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Tracing American Spirit in Indonesia's Independence: A Historical-comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

The US and Indonesia, two countries that fought for freedom, are fascinating subjects to delve more into, despite their great distance from one another and their distant times of conflict. This research used a Transnational American Studies perspective and comparative-historical analysis. By using comparative historical analysis, this research aimed to explore the similarities and differences that exist in the journey of American independence and Indonesian independence. The results of this research showed that even though the independence movements in the US and Indonesia occurred several centuries apart, they had the same goal, namely opposing colonialism. Both showed the same enthusiasm to fight colonial power and the desire to determine the fate of their nation without interference from other parties. Thomas Paine and Bung Tomo through their writings and speeches led the spirit of independence in the US and Indonesia. Even though they use different communication styles, both have an impact in forming the spirit of resistance and unity of their nation. Additionally, by looking at the history of the struggle of the Indonesian people, it can be seen the spirit of freedom that the US promoted.

Keywords: *Bung Tomo; comparative historical analysis; Thomas Paine; transnational*

INTRODUCTION

Looking at the history of the US and Indonesian independence struggles shows the similarity of the struggle in expelling colonialists and winning based on the spirit of nationalism. Even though they are several centuries apart, the independence of the US and Indonesia shows the same spirit in fighting colonialism.

The spirit of the Indonesian people in their fight for independence from colonialists, particularly the Dutch, and Japanese, shows a similar track record to the American people's struggle to achieve their independence from British colonies, despite the enormous geographical distance and stark differences in cultural diversity that separate Indonesia and the US (Rotter, 2003). Both promoted the values of freedom and the enthusiasm to determine the fate of their nation, issued proclamations of independence, and experienced diplomatic struggles and physical war to achieve independence (McMahon, 2020).

Tracing back to World War II, which reached its peak in 1945, the fact that the Allied bloc won this war had a major global impact on both the countries involved directly and indirectly (Alviyani, 2020). This war had a profound effect on Indonesia in several areas. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Indonesia was taken over by the Japanese troops on March 8, 1942 (Syabriya, 2022). The Japanese population led to economic exploitation and the use of Indonesian labor for the war effort (Beck, 2015). Indonesian civilians were used as forced laborers to build defense structures and other war-related facilities. Additionally, from a political perspective, this war also triggered the process of decolonization in Asia and Africa, which led to many countries becoming independent from European colonialism (Gouda & Zaalberg, 2002).

At first, the US tried to remain neutral and did not want to abandon the Netherlands, an important European ally (Triyono, 2020). However, the US began to show sympathy and involve itself more seriously when the Dutch launched the Second Military Aggression in Yogyakarta, which began in December 1948, and in the process of an agreement negotiated with the United Nations Committee of Good Offices (McMahon, 1978). The US played a decisive role in the final stages of Indonesia's independence struggle, in early 1949, which forced the Dutch to

decide to start a Dutch-Indonesian with Republican leaders and ultimately led to the formal recognition of Indonesia's independence on December 27, 1949.

Furthermore, through economic pressure on the Netherlands to renounce its colonial power over the Dutch East Indies, the US played a significant role in Indonesia's rise to independence (Hancock, 1973a). Regarding Cold War strategy and colonial policy in Southeast Asia, Indonesia emerged as a critical test of US diplomatic power. The struggle in the Dutch East Indies between Dutch nationalist and colonial forces was not directly resolved by American military force, but American actions there were significantly different from the restricted war methods used in later Asia.

Apart from that, the US also gave its support to Indonesia through a pamphlet released by the US entitled *It's 1776 in Indonesia* in 1949 which posited a connection between the Indonesian Revolution and the American Revolution (Gouda & Zaalberg, 2002). Gouda and Zaalberg specifically explain this pamphlet in their book entitled *American Visions of the Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia: US Foreign Policy and Indonesian Nationalism*. In the second chapter of this book, they explain that there was an article in the Free Trade Union News written by Andrew Woll that mentioned the support and sympathy of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for Indonesia's struggle and their distrust of what the Dutch were doing to Indonesia.

Inspired by the discussion of *It's 1776 in Indonesia,* Susilo & Pratamasari (2018a) conducted research to explore how America inspired the Indonesian revolution by analyzing the founding fathers of Indonesia. This research used the symbolic-interactionism perspective to examine the speech and writings of Indonesian founding fathers, Achmad Soekarno, Mohamad Hatta, and Soetan Sjahrir. The result of this study showed that Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir drew inspiration from the US in different ways. Soekarno referred to and mentioned the United States more often than Hatta and Sjahrir. Compared to inspiration from other countries, the influence of the US on the third figure is not so dominant. This is due to the view that the liberal democratic system and capitalist system practiced by the US are not the best choices in the view of Soekarno, Hatta,

and Sjahrir (Susilo & Pratamasari, 2018b).

The researcher recognized a research gap in this topic due to the scarcity of reports about this issue, so the researcher was triggered to delve deeper into the American trace in Indonesia's independence. Hence, this study aimed to explore the spirit of the US on Indonesia's independence through comparing the historical context of both these countries.

METHODOLOGY

By conducting research within the framework of American studies, which is interdisciplinary and involves various theories and scientific disciplines. This research was conducted within the framework of Transnational American Studies using comparative-historical analysis.

The transnational perspective provides the crossroads results in the process from historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas, goods, community, politics, and cultures. This crossroad could occur in areas outside the geographic and political boundaries of the US as well as within it (Fishkin, 2005).

Furthermore, by using comparative historical

analysis, the researcher can examine historical events to create valid explanations outside a specific time and place, either by direct comparison with other historical events, theory building, or contemporary references (Neuman, 2014). According to Neuman, comparative-historical data is qualitative research in which the researcher examines data on events and conditions in the historical past and/or in different societies.

As previously mentioned, comparative-historical analysis was performed in this study to understand the data. Thus, this study used a variety of data sources. Firstly, the primary data was historical manuscripts related to America and Indonesia's independence such as the pamphlet of *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, and the manuscript of Bung Tomo's speech. The manuscript of the pamphlet *Common Sense* was downloaded through the official website of the Library of Congress. Then, the manuscript of Tomo's speech was downloaded through trusted online news platforms due to limited access to the official archival institution of the Republic of Indonesia. Secondly, books, article journals, and related articles were the secondary data in this research.

DISCUSSION

The researcher has examined the data sources, both primary and secondary data. By using comparative historical analysis, the results of this research analysis are discussed in several sections.

The Journey of American Independence

The US has a long story about the British colonization of it. As a result of the British and French Seven Years' War (1756-1763), although victory was in the hands of the British, the US had to pay for the losses suffered by the British in this war. England began to implement policies that were detrimental to the colonies in the US (Nelson, 1978). One of the triggers for the thirteen colonies' resistance to England could be seen when the Stamp Act policy, a policy where every colony in the US had to pay taxes on every trade transaction using stamps, was implemented in March 1765. This colonial resistance began to occur when the Boston Massacre occurred in 1765. The protest incident carried out by the colonies against the British army killed one colonist and two people were seriously injured.

However, the British soldiers who were guilty in this case did not receive appropriate sanctions from the British government for this mistake. It didn't stop there. The British kingdom again passed the Tea Act policy (1773) which imposed high taxes on tea imported from England. The separatist group, the Sons of Liberty from the American colonies, protested by throwing approximately 92,000 tons of tea loaded by British ships into the sea. This event became known as the Boston Tea Party.

Britain once again responded to the Boston Tea Party protests by passing coercive or intolerable laws. The major events that culminated in the road to American independence began with British repressive actions known as the Coercive Acts or Intolerable Acts. The British implemented several repressive measures, including closing Boston Harbor and limiting Massachusetts' autonomy. Tensions between the British and the American colonies reached a peak in April 1775 when brief battles occurred at Lexington and Concord (Cogliano, 2010). In this case, British troops attempted to seize and confiscate colonial weapons. Although the fighting was short-lived, tensions rose and sparked further conflict. British troops then moved to Concord and managed to find and

destroy weapons supplied by the colonial militia. However, news of the attack spread, and the increasingly powerful American militia launched a counterattack. The Battle of Concord's North Bridge forced British forces to retreat, and the return trip to Boston became a continuing conflict with increasingly powerful American militia attacks. The Battles of Lexington and Concord greatly increased the mobility of colonial militias and marked the beginning of the American Revolutionary War, which lasted eight years and led to American independence.

First called in September 1774, the Continental Congress tried to organize a reaction to British operations. The purpose of this Congress was to organize colonial protests British policies and denounce the British government's oppressive activities. The second Continental Congress was then called in May 1775, and it was during this assembly that George Washington was named supreme commander of the Continental Army.

Many writings in favor of American independence were published during this intense period. A notable literary work that had a substantial impact on the American people's decision to reject the British monarchy and embrace independence. Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*, which he wrote in January 1776, gained widespread influence and was read by all. The idea of independence was supported, and the spirit of battle was sparked by this pamphlet.

When the Continental Congress published the American Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, the process of gaining independence achieved its zenith. Written by Thomas Jefferson, this proclamation outlined the fundamental rights that every person is believed to have and officially separated America from the British colonies. The Declaration of Independence's acceptance served as a foundation for the future of the US and represented a significant step toward the formation of an independent nation.

The US had a difficult time building a stable system of governance after gaining independence. The Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, which resulted in a new constitution the following year, was one way that this process was expressed. A new chapter in the history of the newly established nation began in 1789 with the inauguration of George Washington as the nation's first president.

The Journey of Indonesian Independence

The Dutch first arrived at Banten Harbor on 23 June 1596 led by Captain Pieter Keyzer and Cornelis de Houtman. The initial purpose of his arrival here was none other than purely to trade in spices by selling them back to Europe at high prices. However, as time went by, the Dutch began to monopolize trade and colonize Indonesia (Rotter, 2003).

In 1602, the Dutch formed a Dutch trade association called Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie (VOC) to minimize trade competition between fellow Dutch traders and reap maximum profits as well as strengthen the Dutch position against the Portuguese and Spanish (Hancock, 1973b). However, the Dutch government took over the VOC in 1799 because of the large amount of corruption that occurred. After controlling and occupying Indonesia for a long time, the Dutch also began to interfere with royal affairs. This received a response from the kingdom, especially Prince Diponegoro, who killed many native victims. This Dutch victory made their position stronger and more arbitrary in Indonesia.

The occurrence of World Wars I and II had a significant impact on political dynamics in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), bringing changes in the direction of the journey towards independence. When World War II ended Japan accepted its defeat after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed on August 6 and 9. This allows Indonesia to become independent. This was used by Indonesian figures, such as Sukarno, and Mohamad Hatta. to proclaim Indonesia's independence. On August 16, 1945, the *Rengasdengklok* incident occurred in which Sukarno and Hatta were kidnapped by young people and forced to proclaim Indonesia's independence immediately. In this event, two groups were divided, namely young and old, who finally agreed that the proclamation of independence would be held on August 17, 1945 (McMahon, 1978).

After Japan surrendered at the end of World War II, Indonesia welcomed the moment with a proclamation of independence on August 17, 1945, which was announced by Soekarno and Hatta. However, the Netherlands attempted to restore its colonial control in Indonesia. It sparked the Indonesian War of Independence against the Dutch, which lasted from 1945 to 1949. After that, they held a meeting at Admiral Maeda's house to formulate the

text of the proclamation. This manuscript was then signed by Soekarno and Hatta on behalf of the Indonesian people (De Graaf, 1959). On 17 August 1945, Indonesia finally announced its independence and on 18 August the Preamble of the 1945 Constitution was passed (A, 2019; Siburian, 2022).

However, the proclamation of Indonesian independence did not immediately eliminate the colonialists from Indonesia. Japan's defeat made the Dutch and their allies want to control Indonesia again. This received fierce resistance from the Indonesian people which caused many clashes to occur throughout Indonesia, including the Battle of Bojong Kokosan, the people of Sukabumi against the British and NICA which became the forerunner to the Bandung Sea of Fire incident, the Five Day Battle of Semarang, the 10 November Surabaya incident, the Battle of Medan Area, Ambarawa Battle in Semarang, Battle of Lengkong; The Battle of the Bali Strait, the Battle of Margarana, the Battle in Palembang, the Battle of the Cirebon Sea, the Battle of the Sibolga Sea, Military Aggression I and II, the March 1, 1949, General Attack in Yogyakarta and the Surakarta General Attack.

The struggle to maintain independence was not only carried out through war but also diplomatic struggle. After receiving support from various countries such as Palestine, Meris, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the US. Then, on December 27, 1949 in Den Hagh, Netherlands, the Netherlands officially recognized Indonesia's sovereignty at the Round Table Conference. This event marked the end of the colonial era and the beginning of a new phase in the history of independent Indonesia. Even though it has achieved independence, Indonesia still must face various challenges in the future, including building a new country and establishing the foundations for national development.

The Spirit of Independence Through Pamphlet and Speech

From the independence journey of the US and Indonesia, it can be seen that both fought for their independence from colonialists with a series of battles and diplomatic struggles. the US's spirit in fighting for independence cannot be separated from the *Common Sense* pamphlet written by Paine. *Common Sense* (full title *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America, on the Following Interesting Subjects*) inspired the US

independence movement. Early on, Paine wrote in a series of letters that would be published in various Philadelphia papers (Paine, 1776).

However, because the writing turned out to be too long and unwieldy to publish as a letter, Paine chose the pamphlet form. In simple, clear, and persuasive language, this pamphlet explained the situation at that time, why the American people had to fight for their independence, and why independence itself needed to be achieved. This pamphlet was published anonymously on January 10, 1776, at the beginning of the American Revolution. Paine's writing has become a topic of discussion for many people in various circles (Hogan & Williams, 2000).

