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REPRESENTATION OF LOVE OF A FATHER WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH GESTURES AND EXPRESSIONS

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Abstract

The development of family communication highlights the importance of nonverbal communication in building emotional closeness. The Indonesian version of the film *Miracle in Cell No. 7* portrays the affection of a father with a disability toward his child through gestures and facial expressions. This study aims to analyze how affection is conveyed through these nonverbal forms. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. Data were collected through non-participant observation, documentation, semi-structured interviews, and literature study. The results show that gestures, facial expressions, and their combination represent protection, warmth, and sincerity. At the connotative level, these meanings strengthen the father-child relationship, while at the mythical level, the film challenges stereotypes about fathers with disabilities. Thus, nonverbal communication becomes the main medium for expressing sincere fatherly affection.

Keywords: gesture, facial expression, disabled father, affection, Roland Barthes' semiotics.

Abstrak

Perkembangan komunikasi keluarga menunjukkan pentingnya komunikasi nonverbal dalam membangun kedekatan emosional. Film *Miracle in Cell No. 7* versi Indonesia menggambarkan kasih sayang ayah disabilitas kepada anak melalui gestur dan ekspresi wajah. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis penyampaian kasih sayang melalui gestur dan ekspresi. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan analisis semiotika Roland Barthes. Data diperoleh melalui observasi non-partisipan, dokumentasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan studi pustaka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa gestur, ekspresi, dan kombinasi keduanya merepresentasikan perlindungan, kehangatan, dan ketulusan ayah. Secara konotatif, makna tersebut memperkuat kedekatan ayah-anak, sedangkan pada tingkat mitos menantang stereotip tentang ayah disabilitas. Dengan demikian, komunikasi nonverbal menjadi sarana utama dalam menampilkan kasih sayang ayah secara tulus.

Kata kunci : gestur, ekspresi wajah, kasih sayang, semiotika Roland Barthes.

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INTRODUCTION

Arif and Dewi (2022) state that communication within the family remains crucial for building emotional closeness, despite changes due to digital technology and shifting social values, as messages conveyed through expressions and gestures are more naturally perceived. Firliandoko et al. (2018) also emphasize that communication is an inner need in interpersonal interactions and is not limited to verbal forms. Similarly, Putri and Yuliani (2025) state that nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions, body movements, and physical distance, is the primary medium for conveying emotions in parent-child relationships, particularly in films depicting family dynamics.

In the context of media representation, these family communication dynamics are often depicted through film, an audio-visual medium. According to Utama et al. (2023), film serves not only as entertainment but also as a space for social reflection. Through visual elements such as gestures, expressions, symbols, and dialogue, film can present human values and demonstrate emotional relationships between characters. Consistent with this view, film, as an audio-visual medium, also serves to convey social and emotional messages implicitly through visual representation. This is emphasized by Saidah and Setiyoningsih (2023). Film media even has the potential to shape social stereotypes through visual representations presented to audiences. One frequently raised theme is the lives of people with disabilities in Indonesia, which still require serious attention in the social and cultural spheres (Putra, 2025).

According to data from the National Commission on Disabilities (KND) quoted by the Pasuruan Jatim Times, the number of people with disabilities in Indonesia is around 28 million, or 10% of the total population. However, they still often face marginalization and negative stereotypes in society. According to Lupito (2025), despite this, fathers with disabilities are still able to demonstrate affection, responsibility, and emotional roles through nonverbal communication.

According to *TribunPekanbaru.com* (2023), the Indonesian version of the film *Miracle in Cell No. 7* features Dodo Rozak, a father with an intellectual disability, who expresses his affection for his child through gestures and facial expressions. The film also won eight awards out of 16 categories at the 2023 Indonesian Movie Actors Awards, recognizing the strength of its storytelling and acting (Sesri, 2023).

