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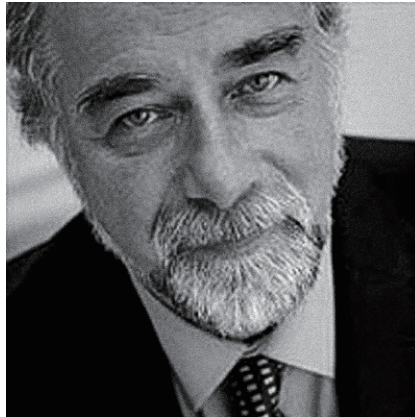


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***Gender, Race & Identity: An Intersectional Analysis of Queer Representation in the Movie Moonlight by Barry Jenkins***

Asmita Sen, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, India

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**Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to deploy key identity structures that are mainly gender and race. These constructs intersect with one another on a social spectrum which is presented through the polemics of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, gender performativity, the role of queer communities, family structures, and racial identities. The dissection and analysis are established with the help of the movie 'Moonlight' by Barry Jenkins as it proposes intersection on the spectrum of both gender and race. The movie is analyzed intricately with the help of the dimensions discussed initially. The study unveils "hegemonic masculinity" as a precarious construct along with "white supremacy" in movies to extend onto real lives. The ultimate goal of this study is that it informs us of intersectional representation in films today. This movie is chosen to comprehend one mainstream LGBT+ film that is "intersectional" and bring it to comparison with other LGBT+ movies that are mostly clouded by cis-normative white people.

Keywords: Gender, Race, Identity, Intersectionality, Moonlight, LGBT+

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## CHAPTER – 1 INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

#### a) Gender

Gender is defined as a set of defined or undefined roles that are socially constructed and refers to the authority associated with men and women within our families, societies, and cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the attributes, aptitudes, and behaviors that are feminine and masculine. Gender roles and expectations are learned over time and it is highly circumstantial.

#### b) Race

Racial discrimination is continuing to be a major problem for “middle class” blacks and it has often been downplayed as analysts have turned to the various problems of the “lower class”. This is an issue that is not seen much worthy of attention (Feagin, 2011). Discrimination can be defined in social contextual terms as “actions or practices carried out by members of dominant racial or ethnic groups that have a differential and negative impact on members of subordinate racial and ethnic groups”.

#### c) Identity

Racial identity is very real in a society like ours, as everyone is assigned a racial identity subconsciously. The centrality of racial identity varies across individuals, groups, contexts, and moments in time (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998). Managing and comprehending racial identities through the lens of media can be very daunting (Horowitz, 1985; Smith, 1991; Laitin, 1993). Social construct and self-identity coexist with one another more frequently.

### 1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### a) Gender, Race and Identity

On both theoretical and linguistic levels, the terms “sex” and “gender” have separate meanings. The bodily aspect is referred to as *sex*, while the social construct is known as *gender* (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2017). Gender includes cultural meanings that are associated with behaviour, persona, and gender expressions that are conventionally labeled as feminine or masculine. For a long time, they were used interchangeably, and sex does seem to be a poor proxy for gender (Fausto-Sterling, 2012).

Gender performativity is a central tenet of work by Judith Butler and is based on the idea that gender is socially constructed through the ongoing practice of exchanging dialogues and portraying actions subconsciously ‘to produce the phenomenon that it regulates and constrains’ (Butler, 1990). Butler’s ideology about gender being in layers and the deconstruction of it is complex. The concept of performativity is influenced by traditional and dominant conventions of gender, which exist in particular settings.

Layers to gender and its construction, especially ‘hegemonic masculinity is dominant in the labour market landscape with rigid masculine roles assumed as the societal norm (Acker, 2011). Hegemonic masculinity is centered around the philosophy that a strict power-based hierarchical gender construct exists that is defined by societal norms. In male-dominated sectors, a type of culture prevails owing to what Connell (1987) described as the strength of “patriarchal dividend” that has major consequences. This refers to the advantages that men

obtain when they conform to a hegemonic masculine roles and uphold a patriarchal system of gender (Gregory, 2016; Hearn, 2004).

The term race has a wide array of definitions, commonly used to describe people who possess certain types of morphological characteristics. There are various schools of thought within the identity aspect and the literature tends to emphasize either on a personal or a social front. Racial identity is taken into consideration to be an important category while defining a person's personal identity (Cokley, 2007).

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The relationship between body and gender is a central focus for gender theory. Binary femininities and masculinities are constant interpretations of the reproductive and sexual capacities of a human being which has led to this demeaning comprehension. Gender is a recurring fabrication of human agency, which at an institutional and structural level leads up to constraining the individual's agency (Connell, 1987, pp. 58-65).

Deducting the overview, it is important that we underline the issue concerning gender, race, and identity in intersection.

## **CHAPTER – 2**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **2.1 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the research study are as follows:

- a) To investigate the intersections of gender, race, and identity in the movie *Moonlight*.
- b) To examine the polemical representation of the queer community in the film *Moonlight*.

#### **2.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research study endeavoured here will use an ideal criterion for 'qualitative analysis'. An intersectional analysis uses qualitative analysis and is based on a two-fold approach. It requires a shift from a singular foundational perspective to an analysis based on the assumption that an individual's experiences are based on multiple identities that come together. The second aspect under the two-fold approach requires enabling analysis to consider contextual factors. This is based on facts of the topic being analyzed as a key approach (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2001, p. 29).

The term 'intersectionality' was coined by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics intersect and merge with one another. It accurately describes the way people from different backgrounds interact with their individual societies along with the universal society at hand (Coaston, 2009). Intersectionality is a *prism* to bring into consideration relations within discrimination laws that were not being acknowledged by the courts (Crenshaw, 1989).

## CHAPTER – 3

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 3.1 Chapter 1: Little

##### A.

##### Analysis: Scene 1-20

##### a. Depiction of: ‘gender identity’, ‘gender expression’ and ‘gender performativity’

Scene 2 of the movie specifically showcases how “Little” alias Chiron, is being chased and bullied by his counterparts because he does not fit in. He is scared and overwhelmed by the people around him with whom he doesn’t relate as much.

Scene 3 and 3A build up a connotative foundation towards gender identity, gender expression and gender performativity. Juan pounds through the door and Little is frightened by an older man’s appearance. Juan asks “What you doin’ in here lil’ man?” Little says nothing, just watches him. Juan again asks, “You don’t talk to strangers huh?”. Juan takes a step forward and Little takes a step back. This portrays Little’s reluctance in this scene as he is unable to trust another man with good intentions.

##### b. Projection of: the ‘polemics of sexual orientation’

In scene 3A, Little shrinks, backs away and covers his ears. He is frightened of the children bullying him again. We know by now that ‘Little’ is an introvert and likes minding his own business. From the moment they meet, Juan only has Little's best interests at heart, winning Little's trust despite being a drug dealer.

In scene 9, Teresa asks Chiron about his family. Chiron seems uncomfortable but it appears that he does not want to go back to his house. There is still no establishment of Chiron’s sexual orientation openly as struggles with his sexual identity.

##### c. Representation of: ‘racial identity’ and the projection of ‘ethnic minorities’

The opening sequence is established with Juan coming out of a car. This scene is a single shot which establishes a framework on racial identity being African-American. Juan is a drug dealer. All the characters in the first scene are black and are exchanging dialogues about selling drugs. It is often misunderstood that the majority of black people are involved in ‘drug dealing businesses’ because they are usually seen as “thugs” or “thieves”, but most of the black people are invested in it because they have no other choice. The African-American community is not treated equally to date.

The fact that these characters are living in small spaces and are living off drug dealing tells us that most of the characters in the establishing scene are poverty stricken. In scene one, Juan asks Terrence (business partner), “Business good?”. Terrence replies by saying, “Business good. Everybody cleaned out, it's in the cut if you want it.”. The exchange of dialogues in this scene gives us an overview into the drug dealing world and the obvious nuances of poverty attached to it.

In scene 3A and 3B, Juan appears to have good intentions towards the kid. He takes Little out to eat and offers him to sleep at his place for the night.

The typical stereotype which has been created over the years about the African-American community is broken in the initial scenes.

### **Interpretation: Scene 1-20**

In the first ten scenes, we come across the aspect of racial identity and ethnicity in a major way. All the actors in the establishing scenes are African-Americans and these scenes are an establishing point to portray the already ongoing struggle that the community is facing. The racial identity is universal in this movie. However, a personal complex identity is being explored here through Chiron. His trauma intersecting with his gender speaks volumes about his character as a black gay child.

### **B.**

#### **Analysis: Scene 21-34**

##### **a. Depiction of: ‘gender identity’, ‘gender expression’ and ‘gender performativity’**

Scene 25 starts with an establishing scene of a few handful of boys standing in a semicircle. We see Kevin in this scene again. Kevin and Chiron are standing together in this circle along with the five other boys. The circle is now forming closer. All their eyes and hands are cast down as they are all comparing their penis sizes. Chiron and Kevin exchange a short glance at each other before looking down. By now Chiron is well aware of his own attraction towards Kevin but he doesn’t know what Kevin feels about him.

As all of these boys start comparing their penis sizes and shapes and it is not long before they started to bully Chiron because of his penis size. This led to the name “Little”. Chiron was made to feel extremely uncomfortable.

##### **b. Projection of: the ‘polemics of sexual orientation’**

In scene 33, Chiron and Juan are sitting at the table at Juan’s house. Chiron is silent from the traumatic night he experienced the day before. Juan was worried for Chiron as he had not seen him this distressed over something in a very long time. Out of the blue, Chiron asked Juan, “What’s a faggot?”. He took a deep breath before answering that question. “A faggot is... a word used to make gay people feel bad”. Chiron took his time to process that answer. After a while, Chiron asked, “Am I a faggot?”. “No. You’re not a faggot. You can be gay, but... you don’t have to let nobody call you a faggot. Not unless...”. “How do I know?” Chiron asked curiously. “You... you just do. I think”, Juan replied. “You don’t have to know right now, you feel me? Not yet”, Juan added. Chiron seemed comfortable and satisfied with the answer but he also appeared to be more wounded and curious.

This entire scene establishes Chiron’s curiosity towards his own sexual orientation. Chiron only wants to know the meaning behind the term “faggot” and resonate with it even if it is an abusive term. He is finally coming to terms with his sexuality and although he is a child, he knows that he is not the same as the others.

##### **c. Representation of: ‘racial identity’ and the projection of ‘ethnic minorities’**

It is not a choice but a necessity in many areas for the african-american communities who are poverty stricken to condone businesses that are illegal. In scene 33 A, the continued dialogue between Juan and Chiron speaks a lot about Juan’s *need* to run the drug dealing business even though Chiron’s mother, Paula is involved. Chiron asks Juan, “Do you sell drugs?”. Juan nods yes. Chiron then asks, “And my momma, she do drugs, right?”. Juan replies with a



“yes”. This shatters Chiron completely as this is almost too incomprehensible for him. However, Chiron is mature enough to understand that Juan comes from a poverty stricken background and he had to provide for his family.

### **Interpretation: Scene 21-34**

Chiron is at this juncture where he is able to comprehend his individuality through different social identities. He now understands that his identity is not just moulded out of what his mother must have told him or what his friends call him, but there is a lot more to him than what others perceive him to be. At this stage, he is making a keen effort at understanding his gender. Many suppress their gender identities and sexualities due to the rigid heteronormative structures. However, Chiron seems to be curious about himself and studies his attraction towards Kevin. He converses with Juan about the Black community to understand where Juan comes from. In return, it helps Chiron to understand his racial identity a lot better in respect to other racial identities. He is now able to draw parallels between his racial and gender identity, and bring them together. This ultimately helps him define his individuality and personality in the long run.

## **3.2 Chapter 2: Chiron**

### **C.**

#### **Analysis: Scene 35-54**

##### **a. Depiction of: ‘gender identity’, ‘gender expression’ and ‘gender performativity’**

In scene 35, there is a significant amount of gender performativity. Chiron is constantly bullied by Terrel in the classroom. Terrel pursues to be aggressive towards Chiron and the other male students follow suit as well. Chiron chooses not to pay heed to Terrel but he breaks after a certain point. The fact that Terrel had pointed out that he was named “Little” after his penis size before, had always made him uncomfortable about his masculinity as compared to the others. Chiron’s masculinity is very fluid, his sensitiveness is seen as a sign of weakness, but he is just an overly empathetic person.

##### **b. Projection of: the ‘polemics of sexual orientation’**

In scene 36, Kevin and Chiron again have an exchange of dialogue. However this time they are teenagers. Chiron appears to be troubled by Terrel who is waiting to beat him up. Kevin approaches Chiron from behind and it is visible that Chiron is flustered by his sudden appearance. Kevin starts the conversation by asking Chiron, “What you doing man?”. He asks Chiron this question because he looks troubled and is looking out of the school balcony constantly to avoid fighting with Terrel. Chiron pretends to sound cool but is caught off guard. “You just standing there straight spaced. School been out, nigga, you ain’t goin’ home?” Kevin asks. “What you still doing here?” Chiron asks Kevin to avoid further conversation about himself. “Detention. Aimes caught me with this trick in the stairway”, Kevin replies. “What? With who?” Chiron asks. “Damn you nosy, Chiron”, Kevin replies with a chuckle. Chiron feels embarrassed to have overstepped. Kevin smiles and narrates the incident to Chiron about receiving detention because he was caught having sexual intercourse with another girl. This confuses Chiron and he feels restless about the incident. Chiron feels defeated as he has felt different with Kevin and had expected for something to happen someday.

**c. Representation of: ‘racial identity’ and the projection of ‘ethnic minorities’**

In scene 35 and 36, it is obvious that the school that Chiron is attending does not exactly carry the decorum of a formal educational institution. These scenes also present us with students who only belong to the African-American community. The language that they are practicing is not exactly formal, rather it is very coarse and local. The school seems to be old and has not been renovated in years together probably due to financial reasons. It is safe to assume that these children belong to a racial minority.

The exchange of dialogue between Terrel and Chiron within the classroom in scene 36 is quite shocking as the teacher does not seem to be surprised or shocked even because this is a routine now. This implies that a significant minority is studying in this school.

**Interpretation: Scene 35-54**

The scenes 35-44, is building a narrative into Chiron’s personality as a teenager. He is now aware of his gender and sexuality. He understands that he is attracted to Kevin but does not emote it explicitly. These scenes, however, establish Chiron’s identity in terms of his gender. We know that his state of confusion has come to an end, and now he is ready to explore.

The dream sequence implies that Chiron never analysed his sexual orientation until that moment. It was then, that he understood that his attraction towards Kevin was not just about him but was also about Chiron’s queerness.

**D.**

**Analysis: Scene 55-66**

**a. Depiction of: ‘gender identity’, ‘gender expression’ and ‘gender performativity’**

Chiron, in scene 55, is finally realizing his gender and sexuality. He has been pushed into focus due to Kevin and he understands that there is nothing wrong in being gay. He, in fact, embraces his identity in all forms. It awkward between the two of them after the kiss as they have always been childhood friends but Chiron is able to churn out his subconscious and believe that his identity is valid.