Paine began his writing by explaining what society is and what government should be. Paine mentioned,

> Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil in its worst state an intolerable one; .... (Paine, 1776).

He emphasized the natural rights that every citizen has, one of which is independence. He expressed his thoughts that the government run by the US under the British monarchy was undemocratic and very far from the people. The government, which should serve as a listener to the aspirations of the people, cannot carry out its role well because there are too many intermediaries that must be passed through to get to the King.

Paine even makes readers think about how it is possible for a king who is confined to the palace to solve the problems experienced by his people. The government should be elected directly by the people and come from the people themselves to be able to know well what problems the people are experiencing and provide the best solutions.

Paine then emphasized that the monarchy system currently being implemented in England has no religious basis because in the Bible there is nothing that regulates whether humans are divided into groups of kings or ordinary people.

> MANKIND being originally equals in the order of creation, the equality could only be destroyed by some subsequent circumstance; ... (Paine, 1776).

The occurrence of conflicts and wars in various parts of the world is none other than the result of the king's arrogance to rule the world. Paine also mentioned that there

were 8 civil wars and 19 rebellions that occurred because of this hereditary power struggle.

Paine emphasizes his criticism of monarchy which is considered a degradation of humanity, so succession of heredity here is also considered very bad because it imposes power on the king's descendants whose qualifications are not necessarily guaranteed. Then this is considered unfair to the next generation. If power is continued by successors who are not credible enough to rule, it will make them unable to lead and increasingly distant from the interests of their people. He stressed that all society needed was honest people. As he mentioned,

> ... Of more worth is one honest man to society, and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived (Paine, 1776).

Then he closed by encouraging American society to think logically and rationally so as not to be haunted by feelings of discomfort because of delaying the fight for independence. He assured that even though the number of American soldiers was not comparable to that of the British, they would win because of the spirit they had.

The value of the struggle to be free from colonialism is also seen in Indonesia's struggle. In contrast to the US which only fought one enemy, Indonesia was faced with many opponents who tried to control Indonesia and colonize Indonesia over a long period. Apart from that, after declaring independence, Indonesia was still faced with colonialists who were still trying to take over Indonesia's sovereignty.

While defending this sovereignty, the Indonesian people faced a series of wars in various regions of Indonesia. One of the greatest battles was the Battle of November 10 in Surabaya. Just like Paine, one of the heroes of Indonesian independence, Soetomo, known as Bung Tomo, ignited the spirit of the Indonesian people to fight the invaders through his thoughts. The difference lies in the medium. Paine channeled his thoughts through pamphlets, while Tomo ignited the enthusiasm of the Indonesian people through radio broadcasts in Surabaya.

Tomo started his speech in a loud voice saying "Merdeka!!!" [Freedom!!!] (Wibawana, 2023). He explained that the British had arrived in Surabaya and distributed pamphlets threatening them to hand over

all the weapons they had. Tomo reminded them that they were able to fight the invaders and push them to the limit. In his speech, Tomo called on all Indonesian youth to remember that previously they had been able to repel the invaders. The presence of the colonialists again at that time should not shake their enthusiasm and courage and confirmed that the people of Surabaya would accept the challenge of the British soldiers. Tomo declares

Tuntutan itu, walaupun kita [kami] tahu bahwa kau sekali lagi akan mengancam kita untuk menggempur kita [kami] dengan kekuatan yang ada, tetapi inilah jawaban kita [kami]. Selama banteng-banteng Indonesia masih mempunyai darah merah yang dapat membikin secarik kain putih merah dan putih. Maka selama itu tidak akan kita [kami] mau menyerah kepada siapapun juga.

[That demand, even though we know that you will once again threaten us to attack us with the existing powers, this is our answer. As long as Indonesian bulls still have red blood, they can make a piece of white cloth red and white. So, during that time we will not surrender to anyone.] (Wibawana, 2023).

Tomo emphasized that the People of Surabaya would not just back down and give up.

However, he also emphasized maintaining peace and respecting his enemies even though they were being colonized.

Tetapi saya peringatkan sekali lagi. Jangan mulai menembak. Baru kalau kita ditembak, maka kita akan ganti menyerang mereka. Itulah, kita tunjukkan bahwa kita ini adalah benar-benar orang yang ingin merdeka.

[But I warn you once again. Don't start shooting. Only if we are shot, then we will attack them instead. That is, we show that we are truly people who want to be independent.] (Wibawana, 2023)

In the end, he emphasized again the motto of the Indonesian people in facing the colonialists, namely that it is better to be destroyed than not to be independent, to be independent or to die! This slogan, which was voiced loudly and passionately, was able to raise the nationalist spirit of the people of Surabaya to fight against the invaders. He then assured again that as Muslims who believe in Allah as God, they must believe that God will accompany their steps to uphold justice and truth.

Here are some differences and similarities between Paine and Tomo in fueling the spirit of their nation. First, it can be seen from the choice of

diction and sentence structure used. Paine tended to present untrue British data and facts regarding the thirteen American colonies. He conveys his thoughts using implicit persuasive language. Meanwhile, Tomo sparked the enthusiasm of the people of Surabaya to dare to fight the invaders by using explicit sentences.

This is understandable considering that Paine published this pamphlet initially in letter form and was published several times. Paine awakened American society with a structured approach. It is different from Tomo, who gave a speech via radio that was direct. So, choosing words that are easy to understand by all groups is necessary. Choosing diction that is straight to the point and can be immediately accepted by listeners is necessary in urgent situations where they are faced with British troops who are ready to go to war.

Second, the two ideas of Paine and Bung Tomo both had a very influential influence on the independence of their respective countries. However, Paine's pamphlet also played a role in the formation of the Declaration of Independence, while Tomo's speech became a symbol of the fighting spirit

and courage of the Indonesian nation.

Apart from that, another difference lies in the purpose. *Common Sense* aimed to motivate the American people they make themselves aware of the injustices committed by England and to support the US to separate from England and gain its independence. Meanwhile, Tomo's speech was more focused on mobilizing and fueling the spirit of the Indonesian people to repel the colonialists who wanted to control their country. He moved the people to unite and dare to fight the invaders.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, from the analysis that has been carried out on the historical manuscripts, Paine's *Common Sense* and Tomo's speech using comparative historical analysis, there are general similarities which show that these two manuscripts are both used to ignite the spirit of their people to be aware of their rights, namely independence. Even though there is no direct relationship between the US and Indonesia in this case, especially Paine and Tomo, the spirit of American independence, which became independent in 1776, has the same spirit as Indonesia which proclaimed its independence in

1945 and received full recognition from various the country as a sovereign state in 1949. Paine and Tomo, even though they used different communication approaches, both had a big impact in raising the spirit of nationalism and the struggle for American and Indonesian independence. They both succeeded in forming an identity of resistance and a spirit of independence in the history of each country. Through the significance of this study, the researcher intends to shed light on how revolutionary rhetoric may be an effective catalyst for national movements and the development of a resilient spirit of independence, even in the face of cultural and chronological disparities.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and revision, and publication process in general.

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The Evolution of Public Reactions on Celebrity Grooming Relationships: An Analysis of Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift

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ABSTRACT

The two well-known female musicians, Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift are examined in connection to their grooming relationships within different periods, specifically in the pre-and post-Me Too movement. The study uses comparative analysis, and feminist media theory was implied, it explores public perceptions, digital magazine portrayal, and cultural awareness of on grooming relationships depicted by celebrities. The pre-Me Too era, characterized by romanticized portrayals of celebrity romances and a shortage of investigation into power dynamics, gave rise to accusations concerning Swift's grooming relationship. However, when the Me Too movement gained popularity, Eilish made her charge at a period when grooming techniques were more generally acknowledged and denounced. This article highlights how societal perceptions of consent, power dynamics, and ethical problems in relationships have evolved using news reporting, cultural discussions, and public responses. The findings demonstrate how public discourse, along with an understanding of celebrity grooming relationships, has been revolutionized by social movements such as Me Too. In the context of evolving societal norms and values, they also illuminated how the public's views and media portrayals are shifting.

Keywords: *Billie Eilish; celebrity; grooming; Me Too movement; public reactions; relationship; Taylor Swift*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most well-known movements in the US is the Me Too movement. The Me Too campaign was started in 2006 by a black activist named Tarana Burke (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Its first goal was to assist and create a place of safety for victims of sexual assault. According to Rodino-Colocino (2018), the Me Too movement strives to empower survivors via empathy to help them become self-sufficient and feel whole. However, when reports of sexual harassment towards American producer Harvey Weinstein appeared in the latter part of 2017, the Me Too movement had a breakthrough and went viral globally. As a result, many women are beginning to speak up on social media to share their experiences with sexual assault.

The Me Too campaign is crucial because it can break through entrenched systems of power that have allowed sexual misbehavior to continue undetected and highlight how widespread it is. The movement has started meaningful discussions regarding consent, boundaries, and the misuse of power in numerous contexts by giving survivors a forum to voice their stories (Me Too. Movement, n.d.). As a result, significant discussions, such as those pertaining to grooming relationships, have attracted a lot of public attention. According to Mcalinden (2006), the actions that an abuser takes to get ready to abuse a child sexually are referred to as grooming. Reaching the child, getting their cooperation, and keeping them secret to prevent revelation are some of the specific objectives - because the perpetrator can use this procedure to refute or defend their acts, it strengthens their abusive tendency (Craven et al., 2006).

To comprehend the relationships between grooming and the Me Too movement, it is crucial to understand the dynamic, for instance, the abuse of power and responsibility within interpersonal relationships. Gradually, the abuser establishes trust, reliance, and obedience in the target through flattery, presents, and emotional blackmail, among other strategies - this is what defines grooming relationships (Winters & Jeglic, 2017). Even though grooming has been known for a long time, especially by psychologists and people from

child sexual abuse, people's concern has started recently due to the pick moment of the Me Too movement in 2017. Since the awakening of the Me Too movement in 2017, it has become the organization that spreads awareness of sexual violence and abuse of power. It supports people in voicing out their sexual assault experience and combating sexual violence.

Through the Me Too movement, we can comprehend the social phenomenon regarding intimidation, abuse, and consent in interpersonal interaction. For instance, it can be seen in the celebrity life. According to Rojek (2001), a person who has gained significant recognition and popularity in the public eye is often referred to as a celebrity, while the phrase can apply to a broad spectrum of people from different backgrounds and sectors. Since the fame of a celebrity has gained public attention, it is common for every aspect of celebrity life to get people's attention, such as relationships or celebrity love life. Recently, the celebrity relationships that got people's attention due to the age gap are Billie Eilish and Jesse Rutherford couple.

Billie Eilish Pirate Baird O'Connel is an American singer-

songwriter, she was born on December 18, 2001. Eilish gained her popularity in 2015 with the song entitled "Ocean Eyes". Despite the hit debut song, Eilish is also known for her unique sense of fashion and her bold stance on environmental and social issues. Meanwhile, Rutherford is also an American singer-songwriter who was born on August 21, 1991. On October 2022, Eilish and Rutherford were spotted together and have been caught kissing by paparazzi (Bailey, 2023b). It was not long before Eilish and Rutherford were seen together; some online magazines reported their official relationship. However, the reports through digital magazines about their relationship caught various people's reactions, especially from feminists, due to the age gap. Since Eilish is still minor, her relationships with Rutherford tend to be grooming.

Moreover, the social concern towards grooming has increased since the campaign of the Me Too movement spread awareness surrounding some issues such as sexual violence, abuse, and assault. So, there is no wonder why people reacted and criticized the relationship between Eilish and Rutherford. Meanwhile, far from the Me Too movement hit the public in 2017, people are not too

concerned about this issue except psychologists or people from this kind of field. Thus, it can be seen in the relationship between Swift and Mayer. Swift is a successful and famous American singer-songwriter who was born on December 13, 1989. Swift's skill, genuineness, and unrelenting commitment to her work have made her one of modern pop culture's most significant and known individuals. On the other hand, Mayer is an American singer-songwriter who was born on October 16, 1977. They were involved in a romantic relationship between 2009 and 2010 when Swift was 19 and Mayer was 32 (Burke, 2023).

Over the years, the relationship between Swift and Mayer has been recognized as grooming by Swift's fans. Back then, there were fewer people concerned about this issue, unlike nowadays, people are more attentive due to the Me Too movement. The emergence of the Me Too movement increased public scrutiny and demands for accountability as a result of increased awareness of cases of power abuse, exploitation, and manipulation (Luo & Zhang, 2022). Then, when the relationship between Eilish and Rutherford was published, it attracted people's reactions. Since their relationship is coming out after the Me Too

movement, it makes people criticize their relationship and try to warn Eilish that she got groomed by her partner. Thus, the various public commentaries of grooming towards Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer, are interesting to examine due to the different periods – specifically before and after the emergence of the Me Too movement in 2017.

METHODOLOGY

In analyzing the different people's reactions to grooming issues towards Eilish and Rutherford couple compared to the Swift and Mayer couple, the comparative analysis and the theory of feminist media studies relies on the theory of feminism. It applies theories, notions, and logic that articulate feminist ideals and conceptions to reception as well as media processes like recruiting, production, and distribution (Press & Tripodi, 2021). It also addresses the structure of representation in both news and entertainment beyond the platforms (Steiner, 2014). People's responses and perceptions of the grooming issue regarding Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer, varied, revealing different viewpoints on gender, power, and media portrayal. This part, which draws on feminist media theory, looks at

how viewers interacted with media depictions of the case and assesses its importance in relation to larger contexts of culture (Walters, 1995).