This research focuses on the representation of affection of a father with a disability through nonverbal communication. This study is important because representations of fathers with disabilities are still often associated with limitations and negative stereotypes, particularly in expressing emotional roles within the family. However, this issue has not been widely explored through nonverbal communication analysis in film. The analysis uses Roland Barthes's semiotic approach, encompassing denotation, connotation, and myth, to uncover the deeper meanings of gestures and expressions in the Indonesian version of *Miracle in Cell No. 7*. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the representation of fatherly affection from a disabled perspective through nonverbal communication, which provides a new perspective in communication and media studies. This research is expected to enrich the study of nonverbal communication and the representation of affection within families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have shown that nonverbal communication plays an important role in conveying emotional meaning in films. Faiz (2025), in his study titled “*Gestures and Silence: Nonverbal Communication in Building the Main Character in the Film Titip Surat untuk Tuhan*,” found that gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and physical touch can effectively convey emotions and inner conflicts without relying on verbal dialogue. Similarly, Jannah et al. (2025), in their study “*Analysis of Nonverbal Communication in the Film Hadiah di Hari Minggu: Gestures and Emotional Expressions*,” explain that gestures and facial expressions serve as the main medium for expressing emotions, especially in characters with limited verbal communication. This indicates that nonverbal communication plays a crucial role in strengthening emotional delivery in films. However, these studies have not specifically examined the representation of affection of a father with a disability through nonverbal communication. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by focusing on the analysis of gestures and facial expressions in the Indonesian version of *Miracle in Cell No. 7*.

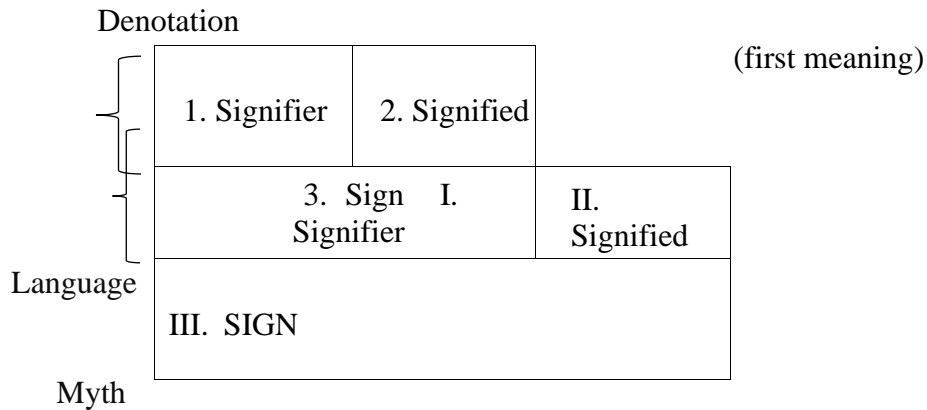
Semiotics

Semiotics is essentially the study of how humans interpret and give meaning to various phenomena around them. The activity of signifying is distinct from simply conveying messages (communicating). From a semiotic perspective, an object not only serves as a carrier of information but also becomes part of a systematically structured system of signs (Riyadi, 2022).

According to Setiawan & Said (2022), the term "sign" comes from the Greek word "semion" and is an entity that can be a word, image, animation, video, sound, object, or other object that represents something beyond itself. Yusriana et al. (2024) add that signs can be images, photographs, paintings, sounds, audio-visuals, or writing that can convey a specific meaning. Meanwhile, Utama et al. (2023) state that semiotics is the study of signs and symbols, which have become an important tradition in communication because humans use signs to convey ideas, feelings, or information to others.

Roland Barthes developed Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs. A sign consists of a signifier, which is a physical form such as an image, sound, or word, and a signified, which is the meaning that emerges from the sign, so that signs can convey meaning in various media, including film (Pambudiasih, 2023). The meaning of a sign operates on two levels: denotation, which is the basic meaning perceived by the senses, and connotation, which is the additional meaning that arises from experience, values, and social context (Salsabila et al., 2025). Above connotation lies myth, a second-level semiological system that makes connotation seem natural, expresses a particular ideology, and affirms prevailing social values and norms (Barus et al., 2025). This is clarified by Derizis & Komara (2020), who state that myth is a second-level meaning constructed from signs and functions to instill certain ideologies, norms, or cultural values that appear 'natural' to society, so that society tends to accept these values without questioning their existence and considers them something normal in everyday life.

