

---

## The Commodification of Romance Thriller in Netflix's *You* Series

Leny Roslinda Sinaga<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

✉: [lenyroslindasinaga@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:lenyroslindasinaga@mail.ugm.ac.id)

---

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine how the *You* series uses the male gaze to commodify romance and thriller elements and manipulate aspects of the genre to draw viewers. Additionally, the analysis of the *You* series reveals that it questions patriarchal beliefs and gender representation in the media. In reviewing this research, qualitative analysis methods were used, and Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze theory was applied to analyze the data after examining primary and secondary data and finding supporting theories for the data. This research also uses a Transnational perspective to understand how Netflix produces, distributes, and consumes this genre in various countries and cultures. The result of this research concluded that the *You* series criticized the dynamics in heterosexual relationships, especially the concept that men should protect women in a way that often leads to control and violence. The *You* series encourages the audience to reconsider protection in relationships, exposing how these seemingly ideals can be weaponized and distorted into control, obsession, and violence.

Keywords: *male gaze; romance; series; thriller*

Article information  
(Filled by Editorial  
Management)

Received: 01 Aug, 2024

Revised: 12 Apr, 2025

Accepted: 15 Apr, 2025

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.22146/rubikon.v12i1.98846>

Available at <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/rubikon/article/view/98846>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

---

### INTRODUCTION

The commodification of literary genres has long been an aspect of publishing industry reflecting boarder

cultural trends. As (Greco et al., 2006) observe, "Publishing is not just cultural enterprise; it is also commercial activity deeply embedded in market

structures and consumer preferences" (p.5). Romance and thriller stand out for their distinct characteristics, wide popularity, and tradability in the cultural market. The hybrid genre of thriller romance is also gaining traction, combining the genre to readers' ever-evolving preferences. The elements of romance and thriller often result in an interesting story in terms of emotion and tension to the audience. The function of genre in the context of a film or series is to group works based on elements such as theme, atmosphere, setting and storytelling.

Furthermore, genre plays an important role in helping audiences determine their tastes and choose the films or series they want to enjoy based on the audience's preferences, interpretations. Many audiences choose their favourite genre which provides comfort and satisfaction. Genres are also part of a person's social and cultural identity, as well as the exploration and discovery of new works for those who try to watch genre films or series. From an industry perspective, genres help with the marketing and distribution of films. A film or series with proper

genre determination helps filmmakers and distributors reach a larger target audience (Berry-Flint, 2003). Thus, genre serves as an important tool in navigating the world of movies and series helping the audience to easily determine the genre that the audience likes and enjoys.

The American Journal of Cultural Sociology discusses the impact and reach of romance genre fiction, further supporting its popularity and demand (Michelson, 2022). The Publishing Research Quarterly examines the romance publishing industry and its pervasive influence, reinforcing its position as a highly sought-after genre (Cameron, 2020). Thus, the romance genre is one of the genres in film that is the most popular and in great demand by many audiences around the world. The popularity of the romance genre offers stories that are universal and touching and are able to reach various levels of society. Romance films or series tell the theme of love, which is one of the most basic emotions experienced by all humans. Love comes in many forms and can be felt by anyone, regardless of gender, age, and cultural background. The audience is invited to follow the emotional journey

of the main character, understanding struggles, happiness, and sadness. Relationships that develop on-screen movies and series often feel real and can reflect their own relationships. Relatable characters and emotional plots make the audience emotionally attached to the story, which can increase audience satisfaction. Therefore, romantic films and series are able to reach a wide and diverse audience. Audiences from different parts of the world can feel and understand the feelings depicted in romance films, be it the first love ending, happiness, or even heartbreak.

One of the main strengths of romance films and series is the diversity of sub-genres. Romance comes in many contexts and forms and is not limited to simple love. The romance genre is divided into several, namely contemporary romance, which depicts love relationships in the modern world with all complexities, historical romance with historical and cultural settings, and romance comedy which combines humor elements with light and fun love stories. The diversity of romance genres continues to grow and find new ways to

attract audiences so as not to be monotonous.

On the contrary, thriller films and series captivate the audience with a scenario full of suspense. Typically, an audience experiences excitement, anticipation, and anxiety when viewing a thriller. Because they may so readily be combined with any other genre, thrillers typically have a lot of subgenres. The thriller component can then be used in many other genres. Action, psychological, historical, and even romantic thrillers are a few genres that fit this category (Hellerman, 2023). Crime thrillers have antagonists such as terrorists, criminals, or insane people. These antagonists are often thematically linked to plots that involve political intrigues, terrorism, or murder. Meanwhile, psychological thrillers may center on obsession, false allegations, or even paranoia and deal with stalkers or sociopaths.

