

## **Obsessive Love Turns to Violence: A Textual Analysis in Edwin's *Posesif***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Relationship violence refers to any attempt to control or dominate another person physically, sexually, or psychologically, causing some level of harm (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999). According to the Ministry of Female Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia, almost half of the perpetrators are boyfriends or friends. This concerning phenomenon is what Edwin, *Posesif's* director, tries to portray in his film. He represents this reality as a means to raise awareness of obsessive love that turns to violence among teenagers, who just left their childhood and are going to a romantic relationship by seeing the signs of such a relationship. However, without proper understanding on why the characters in this movie are involved in violence relationships, it will not be easy for the audience to learn from the movie. We need to acknowledge the characters' background and purposes in the romantic relationship to reveal why they are trapped in relationship violence. Therefore, the question is why obsessive love happened to them. Why is the male character, Yudhis, obsessed with Lala, the female character, and why does Lala not end her relationship despite what has happened to her? Bandura's social learning theory and Bowlby's attachment theory are used as a framework to unfold their background and behaviors. Both theories include the role of caregivers to the young ones that set templates in their behaviors' responses in life. In this study, it is known that Diana, Yudhis's mother, and Lala's father are both failed in giving adequate attention to their children that causes Yudhis and Lala trapped in a co-obsessive relationship, putting Yudhis as the perpetrator and Lala as the victim. By understanding this, this film can encourage adults and teenagers to be aware of obsessive love and prevent violence in any relationship.

**Keywords:** attachment; obsessive love; social learning; teenagers; violence

### **INTRODUCTION**

Relationship violence is pandemic. According to Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman as stated by Wekerle, it occurs commonly in various forms and intensity – parent-child, sibling-sibling, marital partners, teen dating partners - that we sometimes fail to recognise its significance and impact (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.438revi). According to Ministry of Female Empowerment and Child Protection of the Republic of Indonesia, 33.4% women age 15 to 64 has undergone or physical and/or sexual violence (*Waspada Bahaya Kekerasan Dalam Pacaran*, 2018). 18.1% of the cases is physical violence, and 24.2% of the case is sexual violence. 42.7% of the cases happened to unmarried women, and most of the cases are sexual ones. From 10,847 perpetrators, 2,090 are boyfriends or friends. These numbers may be just an iceberg whereas more cases probably have not yet been revealed in Indonesia.

In addition, women who were physically assaulted as adolescents were at greater risk for revictimization during their young adulthood (Smith et al., 2003, p. 1107). Each year of their

young adulthood, women who have experienced violence remain at greater risk for revictimization than those who have not. To make matters worse, across all years, women who were physically assaulted in any year were significantly more likely to be sexually assaulted that same year. In other words, violence during adolescence affected women more in their young adulthood than the violence happened during their childhood.

According to Wolfe as quoted by Wekerle, relationship violence refers to any attempt to control or dominate another person physically, sexually, or psychologically, causing some level of harm (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.436). There are several most influential theories to explain the phenomenon of relationship violence; those are social learning theory and attachment theory. Social learning theory, proposed by Bandura as stated by Wekerle, emphasizes the importance of observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reaction of others (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.438). Hence, people's behavior, like relationship violence, is learnt from the environment, such as family, school, or mass media, through the process of observational learning.

Meanwhile, attachment theory, proposed by Bowlby as stated by Wekerle, argues that a strong emotional and physical bond to the main caregivers, such parents, grandparents, or nannies, in a child first year of life is essential to his development (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.442). If the bonding is strong and the child is securely attached, he will feel safe to explore the world. The child knows that there is always a safe place to return anytime. However, if the bonding is weak and the child feels insecurely attached, he will feel afraid to leave or explore this frightening huge world because he is not sure if he can return. These insecure attachment styles are used to describe a high-risk group of victimization and offending in teen dating relationships.

When perpetrators are insecurely attached to someone, this is what has been referred to as obsessive love. According to Forward, obsessive love is the thought of loving, caring, even controlling as if the target is a possession (Forward & Buck, 1991, p. 7). Most obsessive lovers eventually reach a certain point where they can no longer hold their frustration when something is not happening the way they want in the relationship. The rage of frustration soon piles up and turns into violence. This is what Edwin is trying to portray in his film *Posesif*.