Figure 2.2 Levels of Meaning in Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory



Connotation (second meaning)

Source: (Barthes & Lavers, 1972)

Gestures

Gestures are a form of wordless communication that allows individuals to convey messages through body movements, both consciously and spontaneously, such as reflex movements that occur naturally in everyday interactions. Gestures are a form of nonverbal communication that can convey meaning clearly through body movements, are natural, and are more easily understood when verbal communication is supported by consistent body language. Through gestures, individuals can express intentions, attitudes, and emotional responses without always relying on verbal language. In general, gestures encompass various body movements and nonverbal symbols as a medium for the dynamic exchange of thoughts, ideas, and information during the communication process (Mustafa et al., 2021). In the context of film, gestures play a crucial role in constructing visual meaning and reinforcing a character's emotions. Movements such as nodding, bowing, or folding arms can convey feelings of anger, sadness, or awkwardness without relying on explicit dialogue. The presence of gestures helps viewers grasp a character's inner state more quickly through the body language displayed on screen. Thus, gestures become an effective cinematic element for deepening characterization and strengthening the delivery of emotional messages in film narratives (Jannah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, body movements are also understood as cultural expressions imbued with symbolic meaning and inseparable from the social context in which they occur. Each movement is not only aesthetic but also implicitly conveys social and cultural values to the audience, enriching the viewing experience and understanding of the characters and situations in the story. Therefore, the interpretation of gestures must consider the cultural dimension so that the meaning received by the audience remains relevant to the context established in the film (Akram, Sonni & Akbar, 2025).

Expression

Facial expressions are a form of nonverbal communication seen through changes or movements of facial muscles that can directly reflect a person's feelings and emotional state. Through facial expressions, various emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, and even disgust can be conveyed without using words, thus helping others

understand an individual's emotional state spontaneously and honestly (Mustakim et al., 2017). In the context of film, facial expressions play a crucial role in supporting the storyline because matching a character's expression to the scene's situation can clarify the emotions displayed and strengthen the meaning and atmosphere of each scene (Prasetyowati & Linardi, 2017). Facial expressions are also widely understood as a key component of nonverbal communication, clarifying the intent of verbal messages, enhancing emotional clarity, and helping reduce the potential for miscommunication, particularly when verbal dialogue is limited (Syawalia et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the representation of affection of a father with a disability through nonverbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions, and their combination, in the Indonesian version of the film *Miracle in Cell No. 7*. The unit of analysis is each scene that shows a father expressing affection toward his child through these nonverbal forms. Primary data were collected through non-participant observation, by watching the film repeatedly, identifying relevant scenes, and noting the types of gestures, facial expressions, and their combinations. Secondary data were obtained through literature studies, journals, articles, and film documentation. In addition, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with a film professional to support and strengthen the interpretation of the data. The data analysis was carried out through several steps: selecting relevant scenes, classifying forms of nonverbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, and their combinations), and interpreting the meaning of each sign using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, which includes denotation, connotation, and myth. Through these steps, this study reveals the deeper meaning of nonverbal communication that reflects affection, care, and protection of a father with a disability toward his child.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Indonesian version of *Miracle in Cell No. 7* tells the story of Dodo Rozak, a balloon seller with a mental disability, who expresses his affection for his only daughter, Kartika, through nonverbal communication. Conflict arises when Dodo is imprisoned on false charges, but his closeness to Kartika remains evident, and ultimately, the adult Kartika restores her father's good name, emphasizing a message of humanity and criticizing legal injustice. The film runs 2 hours, 25 minutes, and 22 seconds, and this study analyzed 17 scenes relevant to the representation of gestures, expressions, and combinations of both as forms of nonverbal communication of affection by a father with a disability. These are grouped into three categories, as shown in the following table:

Table 1. Summary of Number of Scenes and Duration

No	Category	Number of Scenes	Total Duration
1	Gesture	8	2 minute 8 seconds
2	Expressions	4	1 minute 58 seconds
3	Gestures and Expressions	5	1 minute 44 seconds
TOTAL			5 minutes 50 seconds




Source: (Data Processing of the Indonesian version of the film *Miracle in Cell No.7* 2022)





Overall, of the film's 2 hours 25 minutes 22 seconds running time, researchers focused on analyzing 17 scenes totaling 5 minutes 50 seconds that were most relevant to depicting the gestures and expressions of affection of a father with a disability through nonverbal communication.


In the film *Miracle in Cell No. 7*, the gestures of a father with a disability toward his child represent affection, protection, and emotional closeness through nonverbal

communication. There are eight main scenes, totaling 2 minutes 8 seconds, demonstrating the warm interaction between father and child.