Thriller is also a favourite among film and series audiences, although scripts in this genre often tell creepy stories. One of the characteristics of the thriller genre is suspense, which presents high-risk

situations, unexpected threats, and surprising plot twists to make the audience think and guess. With elements of suspense, surprising plot twists, complex characters, and a tense atmosphere, thrillers provide a thrilling and satisfying viewing experience. However, the thriller genre remains popular and also has a worldwide audience. The commodification of thriller films and series involves the production of gripping narratives that follow a fast-moving, plot-driven structure. Majer defines the media as a key element in shaping human perceptions of serial killers, and the media often portrays them as monsters to attract the audience's attention (Majer, 2023).

Hybridity genre in the context of the romance thriller genre is a combination of elements from two different genres, namely romance and thriller to create a unique and interesting work. In the hybridity genre, romantic elements, such as the relationship between the main characters and the theme of love, are combined with thriller elements such as suspense, mystery, and threat. According to (Dowd et al., 2021) certain film genres - romantic films - have begun to

provide diverse depictions of female characters or continue to support stereotypical understandings of women as subordinate to the men in their lives. In that case, this genre appeals to audiences who are looking for emotional involvement from romantic storylines and suspense from thriller scenes. The commodification of this hybrid genre involves crafting a narrative that balances romance and suspense, often featuring the protagonist navigating romantic interests and dangerous situations. This genre gained popularity for its ability to provide diverse experiences and appealed to fans of both parent genres. So, the romance, thriller, and hybrid romance thriller genres reflect broader trends in popular culture.

Netflix's *You* exemplifies the hybrid commodification of genres in popular culture by blending romantic and psychological thriller to both entertain and provoke reflection. This fusion is not just stylistic - it reveals how traditional romance tropes in fated love, longing gazes, surveillance, and violence. The series constructs a heteronormative love story that initially appears charming but quickly deteriorates into obsessions

and manipulations. This challenges the audience's moral alignment. By centering Joe Goldberg's disturbing yet charismatic perspective, *You* complicates the audience's emotional response, forcing them to confront the thin line between affection and control. The result is a series that not only keeps the audience in suspense but also interrogates the ethical boundaries of love and desire in media narratives.

This research focuses on the hybridity of the romance thriller series *You* genre, which was distributed by Netflix in 2018 and is still in production until 2024. The series consists of 4 seasons and will air season 5 next year. The researcher chose this topic because the combination of romance and thriller genres in one series has a large audience. SVOD (subscription video on demand) or Netflix uses international coverage from different countries to access all services on the platform (Lotz, 2021). Netflix, as a global distributor, plays an important role in spreading and normalizing certain values and norms through marketing strategies and narratives.

Realizing this series tells about women who are victims of men, is one of the issues in

intimate partner violence. The issue is often discussed and fought for. Particularly in the United States, this problem is well ingrained in society. Because gender stereotypes are still prevalent, women are often the victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in films. This reflects reality and reinforces traditional values about women as vulnerable parties. However, films with Intimate Partner Violence are still being produced and attract audience globally. And then, the film encourages social change, inspires social change, and opens up space for discussion.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a qualitative method to analyze this research. According to Creswell in (Nguyen et al., 2022) qualitative research is a type of research that explores and understands meaning in a number of individuals or groups of people that come from social problems. In analyzing this research, Laura Mulvey's theory is used without including screenshots so that this research emphasizes theoretical analysis over visual illustrations. As Mulvey (1975) argues, "The determining male gaze projects it is phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (p.11),

highlighting the ideological constructions of femininity in visual narratives, uses cinematic techniques, textual description, and characteristics. Cinematic techniques will be used to understand and analyze, such as the characters, plot, and theme in each scene in the *You* series in season 1, which features Male Gaze by watching and understanding the series. Then, include relevant dialogues in literature, journals, online media, and relevant news to be used as research references.

After the data is collected, it is continued to analyze the data obtained in several ways. The process includes collecting and classifying data, adjusting and identifying with literature or supporting theories, discussing theoretical data analysis based on research findings, and drawing conclusions based on the data. The object of this research is a series entitled *You* which contains dialogues to analyze problems. Then, the researcher used observation techniques and documentation to collect data. The observation technique will be used to observe the script in the *You* series scene to show the male gaze by watching and understanding the series,

and elaborate the script to male gaze theory.

The exploitation of the male gaze in *You* series demonstrates how the romance thriller sub-genre has become commercialized. The story is told mostly from Joe's point of view, objectifying and making female characters become objects of his desire. In order to appeal to a broad audience, the series distinguishes itself by combining romance and thriller aspects. In sequences where Joe's voyeuristic gaze is prominent, this commodification is emphasized, underscoring scopophilia pleasure. However, *You* series also critiques this gaze by showcasing the destructive consequences of Joe's obsession. The combination of romance and thriller produces a complex nuanced story and commodifies the romance thriller subgenre.