In scene 60 A, after the physical fight with Kevin that occurs due to peer pressure, Chiron is completely broken as Kevin was the one who made him believe that there was nothing wrong with him. This was the same Kevin who hit him and made him look inferior in front of the others. However Chiron is aware of his individuality and does not suppress it anymore.

**b. Projection of: the ‘polemics of sexual orientation’**

Scene 60 is an important projection of gender anxiety. Terrel is someone who is just unable to accept the fact that Chiron is walking around comfortably. He makes sure that Kevin hurts Chiron because he is aware that they share a bond of friendship and this will ultimately break Chiron.

Kevin eventually submits to the peer pressure because he does not want others to know that he is gay or bisexual. Kevin finally makes a run for it and punches Chiron in the face and keeps hinting at him to stay on the ground and not come up. Nevertheless, Chiron stands up every time to see whether Kevin will hurt him again and he does punch him again. After a while, all the other students who are Terrel’s sidekicks start piling up on Chiron and hit him brutally. This is an ultimate projection of how homosexuality is seen as something that is

completely unacceptable in society. Internalized homophobia turns into violence and people who are struggling to process their homosexuality also get affected within this rigid heteronormative system.

**c. Representation of: ‘racial identity’ and the projection of ‘ethnic minorities’**

In scene 60 A, Principal Williams is trying to extract information out of Chiron about who hit him so brutally. If Chiron took his name, Kevin would land up in juvenile court. The interrogation was very overwhelming for Chiron and he started to break down. This was not surprising to Principal Williams as she assumed that he was going through an issue related to racial discrimination. She said, “Look son, I’m not blaming you, I’m not. I know it’s hard, believe me, I’m not trying to disrespect your struggle. I just need you to know, if you need some help, if you need somebody to talk to... that door right there, it’s always open, you feel me?”

**Interpretation: Scene 55-66**

Kevin has been a huge benefactor in Chiron’s life to help him comprehend his gender in a proper way. Chiron was always trying to figure out his attraction towards boys. In fact, Chiron never thought of anyone else but Kevin. He finally broke through his shield when he kissed Kevin. However, it was a huge let down for him when Kevin punched him even though it was under the influence of someone else. This shows that Chiron had fully accepted his gender identity but Kevin was yet to process his sexuality fully. The fact that he belongs to a minority and is also gay makes it tougher for him.

**3.3 Chapter 3: Black**

**E.**

**Analysis: Scene 67-90**

**a. Depiction of: ‘gender identity’, ‘gender expression’ and ‘gender performativity’**

In scene 68 and 69, we see a completely transformed Chiron. It appears that he works out regularly because his body is well built. He has created a stronger persona, more masculine. We do not see what he has been through while he was in a correctional facility. In scene 77, Chiron is sleeping well after a long time when he receives a call in the middle of the night. He assumes that it would be his mother, but it turns out to be someone else. Chiron is a transformed man, hardened by his struggles and his illegitimate businesses. He picks up the call assuming it’s Paula but it was Kevin on the line. There are long awkward silences. Chiron had felt like he had known Kevin since forever. The incident was fresh in his head and he couldn’t ever get past it. “I’m... I’m sorry about that... about all that, Chiron. About all that shit what went down, man”, Kevin apologized to Chiron. They gradually started having a normal conversation about life and where they lived. For Chiron, it felt like he had gone back to his past and this was the most himself he had ever been, with Kevin.

In scene 78, we see the version of Chiron that is effeminate, softer, sensitive, introverted and happier. It was Kevin, who had brought out Chiron’s real side into the forefront. In fact, Chiron felt fearless around Kevin about his gender expression.

**b. Projection of: the ‘polemics of sexual orientation’**

Scenes 77 and 78, give us a brief idea about Chiron's loyalty towards Kevin. Chiron knows that Kevin had wronged him, but his gender and sexuality is the most present and real when he is speaking to Kevin. In scene 77, when Kevin calls up Chiron, it is obvious that he still

holds fondness towards Chiron. Chiron asks Kevin about what he does now to earn a living, and Kevin answers that he is a cook. This makes Chiron laugh as he had never imagined Kevin to be a cook or a chef. In scene 79, Chiron dreams of Kevin in his chef attire, smoking a cigarette. We see a close up of Kevin smoking and stubbing the cigarette, while smirking in a flirtatious way. Chiron stirs slightly while gradually waking up from his bed. He notices a light streaming through the window, and realises that he had just dreamt of Kevin after a long time. Chiron decides then and there, to meet up with Kevin without giving it a second thought. In scene 90, Kevin and Chiron have a conversation after a long time in many years. Kevin seems to turn out just the way Chiron had imagined.

**c. Representation of: ‘racial identity’ and the projection of ‘ethnic minorities’**

In scene 75, it is established that Chiron has a drug empire. We do not know why he fronts an illegal business despite Juan dying, assumingly while carrying out similar businesses. However, we can assume that Chiron too, had no choice. After he did his time, no one would be ready to hire him because he is a black man who technically went into jail for violence and people definitely stereotype the person and their background. The fact that he does not have a clean record, will not give him much space in a competitive society. In addition, his unstable family background was not easy to comprehend.

**Interpretation: Scene 67-90**

Chiron has made a keen effort to suppress his past personality. His way of expressing himself is more ‘alpha masculine’ and one would assume that he has transformed majorly. However, when Kevin calls him, we observe that the old Chiron is back and he is still sensitive. The fact that he suppressed his expression for so long, means that he had been traumatized due to the incident that had taken place. The aftermath of it led him to take his externalize by working out and buying materialistic goods for himself.

**F**

**Analysis: Scene 91-99**

**a. Depiction of: ‘gender identity’, ‘gender expression’ and ‘gender performativity’**

In scene 97, Chiron crashes at Kevin’s apartment. It is a small and cozy apartment with bare minimum furniture. Chiron notices a picture of a small boy in the living room who looks very much like a younger version of Kevin. Chiron had expected for Kevin to be impressed by his transformation but he seemed to be disappointed. This was probably because Kevin knew that Chiron was putting up a facade.

**b. Projection of: the ‘polemics of sexual orientation’**

In scene 95, both Kevin and Chiron are sitting in Chiron’s Chevy Impala. Chiron is driving the car. There is an awkward silence between the two of them for quite some time. Kevin and Chiron eventually start talking about their respective jobs and Kevin vents about how hard it is for him to earn enough to make a living out of it. Chiron listens out to him and empathises with him. There is an awkward silence again between the two and Kevin breaks it again. This time he asks Chiron a more intense question, “So Chiron, you just drove here?”. Chiron answers with a nod. “Where you gon’ stay tonight?”, Kevin asks Chiron. Chiron’s eyes are on Kevin, staring back at the man lost in that question, the space between its posing and this beat the clear answer. It is obvious to both of them that Chiron would be staying at Kevin’s place. In scene 97, after experiencing some unacknowledged tension between both Chiron and Kevin, Chiron has his gaze fixed at Kevin while he is preparing some tea for the two of

them. He knows that if he does not express himself today then he never will. Kevin is the only person who will help Chiron get past his PTSD and depression. “Kevin, You’re the only man who’s ever touched me”, Chiron tells him. “*The only one*”, Chiron restates. Kevin feels his heart dropping and for a moment he is unable to believe that Chiron said these words from his own mouth. “I haven’t really touched anyone else since” Chiron adds.

In scene 98, we see that the two of them are holding onto each other. Chiron is easing up upon Kevin’s chest and tearing up. He is shaking and is unable to speak clearly. Kevin comforts him like a child and gradually they start to re-learn one another.

### **c. Representation of: ‘racial identity’ and the projection of ‘ethnic minorities’**

In scene 93, Kevin expresses as to why he has taken up a job as a chef. He knows that it does not pay as well and it is minimum wage but it helps him suffice. Kevin tells Chiron that he is done with working in the streets (dealing drugs) because he was held up in the county for a while. Kevin realises that life can get hard for black people especially after they have done jail time. He tells Chiron that him having this job and a child is nothing but a blessing.

Chiron on the other hand, when asked about what he does for a living, tells Kevin that he sells drugs. Kevin knows that this is not what Chiron is and he would be better off doing a more respectable job. Chiron feels offended as he expects Kevin to understand his situation, however Kevin is just looking out for him. They converse about the fact that the options are lesser for them as they are minorities.

### **Interpretation: Scene 91-99**

To surmise the last chapter, Chiron is going through a confused stage in life that needed to be acknowledged. He was experiencing PTSD along with his traumatic gender suppression and was facing an identity crisis in regards to his gender and race. Chiron had always been chasing something more in life but he assumed that it was Kevin that he needed. Kevin was a support system in his life who helped him break into his personal identity in regards to both gender and race. Juan was the only paternal figure Chiron had ever known, and he lacked maternal attention as well, driving him to seek advice from the one other person who knew him from childhood.

## **CHAPTER – 4**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **4.1 CONCLUSION**

*Moonlight* caught the eye of the audience because it carefully dissects the difficulties undergone by the “queer black men” who grew up impoverished and have faced hardships associated with the intersections of race, class, and sexuality. The concept of “Black masculinity” has been emphasized upon as we are able to empathise with the harshness caused by emotional suppression.

The current research study has been tailored to comprehend the intersectional identities within the movie ‘Moonlight’ by Barry Jenkins.

This study has unveiled concepts in regards to gender identity, sexual orientation, gender expression, racial identity, and a combinatorial approach to familial structure. The protagonist, Chiron's racial identity along with his gender and sexual identity has represented the presence of a well-defined community that does not receive as much acknowledgement within this systemic heteronormative society. With regards to queer theory and complexities within media, there are films that have done some amount of justice to that complexity by building onto those layers, but there is scope for more such movies within the mainstream media.

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***New Models of Representing Reality in Digital Journalism: The Case of News Games***

Luca Serafini, University of Naples Federico II, Italy  
Rebeca Andreina Papa, University of Molise, Italy

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**Abstract**

In this paper we analyze a new model of journalistic reporting that aims to overcome the traditional dichotomy between the normative paradigm – centered on a narrative that is as neutral as possible, detached, and uncontaminated by subjective evaluations – and the increasingly emotional and interpretative journalism that has taken shape with the rise of digital technologies. Today, the affordances that guide the uses of digital platforms promote new mechanisms of collective consumption of information, within specific ‘modes of feeling,’ and new forms of sociality built largely by algorithmic logics. Moreover, the emotional nature of social media has led to an increasing disengagement with the problem of journalistic credibility, from a rational approach, starting with a reversal of the relationship between understanding and emotionality (Davies 2018). This does not imply, however, that the media representation of reality should be reduced to a postmodernist type of perspectivism, in which there are no longer parameters for establishing what is objective. Instead, we propose a new model of the “objectivity of empathy” based on Michael Schudson's concept of ‘objectivity 3.0’: this model seeks to merge the emotional involvement of the audience with an accurate and precise account of the facts. The model is particularly suitable for analyzing the journalistic account of reality carried out through immersive and interactive digital technologies. In this context, we will analyze a case study that fits into the “objectivity 3.0” model, that of news games, i.e. the use of interactive video games and virtual reality in factual journalistic reporting.

Keywords: News Games, Objectivity 3.0, Empathetic Journalism

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## Introduction

In the platform society, technological infrastructures are not mere tools for conveying content, but acquire an increasingly editorial profile. By platform society, scholars van Dijck and Poell (2015) mean “a global conglomerate of all kinds of platforms, which interdependencies are structured by a common set of mechanisms” and whose influence in society goes far beyond the role of intermediaries and providers of related digital services (van Dijck and Poell, 2015, pp. 1-5).

The same methods of creation, distribution, and use of news are reformulated according to new criteria and objectives, as digital platforms do not perform the simple function of content producers, but offer an editorial mediation service which consists in hosting the contents of subscribers (individuals, stakeholders, organizations/companies, etc.), storing them, organizing them and promoting their circulation to other users (networked publics), according to logic controlled by the platform itself (Boccia Artieri and Marinelli, 2018). For this reason, as underlined by Mats Ekström and Oscar Westlund (2019), a crucial concept for understanding the fate of journalism today is that of “dislocation”. By dislocation, the authors mean the weakening of the power of news producers, who have less and less control over what they publish, precisely because the news is now diffuse and conveyed in environments that are decontextualized from where they came from, such as, for example, on social platforms.

Furthermore, the affordances that guide the usage of digital platforms promote various mechanisms of collective information consumption, within new “modes of feeling” and forms of sociality built in large part by algorithmic logics.

It is above all social media that have redefined the methods of selecting the contents that reach users, in particular through the process of datafication and information personalization. By analyzing user data and offering what they want, social platforms have ensured that journalism is increasingly oriented towards a data-driven logic, in which the tastes and preferences of the audience acquire ever greater importance in news making activities. These platforms, created for sociability and interaction, cannot be used without providing for a particular involvement or participation on the part of users who use online information.

This process is even further reinforced by the same audience measurement services that companies such as Facebook, for example, offer editorial organizations to meticulously define the characteristics and needs of their readers (van Dijck et al., 2018).

The primary objective therefore becomes that of user engagement, as it is precisely the most engaging contents that collect greater visibility on social platforms.

But what is it that generates the most engagement? Some data analyzed by Facebook have highlighted how “moving, exciting, and motivational stories” and “provocative and passionate debates” generate double or triple the engagement compared to other stories (Osofsky, 2010; van Dijck et al., 2018) and it seems to apply in different cultural contexts and on other social platforms (Berger and Milkman, 2012; Chen and Sakamoto, 2014).

On social platforms the emotional sphere of readers therefore becomes an essential factor that the journalist cannot but take into consideration in the process of building news, as the same technological infrastructures and their business models are organized in such a way as to

arouse, capture, and monetize the feelings and emotions of users. Furthermore, the emotional thrust of social media means that the problem of “journalistic credibility” is increasingly detached from a rational approach, starting with a reversal of the relationship between understanding and emotionality (Davies, 2018).

### **Avoiding news avoidance**

For several years now, digital publishers have been studying new strategies for representing reality and journalistic reporting not only to survive, but to exploit the potential of the new logics of datafication and personalization of information imposed by social media. The world of journalism is thus reinventing itself in order to exploit the potential and mechanisms of the platforms and better respond to the new information habits of an increasingly interconnected audience of readers who are eager to engage.

From an “informative” use, which considers digital platforms as simple communication channels, it is necessary to move to a more dialogic, bidirectional, interactive, and engaging approach, capable of fostering reader engagement (Solito et al. 2019).

The world of information has thus tried to adapt to the new logic of visibility and virality of the social platforms. Many digital publishers have invested enormous resources in order to offer users a constant flow of information mixed with entertainment, focusing on the use of videos, live blogs, presentations, and quizzes. Parallel to the distribution of “lighter” content (infotainment), they have by no means given up on offering users even more detailed and articulated information, often attributable to investigative journalism.

In the platform society characterized by information overload, however, there is a large risk that the latter type of information does not reach the large majority of platform users, since, as already pointed out, it is precisely the entertainment contents and those with a greater emotional component that tend to travel and spread faster than the so-called hard news.