Table 2. Gesture Scenes from Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis

No	Scane	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
1	<p>Head Touching Gesture</p>  <p>minute: 16:16 – 16:25 Total : (9 seconds)</p>	Dodo's father touches his son's head.	This touching gesture signifies emotional closeness, arising from the relaxed and playful atmosphere between the two.	In culture, touching the head playfully is considered normal and a sign of affection. This gesture affirms the socially accepted parental attention, warmth, and closeness.
2	<p>Kissing and Hugging Gesture</p>  <p>Minute: 18:03 – 18:05 Total 2 seconds</p>	Dodo Rozak's father hugs and kisses his son's head as he falls asleep.	This gesture demonstrates Dodo's affection, warmth, and sense of security as a father.	In culture, touching the head playfully is considered normal and a sign of affection. This gesture affirms the socially accepted parental attention, warmth, and closeness.
3	<p>Forehead Kissing Gesture</p>  <p>Minute: 22:04 – 22:06 Total 2 seconds</p>	Dodo Rozak kisses his child's forehead outside the house.	This gesture demonstrates the courage to express love without shame, as well as a symbol of protection and pride.	This gesture, a public display of affection, signifies social acceptance, that parental love is natural and worthy of pride.

<p>4</p>	<p>Protective Body Gesture</p>  <p>Minute: 0:56: 54 – 0:57:03 Total 9 seconds</p>	<p>Dodo Rozak positions his body in front of his child to protect him..</p>	<p>This gesture demonstrates Dodo's readiness and courage to physically protect his child.</p>	<p>The father's body facing threat is mythologized as a symbol of natural paternal protection and responsibility, emphasizing the father's role as the protector of the family.</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>Hugging Gesture</p>  <p>Minute: 0:59:21 – 1:00:09 Total 48 seconds</p>	<p>Dodo Rozak and his child lie down, embracing each other.</p>	<p>This hug expresses the sense of security and comfort Dodo provides to his child</p>	<p>A father's hug is interpreted as a sign of affection and protection inherent in the father-child relationship, emphasizing that a sense of security is a child's right that parents should fulfill.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>Hugging and Kissing Gestures</p>  <p>Minute: 2:07:33 – 2:08:08 Total 35 seconds</p>	<p>Dodo Rozak hugs and kisses his child's head inside the hot air balloon basket.</p>	<p>The hugging and kissing gestures calm the child and demonstrate Dodo's emotional closeness in a tense situation.</p>	<p>Hugs and kisses symbolize a father's sincere love and courage, demonstrating that a father is always there to protect the child, even in risky situations</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>Kissing Gestures</p>  <p>Minute: 2:11:57 -2:12:09</p>	<p>Dodo Rozak kisses his child while holding the child's face.</p>	<p>This gesture expresses deep affection, emotional closeness, and an attempt to calm the child in a tense situation..</p>	<p>A father's kiss is mythologized as a symbol of sincere love, protection, and blessing inherent in the father-child</p>

	Total 12 seconds			relationship, demonstrating the father's emotional presence as a source of security in difficult circumstances
8	<p>Hugging Gestures</p>  <p>Minute: 2:12:17 – 2:12:28 Total 11 seconds</p>	Dodo Rozak hugs his child tightly, the child's head resting on his father's shoulder.	This hug demonstrates affection, protection, and Dodo's attempt to calm the child in an emotional situation while strengthening the emotional bond and sense of security.	A father's hug is mythologized as a symbol of love and protection, affirming that fathers, even those with disabilities, remain a source of security and warmth for their children.

Source: (Data processing of the film *Miracle in cell no. 7*, Indonesian version I)

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, Dodo Rozak's gestures in *Miracle in Cell No. 7* consistently function as nonverbal signifiers that construct meanings of affection, protection, and emotional bonding between father and child. These meanings operate through three levels: denotation, connotation, and myth.

In Scene 1 (16:16–16:25), the head-touching gesture is shown when the father gently touches his child's head in a relaxed moment. Denotatively, this is a simple physical contact. Connotatively, it indicates playful intimacy and a close emotional interaction that reflects familiarity and comfort in everyday father-child bonding. At the myth level, this gesture constructs the ideology that paternal affection is normalized through small, casual physical acts, which are culturally understood as everyday expressions of care within Indonesian family life.