The Me Too movement had already caused a general awareness and conversation about issues of sexual assault, abuse, and inequality of power in numerous industries when the grooming case regarding Eilish and Rutherford arose. Audiences were becoming more critical of media portrayals of the case, especially those that reinforced victim-blaming or downplayed the seriousness of grooming and assault. Through social media, survivors have been able to tell their own stories, show support for one another, and hold grooming offenders and supporters accountable. The theory of feminist media focusing on audience reception and interpretation in responding to grooming issues by examining Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer, are used in this study to discover people's different reactions to grooming issues in a range of time before and after Me Too movement hits public. Furthermore, digital magazines used as the primary data in this study, such as Elle, Glamour, Seventeen, USA Today, etc.; – these digital magazines consist of information about Eilish and

Rutherford's relationship, also information about Swift and Mayer's relationship.

Digital magazines as the object of study are classified as a new media product. According to Glen and Royston (2008), part of the global cultural revolution, new media and the digital revolution are expected to impact the world just as much as the invention of the electrification or printing press. Digital magazines are dynamic, interactive digital products that have emerged with the advent of digital technologies and online platforms (Fidler, 1997). Accommodating the evolving tastes and habits of contemporary consumers, digital magazines have increased their scope, accessibility, and adaptability by embracing digital media. Then, digital magazines tend to develop and innovate as new media products, influencing how people will consume and communicate in the age of digital media (Pavlik, 2008). Therefore, the theory which considers digital magazines as a product of new media is applied to find out the role new media plays in disseminating information to spread awareness.

Steps in examining the study include, first, reading and collecting several credible

digital magazines. Second, the researcher presents evidence which shows people's reactions to grooming issues towards Eilish and Rutherford, as the Swift and Mayer scandal – which later relates to how different people reactions since in the Billie Eilish era, people were already concerned due to Me Too movement, unlike the Swift era. Third, after picking out the scenes that were collected, the researcher analyzes the narratives. The researcher incorporates a few posts that are from X with the keywords "Billie Eilish got groomed by Jesse Rutherford" and "Taylor Swift got groomed by John Mayer" to find people's reactions. The data period is selected specifically since the different periods the Eilish groomed cases are in the range of 2022 - 2023.

Meanwhile, the Taylor Swift groomed cases were in 2009 - 2010. Additionally, the secondary data comes from earlier publications in journals and papers that are relevant. Following that, the researcher examines the information gathered and incorporates it into the discussions.

DISCUSSION

Being a celebrity has many benefits, such as fame, recognition, money, and the chance to follow interests and passions. It is common for celebrities to have advantages over resources, activities, and events that are not available to ordinary people. They also have a platform from which to inspire and encourage others (Gamson, 2023; Rockwell & Giles, 2009). However, there are drawbacks to becoming a celebrity as well, like invasion of privacy, continuous media attention, and pressure to uphold a particular image (Van Krieken, 2018). Being stalked by paparazzi can be especially tough for celebrities, rendering privacy a challenge in their everyday life. Therefore, it is no wonder that the public spots the love lives of celebrities. The celebrity grooming couples of Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer, are in the public spotlight. The issue of grooming arose due to the relationship between Eilish and Rutherford; people criticized their relationship since the awareness of grooming increased because of the Me Too movement.

Even though grooming issues have already been known in the past, people are much less concerned about grooming; this can be seen in the relationship between Swift and Mayer. Then, the different people's reactions to the grooming issues can be compared with the

specific periods before and after the Me Too movement through the reports of digital magazines. Furthermore, in this discussion, there are several sub-sections presented. First, the dynamic of the grooming relationship between Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer couples. Second, the different public reactions to the grooming relationship before and after the Me Too movement sparks in society. In addition, the evolution of public reactions on grooming relationships was depicted in Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer, in the range period pre- and the Me Too movement.

The Comparison of Dynamic Grooming Relationship Between Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift

The relationships between Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer, are referred to as grooming. These fascinating case studies offer to examine the complexities of the age gap, disparities in power, and public reactions. Although both couples attract public attention due to their romantic life, both have their characteristics.

Digital Magazines' Portrayal of Billie Eilish and Jesse Rutherford's Relationship

Rutherford, the main vocalist of The Neighbourhood, was romantically linked with Eilish from 2022 - 2023, an aspiring and talented musician (Logan, 2023). Since Rutherford was considerably older, 11 years older than Eilish, there was much conjecture about their supposed relationship. It may be argued that the power dynamics in this case were lopsided because Rutherford was a more well-known figure in the industry than Eilish, who was still figuring out her rise to fame. Because of their age gap, there have been concerns expressed over the power dynamics in their relationship, and perhaps Eilish was more susceptible to pressure or manipulation because she was a younger, less experienced person; due to this – it brought up concern regarding agency and consent. Then, the people had varied opinions on the couple. Some were worried and felt comfortable about their age gap and possible power imbalances; the information that Rutherford and Eilish met when she was about sixteen and that Eilish had long been an admirer of his band, the Neighborhood, further disturbed many people.

Others were fascinated and intrigued by the couple's popularity and even stood up for the couple, claiming that

Eilish may make her own decisions free from public scrutiny because she is an authorized adult who granted her consent.
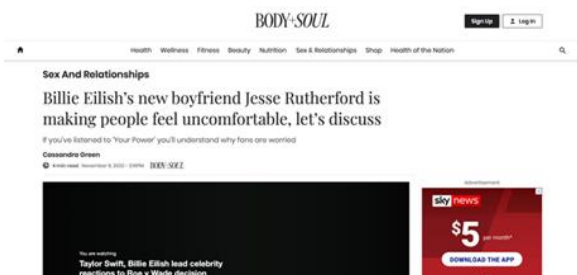
Figure 1. Digital magazine reports on Billie Eilish and Jesse Rutherford's relationship (bodyandsoul.com.au)
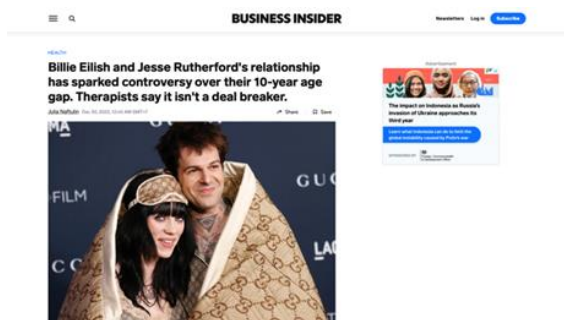
Figure 2. Digital magazine reports on Billie Eilish and Jesse Rutherford's relationship (businessinsider.com)

The media portrayal through digital magazines entitled Business Insider about the grooming relationship between Eilish and Rutherford shows varied perceptions. It presents two strongholds, as quoted by Business Insider magazine in 2022, regarding Eilish's relationship. Their news captured people criticizing the relationship by showing their worries about the age gap (Naftulin, 2022). For instance, "Your sister's dating a 31-year-old man, and your music is shitty." Also, on the other side, there is a stronghold of people who support and think that age disparities are not a matter.

It's not necessarily what the age gap is, but what phase of life you are in. Depending on what experiences you've had, that's really going to be the determining factor for a long-term relationship.

The only age gap that is 'too big' is one where you, as the person entering into the relationship, don't feel connected or can't relate to the person you're with. That's it. It's no one else's decision.

Hopefully over time, after getting to know somebody the power dynamic changes a little bit and they become more on equal footing. But initially, I think it can definitely cloud somebody's judgment to be with someone they once had a crush on, or admired, or looked up to

Despite their controversial relationship, they seem indifferent to public reactions. Even the couple chose to make light of all the criticism over their age difference by dressing up as an older man and a baby for Halloween. They were completely unaffected by the criticism they received. Eilish had a full face of doll-like makeup

on her face and was dressed in a bib, diaper, and bonnet. In the meantime, Rutherford altered his appearance to resemble an older man by donning a bald head covering and prosthetics, which caused people to criticize him hard, but they did not care at all about the commentaries. They even thought that they looked perfect and hilarious in their Halloween costumes (Mohammed, 2022).

Figure 3. Digital magazine reports of Eilish and Rutherford in Halloween costumes (X.com)

Later, they appeared together on the red carpet in similar costumes but said nothing in response to questions about their age difference.

Figure 4. Eilish and Rutherford red carpet debut as officially dating (vogue.com)

In another interview with Vanity Fair in 2023 (Same Interview, The Sixth Year, 00:16:00 – 00:16:43), Eilish expressed her excitement and happiness about the romance. She remarked on dating Rutherford, and she looks happy with it.

> It's really cool and I'm really excited and I'm really happy about it. I managed to get my life to a point where I not only was known by a person that I thought was the hottest fucking fucker alive but pulled his ass! Are you kidding me? Can we just... Round of applause for me? Thank you. Jesse Rutherford, everyone. I pulled his ass! All me. I did that shit. I locked that motherfucker down.
>
> (Billie Eilish:

The public perceptions have responded to Eilish's remarks about Jesse Rutherford in a variety of ways, with many feelings particularly uneasy about her effusive praise given

her long-standing adoration for him.

Taylor Swift and John Mayer's Relationship

Swift and Mayer, on the other hand, had public attention and established renown as they developed their relationship from 2009 until 2010 (Campano, 2023). Swift, who was well-known in the music business already, started dating Mayer, an experienced musician with a track record of often dating women. While still noticeable, Swift and Mayer's age differences were not as significant as those between Eilish and Rutherford. When Swift started dating Mayer, she was already a well-established musician. Thus, the age gap was less of something to discuss when talking about their dating dynamics. Their relationship was complicated in terms of power dynamics, though, as Mayer's standing and experience might have an impact. The public and reporters closely examined how the public saw Swift and Mayer's relationship, with conversations frequently centering on questions of age, compatibility, and the possibility of emotional manipulation in light of Mayer's previous romantic relationships.
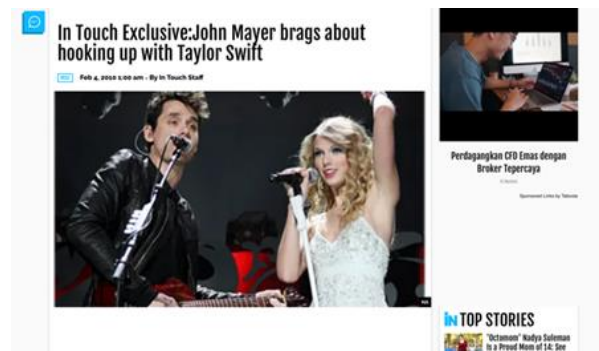
Figure 5. Digital magazine reports of Swift and Mayer's relationship (intouchweekly.com)

Figure 6. Digital magazine reports of Swift and Mayer's relationship (hollywoodlife.com)

At the time they were dating between 2009 and 2010, only a few digital magazines are reporting their romantic life and questioning the relationship dynamic. One of the digital magazines, In Touch Weekly, reports the closeness of Swift and Mayer by saying they seem cozy and act like teenagers. Then, due to the reports, people assumed that Swift adored Mayer even though he was much older than her (Staff, 2010). However, like Eilish and Rutherford's reports, the way media captured the relationship of Swift and Mayer, there are also ones who are against their relationship

and trying to voice out if they should not be in a relationship because it is illegal (Life, 2010).

The Different Public Reactions on Celebrity Grooming Relationship in The Pre- and Post-Me Too Movement Sparks

Far from the Me Too movement becoming popular, the public reactions on grooming are not a hot issue to discuss. Cultural views, societal conventions, and media representations of celebrity relationships frequently influence public perceptions of grooming partnerships (Illouz, 2023). Since the grooming issue arose in celebrity romance, for instance, Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer. This comparison of grooming relationships reveals that the dynamics of celebrities' romances are significantly shaped by power disparities, public perceptions, and age gaps. Moreover, the study case of the grooming relationship presents captivating case examples to investigate how media narratives, established societal norms, and age gaps in relationships affected public impressions.

Public Reactions on Taylor Swift's Grooming Relationship in The Pre-Me Too Movement

The grooming relationship of Swift with her ex, Mayer, caught the public eye and made a lot of media coverage and curious since Swift dating an older man. Tabloids and celebrity gossip columns diligently tracked their progression as their romance developed against a backdrop of intense public scrutiny and controversy. However, at the time, the dominant cultural perspectives and societal norms greatly influenced how the general public responded to their relationship. Before the Me Too movement, romantic clichés and conventional gender roles frequently shaped public opinions about grooming relationships (Kosut, 2012). Mayer was often depicted as the charming and domineering partner because he was the more experienced and mature one in the partnership. Swift, on the other hand, was frequently portrayed as the youthful, naive ingénue seduced by his charm despite her achievements and agency. Their romance had been romanticized by media narratives, which portrayed it as a story of passionate lovers facing the challenges of fame and money.

Then, the public perceptions of Swift and Mayer's relationship, however, were divided. Some public sectors assumed that Swift was not groomed and that Mayer was falling in love with her. Meanwhile, the others voiced concerns or suspicion and already thought their relationship would not work well.

Figure 7. People's reactions over Swift groomed by Mayer (X.com)

Figure 8. People's reactions over Swift groomed by Mayer (X.com)

Figure 9. People's reactions over Swift groomed by Mayer (X.com)

The varied public perceptions towards Swift's relationship with Mayer show there was a power dynamic. Even though it does not question whether the age gap was appropriate clearly, the narrative says, "… We all know he just wants the puss!" implies she has been exploited due to the power dynamic. Thus, it can be seen from the significant age gap of Mayer who is 12 years older than Swift and has a lot of experience in the music industry – which tends to create power imbalance environments and exploitation. Even while Swift was a well-known musician, media representations of her frequently highlighted her youthful status and vulnerability, feeding preconceived notions and clichés about gender and age gaps in love relationships.