Furthermore, examining these elements through Mulvey's theory, this research can see how *You* series navigates the tension between marketable entertainment and cultural critique. Based on the discussion above, concern, and interest, this research finds out how the *You* series combines elements of the romance thriller genre to attract audiences through the

lens of the male gaze. This analysis demonstrates how *You* used the male gaze to commodify romance and thriller elements, appealing to the audience while simultaneously offering a critical perspective on the implications of such a gaze in modern culture. Moreover, the aim of this research is to analyse the *You* series to help reveal that this series challenges patriarchal views and gender representation in the media.

The globalization has changed the way humans consume and distribute media, allowing content to spread to different countries quickly. Netflix is one of the platforms that takes advantage of globalization to distribute content to a global audience. Considering the object of this research a *You* series, a combination of romance thriller genres, to examine this phenomenon. This research uses the transnational perspective of Arjun Appadurai who introduced the concept of scapes in "Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization." (1996). Appadurai explains how these "scapes" interact and shape human experiences and identities in the context of dynamic globalization. The concept of "scapes" emphasizes

the fluidity, tension, and complexity of global flows that influence how we see the world and interact with each other (Appadurai, 1996). These concepts include mediascapes, ethoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes to examine the commodification of romance thriller.

## DISCUSSION

*You* series is an interesting issue of how romance and thriller themes may be combined to commercialize hybrid genres and appeal to a broad audience. The script of the show is built around the masculine gaze, which objectifies female characters and puts viewers in Joe's shoes. While this style allows for moments of transgression that give the characters more depth, it also reinforces established gender stereotypes. The popularity of the show proves that hybrid genres may be profitable, especially when they appeal to gender norms and pre-existing watching tastes. But it also emphasizes how difficult it continues to be to produce media that offers genuinely progressive gender depictions and completely breaks free from the constraints of the male gaze.

### **Joe Goldberg and Female Characters**

Romantic thriller storylines often revolve around male protagonists, with female characters playing the role of female characters playing secondary characters whose main function is to support the male hero's journey. This script focus reinforces traditional gender roles and perpetuates the idea that women's worth lies in their relationships with men (Traesar & Sujiwa, 2025). In the *You* series, the male protagonist is Joe Goldberg, played by Penn Badgley. Joe is a smart bookstore manager and obsessed with women who are the object of his affection and often dangerous. The following is an explanation of Joe's relationship with some of the main female characters in the series.

The first female character is Beck in season 1. Beck is an aspiring writer and the first object of Joe's obsession. Their relationship begins romantically but soon turns toxic. Joe spied on Beck, controlling aspects of his life, and eventually killed people he considered a threat to their relationship. Although Beck is initially attracted to Joe, she eventually realizes his dark side and tries to escape, but

ends tragically with Joe's murderous death.

The second is Love in Seasons 2 and 3, Love is a chef who also has a dark side, similar to Joe. Their relationship begins with a deep and intense love but quickly turns into a relationship full of manipulation and violence. Love, like Joe, has the ability to commit violence for love's sake, including killing people who are perceived as threats. Their relationship became increasingly complicated after getting married and having a child. Although there are moments of happiness, instability, and dark secrets, each makes their relationship fragile and eventually leads to destruction.

Third is Candace Stone in Seasons 1 and 2, Candace is Joe's ex-girlfriend who he thought was dead but turned out to be alive. Candace returns to Joe's life with the goal of revenge and uncovering the truth about him. Their relationship is full of tension and conflict, as Candace tries to stop Joe and warn people about the danger he poses.

Joe's relationship with these female characters shows a dangerous pattern of

obsessive and possessive behavior. Joe often sees himself as a savior or protector, but his actions actually show the nature of control and violence that destroys the lives of those around him. Joe's obsession with love leads him to commit horrific actions, showing that behind his calm and intelligent outward appearance, there is a dangerous psychopathic trait.

### **The Narration in *You* Series Strengthen the Male Gaze Concept**

The theory of the Male Gaze is taken from Laura Mulvey's essay entitled *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* in 1975. It is a critical concept that explores the patriarchal perspective in the representation of women in film and media. According to Mulvey, the cinematic perspective often represents women from the perspective of heterosexual men, which objectifies and functions women as sexual objects for men's visual satisfaction. In this theory, borrowing some psychoanalytic concepts from Sigmund Freud, such as scopophilia, and from Jacques Lacan, such as the mirror phase, Mulvey argues that patriarchal ideology is the dominant order in society and in Hollywood cinema narrative

films. In the past and present era, it is often depicted that the image and presence of female characters in films as passive characters and sexual objects for heterosexual men. This is found in narratives and in formal elements of films. In her essay, Laura Mulvey introduced the theory of Male Gaze, which questions how women are viewed for pleasure based on social structures that are active (male) and passive (female).