In Scene 2 (18:03–18:05), the father hugs and kisses the child's head while the child is sleeping. Denotatively, it shows direct physical affection. Connotatively, this gesture reflects asymmetrical care where the child is passive (sleeping) while the father actively provides emotional security. At the myth level, it constructs the idea of unconditional paternal care, emphasizing that a father continues to protect and express love even when the child is unaware or not actively responding.

In Scene 3 (22:04–22:06), the father kisses the child's forehead in an outdoor/public setting. Denotatively, it is a direct kiss on the forehead. Connotatively, this gesture signifies emotional openness and a willingness to externalize affection in public space without shame. At the myth level, it constructs a social normalization of public parental affection, framing

fatherly love as something legitimate, honorable, and socially visible rather than private or restrained.

In Scene 4 (0:56:54–0:57:03), the father positions his body in front of the child as a protective barrier. Denotatively, it is a physical blocking posture. Connotatively, this gesture represents anticipatory protection, where the father actively places himself as the first line of danger absorption. At the myth level, it constructs the father as a structural protector figure, reinforcing the ideology that paternal responsibility includes physical sacrifice and readiness to face threats before the child is exposed.

In Scene 5 (0:59:21–1:00:09), both father and child lie down while embracing each other. Denotatively, it is a mutual hug in a resting position. Connotatively, this gesture reflects emotional regulation, where physical closeness stabilizes emotional distress and creates psychological safety. At the myth level, it constructs the idea that emotional security is not only protection from danger but also comfort through sustained physical presence and attachment.

In Scene 6 (2:07:33–2:08:08), hugging and kissing occur inside a hot air balloon basket in a tense situation. Denotatively, it shows physical affection in a high-risk environment. Connotatively, this gesture functions as emotional containment, where physical affection is used to reduce fear and stabilize the child's emotional state under pressure. At the myth level, it constructs the father as an emotional anchor, whose presence alone is sufficient to maintain the child's psychological safety even in crisis situations.

In Scene 7 (2:11:57–2:12:09), the father kisses the child while holding the child's face. Denotatively, it is direct face-to-face contact. Connotatively, this gesture intensifies emotional intimacy and reassurance, functioning as a calming mechanism during tension. At the myth level, it symbolizes paternal blessing and emotional affirmation, positioning the father as a source of reassurance and existential security.

In Scene 8 (2:12:17–2:12:28), the father hugs the child tightly with the child resting on his shoulder. Denotatively, it is a strong, sustained embrace. Connotatively, it reflects emotional consolidation, where fear or tension is resolved through physical closeness. At the myth level, it reinforces the ideology that fatherhood even in conditions of disability remains a stable emotional foundation that provides protection, warmth, and psychological grounding for the child.

This finding is aligned with the results of the research interviews. **YAB informants** assessed that Dodo's physical gestures consistently represent genuine affection for his child. This was conveyed by **YAB's informant** as follows:



"Dodo's character consistently displays affectionate gestures through physical contact, such as hugging, kissing his forehead, and patting his child's head. From the beginning of the film, we're shown that Dodo has intellectual limitations and a very pure heart a pure soul, to be precise. His character is constructed as "childlike" and sincere. All of his physical actions are read as a natural protective instinct, so the audience doesn't perceive any hidden agenda or manipulative intent, as Dodo lacks the capacity for such. Ultimately, these gestures are clearly interpreted as gestures of affection." (8/2/ 2026)



These findings are supported by research interviews, in which **YAB's informant** stated that Dodo's physical gestures are consistently understood as expressions of genuine affection for his child. **Informant YAB** explained it this way:

"We live in Indonesia, where a handshake (shaking hands), a hug, or a kiss on the forehead are standard family language to say 'I love you' without having to say anything. Our audience already has that cultural memory chip, so when we see Dodo do that, our brains immediately click: 'Oh, this is a father-son moment of mutual affection.'" (8/2/ 2026)

Overall, Dodo Rozak's gestures in the film emphasize that nonverbal communication is the primary means of expressing love and care. Actions such as hugs, kisses, head touches, and protective body positions strengthen emotional closeness and are interpreted as symbols of natural security, warmth, and protection, despite Dodo's intellectual disability. In analyzing the emotional expressions of a disabled father toward his child in *Miracle in Cell No. 7*, the researcher used Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. There are four main scenes: happiness, admiration, crying, and sadness and worry, with a total duration of 1 minute 58 seconds, which show how the father expresses feelings and emotional closeness nonverbally.