In terms of the movie itself, *Posesif* has won several awards at the Indonesian Film Festival in 2017. The awards are best director, best lead actress by Putri Marino, and best supporting actor by Yuyu Unru. Although this film can be categorized as teen flicks for its target audience, it only has 171,887 tickets sold, much lower than Joko Anwar's *Pengabdi Setan*, a popular horror movie, which has 4,206,103 tickets sold in the same year. However, *Posesif* was nominated for ten categories in Indonesian Film Festival (FFI) (*Daftar Film Indonesia Tahun 2017*, 2021). According to Van Heeren, a Citra was not an indication of the popularity of the film with the audiences. On the contrary, most audiences preferred watching popular action films, slapstick comedies, cheap dramas, teen flicks, horror, and other kinds of film that hardly ever entered the FFI competition (Heeren van, 2012, p. 43). Therefore, *Posesif* was meant to enter FFI, but still could be accepted by popular audiences.

Using romantic-psychological thriller genre conventions, such as low-key lighting, *Posesif* is about the romantic relationship between Lala and Yudhis. At first, the new relationship seems perfect, beautiful, and thrilling, but later, Lala realizes that Yudhis is possessive towards her when she could not find more time to spend with him since she was busy doing her routines as a diving athlete. In this case, Yudhis is considered the obsessive lover or obsessor, while Lala is the target of possession. Yudhis could not accept that Lala is withdrawing herself from the relationship due to the external factors, so Yudhis preoccupies the feeling as being rejected and it turns into an emotional burst. Yudhis also suffers from obsessive jealousy towards Lala's friend, Rino, that leads him to emotional violence to Lala and physical violence to Rino. Every time Lala wants to end the relationship, Yudhis asks for forgiveness by self-punishing or acting out of pursuit. Other signs of obsessive love are stalking, threatening to destroy the target's reputation, and attacking objects to prevent the obsessor from attacking the target. These symptoms are the characteristics of obsessive love that Yudhis has over Lala. Next, the question is why obsessive love happened to them. Why is Yudhis obsessed with Lala? Why does Lala not end her relationship with Yudhis despite what has happened to her?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Social Learning Theory**

To reveal the Yudhis and Lala's behaviors to each other, there are two theories that are used to explain the dating violence in this movie. First is the social learning theory. According to Bandura as stated by Wekerle, social learning theory identifies observational learning as means of acquiring interaction or skills in which the imitated behavior of adult role models will turn to reinforce in the child (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.441). This theory is the most popular one in the relationship with violence research because according to O'Leary as stated by Wekerle, it is consistent with the intergenerational transmission hypothesis which states that the aversive and coercive interpersonal style is learnt from his experiences of violence from one's family of origin. When a child witnesses or directly experiences violence, in the future, it will put him at risk for interpersonal violence because of information learnt about the functional nature of violence. Perpetrators of violence have the chance to express themselves, to solve problems, to control and to dominate others. According to Jacobson as stated by Wekerle, the immediate reward that the perpetrators are longing for when they conduct violence in a romantic relationship is the instant decrease of uncomfortable feelings, such as, tension or urgent feeling for attention (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.441). Another reward is the increasing feelings of "I am in charge, and I control you and my situation." Perpetrators may not be aware of these rewards, but once they do it as a way to channel their anger, they receive the rewards, and the pattern is formed, that anger leads to violence, then uncomfortable feeling is gone, and the situation is under control temporarily.

According to Earls, Cairns, and Mercy as stated by Wekerle, children who are in abusive relationship with their caregivers, have an increase of relationship violence because the basis for such violence are formed during childhood and it is activated in adolescent while they are in their next important relationship, like dating (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.442). Since adolescence is closer in time to the previous maltreatment experiences than adulthood, teenagers

can imitate the violence learnt from the family because there is limited to no chance of revising the maltreatment. Furthermore, this behavior can still be carried on until adulthood when a revision does not occur in the previous stage, and this is the time when parental abuse is repeated to the next generation.

