

Silent Love: The Representation and Construction of Mumu's Identity as the Child of a Deaf-Mute Father in the Film Mùmù

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Abstract

Films play an important role in shaping public understanding of disability and family identity through visual and emotional representation. However, studies discussing children's identity construction within families with disabilities, particularly deaf-mute families, remain limited. This research aims to analyze the representation of a deaf-mute family and the construction of Mùmù's identity as the child of a deaf-mute father in the film Mùmù. The study also examines the influence of social groups on the formation of the child's personal identity. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method using scenes, dialogues, gestures, visual elements, and cinematographic techniques as primary data sources. The analysis applied Stuart Hall's representation theory, Murray Bowen's family systems theory, and Tajfel's social identity theory. Data collection was conducted through observation, documentation, and scene classification from the film. The findings reveal that the film represents deaf-mute families in a humane and emotional manner through non-verbal communication, warm lighting, close-up framing, and visual symbolism that emphasize affection and emotional attachment between father and child. Furthermore, family interaction patterns significantly shape Mùmù's identity through self-differentiation, family projection, and relational triangles. Social identity processes, including self-categorization and social comparison, also influence Mùmù's perception of himself within both deaf and hearing communities. In conclusion, the film demonstrates that disability is not merely a limitation but also a meaningful space for identity formation, emotional growth, and social belonging.

INTRODUCTION

Disability is a condition that makes sufferers have difficulty in carrying out activities and communication with the surrounding environment (Dhamanti & Larasati, 2024). In addition to medical conditions, disability is also understood as a social construct that is formed through values, morals and dominance in society. This perspective creates a stigma against people with disabilities. The stigma that arises places people with disabilities as a helpless group, so they are marginalized and lack opportunities (Wicaksono et al., 2021). In addition, people often consider people with disabilities as individuals who always need others to complete their work and responsibilities (Forbes, 2024). This stigma does not only have an impact on people with disabilities, but also extends into the family sphere. In family dynamics, people with disabilities are often perceived as individuals who are incapable of parenting. As a result, children who grow and develop in the care of families with disabilities are also affected because they are in a social environment where there is still a lack of understanding of disability.

In the issue of disability, people with disabilities are often used as research subjects. However, from the perspective of children in the care of families with disabilities, it is rarely highlighted. Family is a scope that plays a role in shaping a child's identity, because by interacting with family members, children begin to build a perspective about themselves and the surrounding environment (Albab & Pratiwi, 2024). Social interaction and communication created in the family greatly affect children's growth and development (Thomaz et al., 2020). Children who grow up in families with disabilities often experience difficult conditions, on the one hand they build characteristics, emotions and moral values through the family, on the other hand as children of parents with disabilities they experience various experiences and actions such as being marginalized from their environment, undergoing a dual role as *caregiver* and get stigma from the community (McConnell & Hahn, 2020). In addition, children who have parents with disabilities tend to get poor results, inversely proportional to children whose parents are non-disabled (Zeng et al., 2025). Therefore, children in families with disabilities play the role of not only affected parties, but also as active actors who shape their identity, self-meaning, and way of survival in their social environment. The representation of children's experiences in families with disabilities is not only present in social reality, but is also constructed through media, one of which is film.

Film is a representation media that has a role in shaping people's perspectives on disabilities. As a representation medium, films often display problems that occur in society, especially social problems that are rampant (Nismoro et al., 2024). Hall's perspective on representation is a practice in the formation of meaning which is built through visualization and narrative in the film. Film plays an important role in providing insight to the audience (Apriliany & Hermiati, 2021). In terms of disability, films have a function in shaping people's views of families with disabilities in the midst of rampant stigma and negative stereotypes in the community. In addition, films can show views on families with disabilities in a humane and non-degrading manner. Therefore, film is a medium that is in accordance with the study of the meaning of disability, family and identity formed from a child as a research subject.

