

Sexual Fantasy and Alternative Universe: A Reception Study of Science Fiction Fans on the Film *Dear David*

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ABSTRACT

Received : 28 September 2025

Accepted : 21 October 2025

Published : 15 December 2025

Keywords:

Stuart Hall’s Reception Analysis, Dear David Film, Sexual Fantasy AU

This study explores the reception of science fiction fans toward the portrayal of sexual fantasy in the Alternative Universe (AU) narrative within the Indonesian film *Dear David* (2023). Using Stuart Hall’s reception analysis, the research aims to understand how audiences interpret the representation of adolescent sexuality, fantasy, and ethical boundaries in digital culture. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method with in-depth interviews involving ten informants identified as science fiction fans. Findings reveal two dominant audience positions negotiation and opposition. The negotiated position views sexual fantasy AU as creative spaces for self-expression, yet emphasizes the need for ethical awareness, privacy, and respect for cultural taboos surrounding sexuality. Conversely, the oppositional position rejects such depictions for their potential to normalize obsessive or inappropriate behavior, particularly when involving real identities without consent. The research also highlights that AU writing functions as an emotional outlet and a coping mechanism, especially among youth seeking freedom from social and familial pressures. However, the commodification of sexual content in AU communities raises further ethical concerns regarding consent, age restrictions, and digital literacy. This study concludes that while AU narratives offer imaginative freedom and psychological escapism, they must be accompanied by ethical sensitivity and media literacy to prevent misinterpretation or harmful normalization. It contributes to audience studies by contextualizing fan reception of sexual fantasy representation in Indonesian media and underscores the importance of family and education in guiding youth self-expression responsibly.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements have enabled individuals to engage more freely in various activities, including anonymously creating and accessing information through social media. This progress not only facilitates communication but also allows users to construct their own “worlds” in digital spaces, one of which is through Alternative Universe (AU) narratives (Nurina Hakim & Alyu Raj, 2017). Originally written on blogs, AU are now widely found on social media platforms, allowing fans to reimagine their favorite characters in different realities. Due to

its non-factual and imaginative nature, AU has become popular as it enables writers to express emotions and creativity more freely (Khairunnisa, 2024).

The content of AU stories ranges from comedy and romance to horror and adult themes (Bangun et al., 2022). This diversity stems from the vast cultural and entertainment references available online, which allow writers to reshape reality according to their imagination. In Indonesia, while positive and lighthearted AU are popular, works addressing taboo topics such as sexual fantasy are also

gaining interest (Dhiah Indriani, 2024). To avoid stigma, many writers use anonymity, particularly when discussing mature subjects. This trend is visible in several accounts on the X platform known for sharing explicit AU content, illustrating that sexual fantasy AU have become a rapidly growing form of digital creative expression deserving academic attention within popular culture studies.

According to (Nisriinaa & Delliana, 2023), fantasy itself is a natural part of human imagination, even if social norms restrict its open expression. The AU ecosystem in Indonesia continues to expand, supported by active online communities on platforms like X that serve as the main space for interaction between writers and readers. Research by (RNM & Rachmani, 2022) found that Indonesian teenagers are more interested in reading AU than nonfiction books, spending up to five to seven hours daily engaging with such content. This suggests that AU function not only as entertainment but also as creative and emotional outlets for youth.

AU have also entered academic and cinematic discourse, as seen in the film *Dear David* (2023) directed by Lucky Kuswandi. The film presents sexual fantasy as both escapism and a means of self-expression among adolescents constrained by social and cultural taboos surrounding sexuality. Through the protagonist Laras, the film explores how fantasy reflects one's desires while simultaneously critiquing societal stigma. As emphasized by (Nisriinaa & Delliana, 2023), such portrayals challenge the boundary between private and public spaces in digital media.