Moreover, the contribution of same versus opposite sex modeling is also worth consideration. For example, males are more prone to copy violence when they witness the father hitting the mother in their childhood than females (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.442). On the other hand, girls who witness violence in their childhood are less likely to seek help in leaving an abusive relationship.

According to Miedzian as stated by Wekerle, social learning theory also admits that the media and cultural factors have some influences on people's personal understanding of interpersonal violence (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.442). Young people with the background of maltreatment in their earlier life are particularly vulnerable to information from the media such as examples of coercive and sexist models of relationship. As stated by Wekerle, it happens because they are confused with the notions of expressions of love and concern for others as well as their need to be accepted (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.442). In addition, people who had unsatisfactory conditions in the family are more drawn to select and enjoy music videos that enabled escapism and fantasy. This might not be so to those who have a more satisfactory family. To the maltreated children, these videos are more personal and intense that they will perceive them in their intimate relationship and the notions of sexual involvement and romance are reflected from things presented in the videos.

### **Attachment Theory**

In addition, attachment theory, according to Bowlby as stated by Wekerle, proposes that children form mental representations of relationships based on their history with significant caregivers (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.444). In other words, all elements of relationships like the self or identity that children earn from the caregivers work as a prototype and template for their future relationships. This prototype works beyond conscious level and undergo transformations and elaborations throughout life, but it generally remains consistent across time. Thus, once the template is formed, that is carried a whole lifetime in all of the relationships that someone faces. Furthermore, according to Hazan and Shave as stated by Wekerle, romantic love is an attachment process, based on the attachment figures' perceptions and guided by the same relationship style tendencies that happened during childhood (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.442). In other words, if someone has perceived good perceptions from his or her caregiver, such as the mother or father, he or she will have a healthy relationship with his or her romantic partner. On the contrary, if someone obtained insecure, inconsistent, aversive, intrusive or neglecting caregiver's perceptions, he or she will be likely to have unhealthy relationships in his or her life.

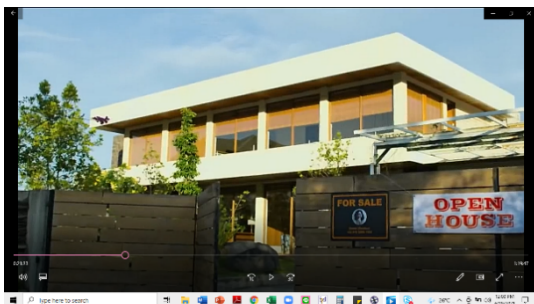
Hazan and Shaver, as quoted by Wekerle, found that secure individuals tended to describe their most important love experiences as happy, friendly, and trusting (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.443). They also report to have longer durations of partnerships and have a more realistic view of partnerships. On the other hand, those who endorse insecure attachment characterized their most important relationships as involving jealousy, emotional lability, fear of

intimacy, and obsessive preoccupation. Moreover, the insecure attachment which someone has, has shifted from parents to their peers, and it is greater than before because there is not enough opportunity to revise such models and the individual faces more important relationships ahead. It explains why teenagers listen to their friends more than to their own parents.

Furthermore, according to Cichetti and Howes as stated by Wekerle, an insecure attachment style appears to describe a high-risk group of relationship violence in dominated-dominating or victim-victimiser dimensions (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.443). Moreover, children who experience physical, sexual, and emotional trauma, are exposed to stark power differentials in the context of romantic relationships. Aggression and sense of personal entitlement will overlap with the victimiser role, meanwhile, passivity and sense of personal deprivation will overlap with the victim role. A perpetrator adopts aggression and sense of personal entitlement from his childhood, concurrently, the victim adopts passivity and sense of personal deprivation from their insecure attachment to the caregiver in the past. Such attachment is consistent overtime, therefore; teenagers tend to select dating partners and situations that are familiar to their understanding of what relationship is all about, who they are in the relationship (victim or victimizer), and what to expect from their partners. By the same token, both interactants are locked in an intense, mutually dependent partnership, that is often parent-child like in character. It means the perpetrators or protectors play the "parent" roles, while the victims play the 'child' role. As a result, it explains why people are often drowned into the same toxic relationships repeatedly.