Components of the Male Gaze theory (Mulvey, 1975) explain scopophilia is the pleasure obtained from seeing, especially in a voyeuristic form. There are some situations where the source of pleasure can be found just by looking, and vice versa. Freud, in *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), distinguishes scopophilia as one of the components of sexual narcissism that exists as an impulse that is not bound to the erotogenic zone. He interpreted scopophilia as the objectivity of other humans, putting them under curious and controlling gazes. First, Narcissistic Identification is the identification of the audience with the male protagonist, often leading to a perspective that objectifies the female character. Second,

Objectification is when women are portrayed as objects of male desire and also portrayed in a way that emphasizes physical appearance over depth and personal agency.

The concept of the Male Gaze extends from film to any media, women are portrayed as an interesting experience in the real world. The body of the woman is used to sell and attract the attention of heterosexual men. Advertisements, magazine covers, and women's social media are more often displayed. In addition, in the world of literacy, there are still many male writers who describe women as objects in their books and mostly as sexual objects. Furthermore, the Male Gaze usually makes women be shown in two levels of eroticism, namely as erotic objects for actors in the film or erotic objects for male viewers. The plot is displayed by depicting women as objects seen by men through the camera movement, which is then forwarded to the audience.

Such visualization creates a more dominant male role by displaying women as passive objects. Thus, the Male Gaze has two main components, namely women as the object of the Male Gaze and the audience, who are finally required to be able to adapt

to the male character. She argued that mainstream cinema often portrays women from a heterosexual male perspective, objectifying them and relegating them to passive roles. The male gaze involves three perspectives, namely the perspective of the male character within the narrative, the perspective of the audience, assumed to be male, and the perspective of the camera, controlled by male filmmakers.

In the world of film, most men become filmmakers. Men make films that are targeted at men as well. Therefore, most films usually make men the main role in the story while women are the only characters who are given limited functions to serve or achieve the goals of the male protagonist. Typical examples of the application of the Male Gaze in the film include close-up shots of women who follow the direction of men's eye movements in exploring the female body, moving shots, and finally fixating on the body of the woman and so on.

This series uses camera perspectives and narratives to reinforce the concept of the male gaze, which is the view of men who view women as objects. Here are a few ways the series illustrates the concept of male gaze. Most

episodes are accompanied by a voice narration from Joe Goldberg, which gives the audience direct access to his thoughts. The dialogue below is a finding in Joe's point of view.

Joe : Here's what I Learned this week. You are special. You're talented. You're passionate. You're smart. Except in the ways you are really not. Like not locking your phone. And falling for men like Benji. You know better, but you can't stop. Because, well, because everyone needs someone. What you really need is someone to save you. I can help, Beck. Let me help you. (You Series Season 1 Eps 1 [40:02 - 40:16])

This script often shows how Joe views and judges the women around him. The script frame the audience's view of the female characters, as the audience hears Joe's interpretation of them before the audience actually sees them develop as individuals. Joe's perspective is often manipulative and distorts reality, making him sound like a caring and compassionate person.

Joe : It's the last thing we ever did together. In the end, you couldn't love me. I

feel at peace with that now, because I loved you. the absolute best that I could. And I gave you what you wanted. I helped you become the writer you so wanted to be. It's sad you're not here to see it. But I know you would be so happy. (You Series Season 1 Eps 10 [45:14 - 45:50])

Joe's voice increasingly puts the audience into his mind in making plans or describing whatever is thinking. So that this involvement builds a strong relationship between the audience and the series.

Intense observation where the camera often follows the direction of Joe's gaze, showing how he spies and observes women. This creates a voyeuristic experience for the audience, where the audience is positioned as a secret keeper, like Joe.

Joe : You can't afford new clothes, but let's be real, you'd look perfect in a potato sack. Not a criticism, God knows I am, too, but you seem distracted. Of course, a new phone. Not sure how you went 24 hours without one. As you active your new friend there, I know you think you're also deactivating your old

one. But here's where you're wrong. Your old phone, which I have, is still logged into the cloud. And that means I'm still logged into you. sci-fi movies are so wrong. Technology is our friend. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 2 [01:56 - 02:36])

The camera often picks up Joe's point of view, giving the viewer access to Joe's voyeuristic view of Beck. The script above is an sample of a scene where Joe walks Beck through a window and follows his every move on social media. The camera presents Beck in very personal and vulnerable moments, all of which are without the knowledge or approval of the female character. The series further uses close-ups of women's faces or bodies from Joe's point of view, reinforcing the idea that they are seen as objects. This shot not only shows their physical beauty but also how Joe sees their every move and expression. From the data above, the close-up was taken when Joe was outside Beck's house to spy on his every move.