This study, therefore, investigates how science fiction fans interpret the representation of sexual fantasy AU in *Dear David*. It aims to understand audience reception while emphasizing the importance of media literacy, ethical awareness, and family support to ensure that digital self-expression among youth remains healthy and responsible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Reception Analysis

Reception originates from the Latin word *recipere*, meaning "to receive" or "reception." In simple terms, reception refers to the way audiences construct meaning from media texts. The focus of this theory is not on the message sender, but on how messages are interpreted by audiences, with meanings

varying according to their cultural background, experiences, and individual context (Dwiputra, 2021). Stuart Hall, through his *encoding/decoding* theory, explains that media institutions encode messages with particular meanings, while audiences decode them based on their own social realities. Communication, therefore, is not seen as a linear process but occurs through four stages: production, circulation, use/consumption, and reproduction.

In the decoding process, audiences may occupy three positions. The first is the hegemonic-dominant position, in which audiences fully accept the media message according to the dominant ideology. The second is the negotiated position, where audiences accept certain parts of the message but reinterpret or adapt them according to their personal views. In this position, audiences are not passive recipients; instead, they critically engage with the message, selecting aspects they find relevant to their circumstances. For example, an audience member may agree with the main point of a news story but still identify its weaknesses or overlooked perspectives. The third is the oppositional position, in which audiences reject the message because it conflicts with their values or beliefs. In this stance, audiences not only reject the intended meaning but may also construct alternative interpretations that oppose the original message (Fitriya & Sumardjijati, 2023).

Although discussions on *alternative universe* (AU) writing have become more prominent within digital culture and fandom studies, very little attention has been given to AUs that incorporate sexual-fantasy themes. Most existing research focuses on AU as a creative outlet, a form of entertainment, or a space for community interaction, while narratives involving sexual fantasy are often avoided because they are considered sensitive or easily conflated with pornography. This creates a significant gap, as sexual fantasy within AU writing represents a growing form of expression among young people, particularly in online environments where imagination offers a safer and more private medium for exploring emotions and desires. The film *Dear David* highlights this phenomenon clearly, portraying a high school student who uses an AU to express her inner conflicts through fantasy rather than real world behavior yet this aspect has not been examined in previous academic work.

2.2 Film as a Form of Mass Media

Film is a form of mass communication that conveys messages or information through audiovisual symbols. These symbols carry diverse meanings in everyday life, allowing films to communicate messages in unique and multidimensional ways. Through this medium, various interpretations can be presented to audiences both visually and aurally. Moreover, film is a form of art that serves as a platform for expressing creativity and talent in the field of cinematography (Tahir & Medita, 2023).

Every film communicates its message through moving images, colors, and sounds. As a medium, film possesses the power to influence its viewers. The messages conveyed may be explicit or implicit, yet through these elements, films are able to deliver deep and layered meanings to audiences. Because of its visual and auditory nature, film has a strong appeal that enables it to reach diverse social groups. As a mass medium, it has great potential to shape perspectives and influence audience behavior, making it one of the most impactful tools in modern communication.

With its distinctive characteristics, film is capable of representing reality and re-presenting it to audiences. As a form of mass communication, it plays a significant role in modern culture by both shaping and reflecting societal views. Each film is crafted with specific intentions whether to entertain, inform, or educate (Tahir & Medita, 2023). Its audiovisual characteristics are embodied through two main components: narrative and cinematic elements. These components are interdependent, working together to create a cohesive and aesthetically engaging experience for audiences.

In today's rapidly developing film industry, audiences no longer need to visit theaters to watch movies, as films can now be accessed easily through legal streaming platforms such as Netflix or HBO. This shift has introduced new forms of diversification, as each platform presents films with distinct stylistic and narrative characteristics. Ultimately, this accessibility has made films more widely consumed and appreciated across various segments of society (Rachmad, 2020).

The absence of research on AU narratives that include sexual fantasy means that little is known about how such content is constructed, interpreted, and negotiated within youth digital culture. Understanding this genre is crucial because it reflects real practices among adolescents, who often turn to fictional

narratives as a way to cope with emotional pressure, explore identity, or process curiosity surrounding sexuality. Studying AU sexual fantasy not only helps distinguish imaginative expression from explicit sexual content but also sheds light on how digital spaces shape young people's understanding of privacy, boundaries, and social consequences. By addressing this overlooked area, the present study contributes to a more complete picture of contemporary youth expression and offers insight into the cultural implications of portraying sexual fantasy through narrative rather than physical representation.

