animated film on YouTube, as well as recording, choosing, and evaluating data in accordance with the employed research model. Moreover, song lyrics served as a data source for the study. According to Machmud, the literature review entailed collecting data from several sources, including technical manuals, journals, websites, and theories that could serve as research material (2016).

Roland Barthes was a French literary theorist, philosopher, and critic who had a considerable impact on the fields of literary and cultural studies. His theory was used to study the connotations and denotations in the animated video of Love Hair. One of his most well-known views is the "death of the author" theory, which proposes that the meaning of a book should not be established only by the author's goals or biographical circumstances, but rather by the reader's interpretation. To study the connotations and denotations in the film,

the researcher viewed the video and collected screenshots of scenes containing signs, then recorded the connotations and denotations based on Barthes' theory.

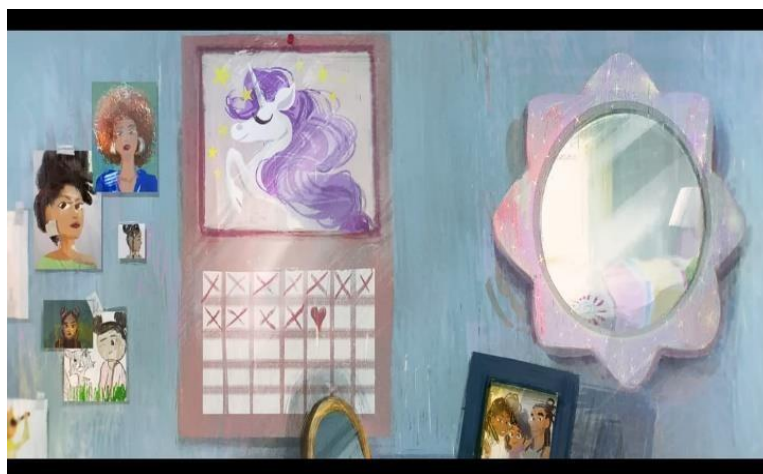
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The animated short film "Hair Love" tells the narrative of a young girl who struggles to find a hairstyle that suits her. The fact that her mother, who normally helps her with styling her hair, is currently hospitalized means that the small girl will have to do it all on her own. The purpose of this study is to apply Roland Barthes' theory in order to conduct an analysis of the denotative and connotative aspects that are contained within this short animation. The purpose of the investigation is for the researcher to determine all of the possible interpretations and meanings that may be derived from the signs and symbols that are displayed in the animation. The researcher wants to provide a more in-depth explanation of the narrative, characters, and issues conveyed in the film. In the end, this research has the potential to offer insight on the ways in which the animation depicts social and cultural standards, as well as personal experiences, that are meaningful to viewers of many ages and backgrounds.



Picture 1

The phrase "Hair Love" is shown in the first scene to show the title of the short animation. It is used to let the audience know what they are going to watch.



Picture 2



**Denotation:***A Calendar*

Calendar is a system of organizing days for social, religious, commercial, or administrative purposes. This is done by giving names to periods of time, typically days, weeks, months, and years. A date is the designation of a single, specific day within such a system. A calendar is also a physical record of such a system, such as a desk calendar or a wall calendar.

*Photos of women with different colors of hair and a horse with purple hair*

A photo, or photograph, is a picture that has been taken with a camera or other device that captures light and records an image. Photos can be printed on paper or displayed digitally on a computer or other device. Photos are typically taken with a camera, which is a device that uses a lens to focus light from a scene onto film or a digital sensor. The light is then captured and recorded as an image, which can be stored as a physical print or a digital file. Photos can be taken with various types of cameras, including digital cameras, film cameras, and smartphones. They can be used for a wide range of purposes, such as preserving memories, documenting events, and expressing creativity through art.

**Connotation:**

A calendar which is usually used to see dates, however in this scene is shown has cross marks with one heart mark. The cross marks symbolize the days that have passed meanwhile the heart symbolize the day that the calendar's owner has been waiting for finally come. Meanwhile, the photograph of women and a horse in different hair color and hair style show that the owner of the room has passion in hair styling.