However, since the media reported that the relationship between Swift and Mayer ended in 2010, as a creative musician, Taylor Swift wrote about her life experience in a song. Even though she has not declared that the song entitled "Dear John" is aimed at Mayer, people assume through the song lyrics that the person who inspired her is Mayer (Dodd, 2023). Her lyrics show the disappointment and heartbreak due to the person she loved only

taking advantage of her (Bailey, 2023). Unfortunately, the public response to "Dear John" was hating the victim, Swift.

Figure 10. People's reactions over Swift groomed by Mayer (X.com)

Figure 11. People's reactions over Swift groomed by Mayer (X.com)

Despite supporting the grooming victims, people were hating Swift. Ironically, victims were getting blamed, and the perpetrators escaped from the public eye. However, this kind of situation is quite understandable due to the lack of public awareness of grooming issues. Therefore, since celebrities are public figures, they play an important role in influencing and shaping public perceptions (Boon & Lomore, 2001). Hence, the entertainment industry frequently promoted damaging tropes about inequality in power and consent, as well as false expectations of relationships,

through its romanticized depictions of love and romance. When abuse and sexual harassment were not widely known, the media frequently romanticized on grooming relationships, giving little thought to the ramifications associated with them.

Furthermore, the public reactions over the grooming relationship between Swift and Mayer before the Me Too movement gained momentum reflected the prevailing cultural beliefs and social mores regarding celebrity relationships. The representation in framing grooming relationships is frequently romanticized, which contributed to the spread of negative preconceptions and cliché about gender and the age gap in celebrity love life. Meanwhile, the issues regarding power imbalance and moral issues within them referred to latent worries about abuse and consent that would emerge as the Me Too movement grew.

Public Reactions Over Billie Eilish Grooming Relationship in The Post-Me Too Movement

The awakening of the Me Too movement campaign in 2017 raised people's awareness or even concern about abuse and power imbalance, harassment. Since the romance between Eilish and Rutherford happened

in the post-period of the Me Too movement, people are more concerned about their age gap and consider it grooming. Hence, their relationship has drawn more public attention to power imbalance, consent, and moral issues. The Me Too campaign, which exposed pervasive instances of sexual assault and harassment, has forced society to confront problems of responsibility and consent, especially in the field of entertainment (Durham, 2021). However, although the Me Too movement has spread awareness to society, it does not rule out the possibility that there are still a lot of people who are not concerned and even support grooming relationships. It can be seen in the media portrayed in reporting grooming relationships through digital magazines or the public debates on social media such as X.

In response to Eilish and Rutherford's relationship, there are varied public reactions to their age gap. As their relationship developed, the cultural environment changed and the way public perceptions raised questions about consent in intimate relationships, power dynamics, and age gaps. Certain sections of the public have expressed that their relationship was not a grooming relationship due to

Eilish being a consenting adult, and she has been Rutherford's admirer for a year.

Figure 12. People's reactions over Eilish groomed by Rutherford (X.com)

Figure 13. People's reactions over Eilish groomed by Rutherford (X.com)

Meanwhile, others have voiced skepticism or concerns regarding the power imbalances involved. Some public view the victim as having the potential to be exploited by her partner due to their age gap and power imbalance.

Figure 14. People's reactions over Eilish groomed by Rutherford (X.com)

Figure 15. People's reactions over Eilish groomed by Rutherford (X.com)

Relationship standards have changed in the wake of the Me Too movement, with a focus now more on openness, responsibility, and respect for one another (Clark-Parsons, 2021). The media's recent focus on grooming relationships — which were previously idealized or disregarded — reflects broader changes in societal perceptions of consent and the balance of power in relationships (Durham, 2021). Therefore, Eilish, groomed by her ex, Rutherford, in the post-Me Too movement, sparked public reactions in highlighting social movement and cultural changes have a profoundly positive influence on public dialogue and relationship attitudes.

Figure 16. People's reactions over Eilish groomed by Rutherford (X.com)

Figure 17. People's reactions over Eilish groomed by Rutherford (X.com)

Many of the responses are concerned about Eilish's romantic life, even though she is denied that her relationship is not wrong. However, the way people criticize and try to spread awareness about grooming is such a significant cultural change in society.

The Evolution of Public Reaction Factors on Grooming Relationship between Billie Eilish Era and Taylor Swift Era

Following the Me Too movement, there have been general changes in culture towards more compassion and accountability, which is reflected in the rising recognition of power imbalances and moral issues within relationships (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Thus, the evolution of people's reactions in responding to grooming relationships depicted in celebrity love life, for instance, Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer, were interesting. Therefore, some factors cause huge differences in people's thoughts on grooming in the range period pre- and post- the Me Too movement. For instance, the cultural context, celebrity age and experience, and the way media portrayed celebrity relationships.

Regarding the larger cultural context of discussions about consent, power dynamics, and moral issues in relationships, the time of the claims is an essential factor. The accusations of grooming made against Swift surfaced in the late 2000s when conversations on sexual assault and exploitation were not as expected or pervasive as they are now. On the other hand, once the Me Too movement gained traction, Eilish's accusations came to light, raising awareness as well as sensitivity to the problems associated with relationship abuse and manipulation. The celebrity's background at the point of the allegations is another consideration. When the accusations of grooming against her came to light, Eilish and Swift were young musicians, even though a lot of people already recognized them. But as teenagers who are still young and do not have many experiences in relationships, they have the potential to be abused by their partners. Then, Swift's grooming relationship arose far from the Me Too movement, which gained public attention. Meanwhile, Eilish's relationship happened after the Me Too movement hit public societies – it means the awareness over power imbalance, abuse, age gap, etc., had been spread out through the Me Too campaign.

When Swift and Mayer were portrayed in the media prior to the Me Too movement, their relationship was frequently not given the same level of close examination as it did in the post-Me Too era. The media tended to romanticize celebrities' relationships over Swift and Mayer's relationship in the late 2000s, emphasizing the glitz and mystery of their relationship instead of challenging any potential power disparities or moral issues. The subtleties of Swift's relationship were rarely highlighted in favor of an overly dramatic portrayal of the rising star and musician as they navigated the difficulties of romance and popularity. On the other hand, in the wake of the Me Too movement, media attention on grooming relationships—like the relationship between Rutherford and Eilish—became more analytical and complex. The Me Too movement's emphasis on consent, abuse, and imbalances in power had changed the cultural environment at the time the charges first arose in the early 2020s, and the media were part of it. As a result of this change in the public consciousness, reporters and analysts began to scrutinize Eilish and Rutherford's relationship more closely, looking for indications of grooming behavior and power imbalances.

Therefore, a more romanticized picture of celebrity romance was possible in the years before the Me Too movement because conversations about consent and abuse were less common in the media. The public perceptions of Eilish and Rutherford's relationship, however, were shaped by the post-Me Too era's increased knowledge of and criticism of grooming activities. Reporting became increasingly critical and reflective because of the reporter's propensity to examine the power dynamics through the prism of more significant societal debates. In addition, the broader changes in societal attitudes, cultural knowledge, and the media environment are reflected in the disparities in how Swift and Mayer's relationship was portrayed in the media before the Me Too movement and how Eilish and Rutherford's romance was shown after the Me Too movement.

CONCLUSION

Comparing the relationship between Eilish and Rutherford, as well as Swift and Mayer, which is considered grooming, has raised exciting debates in public, especially since both of their relationship periods are different. Conclusively,

the examination of the public's responses to the grooming relationships between Eilish and Swift highlights the significant influence of societal background, cultural consciousness, and media attention on the understanding of celebrity relationships. The disparities in responses to these two incidents demonstrate how public discourse on consent, power dynamics, and moral issues in relationships is constantly changing. Regarding Swift, the media frequently idealized celebrity relationships, prioritizing the glamour of fame above a critical analysis of the possibility of imbalances or moral issues in the relationship. These allegations regarding Swift's grooming surfaced during the pre-Me Too movement era. On the other hand, Eilish's grooming claims came to light during the post-Me Too movement period, when grooming practices were more widely recognized and denounced. The Me Too movement's emphasis on consent and abuse changed the cultural environment, as seen by the more analytical and complex way in which the media reported her situation. Finally, consent, agency, and ethical behavior in all relationships—including those involving celebrities—will likely be more widely acknowledged as public

perceptions toward the dynamics of power change and reports in the media and public responses grow more critical and contemplative.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and revision, and publication process in general.

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The Portrayal of Black Feminism in Gary Gray's *Set It Off* through Critical Race Theory

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ABSTRACT

Stories in films are based on social realities in people's lives, embedding messages behind them. Each film is packed with unique characters, events and issues reflecting aspects of life from a particular perspective. One of which is the principles of black feminism in the main characters and to analyze how economic and racial factors influence the character's decision to confront existing injustices depicted in Gary Grey's *Set It Off* (1996). The method used is a qualitative research method. Data collection is conducted to sort and understand the research topic by using data from scenes, dialogues, words, and phrases obtained from the film. The main theories used in this research are the Critical Race theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw and the Feminist Economics theory by Marilyn Waring. The findings reveal that the film encompasses principles of black feminism such as racial discrimination, sexism and social class which are portrayed by each main character in the film. This article also depicts the influence of economic and racial factors on the character's decisions in confronting existing injustices. Analyzing this film aims to trigger and enrich the analysis of how films depict the struggle of black women with various problems, especially racial and economic issues.

Keywords: *Black feminism; Critical Race Theory; feminist economic*

INTRODUCTION

Films serve as a medium for conveying messages to the audience and a source of entertainment, social commentary, or even education. According to Danesi (2011), as a mass medium, films possess aesthetic power due to their ability to present dialogue, music, scenery, and actions simultaneously in a visual and narrative manner. The stories in films, whether explicit or implicit, often draw from the social realities of people's lives and incorporate ideological elements, presented in an engaging way to offer new insights to the viewers (Mudjiono, 2011). Within various social segments, films can shape perspectives, behavior, and understanding of the world around us. They continuously capture evolving social realities and project them onto the screen (Sobur, 2004). This blend of social reality and reconstructed reality presented in film is referred to as representation.

Representation in film refers to how a specific topic, concept, or reality is depicted and presented, including how characters, events, places, or specific concepts are shown to the audience through the visual, narrative, and artistic elements in the medium of film. Turner (2018) suggests that when film acts as a representation of society's reality, it does not only transfer reality to the screen but also actively shapes and reimagines that reality with the codes, conventions, and ideologies within its culture. The United States is one of the countries with significant influence in the film industry, often referred to as Hollywood (Silver, 2007).

Hollywood films do not only provide entertainment but also disseminate American cultural values, leading to the globalization of tastes and preferences. The film industry in the United States has embraced technological advancements such as CGI and recognized the importance of representation. A number of American films currently emphasize inclusivity, adapt stories from other media like books, video games, or comics, and explore various themes, including social issues. One social issue that has been a focus in American filmmaking is black feminism.

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement advocating for gender equality and women's rights in various aspects of life,

including voting rights, workplace equality, and the elimination of gender discrimination (Ilaa, 2021). Meanwhile, black feminism is a specific branch of the feminist movement that emphasizes the intersectionality of race and gender, focusing on black women.

Black women face challenges and struggles that cannot be fully explained by a general feminist perspective. This movement strives to address gender inequality and confront the racism experienced by Black women while attempting to understand how gender and race discrimination intersect in their experiences. In America, many movies are made to show the struggles of certain groups against injustice and inequality. Black feminism in American cinema raises unique issues faced by black women and voicing their aspirations without disregarding the differences in the diverse American society (Collins, 2022). One of the producers and directors who often portray black people in his films is Felix Gary Gray. He has produced many films that not only represent the social circumstances experienced by black people but also provide implicit and explicit messages to the audience, one of which is the film *Set It Off* (1996).

Set It Off is a 1996 American heist crime action film that narrates the story of four African American women—Stony, Frankie, Cleo, and T.T.—who turn to a life of crime by robbing a bank as a last-ditch effort in response to economic hardship and social injustice. *Set It Off* addresses several issues related to gender, race, and the lives of Black women in the United States. The film portrays the experiences of economically disadvantaged black women in urban environments and explores social issues such as poverty, gender inequality, and violence.

Set It Off gives a different twist from other black feminism-themed films. The film combines action, drama, friendship, and rebellion to face the injustice and inequality experienced by black women. Combining these elements creates a unique picture, making *Set It Off* different from other films of the same era.

In African American cinema in the 1990s, black people wrote, directed, and starred in many films. These films tended to explore life in urban environments, issues of racism, hip-hop culture, and the struggle against injustice, either through explicit or implicit messages. However,

most of these films focus on the experiences and lives of black men, leaving the experiences of black women often marginalized.

Set It Off presents a different narrative, focusing on the experiences of black women who face dual discrimination - both based on race and gender. The pressure of these injustices pushes the characters to rebel to survive and fight against the system that oppresses them.

The film provides a clear depiction of how Black women experience double discrimination within society. This issue significantly motivates them to challenge discrimination, giving rise to the Black feminist movement. This paper aims to exemplify the principles of Black feminism in the main characters and analyze how economic and racial factors influence their decisions in confronting existing injustices portrayed in *Set It Off*. In this paper, the authors focus on the experiences and struggles of the main character in facing discrimination that reflect the principles of Black feminism, and how these factors of inequality shape their experiences and motivate them to make extreme decisions to fight against an unjust system.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative method is used in conducting this research to explore and understand the meanings attributed by a group of individuals or a community related to social or human issues (Creswell, 2016) in the form of written or spoken words regarding the behavior of observable individuals. The data in this paper consists of film scripts and captures containing representations of black feminism in the film *Set It Off*. In collecting data, the authors employed observations, document review, and audio-visual analysis. To fully represent black feminism in the film, the data collection was conducted based on the theme's relevance, which combines issues such as gender inequality, racial injustice, and economic exploitation. The film reflects each character's struggle to deal with these issues. Meanwhile, the data analysis consists of identifying the representations and meaning of Black feminism taken from the scripts. Identifying examples of black feminism was conducted using two main theories, namely intersectionality from Critical Race Theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and Feminist Economic Theory by

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Marilyn Waring (1990). Using these two theories, data was collected by analyzing the forms of representation in each film scene. Black feminism's tenets—such as racial injustice, gender inequity, and economic exploitation—were used to identify the representations and meanings of the movement in the movie scenes and scripts to conduct a more thorough study.