2.3 Alternative Universe

The Alternative Universe (AU) is a storytelling concept that has rapidly developed on social media platforms particularly on X and has become an integral part of fanfiction culture. It allows writers to create parallel worlds with different rules and realities from those of the real world. AU are popular among Indonesian youth because they enable the exploration of diverse and unique narratives, often featuring characters adapted from various sources such as K-pop idols, anime figures, television series characters, or even real individuals known to the writer but reimagined within a new fictional context. This phenomenon provides fans with a creative space to express imagination, develop narratives, and form growing fan communities (Rahmadani et al., 2024).

AU appear in various forms, including fake chat conversations, fan art, and simulated screenshots of messaging applications that depict interactions between characters. These formats aim to make the storytelling more engaging and to help readers visualize character dynamics. Within AU, elements such as character traits, settings, and plotlines may change drastically to introduce variety, explore different sides of a character, or present situations that would be impossible in the original storyline. Most AU are written as threaded posts on the X platform, spanning a wide range of genres from horror, comedy, romance, and drama to adult-themed narratives thereby enriching the reading experience.

The motivations behind AU writing are diverse, ranging from emotional expression to personal hobbies or stress relief. According to (Dhiah Indriani, 2024), some AU writers base their stories on personal emotions, such as jealousy toward an idol,

which they later channel into anonymously written homosexual-themed stories. Furthermore, AU writing serves as an outlet for imagination and creativity, enabling authors to produce more varied and dynamic works. In essence, AU function both as a creative medium and as a psychological escape for writers to express themselves beyond the constraints of reality.

2.4 Sexual Fantasy

According to (Febrianto, 2023), sexual fantasy refers to imaginative thoughts or mental imagery related to sexual desire, such as envisioning the physical attributes of a gentle or muscular person. Sexual fantasies can emerge as early as childhood often centered around parental figures and continue to develop as individuals mature. During adolescence, physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development plays a significant role in shaping sexual fantasies, primarily driven by curiosity about adult behavior. Early learning experiences may also influence the direction of one's fantasies and, in some cases, contribute to the formation of deviant sexual behaviors, such as habitual masturbation or other inappropriate acts (Anggriani et al., 2024).

In practice, sexual fantasy involves the mental visualization of a sexual object as a means to satisfy desire, creating an illusion as though the imagined scenario were real. This phenomenon reflects sexual objectification, in which an individual perceives another person merely as an object to fulfill their imagination. Interestingly, the object of sexual fantasy is not always female; it can also be male who, in many cases, is socially perceived as the active subject of desire. This demonstrates that sexual fantasy can be experienced by anyone, regardless of gender, although women tend to be more restrained in expressing sexual desire compared to men (Febrianto, 2023).

However, because sexual fantasy remains a taboo topic in many societies especially when expressed by women many female writers channel their fantasies through Alternative Universe (AU) fanfiction. In this context, the characters within AU indirectly become sexual objects for the writers. Despite the controversial nature of the theme, this genre has gained considerable popularity because the imagined scenarios are unlikely to occur in real life. Consequently, AU writing functions as a safe outlet for emotions and imagination that cannot be openly

expressed in daily life both for the writers and their audiences.

METHOD

3.1 Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method using Stuart Hall's reception analysis to understand how science fiction fans interpret sexual fantasy Alternative Universe (AU) narratives in the film *Dear David*. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with ten informants, focusing on their experiences and the meanings they construct. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a letter of information and a letter of consent to ensure that their participation was voluntary, informed, and in accordance with ethical research principles.

Given the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher maintained strict confidentiality by using pseudonyms for all participants and taking measures to prevent any potential stigma or social pressure. Throughout the interview process, neutral, polite, and non-directive language was used to create a safe and comfortable environment, allowing participants to freely express their perspectives and interpretations.

In analyzing the data, this study used Stuart Hall's reception analysis model, which categorizes audience interpretations into three reading positions, dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. Each interview transcript was examined and grouped according to these categories to understand how participants accepted, questioned, or rejected the portrayal of sexual-fantasy AU narratives in *Dear David*. The analytical process followed the qualitative data analysis framework of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Through these steps, relevant statements from participants were selected, organized, and interpreted to generate meaningful findings.