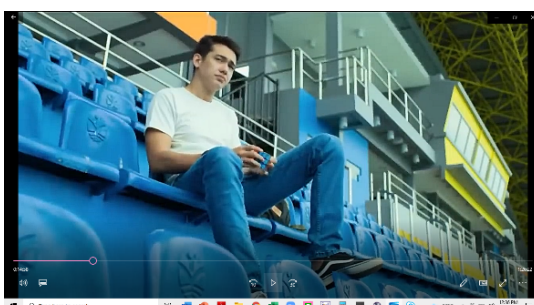
## DISCUSSION

To answer the questions why obsessive love occurs between Yudhis and Lala, first, we need to see the family background of these two interactants. Yudhis is a new student in Lala's school. Both are in their last year of high school. He is the only child of a single mother. In



terms of economic background, Yudhis and his mother come from the upper middle class. The setting of Yudhis' house is a huge house in Jakarta with a large yard and a wide garage. However, the house may be too big for just two people to live in. They also own two cars for each of them. Everything shows that Yudhis' mother is paying much attention to her image, but at the same time also cares for his son by giving him his own car.

On the screen we knew that the house was for sale. Since Yudhis is a new student in Lala's school, it is unlikely that they have just moved in from another city, but they decided to sell the house as well. It is especially uncommon in Indonesia for a last-year high schooler to transfer school if it is not for an emergency. It is improbable that Yudhis was transferred due to



his score because in another frame, Yudhis plays a rubric, a difficult mind game for most students at his age, in his spare time. He also easily answers Lala's test, showing that he is indeed an

intelligent student. It was likely that Yudhis perhaps faced personal problems in his previous school, so his mother decided to transfer him. Referring to Yudhis' background, it is plausible that the problem is related to Yudhis' mental health issue.

What is more, Yudhis' mother, Diana, plays the role of controlling her son. In the script, it is stated:

Diana

Bangun rumah ini aja, Mama awasin lho. Semua Mama pakai bahan-bahan yang terbaik. Apalagi buat masa depan kamu.

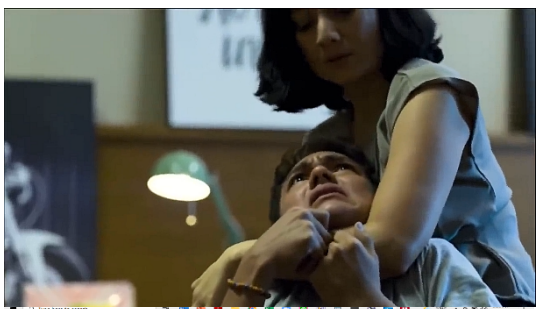
Translation:

When I built this house, I supervised everything. I only wanted the best materials. I'll do the same thing for your future. (Noer, n.d.)

From this dialogue, Diana is making a comparison between the house and Yudhis' future. She implies that she needs to watch Yudhis over carefully just like she supervises the house. She is pretty upset that Yudhis does not want her to come with him in Bandung and she is suspicious for Yudhis' reason. This is the sign of insecure attachment of Diana that she is obsessed with her son and treats him as if he is a possession. Diana also suffers from obsessive jealousy because she is suspicious that Yudhis have hidden reasons for renting a room in Bandung instead of moving out together with her. Referring to the social learning theory, Diana's behavior is learnt by Yudhis and is implemented to Lala the target of obsessive love.