As Jonah Peretti, Founder of BuzzFeed argues, “in the future only a wealthy elite might have access to good journalism from newspapers like the Journal and the New York Times, leaving the vast majority of the public to contend with clickbait and fake news spread on social platforms.” Furthermore, information overload is also generating that phenomenon called news avoidance, or the tendency of people to avoid the news. The extent of this phenomenon is significantly evidenced by the latest data from the “Digital news report 2022”<sup>1</sup> of the Reuters Institute at Oxford, the result of research conducted on 93,000 people from 46 different countries and which offers a worrying insight into the health of contemporary digital information.

According to the research, 38% of people partially or completely avoid the news. The percentage varies widely from country to country but is, generally, on the rise compared with data from previous years. It ranges from 54% of people in Brazil to 14% in Japan. Italy has an average percentage with 34% of respondents in 2022 saying they partially or completely avoid the news.

Scholars Antonis Kalogeropoulos and Benjamin Toff argue that “in a fragmented digital media environment where news is increasingly encountered passively in social media feeds

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<sup>1</sup><https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022>

and via automated mobile alerts, active avoidance of news, rather than deliberate consumption, takes on outsized importance in shaping what it means to be an informed citizen” (Toff & Kalogeropoulosi, 2020, p. 366).

The solution is to adopt a “constructive” journalism, that is, one that offers solutions, or at least seeks them out, rather than flooding the public with problems. Splitting the type of content on offer to the public doesn’t seem to be a sufficient solution to “saving” quality information from the wave of emotion that travels across the web.

Instead it’s necessary that the world of information ride this wave without being overwhelmed and without distorting itself, reflecting adequately on how to involve its users. As early as 2013 Mathew Ingram, communication expert and digital writer for the Columbia Journalism Review, at the journalism festival in Perugia, indicated that “being human” was among the most fundamental points for effective digital journalism. Multimedia, interactivity, and re-appropriation of the emotional sphere seem, therefore, to be crucial aspects that must necessarily be dealt with.

### **“Normative” journalism and the emotional web**

It’s evident how, in such a scenario, it’s become increasingly complex to base the journalistic narratives of reality on the typical ideals of so-called “modern journalism.” With this expression we refer to that model of journalism that established itself between the second half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, in correspondence with the attempt to make journalism itself a professional activity in all respects, focused on specific routines, organizational structures, rules to be respected (Schudson, 1978).

The adjective “modern” refers to the fact that these norms were a direct application of the principles of the Enlightenment and scientific modernity to the field of journalism. With reference to the narratives, the object of this paper, this implied the idea that the narration of reality could be carried out on the basis of objective methods and rational procedures (Schudson, 2018). The paradigm of objectivity, in this historical phase, also established itself in the field of journalism in terms of a “defensive strategic ritual” (Tuchman, 1972): to identify themselves as a professional category, journalists needed to distinguish themselves from those who practiced public relations activities (Lippman, 1922), which also implied the need to avoid the influences of professional communicators and their persuasive narrative model, aimed at convincing and not informing. Therefore, according to the model of modern journalism, the journalistic account of reality must be objective, impartial, detached, and uncontaminated by subjective points of view or emotions (Peters, 2011).

For many decades this remained the dominant paradigm in the self-representation of the journalistic profession. The elements already mentioned in the first section highlighted how the advent of digital media has determined, however, a reaffirmation of the emotional sphere within the public exchange of opinions and meanings.

This scenario inevitably leads to a redefinition of the concept of objectivity in the journalistic account of reality: the ideal of a journalist who acts as a disembodied agent, who observes reality in a detached manner and who limits himself to describing it in a cold way, excluding any element of an emotional nature, is too far from the concreteness of the production and above all of the consumption of information on digital platforms.

At the same time, the overcoming of the modern paradigm of objectivity and the re-evaluation of the emotional sphere shouldn't lead to a postmodern drift, for which interpretations, all equally legitimate, replace facts. The well-known aphorism of Nietzsche (1967, aphorism 481) "there are no facts, only interpretations," especially in its subsequent appropriations by philosophical currents like weak thought (Vattimo and Rovatti, 1983), represents a clear danger to journalism, especially in the fake news, infodemic (Rothkopf, 2003; WHO, 2020), and post-truth era.

It is therefore necessary to understand whether there are ways to redefine the concept of objectivity in the journalistic narrative of reality, by also including the emotions and aesthetic sphere that are absent in the normative paradigm by which journalism incorporated the principles of scientific modernity.

### **Objectivity and emotions**

The journalistic narrative of reality certainly cannot abdicate its role in the construction of an informed democratic and public debate. It's clear that journalism will always need parameters in order to offer an accurate account of the facts. And yet, the processes mentioned in the previous sections, and that digital technologies have brought to completion, require that this narrative be articulated in a way that no longer excludes emotions, without falling into sentimentality and / or postmodern perspectivism. In a context like the internet, in which the consumption of information takes place within filter bubbles more and more, there is a high risk of falling into sensationalism and hyper-emotionality that are functional only to feeding the dynamics of polarization and radicalization. For this reason, a journalistic narrative focused on the aesthetic-playful sphere within digital media must somehow hold the elements of objectivity and empathy together.

This "empathetic objectivity" cannot help but remove itself from the ideals of detachment, noninvolvement, and dispassion typical of "modern journalism." As already highlighted by some scholars, this paradigm shows evident limits precisely in its inability to arouse empathic involvement in its news consumers (Kors et al. 2016; Blank-Libra, 2017).

All these considerations refer, in our opinion, to the concept of "objectivity 3.0" developed by Michael Schudson, one of the leading scholars of contemporary journalism. Schudson configures this type of objectivity precisely in terms of an "empathetic objectivity," thus trying to hold together an accurate account of the facts with the presence of the emotional component.

In using this expression, Schudson distinguishes between three different types of objectivity that have marked the journalistic narrative in the 20th century (Schudson, 2018). First, there was objectivity 1.0, imposed in the first decades of the 20th century in conjunction with the professionalization of journalism. As already underlined, this objectivity was based on the principles of impartiality, on a neutral, cold description of facts, with journalists limiting themselves to reporting what was before their eyes. This model, Schudson explains, was dominant until the 1950s.

In the decade that followed a different model began to become established defined as "objectivity 2.0": in this phase news coverage became more analytical and more transgressive of the boundaries between public and private. There began a growth in contextual and

interpretative reporting. Journalists no longer focused only on events but also on their causes, they sought explanations, analyzed what was happening, and offered their interpretations.

In Schudson's opinion, however, not even this form of objectivity is any longer in step with the changes in the production and consumption of information on digital platforms. Thus, another step is needed towards “objectivity 3.0”: an empathetic objectivity which starts from the assumption that it's also necessary to provoke an emotional involvement of the public through journalistic narratives. The premise is that in the digital public sphere the audience is constituted by “communities of feeling” mentioned in the first section. This emotional involvement should be combined with an accurate and precise account of the facts. Objectivity 3.0 must therefore be based on factual evidence like that of 1.0, it must be interpretative like that of 2.0, but it must add empathy to all this, configuring itself as an objectivity of empathy: “Journalism practiced with Objectivity 3.0 should accept that the job of journalism is to report stories about contemporary life. By reporting, journalists make a commitment to a factual and, to a large extent, verifiable world. By turning those reports into stories, journalists give their reporting a form that makes them understandable, even compelling. They are a combination of reportage and story that not only informs and instructs but may touch people, even move them” (Schudson, 2018, p. 66).

Pursuing this empathetic objectivity means going beyond one's own specific point of view: the journalist, without giving in to sentimentality, must go deeper, managing to immerse themselves in the point of view of both the protagonists of the facts recounted as well as the audience to whom the specific news is addressed. It is not a question here of enhancing the subjectivity of the reporter, following a personalistic drift that transforms journalists into opinion leaders or even celebrities. Empathetic objectivity implies, to the contrary, the journalist's ability to put themselves in the shoes of others, and thus to articulate an engaging and accurate story, in which emotions can (and in a certain sense must) find space.

## News games

A concrete application of the objectivity 3.0 model in the field of journalism can be found in news games, that is in the use of interactive video games and virtual reality in the journalistic story of the facts. News games represent the application of the logic of *serious games* to the field of journalism, that is video games that go beyond entertainment and that are created in order to combine the interactive, multimedia potential of the media with their ability to involve users on the one hand, and learning strategies on the other. The objective is, therefore, to convey serious content in the form of play (Sicart, 2008).

According to the definition offered by Plewe and Fürsich (2018, p. 2472), news games have the following characteristics: they are “created in response to actual events [...] easy to access in order to appeal to a wider audience,” they have a “persuasive intention” carried out “through the artificial, modeled character of their game rules,” and they are “supplementary to traditional news,” since they use a procedural rhetoric of rules and text to convey information. News games thus share the treatment of current events with traditional journalism, but they do so through different narrative forms, which, although beginning from real data, direct the user experience towards an act of imagination. It is precisely for this reason that the narrative techniques of news games have been associated with those of literary journalism (Jacobson et al., 2016), as well as those of New Journalism, particularly in relation to the nonfiction novel (Dowling, 2021, p. 1). In fact, news games merge a simulated

reproduction of reality with typical game protocols which allow users to interact with that same reality (Bogost et al. 2010).

The application of videogames and virtual reality to the journalistic account of the facts has generated several concerns in the field of journalism studies: first of all, gamification implies a definitive abdication of the values of “modern journalism,” that is of detachment, objectivity, and impartiality (Beckett & Deuze, 2016; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017; Jukes, 2020). Furthermore, there are those who have highlighted how, through news games, there is a risk of trivializing issues of the public interest (Ferrer Conill, 2016). Over the years, however, other studies have highlighted the positive potential of news games and the more general application of video games and virtual reality to news stories (Bogost et al., 2010; Dowling, 2021).

The basic idea is that immersive technologies, of which news games are an expression, are able to enrich journalistic storytelling, arousing high levels of empathy and identification with the stories being told (Milk, 2015). News games can be useful for putting the user in the shoes of others and soliciting an “emotional memory” (Zeman, 2017), something that an abstractly rational and detached account of the facts is unable to achieve. In fact, it has been pointed out that the human mind cannot be considered in terms of a fact storing machine, but must be conceived of as an “association-making entity” based on empathy (Shin & Biocca, 2018). In this way, the limits of the journalistic model of the five W's and the paradigm of a merely rational and cognitive objectivity to which it refers is overcome.

Not only that, but several news games are focused on a system of rewards and motivations that direct the gamer's emotions towards external reality, triggering reflexive processes. These are rewards that have nothing to do with the acquisition of points or badges, but with the achievement of a sense of proficiency and with an increased ability to relate to the environment configured by the specific game. Here we are at the polar opposite of clickbait sensationalism or other strategies by which newspapers attempt to grab the (scarce) attention of users.

An example of this motivation and reward system is represented by the video game *Walden: A Game*, an open world simulation of the life of American philosopher Henry David Thoreau during his experiment in self-reliance living at Walden Pond. As explained on the game's website, “Players follow in Thoreau's footsteps, surviving in the woods by finding food and fuel and maintaining their shelter and clothing. At the same time, players are surrounded by the beauty of the woods and the Pond, which holds a promise of a sublime life beyond these basic needs. The game follows the loose narrative of Thoreau's first year in the woods, with each season holding its own challenges for survival and possibilities for inspiration.” All this has to do with a system of motivations centered around a form of “intellectual exploration” of the surrounding environment (Marsh, 2016). The goal of those who play *Walden: A Game* is not to acquire points or pass levels, but to get in touch with an increased awareness of the environment that the game represents, being able to explore it. The experience of the game becomes similar to that of a journey, in which one's perception of reality and nature can change. In this way the game also becomes an intellectual, spiritual experience: by coming into contact, through technology, with an unusual environment, the gamer can enrich their knowledge of the world and bring back what they have learned even in real life.

News games, therefore, use the element of play to stimulate a reflection on themselves and on reality. In this way, they can also facilitate the learning of unfamiliar topics and get users

interested in topics that are generally foreign to them. The gamer is often faced with a series of dilemmas, sometimes of a moral nature, that materialize within the experience of the game, thereby avoiding that they remain on a purely normative and abstract level.

The aesthetics of news games therefore have both a reflective and ethical implication, and approach the concept of “aesthetic cosmopolitanism” developed by authors like Scott Lash and John Urry in the late 90s. With this expression, they referred specifically to the possibility of developing an interest of an ethical nature towards people who are not part of one’s own community, but with whom one enters increasingly in contact thanks to the filter of cultural artefacts and aesthetic signs conveyed by the media in the era of globalization, as well as by virtue of the increased mobility (real or simulated) typical of contemporary societies (Lash & Urry, 1994; Urry, 1995). Aesthetics does not lead here to unthinking immediacy, nor to an escape from reality, but rather becomes a tool for forms of reflective mediation, as well as for the development of interpretative skills.

Schudson's objectivity 3.0 model, as discussed, prescribes holding empathic engagement with an accurate and precise account of the facts together. In other words, it is essential that even in the context of digital and immersive technologies, journalism remains firmly anchored to the principles of a scrupulous verification of facts and their truthful representation. Video games and virtual reality, then, even in the context of an inevitable “playful deformation” of reality, must be built on the basis of the preliminary journalistic work of data and evidence collection, to later return in the experience of the game.

Even in this respect, examples can be given of news games that respect these principles. Among these is the news game *Uber: The Uncomfortable View From the Driving Seat*, developed by the Financial Times in 2017, a video game that critically analyzes the conditions of an Uber driver, allowing the user to experience that type of driving first hand. Before making the game, the Financial Times collected the testimonies of numerous Uber drivers, as well as researching the drivers' working conditions. Examples like these show that in news games a form of “factual empathy” can be promoted, that is an empathy not unconnected to a detailed and objective narration of reality, although transposed into the playful experience of a video game. The same thing happened in the news game *We Are Chicago*, made in 2013, in which users are transported to the neighborhoods of the US city and are confronted with the theme of youth gang violence. Before putting this product on the market, the group of independent programmers “Culture Shock Games” collected testimonials and data on the subject in question. For example, many residents of Chicago's most violent neighborhoods, such as Englewood, were interviewed. This preliminary work served to produce, in the news game, a realistic and faithful experience about the problem of youth gang violence: in other words, a genuine work of journalistic analysis and verification (Dowling, 2021, p. 85).

## Conclusions

It can therefore be said that at least some of the news games put on the market over the years respect the two principles underlying Michael Schudson's objectivity 3.0 model, namely the need to stimulate emotional involvement on the part of users while operating, at the same time, a narrative of facts that is faithful and adherent to reality, as well as based on the journalistic work of examination, verification, and data collection.



Clearly the narration of real facts in the form of play also carries with it several risks. Among these, it should be mentioned that, in the context of the game, users may be less aware of any attempts by developers to provide an ideologically oriented image of reality, in line with their own personal beliefs. It is enough to imagine what could happen, in the current period of history, if someone decided to make a game about the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine. In other words, no account of the facts can ever be completely neutral or objective, and this also applies to those conveyed by News games.