Table 3. Gesture Scenes: Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis

No	Scane	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
1	<p>Expression of Happiness</p>  <p>Minute 0:11: 21 – 0:11:34 Total 13 seconds</p>	<p>Happy expressions Wide smiles, sparkling eyes, and laughter when with children.</p>	<p>This happy expression shows sincere affection, emotional closeness, and the child's sense of comfort when he is near his father.</p>	<p>The expression of a father's happiness is mythologized as an ideal symbol of a father figure who brings warmth, a sense of security, and well-being to the family.</p>
2	<p>Amazed smiling expression</p>  <p>Minute: 0:17:52 – 0:18:02 Total : 12 seconds</p>	<p>Dodo's father looked at his son with a faint smile full of admiration.</p>	<p>A slight smile and a look of admiration indicate the father's appreciation and pride in his child, showing emotional attention and appreciation for the child's uniqueness.</p>	<p>Being a symbol of a father figure who supports and validates the child, culturally affirms that the father's recognition and admiration are a natural part of the father child relationship.</p>

3	<p>Crying facial expression</p>  <p>Minute: 0:20:23 – 0:21:09 Total 46 seconds</p>	Dodo's father has a crying expression while looking at his sleeping child.	Tears and furrowed brows signal deep sadness and emotional concern. A gentle gaze toward a child reinforces feelings of affection and closeness.	Crying is mythologized as a symbol of a father's sensitivity and genuine love, suggesting that emotional expression, while perceived as weak, actually represents emotional protection and care.
4	<p>Facial expressions of sadness and worry</p>  <p>Minute: 1:53:03 – 1:53:49 Total 46 seconds</p>	Father's facial expression showed sadness and worry.	A gloomy and tense face indicates the father's sense of love, responsibility and concern for the child's safety.	Sadness and worry are mythologized as symbols of the father's emotional protection and obligation, demonstrating the father's role as a presence in caring for the child emotionally and morally.

Source: (Data processing of the film *Miracle in cell no. 7*, Indonesian version I)

In analyzing the representation of facial expressions of affection by a father with a disability toward his child in the film *Miracle in Cell No. 7* using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, each scene functions as a sign system that produces layered meanings through denotation, connotation, and myth.

In **Scene 1 (0:11:21–0:11:34)**, the expression of happiness is shown through wide smiles, sparkling eyes, and laughter while being with the child. At the denotative level, this scene shows a father smiling and laughing. Connotatively, it represents sincere affection, emotional closeness, and a sense of comfort experienced by the child. At the myth level, happiness is constructed as a symbol of the ideal father figure who brings warmth, safety, and emotional well-being within the family.

In **Scene 2 (0:17:52–0:18:02)**, the amazed smiling expression appears when the father looks at his child with admiration. Denotatively, it is shown through a soft smile while observing the child. Connotatively, it indicates pride, appreciation, and emotional recognition of the child's uniqueness. Mytically, it reinforces the cultural belief that a father's admiration and emotional validation toward his child is a natural and expected part of the father-child relationship.

In **Scene 3 (0:20:23–0:21:09)**, the crying facial expression is shown when the father looks at his sleeping child. Denotatively, tears and a sorrowful face are visible.

Connotatively, it represents deep sadness, emotional vulnerability, and strong affection. At the myth level, crying is constructed not as weakness, but as a symbol of genuine paternal love and emotional protection, showing that emotional expression is part of caring deeply for a child.

In **Scene 4 (1:53:03–1:53:49)**, sadness and worry are shown through a tense and gloomy facial expression. Denotatively, the face reflects anxiety and sadness. Connotatively, it represents responsibility, fear for the child’s safety, and emotional burden. Mytically, it constructs the father as an emotional and moral protector who carries the responsibility of safeguarding his child.