DISCUSSION
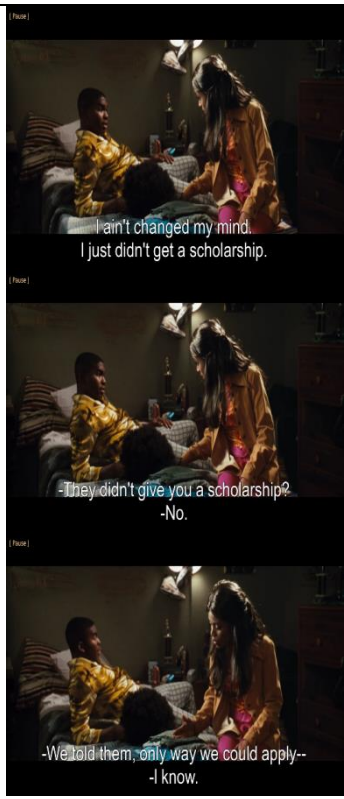
The authors present the results of the data analysis using two leading theories: Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) Critical Race Theory and Marilyn Waring's (1990) Feminist Economics Theory. The analysis is divided into two parts, following the study's objectives: examining the principles of black feminism in the main character and how economic and racial factors influence the character's decisions in confronting existing injustices.

Principles of Black Feminism among the Main Characters

In this analysis, the authors employ Critical Race Theory with the concept of intersectionality (Putri, Adhitya & Kristiawan, 2024, p. 40) to analyze how the main character in the film *Set It Off* reflects the principles of black feminism. Intersectionality is a concept that highlights how different aspects such as gender, race, and class interact and influence individual experiences. In this film, two out of the four main characters (Stony, Frankie, Cleo, and T.T) show how their identities as black women influence their experiences. The following is an analysis of each main character in the context of the principles of black feminism.

Table 1. Lida "Stony" Newson

Scenes	Settings
	Stony receives news that Stevie fails to secure the scholarship. She remains calm and starts looking for alternative ways to fund Stevie's education.

Stony did not get a scholarship
(00:09:28)
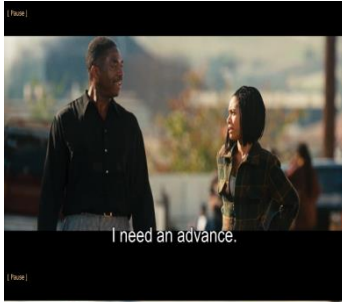
Stony is forced to do whatever it takes and sacrifice her pride to secure money for her brother's education.
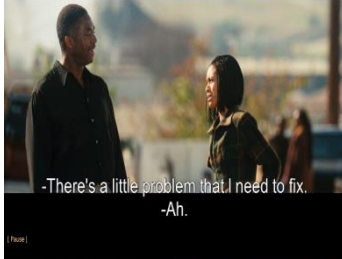
Stony's Desperation
(00:16:17)

After her younger brother becomes a shooting victim. Stony walks through the police line and sees Stevie (her younger brother) lying stiff. She runs and sobs, cradling her brother's lifeless body.

Stony's brother's
tragic death
(00:28:53)

Lida 'Stony' Newton

Stony is a female character who lives with her younger brother and has been the breadwinner of the family since her parents passed away. The various injustices experienced by Stony are depicted in various scenes, reflecting how society treats black women like her. Stony's character appears at the beginning of the film when she is having a party at her house and then a conversation occurs between her, Cleo and her younger brother Stevie. They talk about Stevie, who will soon advance to college-level education. Stevie shows a comfortable demeanor by sighing and looking at his sister, Stony, with a weary expression. Sensing that something is amiss, Stony engages in a conversation with Stevie, who reveals that he did not receive a scholarship to continue his education.

Stony : "Stevie, what's the problem?"
Stevie : "I'm not going. I ain't going to college."
Stony : "What? All right, look, don't start tripping. Okay, you cannot change your mind. We got into UCLA, that's where we're going."
Stevie : "I ain't changed my mind. I just didn't get a scholarship."
Stony : "They didn't give you a scholarship?"

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Stevie : "No."
Stony : "We told them, only
way we could
apply..."
Stevie : "I know."
Stony : "All right, well
don't worry about
it. I'll take care
of it."

The dialogue illustrates the overlap of the forms of discrimination they face, not only due to their race but also because of their socio-economic backgrounds and existing policies. Black students often struggle to access quality education, especially if they come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, which affects their prospects. An opportunity for advancing their education is through scholarships. Stevie's story reveals that his failure to obtain a scholarship was not due to a lack of effort but rather because the system failed to provide access or support for Black students. Stony tries to reassure his younger sibling that there is no need to worry, as she promises to find a way to fund Stevie's college education. Stony is under significant pressure to find employment despite having numerous financial responsibilities. She explores various ways to quickly earn money, including taking on risky and unstable jobs. Amidst her chaotic thoughts and the dead-end search for immediate funds, Stony encounters Nate Andrews, leading to a conversation between them.

Stony : "Nate, before I
come work for
you..."
Nate : "Yeah?"
Stony : "I need an
advance. There's a
little problem
that I need to
fix."
Nate : "Ah. Oh, I can do
that. Oh, yeah,
yeah, I can do
that. But, I
mean... Stony
Newsom's gotta
give me a reason
to do that. You
know what I mean?"
Stony : "And what would
that be?"
Nate : "Oh, come on, now,
you know."

Stony asks for help to solve her problems by returning to work for Nate. Nate agrees to the matter, but under conditions that are unethical and demeaning to women. Stony faces a huge moral dilemma because she feels pressured and stressed by her difficult financial situation to support her brother's education. This dilemma is then utilized by Nate to get what he wants, which is to exploit Stony. The scenes depict how women in urgent situations must make difficult decisions that impact their lives and often sacrifice their own happiness for the sake of their loved ones.

As much injustice as Stony had to endure to support her brother's education, she still had to experience the severe injustice of losing her

brother due to the reckless actions of the police. Her brother became a victim of wrongful arrest because he had the same tattoo as the perpetrator of the robbery.

Low-key lighting is used in the tragic death of Stony's brother to add emotional depth to the situation. This type of lighting often creates an atmosphere of sadness, fear, anxiety, and tension (Huang, 2018; Shafiee & Bidin, 2016; Zettl, 2011). In the context of this scene, low-key lighting not only emphasizes the atmosphere of grief but also highlights Stony's crying, reflecting the devastation and loss she feels at the sight of her lifeless brother. As such, this lighting further reinforces the narrative of racial injustice, showing that this tragedy is not only about personal loss but also about a system that fails to protect innocent individuals.

Detective Strode : "What do you

Detective Waller : "Stevie Newsom, no priors, good student, headed for college. I hear both parents killed in a car accident four years ago."
Detective Strode : "Goddamn it. Goddamn."

The film portrays how the law enforcement system still has many unjust policies that need to be changed. It emphasizes the necessity for a more cautious approach to prevent incidents that result in the loss of innocent civilian lives.

Detective Strode : "If you need to talk, if you have any questions... you won't hesitate to call. There'll be a full investigation."
Stony : "Fuck you! Fuck your investigation! You fucking go to hell! You son of a bitch!"

The police did not handle the case properly. After their careless actions, they did not introspect and make the necessary changes. Instead, they engaged in unethical actions by interrogating the victim in further investigation. These actions not only exacerbated the situation but also tarnished the reputation of the police within the community. Stony fights against double discrimination, not only as a woman but also as a black person. The aforementioned events illustrate Stony's experiences that reflect Black feminism, where her identity as a Black woman and her lower economic background face compounded oppression, leading

to a unique form of individual resistance.

Cleopatra "Cleo" Sims

Cleo is a character who possesses a distinct personality compared to the other three main female characters. She is the most courageous and unafraid to face any challenge. Her appearance and sexual orientation differ from others, which often leads to her receiving unfair treatment.

Table 2. Cleopatra 'Cleo' Sims

Scenes	Settings
Regarded suspiciously by law enforcement (01:25:16)	Detective Strode, suddenly confronts Cleo and suspects her as the one among her friends who killed Luther due to her previous criminal record.

Detective Strode suddenly appears and suspects her of being the murderer of Luther, as she is the only one among her friends with a criminal record.

Detective
Strode   : "Which one of
              you girls
              smoked Luther,
              huh? I'm
thinking it was
you Cleo,
you're the only
one with any
priors."

Cleo   : "Don't know
              what you
              talking."

Detective   : "I'll tell you
Strode   what I'm
               talking. We're
               gonna take a
               ride."
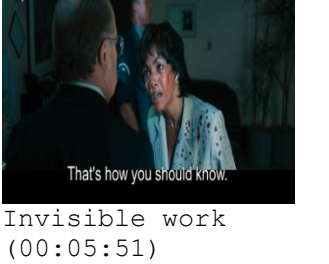
Cleo   "Man, I ain't do
               shit. You ain't
               got probable
               cause."

Detective   "All you're
Strode   doing is a
               lineup. And for
               the record,
               having a witness
               is a lot better
               than probable
               cause. Get in
               the car."

The dialogue above shows how Black women often face intersecting discrimination based on both race and gender. Detective Strode suspects Cleo of being the killer of Luther, the manager of the cleaning company where she and her friends work. As a representation of the legal system, he acts arbitrarily, pressuring and intimidating Cleo to participate in the interrogation process. Cleo is targeted as a suspect not only because she is a woman but also because she is a black woman with a criminal record. This scene shows how institutions like the police have unequal power dynamics in society and frequently discriminate based on prejudice and stereotypes.

Influence of Economic and Racial Factors on Character's Decisions in Confronting Existing Injustices

Table 3. Francesca 'Frankie Sutton

Scenes	Settings
Invisible work (00:05:51)	Frankie's work is unappreciated, and she is even suspected because she knows the bank robbery perpetrator.
	After being fired, Frankie tries to find a new job but is rejected at various places.

Difficulty in finding a job (00:14:28)
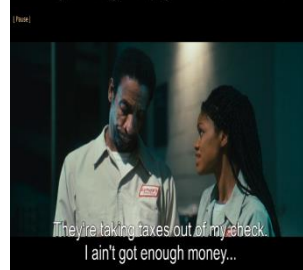
Docking pay (00:10:55)

T.T works as a janitor; her wages are cut for being deemed inadequate at work. She feels increasingly burdened if her salary is reduced due to many responsibilities as a mother.

Waring's feminist economic theory illustrates how economic systems often overlook the work and contributions of women. Waring argues that unpaid and invisible labor performed by women represents a form of discrimination that perpetuates male dominance within the economic system (Waring, 1990). As shown in Table 2.1 above, numerous economic and racial factors influence the decisions and

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responses of characters in confronting injustice. In the film, four African-American women find themselves trapped in economic hardship and social injustice. The character Frankie experiences inequity in her role as a bank teller.

Mr. Zachery	:	"How do we know you're not in collusion?"
Frankie	:	"Collusion? Let me tell you something. I am here at 8. I work my ass off until quitting time. Yesterday I counted $240,000 by hand for you. That's how you should know. I mean, come on, this is just not right. I nearly got blown away in your tired-ass fucking bank! And you're gonna fire me?"

The dialogue illustrates that prejudice always leads to negative consequences. The bank decided to dismiss Frankie solely because she knew the perpetrator of the robbery that occurred at his workplace. Despite not being involved and being a victim in the incident, the bank felt it could no longer trust her. Being unjustly terminated made Frankie feel wronged. She felt that his years of service were undervalued.

The depiction of Frankie's situation is made clear by using a close-up camera angle to emphasize the character's emotions at close range. This angle gives depth to the feelings and injustice Frankie is experiencing. Close-ups create intimacy with the situation, where Frankie's helplessness and frustration reinforce her moment of injustice when Mr. Zachery considers her involvement in the robbery simply because of her race. This shows Frankie's emotional turmoil and emphasizes the inequality and injustice she faces as a black woman.

This is in accordance with Waring's statement, which discusses how women often work unpaid and are undervalued and unrecognized in the economic system (Waring, 1999). This shows how Frankie, a black woman, is often marginalized and unappreciated in the economic system because she is not only a woman but also a black person.

Furthermore, after being dismissed, Frankie struggled to find new employment despite having adequate experience and skills.

Frankie	:	"Can you believe after working for that damn bank for two years. I can't even get a recommendation for another job?"

Frankie's anxiety about securing a new job highlights the reality that Black women often face discrimination and challenges in job hunting.

Waring argues that economic marginalization limits the potential and contribution of women, especially women of color, who often face barriers to achieving economic stability. Black women often experience various forms of discrimination in the economic system even though they have the same or higher skills and qualifications than men and non-black women. Furthermore, they are often less valued and respected and face higher unemployment rates than white women. These deep-rooted injustices affect Black women's employment, income, and social environment.

In this scene, background music also helps emphasize the character's cultural identity. The R&B and hip-hop background music featured in the film accompanies each scene and showcases the reality of black women. Historically, hip-hop has been a highly representative genre of music for black culture that serves to convey, highlight, and address issues of race, gender, and social injustice they experience (Bercasio, 2012). With this background music, Frankie and the other character's experiences are connected to their struggles as a narrative device to express culture, emphasizing the narrative of black feminism and the characters' resistance against injustice.