However, it is equally evident that on digital platforms, for the reasons set out in the theoretical part of this work above, journalism needs to rethink the tools by which to reach users. A (presumed) objectivity devoid of emotions, in fact, will probably be unlikely to cause real transformations in society, since it will most likely be unable to involve a sufficient number of people on issues of public interest.

The concept of “empathetic objectivity” developed by Schudson can therefore be a first important theoretical point of reference for reconfiguring the relationship between rationality and emotions in online journalism, and news games represent one of the concrete examples by which we can attempt to put this theoretical model into practice.

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**Contact email:** [luca.serafini@unina.it](mailto:luca.serafini@unina.it)  
[rebecca.papa@unimol.it](mailto:rebecca.papa@unimol.it)

***The DAU Project: History of One of Russia's Biggest and Most Controversial Film Production***

Sergei Glotov, Tampere University, Finland

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**Abstract**

The DAU project was a unique and colossal film experiment that lasted for several years and employed hundreds of people. Back in 2005, it was conceived as a conventional biopic of Soviet scientist Lev Landau, however, quite soon the idea transformed dramatically. After the production settled in Kharkiv, Ukraine, the director Ilya Khrzhanovsky constructed a gigantic set - The Institute, a dynamic historical reconstruction of a Soviet-era science centre. The Institute was populated by hundreds of untrained extras, who would improvise the majority of their lines and actions. A single camera operated by renowned German cinematographer Jürgen Jürges followed them around. The Institute had functioned for three years, during which 700 hours of footage were filmed. During those years, information began to circulate in Russian media about horrific conditions on the set, continuous abuse from the director, and the disastrous impact the production had on the city. This research explores available information on the production of DAU and constructs a historical narrative that begins in 2005 and ends in current times. The research data is a collection of online materials published in different languages. The research describes controversies that followed the production and release of DAU, as well as brings up responses from the director and his cast and crew.

Keywords: Film History, DAU, Ukraine, Production, Russian Film

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## Introduction

The work on the DAU project began in 2005. The original goal was to create a conventional biopic of Soviet physicist and the Nobel Prize winner Lev Landau with filming completed in Russia (Dau was the real nickname of the scientist). However, in 2009 the production moved to Kharkiv, north-east Ukraine, which in spring of 2022 had been heavily bombed by Russian military forces, following their invasion into the Ukrainian territory (Walker & Tondo, 2022).

Once in Kharkiv, the production with the director Ilya Khrzhanovsky in charge began constructing a gigantic set, the size of two football fields, at the old swimming pool. The set resembled a Soviet research facility, inspired by the one where Landau himself worked. With the financial backing from Russian businessman Serguei Adoniev the set, dubbed the Institute, transformed into an immersive space that followed the rules and customs of Soviet times (Macnab, 2019a).

The people, who populated the set, wore period clothes and used period items (Idov, 2011). They were supposed to embrace the lifestyle of the Institute and live their roles instead of acting them, thus allowing the director to achieve some level of authenticity. Some people, for example, Greek-Russian conductor Teodor Currentzis, who played the role of Landau, lived on the set for months (Rose, 2019), while others could come in in the morning and leave at the end of the day (Belikov, 2020a).

Overall, the filming lasted for three years, during which thousands of people participated in the production, be they part of the crew, cast and administration. 700 hours of footage were filmed by German cinematographer Jürgen Jürges, who worked with Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Michael Haneke. After years of editing, the production presented an immersive exhibition in Paris in early 2019, which was followed by a conventional premiere in 2020 at the Berlin Film Festival. Two films were presented, with one of them, *DAU: Natasha*, selected for the main competition.

*DAU: Natasha* does not feature Lev Landau, instead it tells the story of a cafeteria worker at the Institute, who gets arrested and interrogated by the security forces after meeting, drinking, and having sex with a foreign scientist. At the film's finale, the cafeteria worker is questioned by the actual retired KGB investigator, who was invited to the set. The man forces the main character to drink before questioning her and threatening to put a bottle in her vagina.

Considering that there was no script, and the experiences of the performers were real, the screening of *DAU: Natasha* generated a controversy, raising ethical questions about the physical, sexual, and mental safety of the cast. Following the premiere, five accredited Russian journalists and film critics (Tatiana Shorokhova, Marina Latysheva, Ksenia Reutova, Tamara Khodova, and Dmitry Barchenkov) composed an open letter to Berlin Film Festival creative director Carlo Chatrian and executive director Mariette Rissenbeek.

The letter asked three questions with the main point in inquiring if the Berlin Film Festival sees anything wrong in the mistreatment of talent in the name of art, as well as in screening a film that contains scenes of real violence against non-professional actors and non-simulated sex between people under the influence of alcohol? (kkbbd, 2020). Carlo Chatrian responded that all questions should be directed towards the production company, which ensured that there was no mistreatment on set (Ravindran & Davis, 2020). The director also denied any

mistreatment and allegations of sexual abuse, stating that the production was responsible, and the tough scenes were always discussed beforehand (Belikov, 2020b).

The current paper aims to look at how the DAU project was completed by diving into the history of its production using the available resources. The goal of this research is to find and report people's experiences on the set and with the director. Therefore, the main research question is *How the DAU project was produced?* The paper contributes to the field of film history by describing one of the biggest film productions ever, as well as by bringing the voices of actual participants into the spotlight.

## **Building the Institute**

The director Ilya Khrzhanovsky, the son of acclaimed Soviet filmmaker Andrey Khrzhanovsky, had directed a single film before embarking on the DAU project. That film was *4*, a festival favourite, that blurs the lines between fantasy and reality. Interested in the life of Lev Landau, who was an important scientist, but also a peculiar personality, who believed in the concept of free love, Khrzhanovsky founded a production company Phenomen Films, and set on seeking funding for the project, which at the time was a quite straightforward biopic (Macnab, 2019b).

Following the complicated process of writing the script based on the memoirs of Landau's wife together with Vladimir Sorokin, who also contributed to *4*, Khrzhanovsky decided to abandon his original plan and instead focus on the period that the scientist lived and worked through (Zayats, 2017a). With plans made and funding soon secured, the production moved to Kharkiv, which is the second-largest Ukrainian city located in the northeast of the country. This was done for three reasons (Zayats, 2017a). Firstly, Lev Landau worked in Kharkiv from 1932 till 1937. Secondly, the city still had many examples of Soviet constructivist architecture. Finally, the production costs were significantly cheaper there.

Originally, the shooting was supposed to last for just 63 days (Strelnik, 2008). In the space of the old swimming pool Dynamo, the production company constructed the Institute, a large immersive set in the style of Soviet science centres. The city centre got billboards from the 1930s, old cars flooded the city, and a 1:1 replica of a Soviet plane, which Landau used to arrive in the city, was built in the airport. The director refused to hire professional actors, instead prompting for untrained extras, who would be able to immerse themselves into the film set. Therefore, the call was made for willing participants, as well as for any period artefacts to serve much-desired authenticity.

The keyword for the Institute was immersion. The use of anything modern was prohibited, and the atmosphere of the Soviet times was recreated to detail from clothing to food and packaging. Women were forbidden to wear modern tampons, instead, Soviet-model cloth versions were made available (Meek, 2015). The Institute had its newspaper, but also its own guards, who would look for anyone using modern words and then exclude them from the set. The culture of snitching was also flourishing as the result of such policy, with people reporting each other's failures to comply with the Institute's rules either to the director or people close to him (Idov, 2011).

There was no traditional script, instead the people were supposed to act and live at the same time, even when there was no camera around. A single camera unit was operated by Jürgen Jürges, who would later receive the Berlin Film Festival award for his work. When the

camera would find people, they were bound to allow filming any aspects of their lives, no matter how intimate they were. The production reports that 14 children were conceived during the shooting (Stanley-Becker, 2019).

It is clear that the Institute was not a regular film set. Sometimes there was no actual practical shooting for weeks, even though the set was functioning and living its life (Idov, 2011), sometimes, the shooting lasted for 24 hours a day (Witkin, 2013). There were strict rules in place, which not followed would result in firing from the project.

To create and maintain such a film set required a lot of labour from the supporting crew, be it carpenters, cooks, cleaners, or other professionals. At the same time, the production required a lot of translators for all the foreigners on the set, which included the camera crew, but also notable people who visited the set. Reportedly, people were contacted via phone calls, requesting to come to the film set and to discuss everything there, with the production covering the ticket expenses (Zayats, 2017b). However, once there, witnessing the abnormal film set, a person had to decide between either leaving or staying and trying to work.

There was a strict hierarchy on the set between those who were close to the director and the rest. The first group was treated comfortably and generously rewarded, while the second was continuously harassed (Tonet & Salino, 2019). And it was easy to get on the bad side of the director: ask uncomfortable questions, demand some rights, or refuse to drink with him (Idov, 2011). Therefore, the production was looking for people, who would not oppose the director and his vision, who would be eager to partake in the experiment, and who “had nothing to lose” (Zayats, 2017b).

## **Testimonies**

The production of DAU was done in quite secrecy. While more than 392,000 auditions were completed with 10,000 extras participating in the shooting (Macnab, 2019b), not much information was available about the daily experience of the production. This can be explained by the possible existence of strict non-disclosure agreements (NDA), which would prevent people from speaking out to the media. Geoffrey Macnab (2019b) mentions a draconian NDA that he was suggested to sign when visiting the London office of the production once the filming was wrapped. So perhaps similar strict NDAs were implemented during the production.

Nevertheless, some testimonies, be it anonymous or from a few journalists that were allowed to visit the production appeared in the media. In 2010 Russian online media journal OpenSpace.ru published a collection of anonymous testimonies of people who worked on DAU (Prilepskaya, 2010). A freelance translator mentioned that the production resembled slavery with people from various places working for a small salary, with Ukrainians especially being treated as third-class people.

Another person, the coordinator, says that working on the project meant no sleep, no food, and no money since the production was trying to save on everything, delaying salaries and encouraging free labour (Prilepskaya, 2010). Other reports described how locals, who worked as drivers, cooks, or those who just landed the flats for the crew, were used by the production and never paid for their services (Koretsky, 2019).



Michael Idov (2011), who visited the filmset for a GQ story, describes the experience of Yulia, who was hired to be an assistant director and then was questioned by the director about her sexual life, if her friends are whores, and if she can sleep with another woman. After Yulia acted disgusted, she was fired.

Ukrainian journalist Artyom Zayats (2017b) collected various testimonies, including those published on Kharkiv city forums and popular online communities. He provides the quote from the production administrator, who discusses that everything the director asked for was supposed to be done by any means, and it was a norm; and those who were unsatisfied with this and dared to voice their opinions, were immediately fired. Zayats (2017b) also reports that many people never got back their landed period artefacts, since the production either lost or destroyed them.

Following the premiere of *DAU: Natasha* at the Berlin Film Festival, the first assistant in the second camera team Matthias Ganghofer testified that he experienced the feeling of manipulation and humiliation when his name was marked on a blackboard after using a cellphone inside the Institute (Grenier, 2020).

Rose (2019) shares the experience of Teodor Currentzis, who had the freedom to do what he liked, but still felt uncomfortable many times, although for him it was a necessary sacrifice for filming something real. Rose (2019) continues with the testimony of DAU associate Eddie Dick, who found the director to be a megalomaniac, treating his staff like servants. A former casting assistant reported that the director crossed the line from fictional to real abuse (Kovalyova, 2019).

Not everyone among the visiting intellectuals and noteworthy people had a pleasant time as well, for example, *Le Monde* (Tonet & Salino, 2019) reports that American artist Andrew Ondrejcek was assaulted by real Neo-Nazi extras invited by Khrzhanovsky on the set for further realism. Speaking of the real criminals, James Meek (2015) describes that some participants were arrested by the on-set police in the middle of the night, interrogated, and put into a prison cell with actual criminals hired from a Kharkiv prison.

However, some enjoyed being a part of the project. Witkin (2013) reports on the locals, who were pleased with how nice and kind everyone on the set was and who have not encountered any mistreatment from the production. Zayats (2017b) mentions people who appreciated the unique conditions and truly believed in the director's vision and goals. And it is important to remember, that Khrzhanovsky himself denies any allegations of abuse, manipulation, and sexual exploitation (Rose, 2019).

### **The End of Filming and the Premieres**

After three years the filming was over. Khrzhanovsky decided to throw an epic farewell by partly demolishing the set and organising a rave-party on its ruins with guest appearances from the Canadian musician Peaches and the American DJ Spooky (Meek, 2015). Zayats (2017b) writes that Khrzhanovsky was filming the party by sending cameramen into the crowds composed of anyone willing to come.

Soon afterwards the production moved to London to assemble the 700 hours of footage filmed. The production stayed at 100 Piccadilly, an old neoclassical building close to Buckingham Palace. James Meek (2015), who was invited there to see some footage and

meet the director (both goals were not achieved), described how the building was transformed from the inside to resemble a branch of the Institute: life-size dummies in trenchcoats, the guards requesting to take photos upon the entrance, lunch served with traditional Russian food. When Meek (2015) asked how this building was able to be rented for the production's purpose, he was quickly cut off by the project's lawyer.

Years went by, and, finally, the project was ready to be premiered in October 2018 in Berlin as a huge art installation. The goal was to construct a large section of the Berlin Wall, make the audience get visas for the entrance, have Brian Eno and Robert del Naja of Massive Attack perform, and eventually symbolically tear down the wall on the anniversary of the actual fall of the Berlin Wall (Brown, 2018). But that did not happen. While some criticised such an installation for normalising totalitarianism, the official reason for the rejection was that the production failed to correctly file the necessary paperwork (Thaddeus-Johns, 2019).

The production switched to another European capital - Paris, where in January 2019 it eventually succeeded in screening 13 feature-length films within two public theatres open 24 hours a day (Donadio, 2019). Apart from watching the films, people could experience musical performances, seminars, eat Russian food, discuss their experience with shamans or psychologists, hang out with some of the cast of the project, or visit Centre Pompidou to see two people posing as DAU scientists living in an enclosed furnished Soviet apartment (Donadio, 2019). To enter, a person was required to purchase a visa, which could be valid either for 6 hours, 24 hours, or for an unlimited time, and only then they could enjoy watching various footage playing in different booths (Dolin, 2019).

The following year two films premiered at the Berlin Film Festival. *DAU: Natasha* was selected for the main competition, while the six-hours long *DAU: Degeneration* was screened as a part of the Berlinale Special selection. The first to premiere was *DAU: Natasha*, and it was the one that created the most buzz. That film or at least something resembling it was already screened during the Paris premiere. Excessive drinking and real penetrative sex already were questioned by film journalists, who could not see an artistic purpose behind those (Donadio, 2019).

However, the main controversy started following the open letter addressed to the Berlin Film Festival creative and executive directors that raised ethical questions about the film's production. The letter immediately provoked a strong reaction online with its authors receiving a torrent of criticism and threats, accusing them of being prudish and denouncing the film (Roth, 2020). The director defended the film, stating that the knowledge that everything is real gives a completely different reaction (Macnab, 2020).

In her interview with a Russian film journalist Natalia Berezhnaya (Belikov, 2020a), who played the leading role in the film, stated that anyone could stop filming at any moment, however, she never did so; the scenes were discussed before shooting, although some improvisation, especially with dialogues, was involved; and that she was asked permission to include the sex scene into the final film.