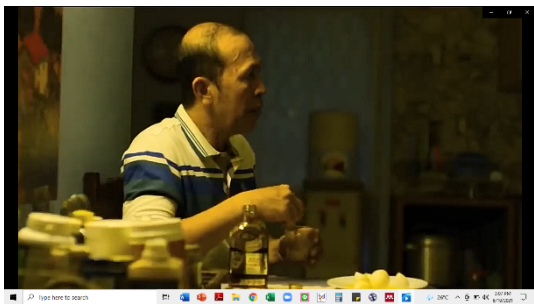
Furthermore, Diana's jealousy builds up when she suddenly meets Lala in her house. She switches gaze from Lala to Yudhis intimidatingly, trying to get a validation that indeed her suspicion is somehow true. She suspects that Yudhis does not want Diana to come with him to Bandung and will rent a room instead so that Yudhis and Lala can spend time together without supervision. In Indonesia, it is culturally unacceptable to have unmarried couples living together under the same roof. Nevertheless, Diana's concern is not just merely for ethical reasons but more driven by her obsessive jealousy. It is seen from her intimidating tone while talking to Lala. Yudhis, conversely, seems uneasy and nervous with his mother's presence. In a nutshell, Yudhis is Diana's obsession target and he imitates that behavior to Lala.



Yudhis' imitation behavior is reflected when he becomes the perpetrator of physical violence toward Lala. Noer, the script writer makes Lala present in the house where Diana is performing her violence toward Yudhis. Therefore, it becomes visible to the audience that Yudhis' behavior is learnt from his mother. In this scene, Diana is reacting violently when her ex is

brought up by Yudhis. It seems that Diana also has insecure attachment toward Yudhis' father and triggers her rage. Considering a perpetrator builds up the insecure attachment from the caregiver, it is obvious that Yudhis' behavior to Lala is more severe than Diana's behavior to him. It happens because Yudhis does not have the chance to revise what he has learnt from his mother since his insecure attachment is still happening up to his adolescence. Besides, his relationship with Lala now is more important to him than with Diana. To be specific, not only Yudhis learns the behavior from his mother, but also, he unconsciously makes it more harmful in his romantic relationship. It can be seen in the scene that Yudhis' eyes are full of hatred when Lala brings up his father in the conversation. Withal, the audience can feel his intention of taking revenge on Lala for every insecurity he has felt from his caregiver.

To continue, Lala as the target of an obsessive lover also suffers from insecure attachment towards her father. She is the only daughter of a diving coach and her mother, who was also a diving athlete, has passed away. Lala's father is also her coach in the national diving team. Accordingly, Lala's father plays double roles in her life, a father and a coach. Nonetheless, the coach figure is more dominant than a father figure, not only at the diving pool but also at home. In the scene, Lala's father is preparing her tonic after she finishes her morning run. It is shown that he coaches Lala all the time, a privilege that no other athletes have received. His intention is, of course, to make Lala the best athlete possible, just like Lala's mother or even better. Thus, Lala's father has the behavior to treat Lala as a possession, instead of a daughter who needs his care and attention.



Notwithstanding, Lala is desperately trying to get her father's positive reinforcement, something necessary that he does not realize to

give. In the dialogue, it is stated:

Lala

Pagi, yah. Aku habis lari lima kilo.

Ayah Lala

Percuma latihan kalau asupannya tidak berkualitas. Nih, minum.

Translation:

Lala

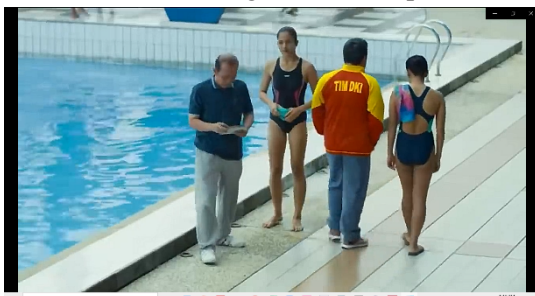
Morning, Dad. I just ran three miles.

Lala's Father

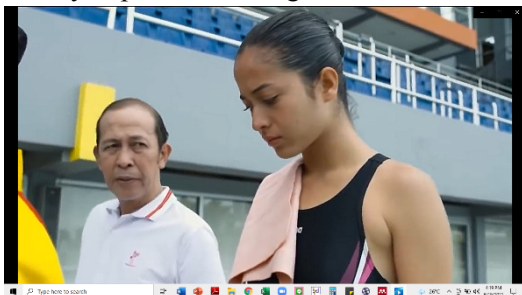
Exercise is no good without good nutrition. Here, drink up. (Noer, n.d.)