The sample in this study consisted of ten participants selected through purposive sampling. These individuals were chosen because they met specific criteria relevant to the research they regularly engage with imaginative and speculative narratives and are familiar with alternative fictional worlds. Their experience with such content makes them capable of distinguishing imaginative expression from real-world behavior, making them suitable for

evaluating how sexual-fantasy AU narratives are represented and understood.

3.2 Subject & Object of Study

The subject of this research consists of Indonesian science fiction fans who have watched the film *Dear David* and are familiar with the concept of Alternative Universe (AU) fanfiction. These individuals were selected because of their understanding and engagement with digital fan culture, which allows them to provide insightful perspectives on the representation of sexual fantasy within the film. The object of this study focuses on the audience's reception toward the portrayal of sexual fantasy in *Dear David*. Using Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory, the research explores how audiences interpret, negotiate, or oppose the film's depiction of AU narratives, reflecting the diversity of meanings constructed by viewers based on their backgrounds, experiences, and cultural values.

3.3 Research Location and Subjects

This study was conducted across various regions of Indonesia. The researcher aimed to obtain diverse responses from participants with different cultural and ideological backgrounds, representing a range of geographical areas and age groups. The controversy surrounding the film *Dear David* in Indonesia motivated the researcher to explore audience perspectives from those who have watched the film. Furthermore, the study seeks to determine whether, through *Dear David*, issues related to sexual fantasy have become normalized in certain parts of Indonesia or if they remain taboo topics. By gathering data from informants across different regions, the researcher was able to capture a wide variety of viewpoints influenced by distinct cultural, social, and personal backgrounds.

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted both online and offline with science fiction fans who had watched the film *Dear David*. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with a Letter of Information and a Letter of Consent to ensure that their participation was voluntary, well-informed, and aligned with ethical research standards. The Letter of Information outlined

the research objectives, procedures, and confidentiality measures, while the Letter of Consent confirmed each participant's agreement to take part in the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This approach was applied to interpret the results of in-depth interviews and documentation related to the audience reception of sexual fantasy and Alternative Universe (AU) representation in the film *Dear David*. The analysis was also guided by Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding framework, which categorizes audience readings into dominant-hegemonic, negotiated, and oppositional positions.

a. Data Reduction

Interview transcripts were carefully reviewed to identify relevant information. Unrelated statements were removed, while meaningful responses were grouped into thematic categories such as: (1) perceptions of AU as a creative space, (2) attitudes toward sexual fantasy representation, and (3) ethical considerations in digital expression.

b. Data Display

The reduced data were then presented in narrative form, supported by direct quotations from participants. This helped highlight recurring themes and differences in audience interpretations based on personal experience and cultural background.

c. Conclusion Drawing/Verification

The final step involved mapping audience interpretations into Hall's three decoding positions. The results showed that most participants occupied negotiated and oppositional positions—acknowledging AU as a creative outlet but expressing concern over ethical and moral boundaries. Through this process, the analysis demonstrated that audiences actively construct meaning influenced by their social values and digital media awareness.

RESULT

This study aims to examine audience reception toward the representation of sexual fantasy and Alternative Universe (AU) in the Indonesian film *Dear David*. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and in-depth interviews, the researcher involved ten

informants between the ages of 19 and 25 who identified themselves as science fiction fans and were familiar with AU narratives circulating on social media platforms. The participants were selected to provide diverse perspectives shaped by different cultural and ideological backgrounds across Indonesia.

The analysis reveals that audience responses to *Dear David* fall into two major decoding positions based on Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding theory: negotiated and oppositional readings.

In the negotiated reading, most participants acknowledged that *Dear David* successfully illustrates AU as a form of creative self-expression and a psychological outlet for adolescents. They viewed sexual fantasy as a normal aspect of human imagination that can serve as a space for emotional release and identity exploration, especially in environments where open discussion of sexuality remains taboo. However, these participants also emphasized the importance of ethical awareness, noting that using real individuals as fantasy objects such as in AU writing can cross moral boundaries and lead to social stigma.