The main characters such as Beck and Love, are often portrayed through Joe's idealistic and romantic views,

which then turn into possessive and controlling.

Joe : The point, Beck ... love is, uh, tricky. A guy needs to protect himself. I had to be sure you're safe. Your name was a glorious place to start. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 1 [06:41 - 07:13])

Joe finished some peanut butter and saltines out of a sleeve. He sits in front of an elderly MacBook. On the screen and search box, Joe types in Guinevere Beck. Joe scrolls on Beck's social media to looking for privacy information about her.

Joe : There you were. Every account set to public. you want to be seen. Heart. Known. Of course, I obliged. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 1 [07:18 - 07:15])

This shows how they are seen not as individuals of their own wants and needs but as objects that Joe must own and control. In addition, Joe uses his observations and knowledge of the lives of these women to control them. He tracks their social media, stalks them, and manages situations so that they feel they need or depend on him. The visual objectification that Beck is often shown through close-ups that highlight his physical appeal, according to how Joe sees and

wants it. The camera captures Beck by focusing attention on his body, not on his individual or personality. According to Liza's understanding from *Mass Media Representation of Gendered Violence*, she said the ways in which male power and masculinity are associated with violence in a variety of interpersonal contexts, including sexual interactions, have been especially problematic in mainstream mass media. (Carter et al., 2014). Mass media images that present violence as a normal part of sex, blur the lines between consent and rape, or show an intimate encounter as starting with force and ending with mutual desire, encourage viewers to believe that women are desirous of sexual violation and that men are incapable of providing non-violent intimacy. These kinds of portrayals are widespread and can be found in a wide range of media and genres.

While clearly committing criminal and manipulative acts, the narrative and camera often make us see the world from Joe's point of view. This creates moral ambiguity where the audience is forced to feel empathy or at least understanding towards Joe, even if his behavior is unjustified.

Joe : Another person I failed to help. I thought I could better myself for you. I couldn't. I tried to be the perfect boyfriend, the perfect friend to your friends, and it wasn't enough. So, to hell with it. It's freeing in a way to know so definitively where I stand. Where you stand. To know for certain what I have to do to protect you. and just like that, everything clicks into place. My feet. Runner's high. It is pretty great. And I remember this is why I took up jogging. (*You Series* Season 1 Episode 5 [40:31 - 41:13])

By positioning the audience through Joe's point of view, visually and narratively, *You* series invites the audience to see the world through the lens of a male gaze.

Joe : Oh. She's dead. of course, she's dead. She fell. That's right she fell. An accident. Happens all the time. She was running and she fell. Into a rock. Over and over again. Okay, let's be real, she was attacked. Someone attacked her. But maybe they had a good reason, right? You ever think of that, Detective? Shit! Detective are real. And DNA is a

thing and I just hit that girl with a rock. God, the sound. I would never hurt a woman. But she was a dangerous flesh-hungry harpy. She forced my hand. That's on her and her family for screwing her up. I had to, Beck. I had to. I knew you'd never forgive me, but she gave me no choice. I'm not a bad person. She was going to ruin you. but you're safe now. Thanks to me. I just want you to live your best life. It's brave, what I do for you. it's not easy. It's hard. Sometimes it makes me sick. I'm brave. How many guys will do anything for the person they love? Honestly, Beck. You're lucky to have me. (*You* Series Season 1 Episode 5 [41:35 - 42:26])

It effectively shows how possessive views and objectivity can occur while also criticizing and exposing the destructive impact of those views. The series opens up a discussion of how narrative and visuals can be used to reinforce or challenge gender and power stereotypes.

### **Exposure to Gender Violence**

The romantic and suspense aspects of the *You* series genre are used to criticize gender stereotypes. The *You*

series uses romantic and suspense aspects to critique gender stereotypes, highlighting the power dynamics and dangerous behaviors that are hidden behind romantic relationships. As discussed above, illustrates the difference between true love and obsession. Joe Goldberg claims that his actions are driven by love, but his statement is a form of toxic and possessive obsession. This criticizes the stereotype that extreme actions in the name of love are romantic or justified. Likewise, in the Narration of the Patient Man, Joe is often described as a patient and caring man who only wants to protect the woman he loves. However, his actions show that this spreading and protective nature is often used to spread manipulative and controlling intentions. The series criticizes the idea that a man who seems perfect on the outside can have very dark intentions on the inside.