Following the Berlin Film Festival, the production tried to obtain the screening rights in Russia for some of the films, including *DAU: Natasha*, however, these were denied due to explicit pornographic materials. Phenomen Films tried to argue for the rights in court, however, the court dismissed the claim (TASS, 2020). A streaming website was launched instead, where a user can purchase a film for 3 dollars. As of the 3rd of August 2022, seven

films are available on the website with 5 more promised in the upcoming release. *DAU: Natasha* is not on any of these lists.

## Conclusion

The DAU project was an ambitious production that lasted for many years that has been slowly fading into the past. There is no public information on the project's box office, as well as audience numbers. On IMDB.com the latest review of *DAU: Natasha* dates back to November 2020. Ilya Khrzhanovsky has moved to the role of art director of Babi Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre in Ukraine, which he wanted to transform into an immersive experience during which the visitors are supposed to make important ethical choices (Gredina et al., 2020). Following Khrzhanovsky's appointment, the members of the staff who had been working on the project during the previous years either left it or were dismissed (Davidzon, 2020).

The aim of this research was to collect the available information on the DAU project's production. It included testimonies of people who felt abused and mistreated by the production, as well as those who did not experience any of that. Such a huge production, the largest in the history of European cinema, had a lot of people involved, and their work, sacrifices, and experiences are worth being acknowledged.

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***Emotional Impacts of Online Purchasing Behaviour During the COVID-19 Pandemic***

Çise Miş, Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus

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**Abstract**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the routine daily habits of individuals have changed. For example, remote working has become a much more common concept, pupils carried out their classes online and various socialization habits have been moved to digital platforms. In this period, a vast number of people have become digitized. This study aimed to investigate the impact of emotions on people's buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Cyprus. More specifically, we investigated whether emotions affected the consumer's decision-making process. A total of 203 participants aged between 18 to 54 participated in the study. An online survey method was utilised and the PAD scale was conducted for data collection. The results revealed that dominance had a positive impact on both pleasure and arousal. Similarly, arousal showed a significant positive impact on pleasure toward online purchasing. The positive effect of pleasure on attitudes also indicated a positive impact on future purchasing intention. In this context, positive feelings about consumption led to re-buying and positive attitudes. During purchasing, on online shopping, emotional experiences are identified as a significant factor for consumers. Thus, consumer emotions were used to create an impact on the consumer and to explain the experiences of consumption. This study pinpoints that there is a gap in the literature regarding studies based on emotion in web-based shopping using further purchasing intentions on customers.

Keywords: Emotion, Online Purchasing, Online Shopping, Consumer Behaviour, COVID-19

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## Introduction

With the growth of the internet and the rising number of digitalized users, online purchasing has become more popular. Famous brands and local retailers (i.e., groceries, home appliances, clothing, etc.) moved their products to online (electronic) businesses (e-business). Due to an increasing number of internet users, it has become easier to meet the needs and demands of consumers by reaching consumers in a short time (Leinbach & Reyhle, 2015). The most indicator of changes in consumer behaviour as shopping has become a tedious activity for some consumers. Thus, the rapid change of the Internet and the popularity of internet marketing has also become an alternative for consumers. With the increased use of online platforms, people have also started to utilise web-based shopping rather than in-store shopping.

In November 2019, the initial Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) case was reported in Wuhan, China and spread all over the world in a short time period. Therefore, the daily lives of people have been affected, changed, and transformed rapidly due to the COVID-19 outbreak. For instance, people started to work from home, students started to take online classes and most people started to use online shopping sites in order to keep social distance and reduce the number of COVID-19 cases. Moreover, considering the restrictions by the government, online purchasing has become more attractive and safer during the pandemic. In addition to changing routines, our emotions may differ. In line with varied emotions during the pandemic, shopping habits may have also been affected.

In the marketing literature, particularly on online shopping behaviour, studies based on consumer emotion have not been studied thoroughly by using further purchasing intentions on the consumer. With the changing emotions and habits during the pandemic, it is important to work on the effects of emotions on online purchasing behaviour. However, studies with respect to emotion on online buying behaviour during the pandemic still lack in the literature. By considering this issue, this study will contribute and fill in a gap in the literature.

The aim of the present study is to investigate the impact of emotions on online purchasing behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic in Northern Cyprus. The objectives of the study are to reveal the demographic differences in online shopping behaviour, to examine the differences regarding products purchased before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, to identify one's emotions and intentions regards to future online buying behaviour, to investigate if consumers find online more secure during the pandemic, and to also find out the most preferred social networking sites (SNSs) among consumers.

To be able to reveal the aims of this study the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the attitudes of consumers while purchasing online during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. To what extent has the buying behaviour of consumers been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How have consumers emotionally changed their behaviour due to the COVID-19 pandemic?



Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H1: Arousal has a positive impact on pleasure on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H2: Dominance has a positive impact on arousal on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H3: Dominance has a positive impact on pleasure on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H4: Pleasure has a positive impact on attitude on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic.

H5: The attitude toward the online purchasing experience has a positive effect on future intentions.

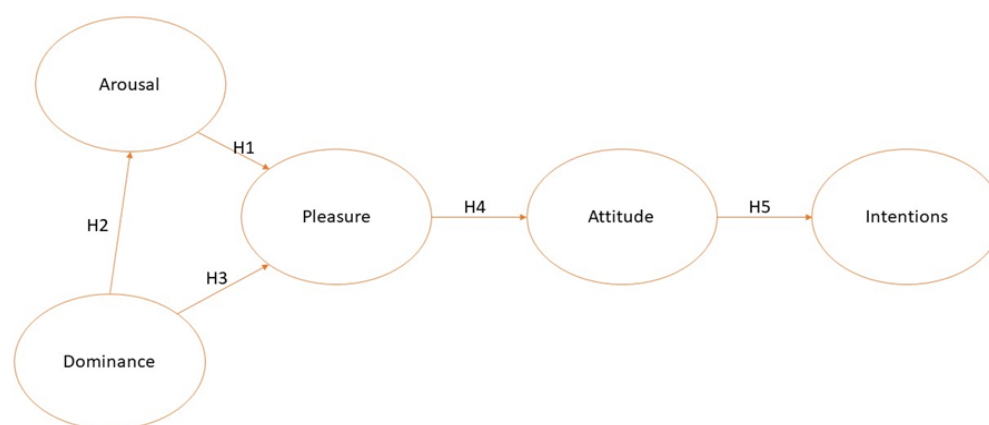


Figure 1: Proposed Hypothesis Model

## Literature Review

Emotion is a “mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is expressed physically (e.g., in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it” (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999, p.184). It is known that emotions have a particular referent (e.g., a consumer becomes unpleasant when a whitening toothpaste has not whitened his or her teeth; he or she can be happy by delivering their order on time). Indeed, emotions arise as a response to evaluations (interpretation and appraisal judgment) of a person’s well-being to make for something relevant. Usually, emotions are not controllable – people may exhibit different emotions during the same event and may also not have emotions at all.

In the marketing literature, emotions were investigated on behavioural trends (Hicks et al., 2005), pleasure (Alcaniz et al., 2005), decision-making process (Stayman & Batra, 1991), retailing (Babin et al., 2005), and advertising (Stayman & Aaker, 1988). According to Bagozzi and his colleagues (1999), emotions particularly affect the consumer and decision-making process.

During purchasing, either in-store or online, emotional experiences have been identified as a significant factor for consumers. Thus, to create an impact on the consumer and to explain experiences of consumption, consumer emotions were made use of. Cacioppo and Gardner (1999) emphasized that to achieve success in marketing strategies, identifying emotions was required and effective in every part of consumption. Moreover, consumption emotions can also be defined as gained emotions, moods, or feelings throughout the consumption of the service or the product (Richins, 1997). In fact, consumer emotions were conceptualized as varied fundamental emotions such as interest, happiness, entertainment, and sadness. In the Consumption Emotion Set (CES), previous scholar Richins (1997) stated that there were 16 consumption emotions and the set of emotions was only used to assess direct emotions regarding product consumption and not assess indirect feelings regarding advertisement in the marketing literature. The previous scholar also dealt with a combination of these emotions like optimism, shame, astonishment, dissatisfaction, romantic love, fun, anxiety, jealousy, fear, freshness, unhappiness, tranquillity, affection, loneliness, and enthusiasm (Richins, 1997).

One recent study examined what kind of emotion should be satisfied with the purchasing behaviour in web-based shopping (Cinar, 2020). Moreover, as sub-objectives of the previous study, “the difference between online purchasing and demographic variables and revealing the factors affecting the consumer’s emotions in online shopping” (Cinar, 2020, p. 230) was investigated. As a result of the study, it was revealed that both negative and positive emotions had an impact on online purchasing behaviour. In addition to this, when the positive emotions of the online consumer increased, the frequency of online purchasing also increased. However, when the negative emotions of the online consumer increased, the frequency of online purchasing decreased. The study also demonstrated a statistically significant difference between demographic variables and online purchasing behaviour. Therefore, the effect of monthly income and age on online purchasing behaviour was found as a significant factor (Cinar, 2020).

Similarly, previous research has illustrated consumers’ affective states (i.e., arousal and pleasure) influenced behavioural responses (Das & Varshneya, 2017). For instance, one of the past studies revealed that both arousal and pleasure had positive effects on approach shopping behaviour (e.g., browsing and unplanned purchasing) (Menon & Kahn, 1995). Eroglu, et al. (2003) pinpointed that both arousal and pleasure had a strong positive impact on both avoidance/approach and satisfaction behaviours. Koo and Ju (2010) showed that both arousal and pleasure had a positive effect on purchase intention.

In recent years, in the field of information technology, considerable progress has been made specifically related to the Internet as purchasing channel (Diaz, Gomez & Molina, 2017). Some previous studies have analysed the differences between offline and online channels (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). To analyse Internet use and levels of knowledge most studies have utilised the differences in socioeconomic and demographic factors (Hirunyawipada & Paswan, 2006). A previous study showed that individuals who purchase offline and online maintain different lifestyles and values that affect their intentions and behaviours (Swinyard & Smith, 2003). For purchases, some researchers investigated the differences between people on the basis of frequency (i.e., more or less) of Internet use.

According to previous scholars, differences and tendencies of companies appear when consumers use offline and online channels (Chen et al., 2014; Levin et al., 2003; Levin et al., 2005) and showed differences in behaviour when consumers search for information offline

and online with regard to diversified types of products such as clothing, airline tickets, computers, electronic products, and books. Some researchers have also demonstrated the differences between the preferences and attitudes of consumers when using offline and online channels (Kwon & Lennon, 2009; Diaz et al., 2017). These researchers emphasized the differences between both forms of media in contexts of tourism and retail services, however, results on companies had positive impacts on multichannel collaboration. Gultas and Yildirim (2016) stated that the investigation of consumers' online buying behaviour has become important due to an increased number of online shoppers.

## Research Methodology

The current study utilised a quantitative research design. Data were collected from a total of 203 participants aged between 18 to 54 from Northern Cyprus. Of the sample of participants, 57.1% (N=116) were female, 41.9% (N=85) were male, and 1% (N=2) who did not want to specify their gender. Regarding age of participants, 18-24 were 25.6% (N=52), 25-34 were 52.2% (N=106), 35-44 were 14.3% (N=29) and 45-54 were 7.5% (N=16). Generally, participants were well educated, with 37.9% (N=77) having an undergraduate degree, obtained 35.5% (N=72) obtaining a master's/Ph.D. degree, 20.2% (N=41) possessing a high school degree, and 6.4% (N=13) having an associate degree, respectively. Referring to the occupancy of participants, 28.6% (N=60) were working in the private sector, 20.6% (N=42) were students, 20% (N=40) were civil servants, 16% (N=31) were working in other sectors (i.e., lawyer, psychologist, teacher, photographer, dietitian, physiotherapist, doctor), 5.9% (N=12) were academicians, 3.9% (N=8) were freelancers, 3% (N=6) were housewives, 1.5% (N=3) were unemployed and 0.5% (N=1) was retired. Vast number of participants were from Nicosia (capital of Cyprus) 36.5% (N=74), Famagusta 23.2% (N=47), Kyrenia 22.2% (N=45), Trikomo 10.3% (N=21) and Morphou 7.9% (N=16).

In this study, a demographic information questionnaire was employed in order to provide some characteristic information about the participants including gender, age, education level, occupancy, and city of residence. Furthermore, the Pleasure Arousal and Dominance (PAD) Scale that was introduced by Mehrabian and Russell in 1974 was utilised in the study. To define perceptions of physical environments, by using three emotional aspects of the PAD (Hall, Elliot, & Meng, 2017). Pleasure interests whether the person deems the environment pleasurable or not, whereas arousal reveals how much the person is stimulated by their environment. Also, dominance comprehends whether the person perceives control or not in the surrounding (Hall, Elliot, & Meng, 2017). The PAD constructs were assessed by using a six-item scale from Kulviwat et al. (2007). Attitude toward online shopping was measured four-item scale (Kulviwat et al., 2007). Furthermore, intentions regarding future online shopping behaviour were assessed by using a three-item scale as developed by the current researcher. The PAD Scale and future intention questions were rated by participants on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Furthermore, additional questions about their social media use, online shopping behaviour and also, and products they preferred to purchase before and during the COVID-19 pandemic were asked of participants. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions (i.e., demographic and basic questions about the SNSs & online shopping) followed by 25 items (to assess emotions, future intentions, and attitudes).

The original questionnaire was translated into Turkish language and adapted to the current study. This study was conducted using an online self-administered questionnaire. All participants were invited to take part in the current study through SNSs (i.e., Facebook and

Instagram). Data collection was carried out for approximately 2 weeks during the strict restrictions for COVID-19 implemented by the government in Northern Cyprus, 2020. The participants spent approximately 10 minutes completing the questionnaire. Data were collected anonymously and participation was totally voluntary.

## Data Analysis

### *Reliability of the PAD Scale*

According to Mehrabian and Russell's PAD scale, the internal consistency of the three factors of the scale was well established. However, for the Turkish PAD, it was required to approve the unemotionality of the three scales. As shown in Table 1, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) reliability result demonstrated a good internal consistency,  $\alpha = 0.73$  lining between the values 0.60 and 0.88 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.735	18

Table 1. The Cronbach's alpha value

### *Model Fit Tests (MFT)*

In order to check the accuracy of the proposed model, three types of information were conducted. The model fit is presented in Table 2. Chi-square is the first proposed theory for Model Fit Testing (MFT). The measurement errors used in this study: The Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Root Mean-Square Residual (RMR). The other fit measurements used to check the model fit are the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Normed Fit Index (NFI). As shown in Table 2, the results of the study approved the validity of the model. Although the Chi-Square p-value was significant at the 1% level, the measurement error (RMR) was relatively low with a value of 0.05. In addition, all the fit indices, including CFI = 0.92, IFI = 0.92, NFI = 0.90 were all above the acceptable cut-off values. The fit indices were all acceptable, indicating that the proposed theoretical model was a good fit.