In the oppositional reading, several participants rejected the film's representation of sexual fantasy, perceiving it as controversial and potentially problematic. They argued that the film exaggerated the issue, making it appear as though writing sexually themed AU was socially acceptable. Some expressed concern that such portrayals could normalize inappropriate behavior among younger audiences, blurring the line between imagination and reality.

In this study, the ten respondents were individuals aged 19 to 25 who share similar characteristics relevant to the research focus. All participants identified themselves as active consumers of speculative or imaginative narratives and were familiar with Alternative Universe (AU) content circulating on platforms such as Twitter/X, Wattpad, and TikTok. Several participants regularly read AU stories, while others engaged with them occasionally but understood the structure and purpose of AU narratives. The respondents came from different regions across Indonesia, offering a variety of cultural and social backgrounds that contributed to diverse interpretations. In addition, all participants were digitally literate and active on social media, making them accustomed to online creative expression and

youth digital culture. These characteristics collectively make the respondents suitable for examining how AU narratives particularly those involving sexual fantasy are interpreted within the context of contemporary Indonesian youth.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that audience reception of *Dear David* is not uniform but varies according to social values, cultural context, and media literacy. The diversity of interpretations supports Stuart Hall's argument that audiences are active interpreters who construct meaning based on their own experiences and moral frameworks. The study also highlights a broader social negotiation within Indonesian youth culture, where digital creativity often intersects with ethical and cultural boundaries.

DISCUSSION

Alternative Universe as a Creative Expressive Medium

The Alternative Universe (AU) is perceived by informants as a creative medium for expression, allowing writers to channel imagination, emotions, and personal experiences that are often difficult to articulate in real life. AU serves as a safe space for exploring sensitive themes, including sexual fantasy, which remains taboo in many social contexts. As readership has grown, AU have evolved beyond personal expression into commodified works, often sold as paid PDFs or exclusive online content. Informant 7 emphasized that AU writers have full creative control over the plot, characters, and behavior of their fictional figures, likening the writing process to that of a film director. Meanwhile, Informants 2, 3, and 8 primarily viewed AU as a medium for expressing fantasies about idols, while Informant 4 interpreted it more broadly as a flexible form of storytelling not limited to modern celebrity figures.

According to Informant 4, AU can incorporate historical, cultural, or real-world contexts that are reimagined into fictional narratives, enabling writers to experiment creatively and produce diverse stories. Informant 2 further described AU as a reflective and imaginative space, serving as an outlet for emotions and experiences that cannot be expressed openly. Thus, AU is not merely entertainment but also a flexible form of expression that enables writers to reinterpret aspects of history, culture, and personal identity.

Informant 2 explained that AU can also help writers overcome low self-esteem by creating idealized versions of themselves through fictional characters essentially romanticizing elements of life that are difficult to achieve in reality. Informants 1 and 3 supported this view, noting that AU often emerges from the writer's need to externalize feelings and experiences that are socially constrained. However, Informant 10 offered a contrasting perspective, suggesting that some AU are motivated primarily by sexual desire, particularly when writers receive positive audience responses. This indicates that AU writing motivations vary widely from emotional needs to instinctive impulses reinforced by audience reception.

Informant 2 also highlighted that AU has become a financially profitable platform once writers recognize reader preferences, particularly toward sexually themed narratives. This view is supported by Informant 3, who noted that many writers sell their works through exclusive paid access, such as password-protected files or PDF versions priced between IDR 7,000 and IDR 20,000 depending on quality. The exclusivity factor attracts buyers, as such content is not publicly accessible due to platform restrictions, granting readers a sense of privileged access.

This phenomenon aligns with (Reißmann et al., 2017), who emphasize that fanfiction functions not only as a creative outlet but also as an economic tool within the digital ecosystem, where works originally created for personal expression are increasingly transformed into commodified cultural products. Similarly, (Rahmadani et al., 2024) describe AU as a participatory space that enables fans to express imagination and foster active creative communities. Moreover, (Rokicka, n.d.) identifies AU as a form of coping mechanism, allowing writers to confront emotional pressure and transform unpleasant experiences into idealized narratives through what she terms *shifting realities* the creation of alternate realities that fulfill emotional needs.