In the dialogue Lala is hoping to get a compliment from her father that she has run in her own initiative and she also has reached another milestone. Yet, instead of a compliment that a father usually gives to his daughter, Lala's father seems to accuse her for not taking care of her own nutrition. In this scene, Lala is behaving like a child longing for attention from her caregiver but not receiving it and leads to insecure attachment to her father.

Also, Lala's insecure attachment toward her father has triggered jealousy toward Jihan, her rival, because her father seems to like her more. Hazan and Shaver as stated by Wekerle adult relationships by insecure individuals involve jealousy and emotional lability (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.451). Since the father is also a coach in the team, the father treats all the athletes like his own children, so among the athletes, they see each other as siblings. Particularly, Lala desperately needs his attention, so she is competing with the other athletes to win it. When the attention does not go to her but to Jihan instead, Lala becomes somehow jealous. Moreover, Jihan is depicted as a young motivated athlete and can perform better than Lala. It is expected that Lala should perform the best since she is the coach's daughter who receive a full-time guide at the pool and at home as an athlete. Yet, Lala is being ignored



instead. In one scene, Lala's father is not looking when she performs a perfect dive. When Lala approaches him, he does not even say anything to her after he finishes talking about Jihan to another coach. In another scene, Lala's father makes her feel uneasy when he tells everyone that Jihan is the benchmark for the best performance, instead of her. He switches gaze to Lala as if telling her to perform better so that he will give the attention to her. Since Lala's father is only capable of caring for Lala as an athlete, she is suffering from personal deprivation, and becomes the victim of her own father.



Furthermore, because he is the sole caregiver, Lala does not have a choice but to continue manifesting this pattern to her own romantic relationship. She cannot hate nor ignore her father because to her, he is the only source who can fill her childish emotional need for attention. Hating him means only eliminating the possibility of getting attention, and that is something that she needs the least and causes her to be dependent on him more. Yudhis presence as the second most important relationship to Lala, on the other hand, has given Lala the attention and care that she needs. As stated by Hazan and Shaver, romantic love is an attachment process and is guided by the same relationship style in childhood (Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999, p.442). In short, her jealousy toward a rival is perceived as a pattern to be a victim in her romantic relationship.

Furthermore, Lala is incapable of breaking the cycle of victimization because her insecure attachment from her father is passed down to Yudhis, her next important relationship. Lala is always struggling for attention from his father and there is no chance for her to give up



because he is the primary if not sole caregiver. Similarly, there should be no chance for her to give up on Yudhis because she will feel guilty for giving up in her most important relationship. It can be seen in the following dialogue:

Lala

Yudhis butuh gue, Ga. Dia bukan orang jahat. Dia itu cuma...  
rumit.

Translation:

Lala

Yudhis needs me. He's not a bad guy. He's just...  
complicated. (Noer, n.d.)

From this dialogue it is shown that Lala suffers from a savior complex, a feeling of having power to fix something broken, or in this case, someone broken (Forward & Buck, 1991, p.77). It happens because Yudhis can give her the feeling of being needed, an attention that she could not get from her father. In other words, Lala is insecurely attached to her father and Yudhis. For this reason, it is very hard for Lala to end her toxic relationship.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, obsessive love happens to Yudhis and Lala because they are insecurely attached to their caregivers. Diana, Yudhis' mother and Lala's father are both incapable of giving attention that their children desperately need. Instead, they set the template that their children use on how to respond negatively to their romantic relationship. This is what is called a co-obsessive relationship, where the interactants are both being obsessive to each other.

As a cultural product, this film becomes a wakeup call for all parents, educators, and teenagers to be aware of the danger of obsessive love. Using romantic psychological thriller genre convention, such as low-key lighting, Edwin is successful in portraying the danger of obsessive love in parent-child and romantic relationships and leaves a strong impression from this movie. Furthermore, if many people can relate themselves to this story, obsessive love is indeed a pandemic.

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