**Picture 3****Denotation:***Sticker on a tablet*

A sticker is a small piece of paper or other material that is adhesive on one side and can be stuck onto a surface or object. Stickers can be used for a variety of purposes, such as to decorate, label, or identify items. They can be made from a variety of materials, including paper, vinyl, and plastic, and can be printed with text, images, or graphics.

**Connotation:**

The stickers on the iPad consist of 4 letters which are Z-U-R-I which symbolize her name Zuri and to put marks on her iPad which symbolizing that the iPad belongs to Zuri.



Picture 4

**Denotation:**

The girl is having her hair tied down by a woman behind her with the bright light around the side of the screen scene.

**Connotation:**

The lights around the side of the side of the screen indicating a flashback memory of the little girl had with her mother. According to Ingermanson, a flashback in the movie is shown in the scene or real-time moment, the flashback happened in the past. The scene is being showed out in the scene of the character's head. The flashback of the scene above shows that the little girl is missing her mother.



Picture 5

**Denotation:** Laugh and kiss.

**Connotation:**

Laugh indicating happiness and kiss are indicating intimacy. A kiss can be given to anyone such as friends, partner and family.



Picture 6

**Denotation:**

- A girl with messy hair.
- A man dropping a pile of clothes with a jawdropped.

**Connotation:**

In the clip above, there is a man with jaw dropped standing in between the door with a pile of clothes fell from his hand to the floor looking on a little girl with messy hair. The girl with messy hair is a sign of failed attempted hair do that she did before by following the hair do tutorial on YouTube. The jaw dropping has a connotation of surprise or shocked, however in this scene it shows the man is shocked from looking the girl in front of him.



Picture 7

**Denotation:**

- Messy hair equipment.
- A tablet with a video playing on.

**Connotation:**

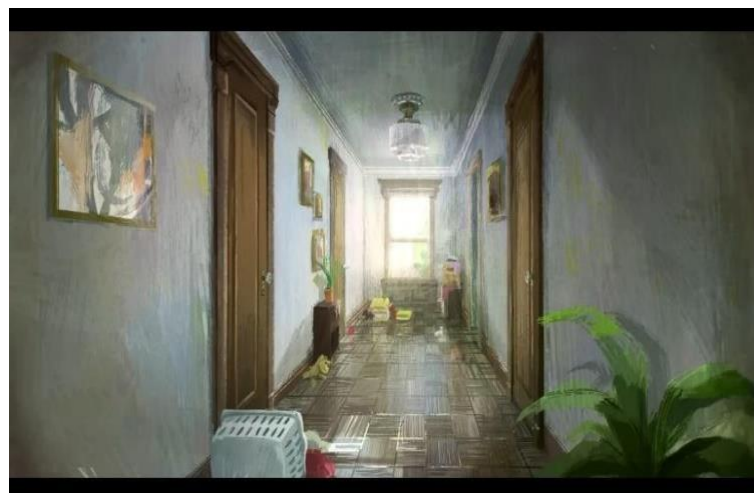
The whole situation shown in the picture above portrays a messy condition of a girl trying to do her hair. It is supported by the sign of the messy hair equipment and messy hair. The messy hair equipment shows that the little girl is having a difficult time to do her hair. The video on the tab shows multiple videos choice of hair style. The picture in the middle of the tab is indicating that it is the hair style the girl wants to do. However, the messy hair shows that the girl is failed to do her hair how she wants like how she wants to have her hair like in the video.

**Picture 8****Denotation:**

- The man taking the tablet.
- The girl's eyes wide open.

**Connotation:**

The man taking the tablet shows that he does not approve the girl trying to do her own hair. Meanwhile, the girl with eyes wide open shows a sign of surprise of the man's sudden action.