In the moviedouban.com film *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》 by Sha Mo, which was released on May 7, 2025, represents families with disabilities by placing the father-child relationship as the main space. The interaction between *Mùmù* 《木木》 and her father is not limited to nonverbal communication, but also a learning of values, emotional closeness and the meaning of family roles. In this case, it grows as a subject who shapes his identity through his family and social environment. In addition, the film also shows how *Mùmù* 《木木》 faced the stigma directed at her father as a deaf-speech disabled individual, as well as influencing *Mùmù* 《木木》's perspective on who she is and her position in society. Therefore, the film *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》 is important to be studied not only to represent families with disabilities, but also to understand the process of constructing *Mùmù*'s identity 《木木》 as a child from a family with disabilities who have to face stigma in the community.

Previous research conducted by Andira & Malayati (2024) and Princess & Delliana (2025) explained about disability that is constructed through media in the form of films and advertisements, but from the two studies still use people with disabilities themselves as research subjects, so that the researcher offers a new thing by using children of people with

deaf-speech disabilities as research subjects whose identities are constructed through the family in Movies *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》. Research conducted by Aurellie & Hidayanto (2023) Explain the motivational messages and moral values contained in the film *CODA*, With the figure of adolescent girls who are born differently in families with deaf disabilities, but this study has not studied in depth the identity of children in family dynamics, so this study offers a new thing by using the representation approach in film *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》, family system theory as well as social identity theory as supporters in the formation of the identity of children in families with deaf-speech disabilities. Research conducted by (Millar & Vione, 2024) Explaining the social identity experienced by children from deaf families in real terms using social identity theory, but has not studied how children's identities are constructed in families with disabilities through film media, so this study offers a new thing by analyzing the identity of children from deaf-speech disability families through representational approaches, family system theory and social identity theory.

Representation according to Hall (1997:15) means placing language as a tool for the formation of meaning as well as describing the phenomena that are displayed to the audience. In addition to language, Hall (1997:24) Argue that symbols or signs also play a role in representing the research subject (figure) in conveying meaning through gestures, light, camera framing and visualization. Furthermore, in the application of representation, there is reciprocity in the form of a representation reception. Representation reception is a way for the audience to acquire, understand and interpret the representation that is displayed (Setiawan, 2025). With a representation reception, this can shape how the audience views the deaf-speech disability. The audience's perspective also depends on how the movie is shown. When films are shown in a humanized manner, the audience's perspective becomes positive and more *aware* to families with disabilities. Meanwhile, if it displays stigma, this will foster stigma against people with disabilities for a long time. In this study, representation is analyzed through scenes, gestures, light, camera framing, and the use of visual elements. On the film *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》 Showing how the life of a disability is represented through several scenes with gestures as a sign in showing the scene of father-son relationship (non-verbal communication), yellow light (*warm tone*) in the scene creating a warm and harmonious feel of a disabled family, camera framing *Close-up* on the face *Mùmù* 《木木》 Creating deep meaning as well as visual elements are used to present the experience of families with disabilities from the child's point of view.

Family is the main component in implementing parenting and education methods for children (Rakhmawati, 2015). From the family, children apply the attitude taught by their parents, because parents as *rolemodel* in educating children (Lubis et al., 2022).

Family system theory is a continuous theory of family psychology put forward by Kerr and Bowen. Kerr and Bowen (1988:97-148) argues that individual emotions are inseparable from family interaction patterns. Bowen also features some important concepts such as, *differentiation of self* (self-differentiation), *triangles* (relationship triangle) and *Family Projection Process* (family projection process). First, *differentiation of self* (self-differentiation) is the ability of individuals to maintain a balance between emotional function and intellectual function in maintaining self-identity, so that individuals with good self-differentiation are able to think rationally without losing emotional sensitivity (Kerr & Bowen, 1988:97). Second,

triangles (relationship triangle) is a three-person relationship pattern that is formed when two individuals experience emotional tension. While third parties can sometimes create temporary stability, they also have the potential to create an emotional burden and perpetuate unresolved conflicts (Kerr & Bowen, 1988:134). Third, *Family Projection Process* (family projection process) is an illustration of how parents pass on emotional problems to their children (Kerr & Bowen, 1988:141). The three concepts described by Kerr and Bowen are interrelated in forming an understanding of family dynamics. On the film *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》 Displays the emotional closeness between the deaf-speech father and the child as well as the role of the family in shaping identity *Mùmù* 《木木》