Informants view Alternative Universe (AU) as a creative space that allows writers to express imagination, emotions, and experiences they cannot easily communicate in real life. AU becomes a safe medium for exploring sensitive themes, including sexual fantasy, which remains socially taboo. As its readership grows, AU also shifts from personal expression to commercial content, such as paid PDFs

or exclusive online releases. Several informants described AU as a flexible form of storytelling where writers have full control over plot and character construction, while others highlighted its role in expressing fantasies about public figures or reimagining real-life contexts into fictional narratives.

Many informants emphasized AU's emotional function helping writers externalize feelings, cope with insecurities, or create idealized versions of themselves. At the same time, motivations differ: some write AU to process emotions, while others produce sexually themed AU because of audience demand. This diversity shows that AU serves multiple psychological and social purposes. Informants also noted the economic aspect of AU, where sexually themed stories often attract buyers due to limited access and exclusivity.

The findings align with previous studies showing that AU and fanfiction act as participatory spaces for self-expression (Rahmadani et al., 2024) and as coping mechanisms where writers build alternate realities to manage emotional pressure (Rokicka, n.d.). The commercialization of AU identified by participants also supports Reißmann et al. (2017), who argue that digital fan works increasingly operate as cultural commodities.

This research expands prior discussions by addressing sexual-fantasy AU, a theme rarely examined in earlier studies. Informants reveal that sexual fantasy in AU is not merely driven by desire, but also by emotional processing, identity exploration, and social validation. These findings clarify that AU sexual fantasy differs from pornography because it remains within imaginative, narrative construction rather than explicit visual action.

Interpretations from informants also illustrate Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model: some accept AU as a normal imaginative form, others negotiate ethical boundaries, and a few oppose it due to moral concerns. This variation shows that AU sexual fantasy becomes a site where youth creativity, cultural norms, and media literacy intersect highlighting why this topic is academically relevant and important to study.

Ethical and Privacy Boundaries in Alternative Universe Writing

Ethical and privacy boundaries in writing sexual fantasy Alternative Universe (AU) stories emerged as a major concern among informants. While AU is understood as a creative space, this freedom raises ethical issues particularly when writers use real

public figures or private individuals as characters. Informant 7 emphasized the importance of ethical responsibility by avoiding real identities, providing explicit content warnings, and restricting underage access. This aligns with (Gupta, 2023) who argues that content warnings are not merely formalities but preventive measures that prepare audiences for sensitive material and reduce potential psychological harm.

Informants 9 and 10 highlighted the moral implications of sexualizing real people. Informant 9 viewed such practices, especially when monetized, as a form of harassment rather than creative freedom. Similarly, Informant 10 noted possible psychological impacts on individuals close to public figures and advised avoiding real names altogether. These perspectives correspond with (Hedrick, 2020), who stresses that using real figures in fiction often disregards consent, creating ethical dilemmas even in fictional contexts.

In contrast, Informants 4 and 8 saw AU as a purely imaginative realm where social norms are flexible. This view echoes (Morrow, 2019), who describes fanfiction as an alternative space for exploring identity and relationships beyond conventional morality. Nonetheless, ethical interpretation remains subjective and context-dependent. (Deller, 2018) similarly notes that digital fan content blurs the boundary between fiction and reality, making privacy and authorship increasingly complex.

Several informants (1, 5, 6, and 8) expressed concern about the involvement of underage writers and readers, emphasizing that immature imagination can lead to uncontrolled sexual depictions. Informant 4 observed that many teenage authors can be identified through linguistic patterns, especially on platforms like Wattpad, where access to adult-themed AU content often begins at a young age. This open access has expanded since the pandemic through new formats such as ASMR style audiobooks. These findings align with (Widjayanti & Anwar, 2020), who argue that pornographic fanfiction often conflicts with cultural norms and may foster abnormal sexual fantasies among adolescents.