	Chi-Square	DF	Probability	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	IFI	NFI	Decision
Overall Model	23.5	5	0.000	0.105	0.05	0.917	0.919	0.90	Acceptable

Table 2. Model Fit Tests

### *Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)*

The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was then performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Analysis of a Moment Structures (SPSS AMOS) to study the relationship between the hypotheses. The path analysis was conducted to test the relevance of

the hypothesis. The path analysis results are illustrated in Table 3. The first hypothesis stated that arousal has a positive impact on pleasure on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results provided in Table 3 supported the H1 ( $\beta = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The second hypothesis stated that dominance has a positive impact on arousal on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results shown in Table 3 supported the H2 ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Also, the third hypothesis postulated that dominance has a positive impact on pleasure on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in Table 3, H3 was also supported ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The fourth hypothesis proposed that pleasure has a positive impact on attitude on online buying behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. As demonstrated in Table 3, H4 was supported ( $\beta = 0.88$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The fifth hypothesis stated that the attitude toward the online purchasing experience has a positive effect on future intentions. Similarly, H5 was also supported ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The results presented in Table 3 supported all the hypotheses in the study.

		Dominance	Arousal	Pleasure	Attitude
<b>Arousal</b>	Path Coefficient	0.322***			
	T-Value	(4.815)			
<b>Pleasure</b>	Path Coefficient	0.140**	0.441***		
	T-Value	(2.003)	(6.973)		
<b>Attitude</b>	Path Coefficient			0.880***	
	T-Value			(27.468)	
<b>Intention</b>	Path Coefficient				0.322***
	T-Value				(4.826)

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$

Table 3. Path Analysis

## Conclusion

To sum up, the purpose of the current study was to explore the effects of emotions on online purchasing behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was revealed that participants purchased online regularly before the COVID-19 outbreak. However, for some of them, online shopping behaviour started after the pandemic. The results of the study showed that most people had pleasure (i.e., happy, satisfied, contented, and hopeful) from the first item of PAD. It was further revealed that most people had arousal (relaxed, excited, frenzied) from the second item. People also had dominance (aroused, in-control, controlling, influential, and

autonomous) while online shopping during COVID-19. These results illustrated those positive emotions toward online purchasing affect consumers' buying behaviour positively. By evaluating the attitudes of consumers on online shopping, it can be said that consumers have positive attitudes indicating good, pleasure, and favourable towards online shopping. Thus, from the results of the study, a link between emotions and attitudes toward online shopping was revealed.

This study specifically revealed that most of the active social media users preferred to use Instagram (57.1%), Facebook (35%), YouTube (4.9%), Twitter (1.5%), and LinkedIn (1.5%), respectively. For further online shopping behaviour, this study also investigated their future intentions about online shopping. As a result, most of them were planning to visit websites more frequently and plan to buy more products from online websites. However, most of them were not sure if they spend less or more time on online shopping after the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 203 people, 85.7% of the participants found that online shopping is more secure during COVID-19.

Interestingly, the participants were buying electronic goods, home appliances, accessories and fashion products mostly before the pandemic. Although these products remained the same, hygiene and personal care products and, food and beverages purchasing behaviour increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, COVID-19 had a positive effect on the consumers to encourage them to shop online by affecting their emotions positively. In fact, positive emotions regarding online shopping behaviour also affected their attitudes and future intentions to buy positively.

In the current study, there are some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, this study is limited to individuals ages 18-54 who are currently living in Northern Cyprus. Therefore, this study lacks active internet users aged under 18 who are also known as Generation Z (Gen Z), and also, active internet users below age 54. Second, only Turkish speakers were able to participate in the study. Further research could be carried out to reveal results of more participants from different ethnic groups as well as having balanced samples in terms of demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, education level, income level) for comparison is suggested.

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**Contact email:** cise.mis@emu.edu.tr



## ***Women's Narratives on COVID-19 Trauma***

Inês Morais, Nova University, Portugal

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### **Abstract**

COVID-19 is a crucial moment in the world's history, not only because of the life/death challenges our society faces, but communication challenges to deal with fear, panic, and anxiety. Newspapers, TV News, Political Speeches are used to shape our thoughts about this pandemic. In this sense, it is important not only to evaluate them but most of all to understand people themselves and their personal perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to understand their behaviour, similarities, differences and heterogeneities, country, level of education, social position and to understand them simultaneously as individuals and members of society, with a cultural reference and value-sharing systems that portray a collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992). This paper focuses on a specific group – Women - through their own narratives, analysing the way they communicate their thoughts, feelings, and concerns towards this pandemic, analysing the content of their narratives. For this purpose, it was created a blog called WOMANITY at the beginning of March 2020 that gathered testimonies from women of different countries and backgrounds. "Humans are storytelling animals" (Alexander, 2012). In this sense, the central object of this project is on the way in which people and cultures represent and respond to the pandemic. To represent trauma is already to overcome it and transform it into memory, contributing to cultural referencing and collective identity and to the increase of lost social capital (Bordieu, 1986).

Keywords: Women, Communication, Narratives, Covid-19, Trauma

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## Introduction

According to Merriam-Webster, the word of 2020 was “pandemic”<sup>1</sup>, and according to the Washington Post<sup>2</sup>, “miss” is one of the verbs which better describes it. We all understand why. Humanity is living the exact same experience, in different parts of the world, where men and women try to survive lockdown, disease, death, and uncertainty.

Our societal, norms, practices, values, and rituals were damaged by an unexpected event, which destroyed our sources of support (Erikson, 1995). The result was a collective trauma, which occurs when an event disrupts many people in a specific period, devastating for individuals and groups, not only direct victims but also society as a whole.

Most of the literature about collective trauma focuses on the idea of the perpetrator, giving examples of some of the most studied cases in the world, the Nazis in World War II, Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, and slave owners as people to blame. In those cases, there was a real enemy, with a face to it. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are fighting an invisible enemy and the unknown. The way in which each one reacts to it could be completely different depending on their personality, environment, and background. From isolation to surprise, from sadness to frenzy, and even enthusiasm, the different coping strategies are considerable. In this sense, it is important to understand people and their personal perspective, simultaneously as individuals and as members of society, with a cultural reference and value-sharing systems that portray a collective memory (Halbwachs, 1992).

In this sense, it is crucial to restrict this understanding to one of the most affected groups – women - who suffered devastating effects in their lives. “The damage is incalculable and will resound down the decades, into future generations.” stated UN Secretary-General António Guterres at the opening of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2021). The list of consequences is long and listed on reports and studies that concluded the pandemic intensified existing inequalities between women and men in almost all areas of life. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) released new findings on the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality. During the first wave of the pandemic, employment for women reduced by 2.2 million across the EU, and those working in retail, accommodation, residential care, domestic work, and clothing manufacturing suffered even more. Work-life balance pressures have increased due to remote work and online schooling. In addition, the European Commission report on gender equality (2021) found, domestic violence rose 32% in France during the first week of the lockdown and in Lithuania increased by 20% in the first three weeks. According to the report, women spent on an average 62 hours per week caring for her children (compared to 36 hours for men) and 23 hours per week doing housework (compared to 15 hours for men) during the lockdown. Women in the paid workforce were often on the frontlines, tackling the pandemic with a rise in workload, health risk, and challenges to work-life balance.

When we consider traumatic events in general, COVID-19 included, women are more likely to meet diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to a 25-year research reported in Psychological Bulletin (2006) by American Psychological Association

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster. (2021, April 7). *Word of the Year*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-of-the-year>

<sup>2</sup> Washington Post. (2021, January 10.). *2020 in one word*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/lifestyle/2020-in-one-word/>

(APA). The reason? The interaction between biological and social vulnerability (gender norms, roles and responsibilities socially determined), genetic and biological factors play a role in the higher prevalence of depressive and anxiety disorders among women (WHO, 2021). Levels of loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use and self-harm or suicidal behaviour are likely to rise due to effects of COVID-19 quarantine on people's usual activities, routines, or livelihoods (WHO, 2021).

### ***Narratives, Trauma and Resilience***

"Humans are storytelling animals" (Alexander, 2012) and narrative plays a central role in human communication and social interaction as a necessary strategy of human expression and a fundamental component of identity (Altman, 2008). It is an instrument of education, to acquire elements that form conceptions for the understanding of the world (Benjamin, 1983) and emerges as a form of transmission of collective memory (Halbwachs, 1990) and an instrument of heritage education, creating conditions for a pedagogical process based on listening through stories that allow the human being's reflexive capacity. Thus, narrative is a cultural form supported by the mnemotechnics of language and holds a social-historical significance, "contributing to reflection and wonder in society" (Benjamin, 1936).

Its practice is especially valuable in times of crises or trauma that can be relieved thanks to diverse narrative practices (Pellicer-Ortín, S., & Sarikaya-Şen, M. (2021). Trauma narratives raise important questions about the possibility of verbalizing the unspeakable, narrating the unnarratable, and making sense of the incomprehensible. "The lack of clarity and the existence of a communication vacuum and meaning deficit of a crises create a discursive space that is filled by narratives, often multiple and conflicting." (Seeger & Timothy, L., 2016). These trauma narrative answers five main questions about the trauma, what and why it happens, who makes it happen, when it happens and how people should respond to these events (Heath, 2004). They are influenced by the narrator point of view, culturally, ideological, psychological, and physically speaking. The form, structure, storyteller, audience, channel, and frequency, as well as probability and fidelity of the content, influence the meaning, lessons, and outcomes.

But the significance of trauma narrative has been theorized in different ways, some of them marked by scepticism, but to some extent, a shift has occurred since the 1990s. For example, Deborah Horvitz's readings of women's trauma writings (2000) identify "the protagonists' varying capacities to use art, especially narrative, as a method of 'working through' or healing from trauma" as a recurrent trope (18).

In this sense, this paper follows Horvitz's perception of narrative and its positive outcome, by focusing on the way women represent and respond to the COVID-19 event. Represent this specific trauma is already to overcome it and transform it into memory, contributing to cultural referencing and collective identity and to the increase of lost social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The current pandemic presents itself as an intergenerational, intercultural trauma, with serious, large-scale political, social, psychological, and economic consequences. The historical and social context, and societal coping strategies will determine the impact of these consequences of trauma. Abramowitz (2005) found that community members who developed collective narratives resisted social disintegration and had fewer post-traumatic stress symptoms than communities with narratives of abandonment and isolation. Public narratives that emphasise overcoming and survival can contribute positively to a post-traumatic growth

of socio-cultural context (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) as a source of resilience in response to adversity and trauma.

Narratives, together with other devices can be essential tools in community interventions aimed at psychosocial recovery. Particularly now, new technologies and social networks broaden the scope and gave the possibility to citizens to use them to seek information, discuss and share personal stories, while interacting with other users regarding issues related to the perceived crisis (Papa & Maniou, 2020), using social media for emotional support and recovery (Stephens and Malone, 2009; Austin, Fisher-Liu, and Jin, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012)

## **Methodology**

### ***Aim and Scope***

*Womanity - Together* blog was born on March 2020th to draw attention to women's crucial role as doctors, nurses, mothers, wives, teachers, and professionals in this unique moment of our history. "Womanity" is understood as womanliness - the nature of a woman, her traits, features, and how she behaves facing trauma. The main goal of this project was to share stories, feelings and experiences from different backgrounds and cultures about the same traumatic phenomenon, to strengthen the sense of community and union of feelings, in an exercise of empathy and support to overcome such a difficult period. Recognizing similar situations in different countries is paramount to create empathy among human beings.

In a second phase, a study of these testimonies was put into place to understand women's perception and to understand how women represent and respond to the same traumatic event as a narrative rather than a simple evaluation of facts. It is a duty of memory as recalled by the Italian writer and chemist Primo Levi, a prisoner at the Auschwitz concentration camp (Ricoeur, 2003) to pass on a legacy to future generations.

### ***Participants and Procedure***

Women from around the world, from twenty different countries, particularly from European countries, participated in this study that analysed testimonies between April 2020 and April 2021. The result was 70 testimonies from women between 20 to 60 years old, from different cultures, political and social backgrounds, and jobs in various fields, but most of them were teachers or health workers. They lived together with their families (husband and children); some lived with a partner, and a few of them lived alone. Diversity was the primary goal to underline the extension of a global problem that affected everyone, young and old, poor, and rich, maybe in surprising ways and to find common patterns. The testimonies were gathered by email/blog submissions, published in the participants' mother tongue so they could better express themselves, English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish. The prompt was simple, "please, send us your testimony and lived experience during this special moment - write whatever you feel is important to you". In most cases, the length of the texts was the same with three paragraphs.

The data was analysed through content analysis, that followed the common procedure of pre-analysis (choice of material, data collection, hypothesis formulation, goals) and study of the material (coding and developing categories). In this last step, a selection of the information was made, through the removal of unnecessary or repeated information. The result was 292 entries, fragments of each narrative. Content analysis was then used to identify intentions,

communicate trends, determine psychological or emotional state, and reveal international differences in communication content, and revealing patterns in communication content. Then two types of analysis were put into place, conceptual analysis of the frequency of concepts, and a relational analysis by examining the relationship among concepts, capturing the emotional and psychological state of the writer.

Next, seven types of themes were selected: feelings/emotions (164 entries); routines (50 entries); facts (35 entries); life lessons (19 entries); political opinion (16 entries); religion (2 entries). Women exposed their feelings, fears, anxieties, and expectations in a higher percentage when compared with facts (such as routines, information about their countries, or even their own needs). Three of the emails received showed appreciation for having this platform available and confessed they cried during the process, which was perceived as a personal exercise.

## Findings and Results

### *State of Mind and Paradoxes*

Most of the testimonies showed a negative and a positive approach simultaneously, reflecting a puzzled state of mind. Different feelings arose, but “miss” and “fear”, were the most referred ones, with 48 entries and 42 entries each. Missing family and friends, missing in the sense of physical distance, translated into “I miss to hug them and kiss them”, even when coming from people who admitted they had never been keen on physical contact. This specific aspect is related to cultural attributes, more prevalent in testimonies from southern European countries such as Portugal, Spain, Italy, and in Latin America, such as Brazil, and Colombia. Besides, some of the respondents are living abroad away from their families and country and forced to stay separated for a long time and missing important festivities or special moments.

The lack of connection made them lose control and guidance during lockdowns and especially when difficult situations happened, such as depressions, miscarriages, job losses, among other issues. An animal therapist, 33 years old from Belgium recognized that,

*“not seeing my family and friends in Belgium was very difficult, especially when I had a miscarriage, and did not have the support I wanted and needed so badly”*

Missing routines and old habits, going out with friends, going to restaurants and museums was mentioned several times by single women or married ones with or without children. This feeling was not related with the context, but with their own personalities and previous life. During lockdowns, this was extremely difficult for most of them. They found these activities as a getaway from their lives, so they suffered immensely and were a source of friction with their families, arguing more with their partner or even children. An IT Consultant, 24 years old from Poland expressed herself clearly and resume these feelings all at once.