Social identity is a term that describes the way individuals define themselves through involvement in a particular social group (Yuliana et al., 2024). Social identity plays an important role in children in understanding themselves and the surrounding environment, in addition to influencing their actions and ways of communicating with the social environment (Adesta et al., 2025). Social Identity Theory was put forward by Henri Tajfel to explain that individual membership in social groups plays an important role in the formation of self-identity. According to Tajfel & Turner (1986:9-19) Self-identity does not only come from individual characteristics, but also from social identities that originate in certain groups. Membership in a social group gives meaning and contribution to the individual. Thus, an individual's behavior and attitude are often influenced by his or her position as a member of the group, especially in the context of intergroup relationships. There are several processes that shape social identity according to Tajfel, namely, *Self-categorization* (self-categorization), *Social Comparison* (social comparison), *Positive distinctiveness* (positive peculiarities).

Self-categorization (self-categorization) is a process that refers to the way an individual classifies himself or herself into a specific social category. Through self-categorization, individuals begin to see themselves as part of the *Ingroup* and simultaneously distinguish it from *Outgroup*. *Ingroup* is an individual who feels that they have a common identity that creates a sense of "we" towards a certain group (Febriani et al., 2019). While *Outgroup* the opposite of *Ingroup* i.e. "them" or it can be defined as another group. The perspective of "who am I?" is intertwined with "which group am I from?" (WF & Nevriyarni, 2026). *Social Comparison* (social comparison) is a stage in which an individual compares his or her group with other groups on a dimension that is considered relevant. The results of such comparisons contribute to an individual's assessment of his group, and indirectly of himself as a member of the group. Process *Self-categorization* (self-categorization) and *Social Comparison* (social comparison) encourages individuals to achieve what Tajfel calls *Positive distinctiveness* (positive peculiarities). *Positive distinctiveness* (positive distinctiveness) refers to the efforts of individuals and groups to maintain a positive and advantageously different image of the group compared to other groups. When a group is perceived to have certain advantages, individuals will experience self-improvement. Conversely, if the results of social comparisons show a disadvantaged position of the group, individuals may experience threats to their social identity. Using a social identity framework, this study analyzes *Mùmù* 《木木》 Not just as a child in a family who has a disability. Rather, he is also an individual who is constantly trying to negotiate his identity among family groups, the listening community and the wider community.

METHOD

In the research, the researcher used a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. According to Sugiyono (2023:18) The qualitative method is a research method based on the postpositivism approach, the research is naturally with the researcher himself as an instrument, data collection using the technique of triangulation analysis on data is inductive and the results of the research focus on the emphasis on meaning rather than in general. Descriptive aims to describe, explain, and explain the object being researched in a structured manner, based on facts, values and social issues observed for research (Sjaifirah et al., 2016). This approach is in accordance with the needs of the researcher, namely explaining the results of non-numerical research analysis.

In this study, a data source was used in the form of a film entitled *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》 by Sha Mo with a duration of 1 hour and 50 minutes. The data collection technique in this study was carried out with the Free Engage Cakap (SBLC) technique, then recorded and documented. First, the author listens to the film, then records the data that has been determined, then takes the data with screenshots. Based on the data collection technique, there are several steps as follows: (1) Open the www.iq.com site and search for *the movie Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》; (2) Watching *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》 repeatedly to digest the content of the film; (3) Studying and classifying data; (4) Analyze data. Data is analyzed through three stages, namely data reduction, data classification and conclusion.

The research was analyzed with the theories of Stuart Hall, Murray Bowen and Tajfel. Hall in his theory states that representation places language and signs (gestures, light, camera framing, visualization) in the formation of meaning, making it appropriate to analyze how families with disabilities are represented through the medium of film. Bowen in his theory states that individual emotions are inseparable from family interaction patterns, making it appropriate to analyze the formation of *Mùmù* identity 《木木》 through a disability family with a deaf-speech father. Furthermore, Tajfel states that self-identity comes not only from individual characteristics, but also from social identities that originate in a particular group, making it appropriate to analyze *Mùmù's* social identity. The credibility test in this study was carried out using the triangulation technique. The triangulation technique is carried out using the Free Listening (SBLC) technique, recording and documenting as data acquisition in the form of dialogue and image visualization on film. To avoid errors and validate the accuracy of Chinese dialogues, the researcher involved Chinese language expert lecturers in credibility tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study, the researcher analyzed Sha Mo's *film Mùmù* with Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Murray Bowen's theory of the family system and Tajfel's theory of social identity. The analysis is carried out through three parts, the first is Stuart Hall's theory of representation. In Stuart Hall's theory of representation, the researcher analyzed the meaning formed in scenes that depict the lives of families with disabilities through language, symbols or signs (gestures, lights, framing and visualization) in *the film Mùmù*. Second, Murray Bowen's family system theory. In Murray Bowen's family system theory, researchers analyzed how family dynamics and father-child communication patterns affect the construction of *Mùmù*