Science Fiction Fans' Critique of Dear David

Audience criticism of *Dear David* centers on the film's portrayal of sexual fantasy within Alternative Universe (AU) writing, its moral implications, and its depiction of adolescent sexuality.

Several informants (5, 6, and 7) expressed discomfort with the explicit visualization of a high school girl writing sexually themed AU, describing it as excessive and culturally inappropriate. This aligns with (Montemurro et al., 2015), who argue that sexualized portrayals in popular media can evoke discomfort, especially when involving adolescents or educational contexts.

Conversely, Informant 2 considered the film realistic, as Laras's character reflects the anxieties of real AU writers in digital spaces. This supports (Dym, 2020), who explains that fanfiction communities often function as safe spaces for exploring imagination, emotions, and identity. Informant 4, however, criticized the lack of ethical boundaries in the narrative, noting that making sexual fantasies public introduces significant moral concerns. This perspective is reinforced by (Hedrick, 2020), who emphasizes the importance of consent, content warnings, and age restrictions in real-person fanfiction.

Informant 9 condemned the film for normalizing non-consensual depictions, as the male character, David, appeared passive and objectified. Similarly, Informant 10 argued that extreme elements such as sexual servitude and exhibitionism should classify the film as 21+, given their potential influence on young viewers. Informants 5 and 6 added that the film fails to underline a clear moral message, which could mislead teenage audiences consistent with (Tahir & Medita, 2023) who note that film not only reflects reality but also shapes audience perception. Informants 2 and 7 further criticized the "happy ending," suggesting it risks normalizing Laras's behavior by portraying her as a successful student who faces minimal consequences. This aligns with (Arijenawa, 2024) who highlights that positive portrayals of problematic characters can shape audience attitudes. Informant 4 related personally to Laras, linking her behavior to academic and familial pressure to maintain an ideal image reflecting the "good girl syndrome" described by (Simmons, n.d.) and expanded by (Brown, 2017) who found that such pressure drives women to construct idealized public identities while suppressing personal expression. Similarly, (Sebre & Miltuze, 2021) emphasize that digital spaces allow young women to explore hidden identities, while (Brown, 2017) warns that the "good girl" ideal can reduce self-esteem and cause emotional distress.

Differences Between Sexual Fantasy AU in Dear David and Its Real-Life Practice

The portrayal of sexual fantasy Alternative Universe (AU) in *Dear David* differs significantly from its real-life practice within online fan communities. The film dramatizes Laras's fantasies around a close friend, whereas in reality, AU writers typically use public figures or fictional characters as fantasy subjects. Informant 2 viewed the depiction of a classmate as a fantasy object as excessive and potentially harmful to personal reputation, while Informant 3 and 7 noted that the film's visualization of Laras and David's relationship felt exaggerated and less realistic than typical AU. These findings suggest that while AUs can serve as safe spaces for creative expression, their ethical boundaries remain fragile.

Conversely, Informant 4 argued that the film is relatively mild compared to real online AU, which often contain more explicit and fantastical elements, including non-human or supernatural characters. This aligns with (Widjayanti & Anwar, 2020), who found that online fanfiction frequently explores extreme and unrealistic sexual narratives, highlighting that *Dear David* remains within a "safe" visual range.

However, the consumption of sexual fantasy AUs can still influence readers. Informant 2 and 3 admitted reading AU for imaginative pleasure but warned that such stories may create unrealistic expectations about intimacy and relationships. Informant 10 added that early exposure to explicit AU during adolescence could distort perceptions of romance and hinder social development. These observations support (Sebre & Miltuze, 2021), who note that visual representations heighten emotional intensity, and (Dym, 2020), who warns that sexualizing peers can constitute identity misuse with psychological and social risks.

Moreover, (Rokicka, n.d.) explains that while fiction can function as a *coping mechanism*, excessive engagement blurs the line between fantasy and reality. Similarly, (Madhushani, 2025) found that overconsumption of sexualized fiction may lead to avoidance behavior and difficulties in emotional or social interaction. Overall, while *Dear David* exaggerates AU fantasy for dramatic effect, the real-world AU ecosystem presents even greater ethical and psychological complexity that requires digital literacy and self-awareness among its audiences.