**Picture 9**

**Denotation:** Messy hallway



**Connotation:**

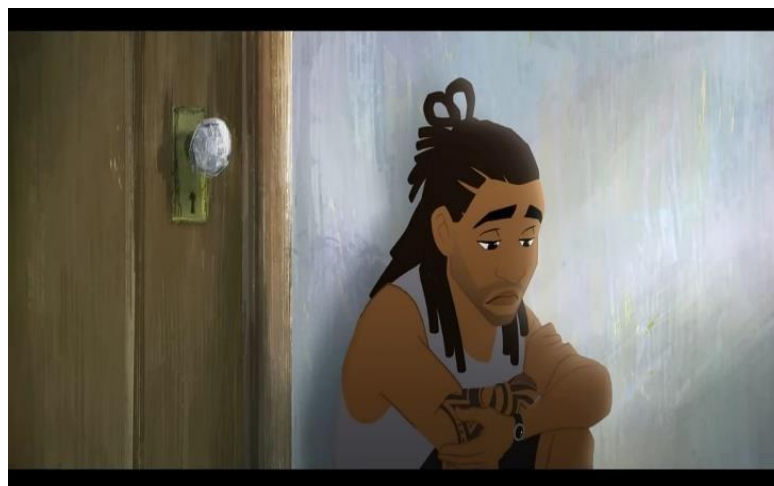
The picture shows a hallway with many things down on the floor indicating an abandoned space. There is a basket, a shirt, and some other stuff on the back of the hall near the window. The stuff laying down on the floor is indicating a lack of maintenance from the owner of the house. It can be seen from the scenes before that the little girl and the man are father and daughter are living together.

**Picture 10**

**Denotation:** The man holding a brush whilst holding her hair.

**Connotation:**

The man holding the girl's hair with a brush on his hand is a sign of him is going to brush her hair. The look on his face with the head going back is indicating that he is scared and being cautious on doing her hair.

**Picture 11****Denotation:**

- The man sitting and hugging the knees.
- Eyes looking down and empty-stare.

**Connotation:**

The eyes looking down with lowered eyebrows are indicating a person being sad. The gesture of sitting and hugging knees are indicating a person is feeling lonely and weak that they no longer have enough energy to support themselves.



Picture 12

**Denotation:**

- The little girl looking up to her father
- A tablet with a video of a woman on the screen

**Connotation:**

The picture of the little girl is looking up to her father with pouty lips are indicating an expression of begging for something. The writer here is analysing what the little girl begging for is for her father to help her to do her hair like the woman in the video.



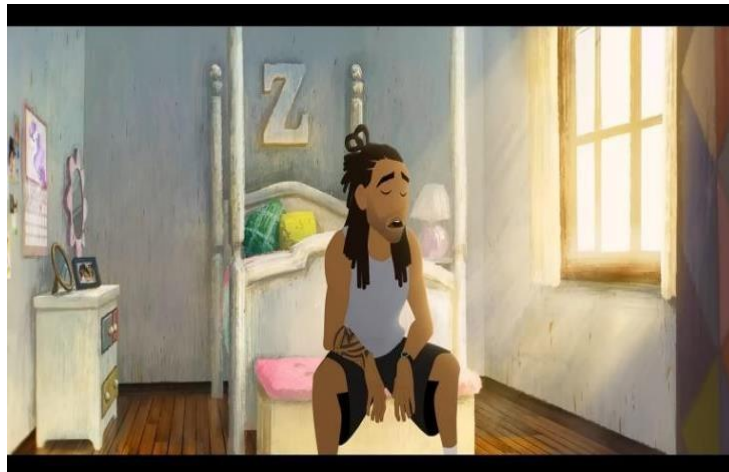
Picture 13

**Denotation:**

- A girl holding a gadget playing a video of a woman smiling with a little girl

**Connotation:**

The woman shows on the gadget is the same as the woman in the video before. This time, there is also a portray of the little girl on the video as well. However, the little girl on the video looks similar as the girl who is holding the gadget. The little girl is seen to be smiling big whilst sitting very close next to her, which indicating they are very close and have a strong bond towards each other. Therefore, the writer here is concluded that the little girl in the video is the younger version of the girl who is holding a gadget and she is the daughter of the woman in the video which is why she has been trying to style her hair like the woman in the video.