*“I miss my family, friends, country, my previous life, and old routines. I miss my family a lot, especially my mother”*

Fear was another predominant feeling. Fear of losing someone; fear of losing hope. The fear of the unknown, however, dominated the testimonies during the first lockdown in April-May 2020. What they feared the most was to think about the possibility of their family members

being infected. Some testimonies reflected serious consequences, namely obsessive-compulsive behaviour. A Financial Director, 40 years old, from France, acknowledged,

*“Then the fear happened (...) I was petrified of the unknown. (...) There have been times where some fear of this unknown situation has taken over.”*

Women did not know how to react, and the media did not help this state of mind. The news with statistics, crowded hospitals, or scary situations worldwide emphasised a state of vigilance and alertness that influenced them negatively. After the first two weeks of lockdown, women decided to stop watching the news for self-preservation.

A 38-year-old entrepreneur from Russia confessed that for her the biggest damage of the pandemic was the strong media involvement that put “this blunt fear into people’s head. The fear that prevents from thinking, and as a result, people become easier to manage and to manipulate”. The attitude towards their own situation depended on the participants’ condition, if they were infected, they would try to rationalise the situation, and their role in the pandemic itself. Health workers working directly with COVID-19 patients would be very rational and professional. A statement prevailed among all of them in this study: this situation would change health workers; they would not be the same after the pandemic. An extreme situation that tests the psychological capacity of even the most experienced. A doctor working with COVID-19 patients, 27 years old, from Portugal depicts,

*“It was unbelievable, nobody knew if they were doing their best, but nobody ever gave up or gave in, because in the end the important thing is always the well-being of the patient”*

As stated above, even though most of the testimonies showed concern and fear, they also showed hope and lessons learned from the experience. At the time of the writing, women tried to find ways to cope with the situation and being hopeful, showing a mixed feeling testimony. A teacher, 35 years old, from Portugal, mother of two expressed her positive attitude towards this difficult context:

*“Covid brought me, like to everyone, so many hard moments: loneliness, fears, anxiety, but I believe that it also made me look at life differently. I went from superwoman to a survivor.”*

### ***Routines and Concerns***

Under lockdown, a work-life balance was proven to be difficult to achieve and this was often stated in the testimonies. Women mentioned a strict daily life, taking care of children, chores, remote work. To be able to overcome these issues they focused on others and forgot about themselves and their personal needs and desires. This was obvious since the most written words in the testimonies were family and friends, with 55 and 49 times written, each. When mentioning their needs, they underlined the difficulty in combining several roles, such as mother, professional, wife, and woman. It brought them to despair, tiredness and in some cases, depression. A researcher, 35 years old, from the United States confessed,

*“I’m also tired of being engaged all day in this. (...) But time went by, we had to re-educate ourselves, in the same space and without breaking trying to be the mother, the professional, the teacher, the housewife, the wife and without forgetting, but*

*always last, the person I am. Every day, at the end of the day, it remains and always with the doubt or demand that it could have been given more or been better.”*

Some testimonies from southern Europe still show the obligation to serve the house and the family as a given, as showed in a testimony of a 42-year-old engineer, from Portugal.

*“All by myself and I went on autopilot because it had to be that way, for the family, I didn't think much and didn't complain. Now I look back, and it was heavy for me, but at the time, I did not feel it.”*

A common concern during the lockdown was the ability to combine remote work with family and online schooling. In fact, online schooling was an issue itself, usually seen as non-productive and inefficient from mothers' perspective and with serious long-term learning effects. According to the respondents, younger students felt a lack of motivation and interest alongside with internet issues and lack of teachers' preparation due to the sudden change of teaching methods.

However, remote work was seen as a positive outcome, saving time in commuting, which led to more time spent with family, and to being more productive. This fact follows the world tendency to change work habits, where remote work is becoming a trend. A trainee 26 years old, from Venezuela,

*“At a work level, although it seems strange, I loved remote work; even my bosses said that I am more productive at home”*

Also made possible for people to move to the countryside to improve their quality of life. A lawyer and an English Teacher moved to the Azores Islands, and both agreed it had a positive outcome.

*“I have been fortunate enough to be able to continue working a full schedule and teaching English online. This pandemic has allowed me to be closer to my parents while working online”.*

*“This is how, after 20 years living in a European capital, we moved to an island. We are delighted with this move (...) our daughter grows up in a freer and healthier environment, we have increased our income, reduced expenses, and we have more quality time together”*

Also, the travel restrictions allowed women to rediscover their own countries, exploring them with family and friends. It did not matter the size of the country or features, women from different parts of the world showed this desire, namely in Romania and East Timor.

### ***Perspectives and Opinions***

Facts about one's country, statistics, and description of hospitals and their conditions were also mentioned, alongside political views or the participant's thoughts on governmental decisions. Lack of leadership, inadequate social measures, and media manipulation causing increased fear, were mentioned in countries where the political scenario was unstable for different reasons, mainly due to polarising country leaders, such as in the United States or

Brazil. Economic deprivation was hardly mentioned only in specific cases and countries, such as Angola, Brazil, and the United States. A teacher, 34 years old, from Brazil,

*“It also arose a significant crisis of governance and health management in most of the countries which was particularly noticeable during the second wave of pandemic. And unfortunately, people had to pay for these failures.”*

And a Lawyer, 35 years old,

*“I feel hostage to this pandemic and with the feeling that we are in ongoing trials by those who govern us. It has been plain sailing, in absolute misgovernment, with a growing sense that we cannot count on some support in a solid and robust way. (...) They forgot we are humans and not robots”*

The media and its effects were prevalent in many testimonies: “I am tired of conflicts related to the pandemic, fake news, media, politics. That has been extremely tiresome.” At first, they were the link to the outside world, but when the days went by, the negative influence on mental health at the first lockdown was notorious. There was a common understanding of the effect of media on mental health and individuals' routine. No matter which country or region, the media did not help to overcome the situation. A clerk, 42 years old, from Portugal confessed,

*“At first, I was hooked on the news; I wanted to know everything about what was going on in the world, to see if it brought me any peace of mind. It didn't... so I hung up”*

On the other hand, social media had a crucial role in connecting with others, not only for work reasons but also to communicate with friends and family. A special report by Datareportal (July, 2020), showed a monumental increase in online and digital activities<sup>3</sup>. This factor was a turning point in this pandemic, indeed, social media enabled communication and diminished loneliness. A student, 21 years old, from Switzerland,

*“There are solutions that already help us a lot and connect us more, even when we are not together, such as FaceTime, Zoom, among others.”*

Religion and God were not mentioned as expected since religion is central to the culture of Brazil and Angola (countries represented in the study). Surprisingly, considering the importance of religion in this country, only five in Brazilian testimonies mentioned this topic.

*“There were many moments of reflection, learning, adaptation, and more than ever, hope and faith in God. ”*

### **General Overview**

As previously mentioned, a binomial negative/positive message was presented. The most referred words were negative words such as “miss, fear, tired, worried, isolation, difficult,

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<sup>3</sup> Datareportal. (2021, January 10). *Digital2020: July Global Statshot*. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-july-global-statshot>



death, loneliness” while “learn, lucky, hope, and value”, were the most positive words presented.

Two conclusions resulted from this analysis. First, the most prevalent feelings in these testimonies are not related to country or culture. Instead, the same perspective on the pandemic was shared by all women who participated from the United States, East Timor, or Angola. This could possibly be related to personal experience, personality, or social/economic position. Still, this fact remains to be proven through other studies, psychological, financial, or different samples.

The second conclusion stems from the moment when the testimonies were written and whether they were shared at the beginning of the pandemic, in 2020, or later in 2021. Indeed, perspectives diverged depending on their time frame. During the first lockdown, surprise, shock, disbelief, and fear of the unknown were the main predominant feelings. Women shared they felt as if living in a different dimension, out of their reality or even worse inside a fictional narrative. A scientific advisor from New York, 42 years old, confessed that,

*“I am still in shock that our life has changed in the USA (...) ”I never in my lifetime thought I would live through what is going on in the world”*

Several lockdowns and strict rules that were extended over time translated into tiredness, sadness, and most of all exhaustion. A general tendency towards depression and anxiety was shown. Three testimonies shared stories in which severe mental illness had to be addressed in hospital context. Distance from family and friends was one of the major influences on mental health, especially during special events or difficult moments such as miscarriages, birthdays or relationships breakups, pregnancy. Nevertheless, in some cases, testimonies showed an entirely different perspective, with more adaptability over time. In the long run, women began to relax and understand the situation from another perspective. A teacher, 35 years old, from Portugal,

*“In this new confinement, I already feel calm (since I'm no longer stepping on unknown territory), and I promised myself to do different things”*

The most challenging issue for all women was to merge work, family, chores, and personal time. This fact aligned with the studies presented in the first part of this chapter and with so many of the statements from women in media from around the world, “If I want to be a good mother, I am a bad worker. And vice versa.”<sup>4</sup> Following recent studies from the EIGE (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), work-life balance pressures have increased for women, especially those with children aged 0-5 years old.

Nevertheless, we could also observe how the human being tries to survive even in the harshest of circumstances, while focusing on the most positive aspects of a difficult situation, as stated in many of the testimonies: “we cannot control everything”; “value what we have” “we are lucky to have work, and the family is well and healthy”; “life is precious.” Curiously, most of these accounts arose from single people without children, who mentioned optimistic aspects such. “Time for transformation”; “Let us find in discomfort our voice, in the hope of

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<sup>4</sup> Publico. (2021, January 10). *Eu se quiser ser boa mãe, sou má trabalhadora. E vice-versa.*  
<https://www.publico.pt/2021/02/06/sociedade/noticia/quiser-boa-mae-ma-trabalhadora-viceversa-1949637>

being able to experience the true meaning of the great word humanity"; "It has also made me value what I have much more".

One of the most inspiring aspects of this analysis was that, besides sharing common feelings and thoughts, they all tried to show and use everyday situations to express their feelings and reactions, thus providing even more powerful narratives emanating from an increased sense of reality.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter sought to understand the central role of narrative and communication as an agent that conveys collective memory (Halbwachs, 1990) and gives it meaning, to help for its interpretation, acceptance, inclusion, and recovery of society in the present, while aiming to learn how to build the future.

As such, this project made perfect sense to prove how communication through a blog could be a powerful tool in overcoming trauma. This blog and research were a small step into building a narrative to help the healing process of women. It served as a portrait, of our times, as well as a confirmation of the studies and statistics presented in the first part of this study which show how, women are being pressured to do and be more. Notwithstanding, the study has a small sample and lack diversity regarding nationality, social/economic, and cultural status. We consider it to be a starting point which will be improved and enlarged, always aiming at helping women of today and women of the future.

The testimonies presented showed a general negative tone where feelings of missing, loneliness, anxiety were presented, increasing the risk of as a medium and long-term effect for women who have lived through this period, along the way, the infected ones, the health workers, the mothers, professionals, and so on. This should be avoided or minimised at all costs, due to the enormous percentage of society who will be affected. The World Health Organisation mentions that psychological issues need to be taken into considerations during the COVID-19 pandemic for the general public (2020). Many authors have also stressed the need for psychological first aid to be provided to the patients admitted in the Covid wards (Lietal, 2020; Xiang et al, 2020).

It is assumed that the story of trauma should only be told in the third generation, perhaps 70 years after the event. "The social contract of silence can only be broken after a long period, and it is now your generation and your children generation that will have the opportunity to rewrite the social contract of history and memory." (Winter, 2018). But COVID-19 cannot wait that long; its harshness and influence on society at the beginning of the 21st century cannot repeat the same attitude towards world past traumas. COVID-19 puts everything to the test in a community where information and communication technologies are a powerful tool, pushing a new attitude towards trauma and rethinking difficult memories and the past. Undoubtedly, forgetting will never be the best medicine.

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**Contact email:** moraisines20@gmail.com



***An Analysis of the Portrayal of Madwomen in the Films of the Sixth Generation of Chinese Directors***

Xinyue Wang, Beijing Film Academy, China

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**Abstract**

The sixth generation of Chinese directors is a special group of Chinese directors, who are both rebellious to the control of the film system and self-expressive, and their works are often rich in meaning, well-received, and recognized by the film industry both at home and abroad. The representative figures include Lou Ye, Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, Gu Changwei, etc. The focus of their films is no longer the same as films before, but more on the lower class people, such as the lower class people with difficult lives, the youth groups with growing pains, and the working-class people in the urban corners. They show their helplessness and confusion in difficult situations, and their strong will to struggle and fight for their lives so that people can feel the shock and power brought by the art of tragedy. However, the portrayal of women in their films has not been given much attention, and the "madwomen" have received even less attention among the many female images. The "madwoman" is usually a superficial, stereotypical portrayal of women, a stigmatized construction of women. This paper will focus on the analysis of "madwomen" in the films of the sixth generation of Chinese directors and explore the position of Chinese women in the social and cultural spheres through the context of the Chinese era.

Keywords: Feminism Film Study, The Chinese Sixth Generation, Madwoman, Images of Woman, Woman Fatale

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## Introduction

### 1.1 Theory background

The term "Madwoman" comes from S.M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's book *The Madwoman in the Attic*, which offers a very different perspective on 19th-century authors and literature from a feminist reading of literary criticism. The image of the "madwoman" is derived from the character of Bertha in Charlotte Brontë's book *Jane Eyre*. Bertha is Rochester's ex-wife, who is kept in the attic of the top floor of the house by Rochester and is called the "madwoman". In previous literary studies, scholars have often focused on Jane Eyre and Rochester, while neglecting the role of Bertha. In the novel's portrayal, Bertha is of exotic descent and has strong violent tendencies; she tries to set fires and harm Rochester, so it is reasonable for Rochester to lock her in the attic, and his affair with Jane Eyre in the midst of a marital relationship is made acceptable by the stigmatization of Bertha. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, however, the authors consider the characterization of Bertha to be stigmatization and use it to discuss the challenges women face in the field of literary creation.

In the field of film studies, it is important to study the portrayal of the "madwoman". In the field of cinema where women are always placed as the OTHER (the second sex), women are always portrayed as two polarized images, namely the meek "angel" and the threatening "demon" or "femme fatale". The "angel" image is very dependent on the male and less resistant, while women (femme fatale) with a certain degree of independence and financial ability are often portrayed as "femme fatale", and the economic source of such image often comes from doing sexualized work. Such polarized characterization stems from the romanticized imagination of men and dwarfing of women, and within the realm of film, women are colonized, their images and personalities shaped by vested interests. However, Gilbert and Susan's idea of the "madwoman" offers a new way of thinking about the existence of the "madwoman" in cinema and the socio-cultural environment it reflects.

This study takes the films of the sixth generation directors as the research vehicle, and there are four main ways to define the sixth generation directors. The first is to divide them according to the directors' educational experiences, with the students of Class 85 and Class 87 of the Beijing Film Academy as the main body. Secondly, according to the style and filming system, Chinese scholar Dai Jinhua proposed in *Landscape in the Mist: A First Reading of the Sixth Generation* that "the Sixth Generation includes independent filmmakers who emerged in the 1990s, made low-budget feature films, and were outside of the mainstream production system and film censorship system, and were financed by individuals or supported by the European Cultural Foundation." Third, it defines the sixth generation of directors recurring after the fifth generation of directors. In *Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Chen Xiaoyun points out that the fifth generation usually takes history and vernacular as the main subject, reflects on Chinese national culture, and focuses on macro narratives, while the sixth generation often focuses on social reality, marginalized groups, and micro-narratives. Fourth, special pronouns are used to refer to the sixth generation of directors. In his book *My Camera Doesn't Lie*, Cheng Qing-song summarizes the terms used by different regions for the Sixth Generation directors, such as "Chinese underground film creators" in Europe and America, and "Seven Junzi" in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In Mainland China, they are called "independent filmmakers" or the "new documentary movement".