Science Fiction Fans' Reception of Sexual Fantasy AU in Dear David

The reception of science fiction fans toward sexual fantasy Alternative Universe (AU) in *Dear David* is divided into two main positions oppositional and negotiated as conceptualized by Stuart Hall's (1980) *encoding/decoding* framework.

In the oppositional reading, several informants (1, 3, 5, 6, 9, and 10) criticized the film's depiction as excessive, provocative, and culturally inappropriate. Informant 1 described the queen-and-slave fantasy scene as disturbing, while Informant 3 noted that Laras's sexualized portrayal diminished the essence of the AU narrative. Informants 9 and 10 argued that Laras's story reflected unhealthy obsession rather than adolescent romance, with Informant 10 suggesting that the film should have been classified as adult (21+) content. These audiences viewed *Dear David* as failing to represent teenage fantasy appropriately, instead normalizing obsessive and non-consensual behavior.

Meanwhile, in the negotiated reading, informants (2, 4, 7, and 8) acknowledged AU as a legitimate creative expression but emphasized the importance of ethical and privacy boundaries. Informant 2 argued that AU representation should avoid using real identities without consent, while Informant 4 admitted the film was not overly explicit yet criticized Laras's statement that sexual fantasy is normal to share publicly. Informants 7 and 8 observed that real-life AU on social media are typically simpler and more relatable, suggesting that the film's dramatization distanced it from community reality.

These two audience positions align with Hall's theory of active reception, wherein interpretation is shaped by personal experience, cultural background, and ethical awareness (Fitriya & Sumardjijati, 2023). The oppositional viewers rejected the film for crossing narrative and cultural boundaries, seeing it as overly vulgar and emotionally unsettling. Conversely, the negotiated viewers partially accepted its imaginative aspect but called for proportionality, consent, and social sensitivity in media representation. Notably, Informant 4 identified with Laras's internal struggle pressured to appear perfect and obedient under family expectations yet still rejected her moral justification for exposing sexual fantasies.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that audience reception of the sexual-fantasy Alternative Universe (AU) depicted in *Dear David* is far from uniform, as participants occupy negotiated and oppositional positions shaped by personal values, cultural background, and media literacy. The negotiated position views AU as a creative and emotional outlet while still highlighting ethical concerns related to privacy, consent, and the use of real individuals as fantasy objects. In contrast, the oppositional position rejects the film's portrayal, perceiving it as excessive or potentially misleading for younger audiences. These contrasting interpretations support Stuart Hall's reception theory, demonstrating that audiences actively construct meaning rather than passively accept media messages. Overall, the findings reveal how digital creativity among youth intersects with sensitive topics such as sexuality, fantasy, and cultural norms.

Practically, this research underscores the need for stronger media literacy among young audiences, clearer ethical guidelines for digital platforms that host AU content, and greater awareness from parents, educators, and counselors about how adolescents use digital spaces to express emotions or cope with personal pressures. Filmmakers are also encouraged to handle sensitive themes involving minors with greater cultural and ethical sensitivity to avoid misinterpretation. For future research, studies should expand to different audience groups beyond science fiction fans, compare AU practices across multiple digital platforms, explore psychological motivations behind the creation of sexually themed AU, examine gender-based differences in audience reception, and investigate how viewers distinguish imaginative sexual fantasy from pornography within youth-oriented narratives. **Author contribution**

Fauzan Fahmi Baswedan was responsible for the entire process of preparing this thesis, including topic conceptualization and research design, literature review, development of research instruments, conducting in-depth interviews, data collection and analysis, as well as the full drafting and editing of the manuscript. The author also integrated Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory into the analytical framework and conducted an in-depth interpretation of audience perceptions regarding sexual fantasy and Alternative Universe (AU) representations in the film *Dear David*.

Latif Ahmad Fauzan, S.I.Kom., M.A, as the academic advisor, provided guidance, feedback, and substantial academic corrections in refining the theoretical framework, research methodology, and improving the clarity, structure, and argumentation of the writing. All parties involved have approved the final version of this thesis.

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