According to feminist economic principles, what is needed is a workplace that humanizes individuals. In this context, women should not merely be compensated for their work but should have their contributions recognized and valued. In the scene where T.T. experiences arbitrary salary deductions due to a single mistake.

> Luther : "Who had 104?"
> T.T : "I did."
> Luther : "You didn't empty the cans in 104. I'm docking your pay."
> Cleo : "That ain't right."
> Luther : "Who are you supposed to be? Goddamn Mighty Morphing fucking Power Ranger? What you gonna do? I'm docking her pay."
> T.T : "Speaking of pay, I thought you said that you was gonna pay me under the table. They're taking taxes out of my check. I ain't got enough money to pay for my babys*itter*."

How women strive to meet economic needs gets complicated as they also need to fulfil family responsibilities.

Luther treats T.T. harshly and arbitrarily reduces her wages. Luther does not even listen to T.T.'s reasons or the opinions of other Black female workers. This demonstrates how men still dominate the economic system over women. The scene also reflects the reality of how Black women are often treated unfairly and have their

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opinions disregarded. Waring states that the gender bias inherent in traditional economic systems tends to be designed around the experiences and roles of men, thus showing neglect and underestimation of women's contributions to the economic system (Waring, 1999). The gender bias in the economic system experienced by Black women is a very complex issue, reflecting the overlap of multiple discrimination (based on gender and race).

T.T. juggles dual roles as both a breadwinner and a homemaker. This portrayal aligns with Waring's argument that women's work, whether paid or unpaid, is frequently undervalued and inadequately recognized within the economic system. As Waring (1999) states, black women are often paid low, unstable wages and do not have adequate education and training to improve their career prospects, resulting in a widening economic gap. This scene highlights T.T.'s efforts as a single mother, struggling to support and care for her child while maintaining her low-wage job. This scene highlights that women's economic contributions are often invisible and undervalued.

This unjust economic system serves as the primary catalyst for characters to undertake and decide on extreme actions. The numerous events that transpire lead them to despair over their own future. Confronted with extremely limited choices, they eventually resort to extreme measures, such as robbing banks. They perceive that the system has failed them, thus justifying their actions of robbing banks as a form of resistance. This illustrates how the pervasive injustice they experience drives them into a desperate and perilous situation as a final effort to confront the inequity.

The movie provides a broader picture of US economic conditions in the 1990s. Economic development at that time was increasing in certain areas, but the distribution was not good enough, especially regarding wage growth among women (Boushey & Cherry, 2003). In addition, black women in this era were also often marginalized from higher-paying jobs and promotion opportunities. This can be seen in the scene when Frankie feels that her work as a bank teller for two years is unappreciated and unvalued. Therefore, the act of robbing a bank shown in the film is a response and critique of injustice, where black women are often victims not only of racial and gender discrimination but also of unfair economic structures.

CONCLUSION

There are principles of black feminism in this film. It is caused by intersectionality depicted through the main Black female characters as social identity,

such as race, gender, and class interact and create unique forms of discrimination. They face racism, unjust treatment by law enforcement, workplace discrimination, and societal inequalities. Additionally, they encounter gender-based discrimination, including child-rearing challenges and sexual harassment. Regarding the influence of economic and racial factors on a character's decisions in confronting existing injustices, economic and racial factors have a great influence on a character's decision-making. The economic difficulties and injustices experienced by the four main characters, such as unilateral dismissal and salary cuts, make them feel desperate and forced to make extreme decisions. The racial factor in this film is evidenced by the racial discrimination, such as dismissal, based on racial assumptions, and a system that treats them unfairly because of their racial background. These factors illustrate how existing injustice pushes them into criminal acts as a form of resistance against the system that has exploited them and shows the complexity of the interplay between economic, racial, and gender issues.

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The Myth of Pursuing Happiness in *The Pursuit of Happyness*

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine how to pursue happiness constructs Americans in the film *The Pursuit of Happyness (2006)*. Pursuing happiness is included in one of the American Dreams which means that everyone in America deserves their happiness. To investigate the analyses, this study uses Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to find out the happiness in Americans. The results show that pursuing happiness is categorized as one of the American myths and the American characteristics. The characteristics of freedom, happiness, and success describe the American character in pursuing happiness as the myth. In addition, pursuing happiness illustrates the similarity of the narrative when compared to the myth. It analyses in social and cultural of Americans' lives.

Keywords: *Americans; American Dreams; happiness; myth; semiotic*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of happiness has been so deeply embedded in American culture and is in many other cultures around the world since happiness is the primary concern for all mankind in the world. However, the term happiness commonly refers to the US since it is rooted in the Declaration of Independence, which is named the Pursuit of Happiness (Jefferson, 1973), stateing that

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.

This statement plays an important role in portraying the US as a nation that promotes liberty and equality. Besides the famous ideal of liberty, the Pursuit of Happiness appears in American writings as the American Dream, whether it is in American fiction or non-fiction.

The American Dream has a wonderful appeal that draws many people to the country. It has been a powerful belief among many individuals in the US, owing to how many people have been aroused by the promises of a better opportunity and life. The term "American Dream" was first used by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America* (2001, p. 31),

> The term refers to the hope promised by America to thousands of people who demanded liberty and equality in pursuing their dream to have a better life.

Because of this strong belief, the American Dream has become a myth for the American people. Foosum and Roth, in their book *The American Dream*, say that "the American Dream is one and

many, i.e., the success myth and the many myths" (Fossum & Roth, 1981, p. 5). The question is whether or not the Pursuit of Happiness is the American myth. If it is a myth, it must be reflected in American cultural products as it is a bedrock belief underlying the product.

The myths originated from stories and historical records of phenomena that take place in a specific area. The myths can also be believed by people as the phenomena happened in the past, and the myth illustrates the same narratives. Robertson (1980, p. xv) argues that the myths in the United States are "part of the world where we live in". Myths in the US are rationally and logically acceptable. This strong belief is based on realities that they get and see in the US. The description was stated explicitly as the American Dream, that people came to the US to seek a better life and to pursue happiness.

Pursuing happiness is closely tied with the US, both as a purpose for its founding and as a measure of success or failure. Most vividly, it reflects the American Dream more than any other and treats happiness as a concrete and possible goal. The inclusion of the pursuit of happiness as one of the three most fundamental

inalienable rights (Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) in the Constitution by Thomas Jefferson demonstrates the connection between freedom and happiness and how important happiness is for individuals. As Robert Darnton, in his journal, The Pursuit of Happiness, says, "Most Americans take it for granted as a natural extension of 'life' and 'liberty.' The pursuit of happiness is an idea that has long been debated and whose meaning is still up for grabs" (Darnton, 1995, p. 42).

Therefore, one of the American films entitled *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) shows equality in the search for opportunities since it references the myth of the pursuit of happiness. It assumes to wholly depict the same narratives as the myth of pursuing happiness. After that, this film is important to be investigated because of its status as a popular film. It became the most popular film due to its winning famous awards. With nearly the same title as The Pursuit of Happiness, it appears and grasps a successful film. According to IMDB (2006), this film won 12 awards from 26 nominations as a result of its popularity from 2006 to 2007. In 2006, the movie won nominations for the Capri Movie of the Year Award and the Phoenix Film Critics Society Awards. In 2007, there were ten winners from the ASCAP Film and Television Music Awards, Italian National Syndicate of Film Journalists (2007), MovieGuide Awards, MTV Movie + TV Awards, NRJ Ciné Awards, Santa Barbara International Film Festival, and Teen Choice Awards. Therefore, connecting The Pursuit of Happiness (2006) in the context of the American dream of the pursuit of happiness as intended in this research is important to investigate.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses Roland Barthes' semiotic approach which is reconstructed and focused on giving meaning to sign rather than language. It is mainly used in structural activity based on the process. Barthes proclaimed that "semiology aims to take in any system of signs whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects" (Barthes, 1968, p. 9). The analysis focuses on the signs that are taken from many objects as a result to reveal the meaning. As known, the signs are universal, and they are used in daily life. The signs indicate something and generate meaning. "Sign not only brings but also produces meaning. Meaning is not an

absolute and stable concept that has been packed in the process of delivering a message or in a message in this situation" (Adi, 2016, p. 63).

Barthes expands on Saussure's ideas by emphasizing the significance of the interaction between sign users and signs in producing meaning, a phenomenon known as signification (Fiske, 2004, p. 114). Barthes (1968, p. 95) developed semiology with a secondary meaning, stating "the aim of semiological research is to reconstitute the functioning of the systems of significations other than language with accordance with the process typical of any structuralist activity". Here is Barthes' semiological system as follows.
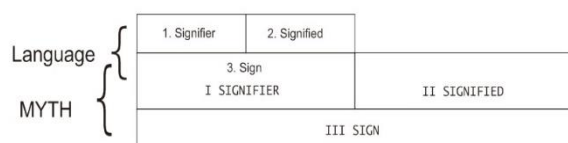
Figure 1. Semiological System
(Barthes, 1968, p. 133)

Barthes' semiological system operates in two stages. In the first stage (language), it is directly talking about the object's description (denotative stage), which consists of the signifier, signified, and sign. The second stage combines the whole sign system of the first stage

(connotative stage) and creates the second-order semiology as the result of myth.

Therefore, this research is conducted under qualitative method, which provides a broader understanding and explanation. Moreover, the theory of semiotics from Roland Barthes might provide the Information to fully investigate how the myth is being represented through the film. As Barthes said myth is a peculiar system, it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second order-semiological system (Barthes, 1991, p. 114.)

DISCUSSION

In portraying the myth of the pursuit of happiness in the film *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), this film shows its appearance to depict capability in presenting the reality of American myth. The myth has the narration referring to the search for freedom and happiness. Yingli asserts that, more specifically, the myth applies to Americans relying on their effort to achieve their overall life goals (Yingli, Rui, & Xuewei, 2017, p. 477). The myth of the pursuit of happiness is constructed for the people in the United States who place a significant goal on obtaining achievement,

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searching for freedom, and getting equality with the determination of their happiness being completely within their control. In the process of achieving happiness, the myth of the pursuit of happiness depends on Americans' capabilities who are struggling to pursue happiness.

The Symbols of Happiness

Struggle

The struggle in pursuing happiness is meaningful in that they begin on a new phase in the US, which is symbolized by a life-changing path. This goal is supported by equal opportunities, which also serve as the focus for several discussions concerning the concept of happiness. It has been accepted that a successful life is always followed by various struggles.

Image 2. Trying to fix the machine to be sold (01:44:30)

The struggle is illustrated through the symbol of a man finishing a job. He performed to show his ability to complete the job successfully. This struggle might be seen as a

means of attaining success. He hopes to improve their quality of life to achieve happiness. From the struggle, most people, including Chris Gardner as main character, have a dream to pursue happiness in their lives. Their happiness is determined by his ability to struggle with himself. The basic idea of an individual's personality is in their pursuit and desire to achieve advantages in life because Friedman & Schustack (2008, p. 137) suggested that the level of success achieved by individuals could differ from common expectations in the meaning of happiness. Indeed, the situation may be difficult and may be easy. Both could be solved because challenges always appear in life, like in the scenes shown above, and the struggle is the solution to achieving the goal.

Family

Family has a significant place in American society; it is often regarded as people's dream of happiness. Pursuing happiness with family is one of the pathways to the ambitious goal for many individuals in American society. Certain individuals in the US spend their time with family to achieve personal happiness. It is part of American characteristics that they will

be strong if the family can also feel happy (Griggs, 2020).

The portrayal of family is shown in the film *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006). The story told that the role of a father is to bring happiness to his son. He is willing to work hard for the happiness of his son. The portrayal of family contains one of the characteristics of American people to achieve happiness in life.

Figure 3. A father buying a bar of chocolate for his son (00:57:23)

The illustration portrays the father's great love for his son. It can be seen from the scene that the father spends his time trying to bring happiness to his son. The sign appears when he dedicates his time to the purpose of his son's happiness. This portrayal is deeply connected with the American myth of the name of happiness, and it proposes that people own their desires to achieve happiness. It shows family happiness because it portrays happiness in other ways, and it reflects American characteristics.

This symbol refers to the myth of the pursuit of happiness as a characteristic of Americans. Various ways are portrayed as a means to achieve happiness, and happiness appears as a form of struggle to achieve success. Struggle and family are included in one of the American characters, showing that they are not easy to give up, and are ambitious people who pursue happiness.

The Symbol of Freedom

The US is known as the land of freedom. People came to America in search of a better life, to change their fate, and to find happiness. It has become the land of freedom because "from the beginning, people came to America to seek the opportunity to lead their lives following their conscience" (Assiddiqi, 2011, p. 1). They came from various countries and regions to get freedom because they did not get what they needed where they lived before. Then, Remini (2014) says that the people who first came to America needed a new life. They were motivated by freedom in the land of opportunity, the US. They were also looking for food as a means of survival there. Then, each of them formed a group and culture that was created from various countries and regions (pp. 1-2). It is important to note that their goal is to gain

freedom in life and to find happiness in America.

Every American has the freedom to take a part in his life. He is free to decide what to do now and in the future. As stated in the Declaration of Independence, the American government or constitution guarantees each individual without interference as a natural right. He is free to speak, to get material wealth, and to profess religion. As Kearney et al. (1984) state, by freedom, Americans mean this concept as the desire and the ability of all individuals to control their destinies. The desire to be free of control was a basic value of the new nation in 1776, and it has continued to attract immigrants to this country (pp. 20-21).

To see how American people define freedom, some scenes in the movie show various meanings of freedom characterized as American characteristics. Some of the characters have their way of gaining freedom in the US.