identities. Third, the theory of social identity of Tajfel. In Tajfel's social identity theory, researchers analyze how social identity affects *Mùmù*'s personal identity.

Table 1. Representation, family system, social identity *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》

No.	Theme	Amount of data
1.	Representation of families with disabilities	2
2.	<i>Differentiation of self</i>	2
3.	<i>Triangles</i>	3
4.	<i>Family projection process</i>	3
5.	<i>Self-categorization</i>	2
6.	<i>Social comparison</i>	2
7.	<i>Positive distinctiveness</i>	2

Source: Processed and analyzed by the researchers based on film scene data from *Mùmù* 《不说话的爱》

Cheerful in silence



Figure 1. Data 1: *Mùmù*'s moment of togetherness 《木木》 with his father at a deaf community home

This scene features a warm interaction between *Mùmù* 《木木》 with her father through gentle facial touches and affectionate gazes at the deaf-speech community home. The film conveys the meaning that communication in families with disabilities is not always conveyed through verbal language, but can also be through non-verbal language such as gestures (physical touch) and emotional warmth. Parents of deaf-speech disabilities who use parenting *Self-efficacy* with the *Social Caregiving*, That is, through physical touch, eye contact and smile can create an emotional attachment between father and son (Antawati & Murdiyani, 2013). So that *Mùmù* 《木木》 still get happiness and a sense of security even though his father's affection is not directly conveyed through words. In representation theory, this scene represents the harmonious life of a family with a disability supported by gestures (father's hand holding the face *Mùmù* 《木木》 gently) and yellow light (*warm tone*) depicts an intimate and warm atmosphere (Hall, 1997). Thus, even though they are in a family with a father with a deaf-speech disability, *Mùmù* 《木木》 can grow up to be a cheerful and joyful child.

Differentiation of Ego



Figure 2. Data 4: Mùmù 《木木》 communicated long distances with his father before leaving his father abroad

This scene represents Mùmù 《木木》 who is communicating remotely with his father through glass using sign language. In this data, conveying the meaning of a child's helplessness in making decisions according to his own wishes. As a child of parents with deaf-speech disabilities, Mùmù 《木木》 Growing up in two worlds, namely the hearing world and the deaf-speech world, so sometimes they often face confusion and emotional pressure from their families (Rahmawati et al., 2025). In the theory of the family system *Differentiation of self* (Self-differentiation) the ability of individuals to maintain a balance between emotional and intellectual functions in maintaining self-identity (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Mùmù 《木木》 shows low differentiation, because it is unable to separate between emotional and intellectual functions in maintaining self-identity. Thus, Mùmù 《木木》 Shaping personal identity The cannot put their ego and desire first in making decisions.

Interaction Media



Figure 3. Data 7: Mùmù 《木木》 communicate with his father in the room

This scene represents Mùmù 《木木》 who was communicating with his father about school. In this data, it conveys the meaning of the child's concern that he cannot fulfill his responsibility to his parents as a sign language translator with the community. Children who grow up in families with disabilities often experience difficult conditions, on the one hand they build characteristics, emotions and moral values through the family, on the other hand as children of parents with disabilities, they experience various experiences and actions such as being marginalized from their environment, living a dual role as *caregiver* and get stigma from the community (McConnell & Hahn, 2020). In the theory of the family system *Triangles*

(Relationship triangle) describes the three-person relationship pattern that forms when two individuals experience emotional tension (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). *Mùmù* 《木木》 Acting as a third party in stabilizing the relationship between the father and others as a translator when the father cannot communicate directly. Thus, this forms an identity *Mùmù* 《木木》 become an adult premature child because it takes on a responsible role in a disability family.