This data was reinforced through interviews with informants who provided insight into the emotional effects evoked by the combination of these expressions. **Informant YAB** conveyed this as follows:


“Because Dodo's limited ability to express words, ultimately, it is his expression that the audience hears. For example, when he smiles, the muscles around his eyes move (his eyes narrow). In film psychology, this is called a Duchenne Smile, a truly sincere smile. This conveys the message to the audience that his happiness is genuine, not just an act to please Kartika. This expression makes the audience feel that his love is pure and unburdened.” (8/2/2026)




YAB's informant emphasized the importance of the character's honest expression in building audience empathy for the father-child relationship. In an interview, he explained:


“Because Dodo’s expressions are unfiltered. As a character with an intellectual disability, he’s not good at hiding his feelings. The honesty on his face is what ‘forces’ the audience to share his feelings.” (8/2/2026)

Based on Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis, the facial expressions of the disabled father in *Miracle in Cell No. 7* including happiness, admiration, crying, sadness, and worry consistently represent affection, care, and emotional closeness toward his child. These expressions function as primary nonverbal signs that construct emotional meaning beyond verbal language. The analysis shows that facial expressions become the most dominant medium in communicating paternal love due to the character’s limited verbal ability. His genuine smile, admiring gaze, tears, and anxious expressions create emotional authenticity that strengthens audience empathy toward the father child relationship. Thus, the film emphasizes that intellectual disability does not diminish a father’s ability to express love, care, and protection through facial expressions.

Table 4. Gesture and Expression Scenes of Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis

No	Scane	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
1	<p>Hugging gestures and warm facial expressions</p> 	The father hugged his son and looked at him with a warm facial expression.	Hugs signify care and a desire to protect with warm facial expressions emphasizing a genuine emotional bond.	The father's gentle hugging gesture and warm gaze affirm the social norm that fathers are emotional protectors,

	<p>Minute: 17:46 – 17:51 Total 5 seconds</p>			<p>while also being a symbol of natural and culturally accepted parental love.</p>
2	<p>Waving gesture and smiling expression</p>  <p>Minute: 0:22:24 – 0:22:51 Total 27 seconds</p>	<p>Father waved to his son with a smile.</p>	<p>A waving gesture indicates attention and enthusiasm, a smiling expression indicates happiness and a desire to build emotional closeness.</p>	<p>The waving gesture and smiling expression are culturally interpreted as symbols of a father's support and affection, emphasizing the father's role as an emotional protector even though he is not always physically present.</p>
3	<p>Hugging Gestures and Happy Expressions</p>  <p>Minute: 0:53:18 – 0:53:45 Total 27 seconds</p>	<p>Father hugs his child while showing a happy expression.</p>	<p>The gesture of hugging signifies longing and a protective urge, the happy expression shows warmth, emotion and deep love.</p>	<p>The hugging gesture and happy expression indicate that the ideal father shows affection and protection, becoming a symbol of the father's role as a responsible father towards his child.</p>
4	<p>Hugging Gestures and Anxious Expressions</p>  <p>Minute: 1:06:40 -1:07:00 Total 20 seconds</p>	<p>Hugging the child tightly, holding the child's head, face tense and anxious.</p>	<p>A tight hug indicates a desire to protect and soothe the child, an anxious expression indicates worry, fear of loss, and emotional responsibility.</p>	<p>The gesture of hugging tightly and the anxious expression indicate that the ideal father always protects his child, even sacrificing his own sense of security, becoming a symbol of</p>

				sincere parental affection in difficult situations.
5	<p>Kneeling Gesture and Smiling Expression</p>  <p>Minute: 2:11:15- 2:11:40 Total 25 seconds</p>	The father bent down in front of his son, smiling and touching his face.	The kneeling gesture shows humility and full attention, the smiling expression signifies calmness and emotional support in the midst of a stressful situation, an attempt to calm the child and provide a sense of security.	The kneeling gesture and warm smiling expression are signs that the ideal father is gentle, actively provides support and protection, demonstrating the father's role as a sincere protector and caregiver.

Source: (Data processing of the film *Miracle in cell no. 7*, Indonesian version I)

In analyzing the representation of gestures and expressions of affection by a father with a disability toward his child in the film *Miracle in Cell No. 7*, researchers used Roland Barthes's semiotic approach. This study focuses on how each nonverbal gesture and facial expression functions as a system of signs that constructs meanings of affection, protection, and emotional closeness.

In Scene 1 (17:46–17:51), a warm hug accompanied by a gentle facial expression at the denotative level shows the father physically embracing his child. At the connotative level, this gesture represents safety, affection, and strong emotional protection. At the myth level, this scene constructs the idea that an ideal father is a protective figure who expresses love through warm physical contact.

In Scene 2 (0:22:24–0:22:51), the waving gesture and smiling expression at the denotative level indicate a distant interaction between father and child. Connotatively, it signifies attention, emotional support, and an effort to maintain closeness despite physical distance. At the myth level, this scene reinforces the belief that a father's presence is not only physical but can also be felt through simple yet meaningful signs.