Equality

In defining freedom, equality is one of the discussions to gain freedom in life. It is important to understand that Americans believe in equality as an opportunity. Each of them should have an equal chance, which means equality for everyone to get freedom as Americans. Equality of opportunity may be thought of as an ethical rule to get freedom in the US (Kearney et al., p. 22).

Demanding equality in America is one of the American characteristics that is rooted in the spirit of the earlier settlers who first came to the US. Jackson (1986) states, "it became an appropriate symbol of the American frontier spirit, one which focused on the future" (p. 16). Their spirit can also be characterized as the future for individuals, a future in which equality should be applied in the US. Thus, according to Spiller (1956), the US represents a new world. The idea of having a mindset of equality undoubtedly came from the immigrants who had the concept of material realities and freedom of life during the beginning of the US (p. 17). Therefore, freedom of thought is one of the elements of Americans' search for freedom. They come to the US for equal opportunity and freedom to live their lives. To see further the meaning of equality, the following scenes are proof that equality happens in the US.

Figure 4. Workers coming from different backgrounds walking on the side of the street (00:10:23)

The scene illustrates the occurrence of equality in the US. The concept of the pursuit of happiness is universally embraced by every individual in America. Regardless of their origin, they have a common objective of pursuing happiness. According to Frey (2020), In 1980, American people consist white people comprised almost 80% of the national population, with Black residents accounting for 11.5%, Latino or Hispanic residents at 6.5%, and Asian Americans at 1.8%. It is proven that American people have origins in different countries. They immigrated to the US intending to improve the quality of life.

Improving the quality of life has been formed in the minds of Americans through American myths. Their characteristics serve as a representation and define, as Ausband (1983) said, a product of the Enlightenment in the sense that no other country is terrible. Its progenitors were rational men who believed that equality in the US could solve all problems (p. 51). Therefore, Kearney et al. (1984) claim that Americans believe in creating their freedom through their characteristics. It requires a commitment from each other that they are united. It means that they have an important role in achieving happiness in American society and gaining influence and respect, and the individuals must be viewed as having the spirit to achieve their wishes (p. 21).

Individualism

The US ideally leads to "respect for the individuality of other selves" (Traber, 2007, p. 6). Individualism lies at the very core of American culture (Bellah et al. 1985, p. 55). People have their individuality to mean success in life. The individual concept of getting happiness is one of the characteristics of the American people. As Hudgins (2010) says, it is a natural character and calm feeling. It is sourced from themselves to identify who they are. As it is known that Americans have individual thoughts, they came to the US to seek freedom. Every man and woman freely have the same opportunity to express their way to pursue happiness as individual thought.

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Figure 5. A father and a son laughing together while walking (00:17:21)

Individual happiness is depicted in the scene above, where each person has their way of pursuing happiness. Laughing above presents as the symbol of happiness in different ways. This happiness shows that Americans have their way of achieving happiness. According to Kearney et al. (1984, p. 21), American people believe that everyone must learn to rely on themselves for happiness. It means that achieving happiness both in the way of family and material wealth is possible to be reached because it is the freedom to choose what happiness they want. They believed that they should take care of themselves, solve their problems, and stand on their own two feet for their happiness. Kearney et al. (1984, p. 21) claim that "Americans believe they must believe in individual happiness in order to keep their freedom. It means to respect American life in the name of individualism".

The Symbol of Success

The symbol of success has been embedded in American people's minds as their dream. They want to achieve their dreams by working hard. They believe that success can be achieved if people are willing to work hard. Hard work is one of the components of a successful life. It reflects the reality of American life.

Hard work

The belief in hard work in the pursuit of material gain and other goals is often referred to as the characteristics of Americans (Kearney et al., 1984, p. 43). Every individual in the US is allowed to have the same rights in the opportunity and support to develop their wealth. It also means accepting the value of hard work and contributing happiness to others or embracing social responsibilities (Adhitya & Hapsari, 2023, p. 130). As Marx (1964) suggests, in defining the meaning of happiness in the US, it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination of dreams (p. 3). They have imaginations to think and to be able to ensure their life through fighting for the success of everyone.

Figure 6. The man is facing an examination for acceptance as an employee (01:02:27)

Starting with the entrance test to the company is one of the elements of hard work. It may take the form of competition between individuals in the group or the competitive effort of social groups to gain their objectives. Through competitive effort, they may be expended to achieve success and survive in life, like competition in doing the examination or test to be an employee for working. Kearney et al. (1984) argued,

> If much of life is seen as a race, then a person must run the race in order to succeed; a person must compete with others. If everyone has an equal chance to succeed in the United States, then it is every person's duty to try. Americans match their energy and intelligence against that of their neighbors in a competitive contest for success. People who like to compete and are more successful than others are honored by being called "winners." On the other hand, those who do not like to compete and are not successful when they try are dishonored by being called "losers." This is especially true for American men (p. 23).

Understanding American views on the concept of hard work holds significant importance in gaining opportunity. The purpose points out that every individual should be afforded an equal chance of achieving achievement. Many Americans regard life as a competitive struggle to pursue happiness and achieve success. This portrayal provides every individual with an opportunity to compete in a competition and become the winner. In various ways, this idea can be regarded as a moral principle that every individual is free to achieve a better life to pursue happiness (Kearney et al., 1984, p. 22).

His ways illustrate the process of pursuing happiness in his life. The phenomena gave the same narratives as the myth portrayed in the United States. Therefore, the status of the myth of the pursuit of happiness describes the similarity to reflect the American culture through the scenes film above which has been portrayed. The phenomena occurred because they wanted to improve their social status and reach happiness in many opportunities than what their

countries could provide (Pamungkas, 2013). Those who lived in the US began to create a new life to pursue their happiness.

CONCLUSION

A myth can be defined as a story that does not necessarily follow truth or untruth. However, Robertson's statement argues that American myths exclusively have the potential to reflect actuality. The portrayal of this myth draws on historical events of the past, giving an illustration for Americans to believe in the various phenomena present in the US. The pursuit of happiness serves the portrayal of seeking a better life, ideal jobs, and freedom in society. Therefore, this term has grown into the ideology of the American people, and its status has become a myth in American society. It is characterized by an underlying story that is repeatedly conveyed to individuals.

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The Analysis of Dark Triad Concept in the Song Lyrics of Metallica's "Master of Puppets" and "Sad But True"

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ABSTRACT

The dark triad personality is commonly understood in the field of psychological studies. However, the analysis of the dark triad is still relatively new in the realm of literary studies. This article presents the dark triad in the lyrics of Metallica's songs "Master of Puppets" and "Sad but True". The selection of these two songs is based on the popularity of the song and the choice of words that cause multiple interpretations among Metallica fans. The findings of this research show that there are three traits of the dark triad found in both song lyrics. Machiavellianism represents manipulation; narcissism represents self-admiration; psychopathy represents anti-social and cruelty. This article can hopefully provide in-depth understanding to listeners as the music from previous decades keeps making comebacks.

Keywords: *dark triad; Machiavellianism; narcissism; psychopathy*

INTRODUCTION

Metallica has been recognized by many music observers as one of the four biggest thrash metal bands alongside Slayer, Megadeth, and Anthrax. The Big Four, as these four bands are called, are also known as the pioneers of thrash metal music. James Hetfield, Metallica's vocalist, said that people should have the right to scream as loudly and freely as possible. Metallica itself was

formed in 1981 in Los Angeles, California by drummer Lars Ulrich (Vogue, 2023). Thrash metal music is another variation of heavy metal music. Weinstein (2000, p. 48) philosophically defines thrash metal as a criticism and expression of dislike for pop music that tends to be more "soft" and "polite". The hallmark of thrash metal lies in the fast tempo with guttural vocals and fast and shrill guitar solo techniques or what is known as shredding techniques.

Of the many songs that Metallica released, "Master of Puppets" in 1986 and "Sad but True" in 1993 are two of the most popular songs. Both have a deep message and meaning in the lyrics of both songs. "Master of Puppets" is claimed by many fans as a form of expression or depiction of how dark drug addiction is. Meanwhile, "Sad but True" describes how a person's past also determines his fate in the future. However, they certainly leave room for other interpretations that have different implications.

The dark impression in "Master of Puppets" and "Sad but True" is undeniable due to the harsh and brutal lyrical choices. This analysis derives the influence of the two songs among fans and society in general. Based on the influence of the lyrics of the two songs, the article aims to look at other perspectives from a psychoanalytic point of view, especially the concept of dark triad personality that exists in the two songs.

The concept of the dark triad has not been touched upon many by literary critics, especially those who study psychoanalysis. The dark triad, as expressed by Lyons (Lyons, 2019), is a character who is antagonistic, self-centered, and exploitative. Someone with such traits can be observed on a day-to-day basis. Among young Indonesians, the term "toxic relationship" often appears in daily conversations or on social media. Toxic relationships have the same characteristics as the dark triad. Therefore, this article will provide an in-depth understanding of the darkest side of the "evil nature" of a person.

According to O'Boyle et.al. (Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012), the term 'dark triad' refers to Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. All of them have a level of ugliness that affects a person's behaviors. Each characteristic of the dark triad has its specific characteristics but are interrelated

A person with Machiavellianism tends to manipulate others. Machiavellianism is characterized as manipulative and cynical towards others and seeks to take advantage even if it violates norms and rules (Lyons, 2019). Narcissism, on the other hand, refers to an exaggerated view of oneself. In addition, a person with this character tends to be unwilling to accept criticism and crazy for praise from others. The third trait is psychopathy, which refers to individuals who are unable to show empathy towards others (Rizal & Handayani, 2021). When someone with this character commits an evil and cruel act, they will show no remorse.

Furthermore, this article explores the dark triad that appears in the interpretation of the lyrics of "Master of Puppets" and "Sad but True". The discussion will be divided into three segments, namely Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. These three parts of the dark side triad have often been discussed by a number of researchers, especially within the scope of psychological studies (Muris, Merckelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017). Despite the fact that the dark triad personality often appears in a number of characters in many literary works. However, so far, almost no one has brought the concept of the dark triad into literary studies (Sumner, Byers, Boochever, & Park, 2012). Therefore, this article is the first to focus on song lyrics as the object of research.

This research has two objectives to be elaborated: (1) How do the lyrics of "Master of Puppets" and "Sad but True" represent the characteristics of the dark triad? and (2) How is the meaning of the lyrics related to the dark triad?. The purpose of this research is to see the representation of dark triad characteristics. In addition to classification, how dark triads are displayed in song lyrics will also be presented.

METHODOLOGY

The article displays literary research conducted on the object of song lyrics in Metallica's "Master of Puppets" and "Sad but True". All stages of research are carried out remotely by relying on access to literacy from the internet and also the institution's library. Therefore, it is expected that there will be no obstacles for researchers to conduct research in relation to access to information.

In collecting and processing data, this research uses

descriptive qualitative methods. This method is intended to examine literary elements without any experimental engineering by researchers. The application of this method is used to explain the meaning of data supported by a number of empirical factual evidence (Ahmadi & Kartiwi, 2020). Therefore, it is expected that this research will be able to produce a comprehensive explanation in accordance with the researcher's interpretation.

In the realm of literary studies, psychoanalytic theory is a commonly used theory, in both Freudian and Lacanian schools. The concept of psychoanalytic theory is related to human mental function and development (Puspitasari, 2016). This then underlies the motives of every human action. Psychoanalysis applies to literary studies and then triggers the emergence of many literary studies that use psychology as a theoretical basis.

According to Freud (Ardiansyah, Sarinah, Susilawati, & Juanda, 2022), the consciousness that exists in a person is a small part of his overall mental life. On the one hand, the unconscious is a much bigger part. With the premise that the human subconscious plays an active

role in determining a person's character, attitude and actions, this psychological condition encourages a variety of motives. The actions that emerge can be either polite, courteous and friendly or rude, cruel and brutal. Human nature can go so far that it even leads to the dark side. This dark side of human character in the realm of psychology is known as the dark triad personality.

In qualitative research, the data analyzed are written language elements in the form of words, phrases sentences and paragraphs (Sugiyono, 2017). In addition, oral language elements are also analyzed, which are then transcribed. Based on the source, the data in the research can be divided into primary and secondary data. The primary data used are the lyrics of the songs "Master of Puppets" and "Sad but True" by Metallica. Meanwhile, secondary data are theories and arguments from reference books, journal articles and other publications related to the study of psychoanalysis and the theory of dark triad personality. The data are collected using the listen-read-record technique. Primary data collection begins with reading primary and secondary data sources. The researchers then analyze the meaning and classification of the dark

triad personality in the song lyrics.

After collecting the data, they are then analyzed using content analysis, which is a systematic technique to parse the detailed content of the data and interpret it (Adhitya, et al., 2022, p. 263). To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, the research team applied the triangulation method (Bhandari, 2023). In the research, data and theoretical triangulation are applied.

DISCUSSION

A Machiavellian is a person who uses others for their benefit (Bereczkei, 2018). The term Machiavellian is named after a Renaissance writer, Nicolo Machiavelli. He wrote a book called The Prince, which is about how a leader perpetuates his position. Machiavellian beliefs argue that a leader must maintain ethics but on the one hand, should not hesitate to be cunning and deceptive to maintain his or her power. Therefore, the concept of Machiavellianism is based on the ideas put forward by Machiavelli. Furthermore, there are five main characteristics of Machiavellianism, namely manipulation, immorality, cynicism, emotional coldness,

and lack of empathy (Bereczkei, 2018). Therefore, the categorization and analysis of song lyrics are based on these five main characteristics of Machiavellianism (Paulhus & William, 2002).