Social Attachment



Figure 4. Data 10: *Mùmù* 《木木》 follow his father in the back seat of the car

This scene represents *Mùmù* 《木木》 who woke up from his sleep and was anxious to see his father who was driving a car very fast. In this data, a child indirectly feels emotional pressure from parents. The concept of the family system *Family Projection Process* (family projection process) explains that the picture of how parents pass on emotional problems to their children (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Thus, unconsciously *Mùmù* 《木木》 Also feel emotional pressure from the father because of the attachment between the two, so that the family with disabilities constructs an identity *Mùmù* 《木木》 as a child who grows up with the emotional burden of the family. *Mùmù* 《木木》 Become a more sensitive and sensitive child to the surrounding situation.

Self-categorization



Figure 5. Data 12: *Mùmù* 《木木》 Closing his ears among all his friends who play musical instruments

This scene represents *Mùmù* 《木木》 and his schoolmates were taking music classes. In this data, a child feels unfamiliar with the sound of a musical instrument being played, because his daily environment is the world of deaf-speech. Visible gesture *Mùmù* 《木木》 who closes their ears as if it is not just a response to the noise of the sound of musical

instruments played by all students, but the application of identity. The concept of social identity *Self-categorization* (self-categorization) describes the way in which individuals classify themselves into specific social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, Mùmù 《木木》 classify themselves as a "deaf-speech group" or *Outgroup* Even though he was physically normal. This constructs an identity Mùmù 《木木》 be a defensive and loyal child. Mùmù 《木木》 He was still not used to entering the world of intense hearing so that he unknowingly categorized himself into the world of deaf-speech his father.

"Normal" Life Offer



Figure 6. Data 14: Mùmù 《木木》 is in an apartment with his mother

This scene represents Mùmù 《木木》 who was sitting on the sofa with his mother. In this data, a child seems to avoid the loving gaze of his parents. The child's gaze was cold mixed with expressions of sadness. The concept of social identity theory *Social Comparison* describes the stages in individuals who compare their group with other groups on the dimensions that are considered relevant (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Mùmù 《木木》 forced to accept a life that is considered "normal" with luxurious apartment facilities and adequate needs. On the other hand, he misses his father who, although considered to have limitations, can provide happiness and a sense of security. Thus, the social comparison of the "normal" life offered by the mother constructs the identity Mùmù 《木木》 Being a loyal child and steadfast in his stance, which is living with limitations with his father as a person with a deaf-speech disability, but he is happy.

Pride Gesture



Figure 7. Data 16: Mùmù 《木木》 teaches his friend sign language

This scene represents Mùmù 《木木》 who was sitting in a food shop with his friend while eating snacks. In this data, a child displays the positive side of his group. The concept of social identity theory *Positive distinctiveness* (positive distinctiveness) describes the efforts of individuals and groups to maintain a positive and distinct group image advantageously compared to other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Mùmù 《木木》 Teaching his friend sign language as a new and unique thing in the world of listening. Thus, it constructs identity Mùmù 《木木》 As a child who is proud of his community, because he is not ashamed to display a habitual action carried out by the deaf-speech group.

CONCLUSION

According to the analysis presented, the film Mùmù 《不说话的爱》 represents a socially and emotionally complex environment in the form of a family with a disability, depicted through the relationship between Mùmù 《木木》 and her deaf-mute father. This representation is conveyed through dialogue, movement, character facial expressions, and visual storytelling, illustrating that families with disabilities are not only characterized by communication barriers but also by love, sacrifice, and lived social experiences within a hearing-centered society.

Mùmù's social identity 《木木》 is constructed through her role as a mediator between the Deaf community and the "normal" (hearing) community. Thus, social interactions, lived experiences, and responses from the surrounding environment play an important role in shaping Mùmù's identity 《木木》 and her perception of reality.

This study focuses on the representation and identity construction through a film-based research object. Therefore, future research may expand by incorporating approaches such as film semiotics, disability studies, and cinematographic analysis to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the representation of families with disabilities in audiovisual media. Additionally, future studies may also conduct comparative analyses across multiple films depicting families with disabilities to gain a broader perspective on the identity construction of children growing up in such family contexts.

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