Since most of the Sixth Generation directors grew up in a turbulent era, "the cultural community almost universally perceives Chinese culture in the 1990s as a superficially

pluralistic but culturally incoherent cultural space". This contradictory cultural environment has nurtured the work of the sixth generation of directors and shaped a style that is unique to this generation. Repression and desire are often the subjects of discussion, and personal confusion fills these films one after another, creating the unique style of the Sixth Generation. In the history of Chinese cinema, the works of the Sixth Generation are like isolated children, telling their own stories of obsession, and their stories have in turn enthralled the confused youth.

After the Sixth Generation, there is no longer a generational division of Chinese directors, which shows the uniqueness of the Sixth Generation. As a model of Chinese auteur cinema, the works of the Sixth Generation directors often have high artistic value, and therefore the films of the Sixth Generation directors will be chosen as the sample for this study. At the same time, it should be noted that there are few influential female directors in the Sixth Generation, which is also the focus of this study.

## **1.2 Literature review**

In the previous studies on female images in film works, the following characteristics are presented. First, it tends to conduct research on the change of female images within a certain time period, such as "A Study on the Propagation of Female Images in Domestic Youth Films since the 1990s(Zhao, 2020)", which explores the propagation of female images and their cultural implications in the context of social development. Second, it is a study of female images according to the country or cultural attributes, such as "The Shaping of Female Images in Indian Films - Taking Films Starring Aamir Khan from 2011-2018 as an Example(Hou, 2018)", to explore the female images in the films in which specific creators are involved and interpret the socio-cultural environment that shaped them. Third, it is a study of a specific director's work, such as "A Study of the Image of Women in Luc Besson's Films(Chen, 2020)". Fourth, it is a study of a specific film, such as "The Changing Imagination of Women in the Film 'The Blind Mountain'(Sun, 2018)". Fewer studies have been conducted on the image of women in a certain group of domestic directors, and they are mainly focused on a group study of the image of women, such as "A Study of the Image of Women in the Film Works of the Sixth Generation of Chinese Directors(Ao, 2013)". Such a research approach can provide a macro understanding of the female group in film works, but at the same time, it tends to focus on the protagonists and ignore the marginal supporting characters, who tend to show polarized characteristics and enhance the focus on female stereotypes. In this paper, we focus on the Madwomen, the stereotyped image of women, and how women break through the shackles and traditional expectations.

## **1.3 Study purpose**

The sixth generation of Chinese directors is a special group in China, who are both rebellious to the control of the film system and self-expressive, and their works are often rich in meaning, well-received, and recognized by the film industry both at home and abroad. The representative figures include Lou Ye, Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, Gu Changwei, etc. The focus of their films is no longer the same as films before, but more on the lower class people, such as people with difficult lives, the youth groups with growing pains, and the working-class people in the urban corners. They show their helplessness and confusion in difficult situations, and their strong will to struggle and fight for their lives so that people can feel the shock and power brought by the art of tragedy. However, the portrayal of women in their films has not been given much attention, and the "madwomen" have received even less

attention among the many female images. This study will focus on the analysis of "madwomen" in the films of the sixth generation and explore the position of Chinese women in the social and cultural spheres through the context of the Chinese era.

## 2 Creating Women in Film

By holding to the right of creation, male directors occupy the resource of film production from script to directing and editing, who can depict women as their imagination, regardless of the inner thoughts of real women. In the sixth generation's film, there are two kinds of typical women images, namely angel and femme fatale, while the existence of madwomen firstly reflects directors' attitude towards women and secondly brings a new perspective of the female image in the film study area.

### 2.1 Angle: Pure, Submissive, Mistress and the Lost Eve

The portrayal of women often shows polarized qualities, namely "angels" and "femme fatale". In the films of the sixth generation directors, female characters are often pure as angels. Women who are angels are often sexually conservative, highly submissive, and strongly submissive to men, while women who are not supported by men often appear as sex workers or sell their sexuality for work while being framed as the culprits of men's misfortune. It seems that in the male subconscious, the female archetype is Eve, made of a male's rib, who is also the one who steals the forbidden fruit and makes Adam punished.

In the films of the sixth generation, directors have used the same actor to play two roles to reflect the two sides of women. In this way, women often present two contrasting images of "angel" and "femme fatale". Between these two images, the "angel" is infinitely preferred.

In *Green Tea*, Wu Fang and Lang Lang are played by the same actress Zhao Wei. Wu Fang has a conservative personality and wears a pair of black-framed glasses, typical of a graduate student, whose interaction with men is limited to blind dates. In *Suzhou River*, Mudan and Mei Mei are played by the same actress Zhou Xun. Mudan is an innocent and lovely young girl who is only a high school student when she meets the male protagonist, Mada, and she falls in love with him after spending time with him. She is simple and naive and trusts Mada a lot. The images of "angels" are non-threatening, submissive, loyal, and moral, as if they are the perfect companion for the male imagination.

*The Madwoman in the Attic* suggests that "what she sees in the mirror is usually a male construct, the 'pure golden baby' of male brains, a glittering and wholly artificial child". The "angels" in the films of the Sixth Generation directors are like "pure golden baby", with pretty faces and obedience. These images best reflect the phenomenon of women being defined by men, as if they were ribs taken from underneath the director, as obedient Eve, existing for the sake of male existence: "From Eve, Minerva, Sophia and Galatea onward, after all, patriarchal mythology defines women as created by, from, and for men, the children of male brains, ribs, and ingenuity."

### 2.2 Femme Fatale: Sex, Threat and Sphinx

The opposite of the "angel" image is the "femme fatale". However, in the works of the sixth generation of male directors, the "femme fatale" image often has strong female characteristics. This type of character, is often beautiful in appearance, their makeup, and dress all show their



femininity, while these characters often sell their sexuality for a living. They are as dangerous and seductive as snakes, and they are a threat to the male characters in the film, to pay for the degenerate behavior of men.

In *Suzhou River*, Mei Mei is the opposite of Mudan, the role of the "femme fatale". After years of Mudan's disappearance, Mada unexpectedly meets Mei Mei. He is surprised at how similar Mei Mei is to Mudan in appearance, but at the same time, he is suspicious of the characteristics Mei Mei exhibits. Mei Mei is a mermaid performer, and the men around her are more or less interested in her, while Mei Mei's attire also reveals women's mature and sexy qualities. At the end of the film, the director shows us that Mei Mei and Mudan are not the same people, yet the blurring of their identities in the plot reflects the double-sided expectation of women, hoping that they are pure and flawless, but also hoping that they are sultry and hot.

If the "femme fatale" in *Suzhou River* and *Green Tea* is a romanticized imagination of women, then Feng Yanli in *The Orphan of Anyang* is a realistic depiction. Feng Yanli is a sex worker who accidentally becomes pregnant with a whoremonger. After giving birth to the child, Feng Yanli has no choice but to give the child to someone else to raise. In such a serious film about the layoffs and repressed human nature, it is no coincidence that the female character appears as a sex worker. Lili, who has a small role in *Wushan's Clouds and Rain*, is a sex worker brought in by the main male character's friend, and Yanhong, the heroine of *Luxury Car*, is also a nightclub escort and sex worker. In addition, the hair salon girls in *Ren Xiao Yao* and the hair salon girls like Fang Fang, Li Li, and Qin Qin in *A Touch of Sin* acted as the backdrop for the chaotic background of that chaotic era. Zhao Qiaoqiao in *Ren Xiao Yao* and Xiaoyu in *A Touch of Sin* both play the role of having affairs with married men, and this setting, which breaks through certain moral concepts, reflects the director's thoughts.

In *The Second Sex*, it says that "The only difference between a woman who sells herself through prostitution and a woman who sells herself through marriage is the difference in price and the difference in the length." In the sixth generation of directors, some male directors especially like to portray women with a sense of autonomy as sex workers, regardless of the dignity of sex workers or not, this kind of forced binding of independence and sex can be seen as the director's inferiority complex and self-psychosexuality because this has the personal charm and sense of autonomy of women as prostitutes so that men can easily have sex with them. Dai Jinhua points out that "the female figure becomes the 'empty signify' or the 'imaginary signify' of male history", that is, no matter how attractive or independent such women are in the film, they are still being viewed, the object to be gazed at, the OTHER in the film, the disembodied one who has no right to shape herself.

### 2.3 Madwomen: Repression, Resistance, and Destruction

It should be noted that in addition to the binary characterization of "angels" and "femme fatale", there is another kind of female character in the works of the sixth generation. They are neither as submissive as the "angels" nor as flattering as the "femme fatale". They are the "madwomen". The "madwomen" often feel repressed under the patriarchal system, and when they try to resist, they are labeled as "madwomen". However, the same behavior in men is described as "resistance to oppression". The very description of "madwomen" is extremely patriarchal. They stigmatize awakening as insanity and use it to suppress women's resistance in order to maintain the functioning of a patriarchal society.

There are several ways to define "madwomen". The first is based on the traditional understanding of "madwomen", which means that they are portrayed as mentally disturbed and uncontrollable women. The second is aggressive women, and the third is women who can effectively threaten the interests of men.

The protagonist Qinghong in the film *Shanghai Dreams* has a mutual love affair with a young man in Guizhou, a province in China, however, under the control of her father, she is not allowed to associate with young men or participate in recreational activities of her peers. In those repressive times, the young man raped Qinghong after learning that he had no hope to be with her and was subsequently sentenced to death, while Qinghong was stimulated to commit suicide. Although the suicide is successfully resuscitated, Qinghong seems mentally disturbed and loses touch with the brilliant life she should have had. In the world shaped by the film, Qinghong suffers a double rape: a physical rape by the young man, and a spiritual rape by the male-dominated society represented by her father. As a young girl in her prime, Qinghong is not allowed to wear brightly colored clothes, play outside with her classmates, or fall in love at an early age. As one small thing after another piles up, Qinghong chooses to resist, and she does so by hurting herself. Qing Hong's sense of autonomy awakens, but she does not allow it to do so. In such a repressive environment, Qinghong chooses to self-destruct and resist the oppression with self-destruction.

In the film *Ren Xiao Yao*, Zhao Qiaoqiao is slapped by her then-boyfriend who relies on her performance for money when she decides to rush out of the bus while trying to escape her life of performance. After being slapped the first time, Zhao Qiaoqiao rushes to the door again, gets slapped again, rushes to the door again, and so on and so forth. In a similar scene in *A Touch of Sin*, the receptionist Xiaoyu is asked to accompany a whoremonger, and Xiaoyu chooses to refuse and is slapped by the man with the money, so the cycle repeats itself again and again in resistance and being slapped. The state of the two characters is like Sisyphus pushing a boulder towards the top of a mountain, resisting again and again and again. This defiant stance is expressed with an almost insane persistence. In their defiance, their faces are grim and seemingly indecent, but in fact, they have a great sense of autonomy, and their "madness" makes them even more unique. Although both films are directed by Jia Zhangke, when faced with such oppression, Zhao Qiaoqiao chooses to accept it, while Xiaoyu chooses to resist to the end, killing the man who forced her to go on the run.

In addition, the "madwomen" image is also presented in the films of the fifth generation directors. The protagonist in *Peacock*, Gao Weihong, is the eldest daughter of a family with three children. In such a turbulent time in China in the 1970s and 1980s, Gao Weihong had a dream of becoming a paratrooper, yet she had no access to her dream for various reasons. She would make her own parachute and pedal her bike to get her off the ground, yet she was treated by her family as mentally deranged and forced to be injected with pharmaceuticals. Her life after that was just like the blue parachute that was extinguished, she became a peacock who could not open her screen. Gao Weihong had many actions that were incomprehensible to the people around her at the time. She was seen as an anomaly, an alien, a woman with an untamable nature, and her eventual fate was not a good one.

Virginia Woolf once said, "Before we women can write, we must 'kill' the angels in the house." The emergence of the "madwoman" shatters the filter of the "angel" image, demonstrates the aggressiveness and aggression of women, and rebels against the dwarfing of women.

## 2.4 Speechless Women: the Right to Express in the Magic Mirror

In an article, Virginia Woolf hypothesizes that if Shakespeare had a sister with the same talent, would she have been as good a writer as her brother? The answer is no because, in those days, women did not have the right to receive an education and would have been restricted from even going out and being allowed to create literature. The same situation is still happening in the film field. Not only the female characters in films but also the female creators in the film industry and the female audiences in films, are "Shakespeare's sisters" and have difficulties in obtaining the same rights as men.

A point made in *The Madwoman in the Attic* is that there is a classic setting in the famous Snow White fairy tale where the question is asked of the magic mirror, "Am I beautiful?". It is noteworthy that in this fairy tale, the story revolves only around the struggle between Snow White and the wicked queen, while the object of their struggle, the king, seems to be an absent state. Susan and Gilbert, on the other hand, argue that the voice of the magic mirror represents the voice of the king, that is, the king has the right to approve the decision of beauty. Likewise, in the field of film, male opinions occupy the same power of deciding the view of women as the voice in the magic mirror.

Although the works of the sixth generation directors have presented the world with rich images of women, their narratives are often told from the male point of view, inevitably depriving women of their right to speak. The point of view of the entire film *Suzhou River* is the male "I", who does even not appear in the film, but whose voice is used throughout the film to judge the men and women in the whole story. It is also important to note that all of the sixth generation directors are men, which has a significant impact on the portrayal of female characters in the film.

At the same time, in the field of Chinese film creation, there is an imbalance in the ratio of men to women in creative positions such as director, screenwriter, cinematographer, and artist. When female creators in real life are in a state of dissonance, it is inevitable that female characters in films are also in a state of dissonance. Therefore, female audiences receive signals from the "magic mirror" and watch the "angels", "femme fatale" or "madwomen" on the screen. They look at themselves, examine themselves behind the "magic mirror" and think about what they should look like. In the field of cinema, women have always been in a state of "silence".

## 3 Conclusion

This study takes the works of the sixth generation directors as the research text, and starts from the dualistic characterization of "angel" and "femme fatale", and then introduces the special characterization of "madwoman". The "madwoman" is a special role. The existence of such a character as the "madwoman" is a portrayal of a woman who has awakened to herself, and the manner in which she is portrayed depends on the director's attitude toward this type of woman. In addition to the director's personal tendency, this phenomenon is also caused by the structural gender imbalance in the creative field, so that both the female characters, the female creators, and the female audience lost their right to express their opinions through films, receiving "sage advice" from the men behind the magic mirror.

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**Contact email:** 18030443196@163.com  
wxy18030443196@gmail.com





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Sakae 1-16-26-201  
Naka Ward, Nagoya, Aichi  
Japan 460-0008  
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