This research captures a clue that with the narrative of tension in the story series, tension is a criticism of heterosexual stereotypes. The very clear part is about control and domination, control and domination, where tension often stems from Joe's actions to control the lives

of the women he loves. The use of technology and surveillance shows how men can use their power to control and intimidate women, criticizing gender stereotypes about who is in control in relationships. At this point, it can be found in the dialogue between Beck and Joe in the last episode of the series.

Joe : Wait, wait, wait, please wait. I know you're angry. I know.

Beck : You have no idea what I am, you fucking psychopath.

Joe : I knew it was too good to be true.

Beck : What, I all the nice things I said to you while I was locked in a cage? You actually believe that all of this is somehow justified.

Joe : It is.

Beck : You are insane. You think that you did some bad shit and that I did some bad shit and that this is equivalent? Yeah, I lied. I cheated. But didn't stalk you, I didn't hit you. I didn't kill people. I didn't do any of this!

Joe : There's not all line in the world that I wouldn't cross for you.

Beck : I didn't ask you to swoop in for me.

Joe : But you did. Your life was a mess.

Beck : Yes, but it was my life. And I didn't need some sociopath on a white horse to clean house. I mean, what gives you the right? You thought that I would be grateful? You ... You are him. You are the bad thing. You are the thing that you should have killed.

Joe : If you let me out, we can just talk.

Beck : You know what I think? I think that this was all just an excuse. An excuse to justify creeping into girls' lives and violating the shit out of them. I think you love it. The power. You love it...!

Joe : No, I don't.

Beck : I think that this ... this was the perfect excuse to take put people like Benji and Peach, who've always looked down on you and your whole miserable life. But you ... You are not special. You're broken. I could never love you. Rot in here, you psychotic asshole. You're gonna spend the rest of your life in jail. (You Series Season 1 Episode 10 [39:30 - 41:31])

The fake security part is creating tension by showing how women feel safe around Joe, only to determine that he is their biggest threat. This

criticizes the stereotype that men who seem trustworthy and kind always have good intentions. Violence is carried out to overcome what male characters perceive as dangerous or a barrier to their relationship. Although the intention was to protect, this action actually created great danger. The implication is that Joe tries to control aspects of women's lives under the pretext of protecting them from harm. This includes deciding who they can be sectarian with and what they do, which slowly erodes women's freedom and autonomy.

The thriller elements in the *You* series play an important role in reinforcing gender-related messages. The psychological tension built through Joe's action to manipulate and control those around him, especially women, shows the power dynamics in the relationship. Joe's action of monitoring, stalking, and controlling the lives of the women he loves reflects how men can use their power to oppress and control women. The stalking aspect is a major thriller element in *You* series that highlights the fears and insecurities that many women experience in real life. The series shows how Joe's seemingly loving actions are

actually a highly invasive and dangerous form of control.

The thriller element also arises from Joe's internal conflict between his image as an ideal protector and lover and the reality of his cruel and obsessive actions. It criticizes gender stereotypes about men as true protectors, showing how protection can turn into dominance. In his extreme, Joe commits the murder with the aim of protecting Beck. This is a critique of the traditional concept of masculinity that often associates violence with protection. In addition, Joe often appears to be a good and caring man on the surface, but underneath him are manipulative and dangerous qualities. These elements show how a seemingly good man can be a threat to women always comes from a clear and easily recognizable source.

The plot twists in the *You* series often expose the dark side of the characters, including women like Love, who have a dark side and the ability to commit violence. It criticizes the stereotype that women are always passive victims in thriller stories by showing that they can also have power. Then, the thriller element creates moral uncertainty, where the audience is forced to question

the character's actions and motivations. For example, even though the audience sees Joe as the protagonist, his cruel and manipulative actions force the audience to question sympathy for Joe.

The issue in this series is related to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a form of violence or abuse that occurs between individuals who are or have been involved in romantic or intimate relationships, such as girlfriends, life partners, or husband and wife. This violence can include various forms, including physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic (Violence, 2018). IPV can occur in heterosexual relationships as well as same-sex relationships and can affect individuals of all ages, races, backgrounds, and social status.

Rigid gender roles, this series shows that traditional gender roles can facilitate and justify control behavior. Joe feels entitled to control Beck because he sees himself as his protector. It criticizes the view that women need to be protected by men by depriving women of their freedom and autonomy. First, violence and abuse, this series shows the physical and psychological violence experienced by women at the

hands of Joe. This violence adds to the tension but also highlights the issues of gender violence and how power can be abused in intimate relationships. Second, reaction and resistance, the thriller element also pays attention to how the women reacts and fights against this violence. Beck and Love, they showed different ways to fight and defend, even though they were often in vulnerable positions.