Picture 14

**Denotation:**

- The letter Z on the wall of the room

**Connotation:**

The letter Z on the wall is a symbol of the name Zuri which indicating that the room is Zuri's. The other furniture that might support that the room is Zuri's are the single bed, pink calendar, pink mirror, and pink ottoman. The color pink is a symbol of girl. Hence, the room is Zuri's.



Picture 15

**Denotation:**

- The father and Zuri watching the reflection of Zuri's
- Zuri is smiling and touching her hair
- Zuri's hair is looking neat

**Connotation:**

The scene above is Zuri and her father watching their reflection on the mirror. It can be seen from the picture above where the father's face expression is looking shocked with the hand closeto Zuri's head which and the face of Zuri that is lighten up whilst touching her hair is showing the feeling of happy. The hair of Zuri is now also changed. It is no longer fluffy and now is looking neat is indicating that the father has helped her did her hair.



Picture 16

**Denotation:***Hug*

A hug is a physical gesture in which two people put their arms around each other's upper bodies and hold each other tightly, often to express affection, support, or comfort. Hugs are a common form of physical contact and are typically used as a way to show love, care, or appreciation for someone. Hugs can be given to friends, family, romantic partners, and even strangers, and are often seen as a way to show kindness and compassion towards others. Some experts believe that hugs can have positive effects on physical and mental health, including reducing stress, boosting mood, and increasing feelings of social connectedness and well-being

**Connotation:**

It can be seen in the scene above, that there is 2 people hugging. It is the daughter and the father hugging. A hug is a physical gesture in which two people put their arms around each other's upper bodies and hold each other tightly, often to express affection, support, or comfort. However, in this scene the daughter is hugging the father is indicating a happiness she feels for how her father tied her hair.





Picture 17

**Denotation:**

- A person sitting on a wheelchair with a turban on her head
- Many medical devices on the room

**Connotation:**

Medical devices are instruments, machines, or other products that are used in the diagnosis, treatment, or management of medical conditions. These devices can range from simple, single-use items like bandages and gauze, to complex, high-tech devices like imaging machines and surgical robots. Medical devices are used in a variety of settings, including hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare facilities, as well as in people's homes.

In the scene above there are only medical devices such as infusion pole, hospital bed, health monitor, wheelchair and there is no other household furniture which indicates it is a hospital which makes the person sitting on the wheelchair sick, hence the person needs the wheelchair to support herself to move.

A turban is a type of headwear that is typically worn by men in certain parts of the world, particularly in South Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa. It is a long, often brightly colored piece of cloth that is wrapped around the head and held in place with a knot or pin. Turbans are worn for a variety of reasons, including as a symbol of cultural or religious identity, as a mark of respect or authority, or for protection from the elements. However, other than as a religious reason, a turban can have many more reasons of why a person is wearing it. The person in the scene is wearing a turban is more likely to cover her head due to a reason of being sick.



Picture 18

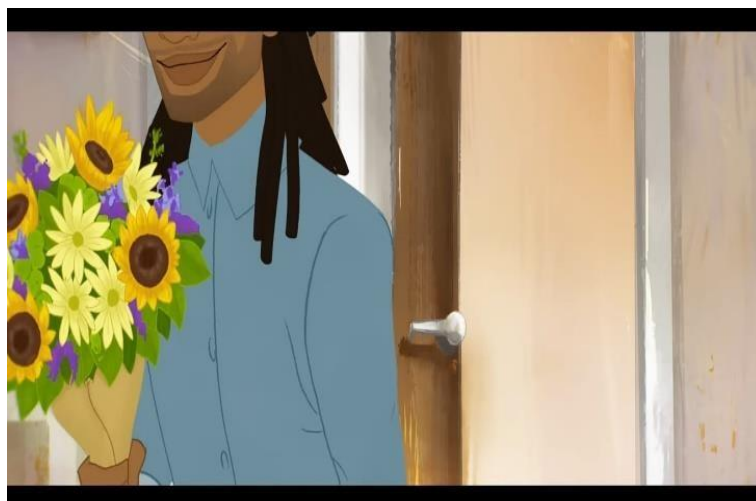
**Denotation:**

- The woman hugging the little girl

**Connotation:**

A hug is a physical gesture in which two people put their arms around each other's bodies. A hug is a sign to express affection, comfort, or support. This nonverbal communication can be done with anyone, such as friends, partner, family, even pets.