In Scene 3 (0:53:18–0:53:45), a hug accompanied by a happy expression at the denotative level shows an emotional reunion between father and child. Connotatively, it represents longing being fulfilled and deep emotional happiness. At the myth level, this scene illustrates that an ideal father–child relationship is characterized by open emotional warmth.

In Scene 4 (1:06:40–1:07:00), a tight hug with an anxious facial expression at the denotative level shows a more intense protective action. Connotatively, it reflects fear of loss, anxiety, and a strong sense of emotional responsibility. At the myth level, this scene

shows that an ideal father is someone who is willing to carry emotional burden for the safety of his child.

In Scene 5 (2:11:15–2:11:40), a kneeling gesture with a smile at the denotative level shows the father lowering himself to the child's level while touching the child's face. Connotatively, this gesture represents sincerity, humility, and an attempt to calm the child in an emotional situation. At the myth level, this scene constructs the representation that a good father is emotionally accessible and does not maintain hierarchical distance from his child.

This data was reinforced through interviews with informants who provided insight into the emotional effects evoked by the combination of these gestures and expressions.

Informant YAB conveyed this as follows:

"Every gesture of Dodo's hug, kiss, and caress toward his child is always accompanied by a sincere smile. This allows the audience to feel Dodo's affection for his child." (8/2/2026)

Furthermore, the interview results indicated that the facial expressions and gestures of the father with a disability in *Miracle in Cell No. 7* are not only emotionally understood by the audience but also feel natural because they are in keeping with the Indonesian cultural context. This was explained by **informant YAB**:

"In Indonesia, the relationship between fathers and young children is usually very close. Gestures like holding hands, holding the child in their arms, or patting the head are everyday occurrences. So when Dodo does that, our brains don't think, 'That's an acting technique,' but rather, we think, 'Yes, that's how fathers and children are like in our country.' It's a cultural code of affection that's ingrained in our minds." (8/2/2026)

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the gestures and facial expressions of the disabled father in *Miracle in Cell No. 7* consistently represent affection, care, and protection for his child. Scenes such as warm hugs, smiling waves, happy hugs, anxious hugs, and even kneeling with a smile demonstrate how Dodo expresses love and concern nonverbally. These gestures and expressions not only emphasize the child's emotional bond and sense of security but also form an emotional narrative that allows the audience to feel empathy and a closeness to the character. These findings are reinforced by interviews with informants, who emphasized that the combination of gestures and facial expressions feels natural and appropriate in the Indonesian cultural context. Gestures such as stroking the head, carrying, or bowing before a child are understood as a form of affection deeply embedded in the audience's cultural experience. Thus, the film emphasizes that intellectual disabilities do not diminish a father's ability to provide protection, care, and emotional warmth. Gestures and facial expressions are effective nonverbal communication tools for conveying genuine love, strengthening the father-child bond, and creating a deeply emotional experience for the audience.

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian version of *Miracle in Cell No. 7* depicts the affection of a father with a disability for his child through nonverbal communication, both gestures and facial expressions. Gestures such as hugging, holding hands, kissing the forehead, and protective body postures convey emotional closeness, protection, and a sense of security from the father to the child. Meanwhile, facial expressions, ranging from happy smiles and admiring gazes to tears of sadness and worry, reinforce the meaning of sincere and pure affection, despite the main character's intellectual disability. Moreover, the combination of gestures and

expressions—such as a warm hug accompanied by a smile, a wave with a caring gaze, or an anxious embrace with a worried expression—strengthens the message of affection and emotional closeness nonverbally, demonstrating that fathers are still capable of expressing love and protection fully.

Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis shows that each scene's gestures and expressions convey not only denotative meaning, but also connotative and mythical meaning, affirming that fathers, even those with disabilities, are still capable of being nurturing figures and emotional protectors. This combination of gestures and expressions creates a powerful nonverbal language for conveying affection, care, and responsibility, while challenging negative stereotypes about intellectual limitations. Thus, the film not only presents an emotional story but also provides a social and cultural lesson: a parent's love, care, and emotional closeness to their child are not limited by physical or intellectual abilities, but can be expressed through consistent and sincere nonverbal communication.

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