Related to the issues in this series, there is coercive control which is a form of violence in intimate relationships that involves a series of actions that aim to dominate, control, and regulate the behavior and freedom of the victim (Stark, 2012). This tactic does not always involve physical violence but can be just as or more damaging to the mental and emotional well-being of the victim. Coercive control is often difficult to recognize because it appears in a subtle form and is often mistaken for concern or protection by behavior.

Penn Badgley as a main character had an interview to discuss IPV in *You* series. "Penn Badgley may play a murderous psychopath in Netflix's *You*," but in real-life, he's an outspoken

advocate against gender-based violence. The role has also drawn controversy, as Badgley himself has warned viewers not to normalize or overlook Joe's behavior. Yet Badgley has also said he hopes the role can present an opportunity to openly discuss and probe gender-based violence." (Aviles, 2020). The news contained an interview with Penn Badgley also discussed the role of gender and social media in gender-based violence through *You* series. Thus, the *You* series is not only an entertaining psychological thriller but also a critique of certain dynamics in heterosexual relationships. Through the issues, it explores the traditional concept that men should protect women, often in an exaggerated and unhealthy way.

The key principles of sound and image interaction in film are established, and they include: harmony or intensification of the interaction between the recipients' perception of the inner sense and their own, mutual reinforcement and counterpoint between sound and visual components in film drama, consistency and logic in the development of the storyline and unfolding of the concept of the film. According to (Kharchenko, 2020), the

following are the main purposes of music in film: controlling emotions; enhancing artistic communication; establishing intertextuality within the work; providing "background" support for the primary plot line; and integrating the other elements of the screenplay's structure, such as the plotline.

The illustrative, contrast, synchronous, communicative, and structural basic models of how music interacts with a story function in a movie. The fundamental ideas and purposes of music in contemporary film, which have been influenced by advancements in technology and creative practice, are supported. Certain models of the interplay between sound and visuals on screen are determined by the functions of music in movies. The dark cinematographic techniques and the close framing of the face or Joe's actions reinforce feelings of terror and fear, highlighting women being objects of surveillance and violence. Similarly, the music used often adds tension and discomfort, reinforcing the message that behind the word romantic, there is a real and dangerous threat. By combining these elements of thriller, the *You* series not only creates an engaging and

suspenseful story but also sends a powerful message about gender dynamics, power, and violence. This series invites the audience to question and criticize gender stereotypes that are often taken for granted in romantic relationships and society in general.

The *You* series stands out as one of the clearest sample of the interaction between the commodification of the romance thriller genre and the male gaze theory in today's popular culture. Told through the perspective of Joe, a handsome but obsessive and manipulative bookstore manager. The series combines elements of romance and thriller in a scary way and invites a crisis reflection on how people consume love stories in the media. Genre commodification is the process by which elements of a genre are taken and adapted to maximize commercial appeal. In the context of *You*, it means taking elements from both romance and thriller genres to create a story that appeals to researcher who want the emotional tension of a love story.

In *You* series, Joe's act of stalking and controlling women is framed as a form of deep love. This narrative clearly embeds his actions in a

romantic context, even though it is actually terrifying. So that the audience is interested and continues to watch, this is an example of commodification, where the scary elements of thrillers are romanticized to attract audiences who enjoy the genre. Additionally, the series emphasizes the high emotional tension in the relationship between Joe and his target. The mixture of feelings of attraction and fear is a hallmark of the romance thriller genre, and this commodification increases the emotional involvement of the audience in the fate of these characters. Joe is portrayed as a charismatic character and, at the same time, very morally flawed. This approach creates an additional layer of plot and characterization, making the series even more engaging and engaging for viewers. Gluing is not just watching a villain. They are watching someone they can understand, even if his actions are unjustifiable.

In relation to the above, the theory of Male Gaze by Laura Mulvey refers to the way in which the media often represents the world and characters from the perspective of heterosexual men, who objectify and judge women based on their physical

attractiveness and ability to satisfy men's desires. In the *You* series, this theory is very evident in how the narrative and plot development are influenced from a male point of view. The woman in *You* series is often positioned as an object to be seen and judged based on Joe's wants and needs. They became. The center of Joe's obsession is not because of their individuality but how they are seen by Joe. This is a direct manifestation of the male gaze, where women are made the object of men's gaze.

The narrative of *You* series is controlled and mostly told from the point of view of Joe, who strengthens the Male Gaze. The audience sees the world through her eyes, often deducing the more complicated reality of the female characters. This perspective leads the audience to understand, and even in the middle of the story the audience can sympathize with Joe's actions. Thus, Male Gaze influences how the plot develops, especially in the way the relationship between Joe and the woman is built and destroyed. The focus on Joe's desires and perspectives directs the development of a plot that sacrifices a deeper characterization of women.