The scene above showing the little girl hugging a woman. The woman is the same one as the one in the YouTube video and the photo in Zuri's bedroom which indicating that the woman is Zuri's mother. The hug is indicating a happiness and as an expression of them who hasn't been seeing each other for a while.



Picture 19

**Denotation:**

- Yellow flower

**Connotation:**

The picture above is showing the husband bringing yellow flowers. Giving flowers is a common way to show affection, appreciation, or congratulations to someone. Flowers are often given as gifts on special occasions such as birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries, or to celebrate important events such as graduations and weddings. In many cultures, flowers are also used to express condolences or as a way to offer comfort and support to someone who is grieving.

Different types of flowers can symbolize different things. For example, red roses are often associated with love and passion, while white roses are associated with purity and innocence. Pink roses are often associated with appreciation, gratitude, and admiration. Lilies are often associated with beauty, innocence, and purity, while daisies are associated with innocence and simplicity, while tulips are associated with love and passion. The yellow flowers symbolize a happiness and optimism. Here, the husband is giving sunflowers to support his sick wife as a sign of optimism and happiness.



**Picture 20**

**Denotation:**

*A drawing of the woman bald with a crown.*

A crown is a type of headwear that is traditionally worn by monarchs or rulers as a symbol of their power and authority. Crowns are often made of precious metals and are adorned with jewels, and they are often designed to be worn on top of the head.

**Connotation:**

Here, the little girl is drawing a crown on top of the woman's head. A crown is a symbol of someone's dignity. The crown that is being drawn by the daughter is indicating her telling the mother, that even though she does not have any hair, she is a precious woman to her with or without hair.



Picture 21

**Denotation:**

- The hand on the chest

**Connotation:**

Placing a hand on the chest is a common gesture that can have a variety of meanings depending on the context in which it is used. It is often used as a sign of sincerity or honesty, as if to say "I am telling the truth and my hand on my chest is a symbol of my honesty." Placing a hand on the chest can also be a sign of respect, such as when someone is thanking someone else or expressing gratitude. In this context, the hand on the chest can be seen as a way of expressing appreciation and showing respect for the other person. In some cases, placing a hand on the chest can also be a sign of vulnerability or vulnerability. It may be used to convey a sense of openness or honesty, as if to say "I am being completely honest with you and I am willing to be open and vulnerable." In general, the meaning of this gesture will depend on the context in which it is used and the body language and facial expressions of the person using it. The woman in the picture above places her hand on her chest whilst looking at the drawing as a sign of an admiration and she felt touched by the drawing of herself that is made by her daughter.



Picture 22



**Denotation:***The family hugging and smiling*

A smile is a facial expression that is characterized by an upward curvature of the corners of the mouth and often involves the muscles around the eyes.

**Connotation:**

Smiling is a universal human expression that is used to convey a range of emotions, including happiness, joy, contentment, and amusement. Here the family is hugging which indicating a feeling of missing the mother and as an excitement to finally see each other again.



**Picture 23**

**Denotation:**

- The hair on the mother
- Smile on everyone's face

**Connotation:**

The hair on the mother is a sign that she has recovered from her illness. The smile on their face is indicating a happiness.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has revealed that the animated video of Love Hair is rich in semiotic elements, both denotative and connotative. The analysis of the video has led to the identification of 23 different discussions related to various signs, symbols and representations used in the video. The signs and symbols that were identified in the video include the letter Z in the girl's room, the sticker on the girl's tablet, and the medical devices. Through the identification of these signs, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and message conveyed in the video, which ultimately contributes to a better appreciation of the artistry and creativity of the animators. Overall, this research has demonstrated the importance of semiotic analysis in understanding the complex and layered meanings embedded in visual media, and highlights the need for further research in this area.

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