The interaction between genre commodification and male gaze creates a narrative that makes the viewer feel torn between sympathizing with Joe and horrifying his actions. This creates a consistent tension in the plot, forcing the viewer to keep watching to see how the story will unfold. The series also criticizes real phenomena such as stalking, relationship violence, and surveillance. There is a critical aspect of social issues, so by highlighting the extremities of Joe's behavior through the lens of Male Gaze from the commodification thriller series, this thriller series invites the audience to question the normalization and romanticization of the act in popular culture.

Overall, the commodification of the romance thriller genre and the male gaze theory in the *You* series creates an interesting narrative and critiques relevant social issues. The series is not just a series of stories about love and obsession, but also a reflection of how viewers view and consume the series in popular culture. The result of combining romance thrillers in one story was successfully enjoyed by all viewers. The large number of viewers'

interests adds to the correlation that many viewers associate themselves with issues of relationships and violence.

## CONCLUSION

The success of the romance thriller series with social issues regarding love and tension has made many viewers interested in watching. The *You* series airs on Netflix, a major streaming platform that can reach a global audience. So, the audience is often invited to see the world through Joe's perspective. The audience was placed in the position of an active observer identified by Laura Mulvey.

Through the Male Gaze theory, the *You* series on Netflix can be seen as a commodification representation of the romance thriller genre that reinforces and criticizes the dynamics of gender power in popular culture. The female characters in the *You* series are objectified and controlled through the perspective of the male protagonist. The narrative is built from Joe Goldberg's point of view, influencing the audience to understand and judge female characters in the form of sexualization and control.

Thus, the *You* series encourages viewers to re-

evaluate the traditional concept of protection in relationships. Through this narrative, it reminds the audience of the importance of equality, respect, and freedom in every relationship, as well as rigid and manipulative gender roles.

## REFERENCES

- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Aviles, G. (2020, January 28). *Penn Badgley condemns violence against women*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/pop-culture-news/penn-badgley-who-plays-murderous-psychopath-netflix-s-you-condemns-n1124561>
- Berry-Flint, S. (2003). Genre. *A Companion to Film Theory* (pp. 25-44).
- Cameron, L. (2020). The Romance Publishing Industry and Its Reputation. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 36(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-019-09703-2>
- Carter, C., Steiner, L., & McLaughlin, L. (Eds.). (2014). *The Routledge companion to media and*

- gender. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Dowd, J., Crabtree, A., & Cannon, B. (2021). Movies, gender, and social change: The hollywood romance film. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 32.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1979479>
- Greco, A. N., Rodríguez, C. E., & Wharton, R. M. (2006). *The Culture and Commerce of Publishing in the 21st Century*. Stanford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804779425>
- Hellerman, J. (2023). *Defining The Thriller Genre in Movies and TV | No Film School*.  
<https://nofilmschool.com/thriller-genre-definition>
- Kharchenko, P. (2020). Principles of Functional Classification of Music in Cinema. *ARTISTIC CULTURE. TOPICAL ISSUES*, 16(1), 179-188.  
<https://doi.org/10.31500/1992-5514.16.2020.205257>
- Lotz, A. D. (2021). In between the global and the local: Mapping the geographies of Netflix as a multinational service. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(2), 195-215.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877920953166>
- Majer, E. (2023). *The Representation of Serial Killers in the Media* [PhD Thesis, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek. Faculty of Humanities and ...].  
<https://repositorij.unios.hr/en/islandora/object/ffos%3A6561>
- Michelson, A. (2022). The Politics of Happily-Ever-After: Romance Genre Fiction as Aesthetic Public Sphere. In M. A. Thumala Olave (Ed.), *The Cultural Sociology of Reading* (pp. 453-496). Springer International Publishing.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13227-8\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13227-8_16)
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6-18.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>
- Nguyen, T. N. M., Whitehead, L., Dermody, G., & Saunders, R. (2022). The use of theory in qualitative research: Challenges, development of a framework and exemplar. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 78(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.15053>
- Stark, E. (2012). Re-presenting battered women: Coercive control and the defense of liberty.

*Violence against Women:  
Complex Realities and New  
Issues in a Changing World,*  
19.

Traesar, L., & Sujiwa, K.  
(2025). A gender  
performativity analysis on  
gender norms portrayed in  
*Louisa May Alcott's Little  
Women*. *JOLALI: Journal of  
Language and Literature*,  
3(1), 18-22.  
[https://jolali.respati.ac.i  
d/index.php/jolali](https://jolali.respati.ac.id/index.php/jolali)

Violence, I. P. (2018).  
*Intimate partner violence*.  
[https://www.nwhjournal.org/  
article/S1751-  
4851\(15\)30830-8/abstract](https://www.nwhjournal.org/article/S1751-4851(15)30830-8/abstract)