Someone with a narcissistic personality admires themselves excessively, has fantasies of control over others and a high imagination of success (Rizal & Handayani, 2021). He or she also tends to look down on others so that they are always better than others. People with narcissism also dislike negative responses from others or opinions that point out their shortcomings.

The last one is psychopathy. Of the three dark triad traits, psychopathy is known for its more aggressive and evil character traits. Psychopathic characters tend not to care about their surroundings which leads to violent criminal things (Rizal & Handayani, 2021). People with this character will not show remorse for their evil deeds to others. These three dark triad traits are all found in the lyrics of "Master of Puppets" and "Sad but True", as shown below.

Table 1. The Classification of Dark Triad Traits

No	Dark Triad	"Master of Puppets"	"Sad but True"
1	Machiavellianism	I'm your source of self-destruction	I'm your eyes when you must steal
		Leading on your death's construction	You (you), you're my mask
		Taste me, you will see	You're my cover, my shelter
		More is all you need	Do (do), do my work
		Master of puppets, I'm pulling your strings	Do my dirty work, scapegoat
		Now I rule you too	I'm your truth, telling lies
2	Narcissism	Come crawling faster	Hey (hey), I'm your life
		Obey your master	I'm the one who takes you there
		Just call my name, 'cause I'll hear you scream	I'm the one who cares
			I'm your only true friend now

Table 2. (continued)

No	Dark Triad	"Master of Puppets"	"Sad but True"
3	Psychopathy	How I'm killing you	I'm your dream, make you real Hate (hate), I'm your hate
		Twisting your mind and smashing your dreams	And I no longer care
		I will help you die	

Machiavellianism and narcissism traits appear most dominantly in the lyrics. Meanwhile, psychopathy traits appear as the least. We can conclude that the lyrics in both songs represent the traits of the dark triad. The following is the meaning of the lyrics of Master of Puppets and Sad but True related to the dark triad traits.

Table 2. The Meaning Interpretation of Dark Triad Traits in "Master of Puppets"

No	Dark Triad	"Master of Puppets"	Meaning
1	Machiavellianism	I'm your source of self-destruction	A takes control of B's life
		Leading on your death's construction	A is the end of B's life

No	Dark Triad		
		Taste me, you will see	A manipulates B
		More is all you need	A puts the doctrine to B
		Master of puppets, I'm pulling your strings	A is the master of B
		Now I rule you too	A owns B
2	Narcissism	Come crawling faster	A orders B
		Obey your master	A shows the power of B
		Just call my name, 'cause I'll hear your scream	A acts as the savior for B
3	Psychopathy	How I'm killing you	A threatens B
		Twisting your mind and smashing your dreams	A destroys B's mind and dream
		I will help you die	A accompanies B until the death

Table 3. The meaning interpretation of Dark Triad Characteristics in "Sad but True"

No	Dark Triad	"Sad But True"	Meaning
1	Machiavellianism	I'm your eyes when you must steal	A manipulates B
		You (you), you're my mask	A makes B his/her disguise
		You're my cover, my shelter	A makes B his/her shield
		Do (do), do my work	A asks/orders B to do his/her job (showing superiority)
		Do my dirty work, scapegoat	A orders B to do his/her nasty job and blames B
		I'm your truth, telling lies	A's utterance is used as the truth when B lies.
2	Narcissism	Hey (hey), I'm your life	A is the source of life for B
		I'm the one who takes you there	B is indebted to A for the rest of life
		I'm the one who cares	A show to B that he/she is the only person

			that cares for B.
		I'm your only true friend now	A is the one and only true companion for B
		I'm your dream, make you real	A is the destiny and finish line for B
3	Psychopathy	Hate (hate), I'm your hate	A is the single source of B's hatred
		And I no longer care	A does not care/pay attention to B anymore

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Metallica's "Master of Puppets" and "Sad but True" shows a connection with the concept of the Dark Triad, which includes three main characteristics: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. The three traits of the dark triad represent manipulative nature, superiority and antipathy. Both songs thematically explore the dark side of humanity, feelings of manipulation, and power that can control and corrupt. In "Master of Puppets," the lyrics describe a person as a "puppet master" who controls the lives of others, reflecting elements of psychopathy with control and manipulation. The song refers to the power relationships and chaos that can result from

someone who tends to manipulate and control others. Meanwhile, "Sad but True" underscores the confusing and misleading feeling of attachment. The lyrics reflect narcissistic tendencies with the depiction of the self as a source of suffering, while still maintaining an attractiveness that affects others. Also, elements of Machiavellianism are seen in the lyrical message that describes complex and strategic relationships, emphasizing the manipulation of emotions and perceptions. People with Machiavellianism tend to lack affection in interpersonal relationships. Both songs highlight the dark aspects of humans associated with the Dark Triad, reflecting complex and often detrimental psychological characteristics. Metallica cleverly incorporates these elements into their lyrics, creating a message that questions manipulation, attachment, and the dark side of humanity.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and revision, and publication process in general.

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Revealing Posttraumatic Growth, Identity and Global Influence in Demi Lovato: *Dancing with the Devil* Documentary

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ABSTRACT

As a singer and an actress, Demi Lovato has fame which can influence her fans globally. Further, with the mental health, addiction, and trauma issues, she gains positive changes in her life that affect and encourage her fans as well. The object of this study is *Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil* documentary series. This study reveals Lovato's posttraumatic growth that influences her identity and global influence. The narratives, captured clips, posts, and previous research are used as the data in this study. This study uses the theory of posttraumatic growth and new media for data interpretation. The findings show that Lovato's posttraumatic growth consists of five domains: personal strength, relations to others, new possibilities, appreciation of life, and spiritual and existential changes. Moreover, her posttraumatic growth also leads her to discover her identity as a non-binary person and bring positive impacts to her fans around the world and the non-binary community. Therefore, as a new media form, the *Dancing with the Devil* documentary series successfully delivers Lovato's stories and struggles to people worldwide, especially her fans.

Keywords: *Demi Lovato; documentary series; global influence; identity; trauma*

INTRODUCTION

Demetria Devonne, who is well known as Demi Lovato, is an actress and an American singer. She first gained her popularity through her appearance in a TV show for kids called *Barney and Friends*. Lovato further got fame when she played the role of Torres in Disney's *Camp Rock* in 2008. She then worked for Disney for a couple of years of her teenage years. As she worked for Disney, she was chosen to be the advocate for mental health as she was known for being completely sober for six years from when she was 18 up to 23 years old. Since then, she has raised awareness about mental health through some events and her social media platforms so that she can spread positivity and understanding to people, especially her fans globally.

However, as time passes by, Lovato finds herself struggling with the fame she has, her mental health, her trauma, and her addiction. In 2021, Lovato released her seventh album called *Dancing with the Devil... the Art of Starting Over*. During the same period, Lovato also announced her four-part documentary, entitled *Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil*. It has four parts or episodes filmed by Michael D. Ratner, reflects Demi, who fearlessly opens up about the worst periods in her life, including an overdose in 2018 (Dodds, 2023).

Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil documentary series serves some important and crucial moments in her life, especially with her struggles. It includes her childhood trauma, her teenage dark years, and her mental health issues. The documentary series consists of four parts: Part One: Losing Control; Part Two: 5 Minutes from Death; Part Three: Reclaiming Power; Part Four: Rebirthing. This four-part documentary series is very significant in showing Lovato's posttraumatic growth, her identity, and the global influence she has. Further, the documentary series also includes some of the important people in Lovato's life who also give witnesses of things which happened to her.

Moreover, the four-part documentary series is relevant because nowadays, some public figures have addiction issues. Those include Robert Downey Jr., Ben Affleck, Bradley Cooper, Drew Barrymore, Elton John, Jamie Lee Curtis, Keith Urban, Daniel Radcliffe, Amber Valletta, Eric Clapton, and

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Matthew Perry (Langmaid, 2022). The psychological explanation underlying drug addiction is based on a variety of environmental and societal factors. These pressures might vary from unstable relationships in family life to external demands such as making big singles. Besides creative improvement, some artists utilize drugs to cope with the strain of performing. This form of relaxation, while helpful, is the most likely to lead to addiction (Luck, 2021). Therefore, Lovato's documentary series has gained much attention from her fans worldwide.

In relation to global influence, by addressing her mental health issue, her trauma, and her past life in her documentary series, Lovato could connect and let the audience, especially her fans, relate to and reflect on them in their lives. Further, the documentary series itself was publicly posted on *YouTube*, where everyone can access it freely. Therefore, by raising her life issues, she wants to share her perspective on those problems she deals with, encourage her audience and fans who are experiencing the same issues, and empower them to seek self-love. Thus, with the diverse background of her fans, she could help them by showing

her positive changes after she lived in trauma and along with the issues she has.

Lovato's life stories have a significant impact on cultural and societal implications. Through her actions, she has been a role model for her fans. She has been breaking down the social norms about mental health and encouraging her fans to always ask for help whenever they need it. Further, Lovato also gave an example that people deserve to be heard. It was shown by her advocate events where she opened up and told her own experiences to her fans. As she positively shares her issues, she could inspire people worldwide to always gain power from the struggle they have and try to put much love into themselves rather than thinking about what people might say about such issues.

Moreover, for young people whose emotions are not stable yet, Lovato's documentary series can be a sort of media for young people who suffer from existential crises to find a safe place within themselves. It includes how they identify themselves, discover what they like and do not like, find ways to solve problems, and find comfort. In relation to her addiction, Lovato also gives an understanding of how strong the influence of drugs is, and she also shows her empathy and

support to those who experience the same things. Therefore, from her recovery journey until her current career, she shows how many positive changes she has.

METHODOLOGY

In analyzing this case, the writer decides to use the theory of posttraumatic growth by Tedeschi and Calhoun. The posttraumatic growth theory applied in this study involves the use of some principal psychological perspectives to explain or support several arguments, particularly those that are related to psychology. Posttraumatic growth itself refers to the positive changes which people have after experiencing traumatic events in their lives. What makes it interesting is that people tend to focus on the negative sides of having traumatic experiences. However, it can also bring some positive aftermath impact. Even though the process requires much time, posttraumatic growth highlights five domains. Those are personal strength, relating to others, new possibilities, appreciation of life, and spiritual and existence changes (Tedeschi et al., 2018).

Personal strength is where people who have had traumatic experiences are finally able to gain the power to come back and use their past experiences as fuel to be a better version of themselves. Relating to others, the second domain is where people try to build up their trust and have relationships with others. Nevertheless, it does not mean that they leave the relationship they had. On the contrary, they improve their past relationships with others.

In the third domain, new possibilities, people who had trauma can see how brave and bold they are, and now they can decide what they want, what their interests are, and what career they want to pursue. Appreciation of life, the fourth domain, is where people show their gratitude for the chances they get now. Despite the traumatic events they experienced, they are learning to be more grateful for life and every little thing they have in the present. The last domain, spirituality and existence, does not always have to do with spiritual beliefs. In this domain, people who have traumatic experiences can relate it to their journey and the existential changes they have (Tedeschi et al., 2018, pp. 26–28).

With the offered five domains, the theory of posttraumatic growth is used to help the writer reveal Demi Lovato's posttraumatic growth,

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identity, and global influence. Furthermore, in this research, the primary data is taken from the four-part documentary series itself, *Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil, in the form of statements and scenes.* It was produced by Marc Ambrose and was directed by Michael D. Ratner. It consists of four episodes with different duration for each episode. The first part is 22 minutes 35 seconds long. The second part is 21 minutes and 55 seconds long. The third part is 21 minutes 58 seconds. The last part is 28 minutes 50 seconds.

As the object is a documentary series, it is included as one of the new media products. The theory of new media is taken from Ocak (2012). New documentary types arose on the Internet as new media as well as digital technology evolved. These contemporary forms are classified as online documentary (web-doc), interactive documentary (i-doc), database filmmaking, and non-linear documentary. New media, with its unique characteristics, allows documentary producers to think, envision, build, and create documentary projects in new ways and motivates them to create documentaries in new ways (Ocak, 2012). This theory is used to discover new media's

influence in spreading the information and create a connection between public figures, in this case, Demi Lovato, and the audience.

The writer first watched the four-part documentary series several times. Second, the writer captures the important evidence which shows Lovato's posttraumatic growth, which later relates to how she identifies herself and the global influence she makes. Third, the writer selects the captured scenes and writes down the narratives. The writer also uses some *posts* that are taken from *X* with the hashtag *#HowDemiHasHelpedMe* to find the global influence she made. In addition, the secondary data is taken from the previous related articles and journals. After that, the writer analyzes the collected data and puts it into the discussion.

DISCUSSION

As a famous singer, Lovato has done things that might influence her fans. It includes her songs, her acts, and her appearances. In her four-part documentary series, she breaks down all her career experiences until the time she overdosed in 2018. Lovato has been known since she first appeared in the *Barney and Friends* TV show. Since then, she has been

gaining more popularity, especially since she decided to pursue a singing career. There is no doubt that popular public figures undergo some issues in their lives. In the case of Lovato, she exemplifies celebrities' contradictory cultural status: they exemplify prosperity, glamour, and beauty, yet society develops a fetishistic fixation with their collapse (Franssen, 2020).

Further, Lovato once became an advocate of mental health for youth. With that being said, society thinks that her mental health issue is the one that keeps her from becoming this successful. However, Lovato has rebranded herself as the personification of confidence, self-improvement, and recovery by integrating her crises, diagnosis, and therapy into her public image (Franssen, 2020). Therefore, in this discussion, the writer provides some parts. The first one is all about the four-part documentary series, *Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil as a new medium.* Second, it elaborates on Demi Lovato's posttraumatic growth. The third one discusses Lovato's identity. Lastly, it describes the global influence she has.

Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil as a New Media

As technology develops rapidly, many forms of media offer people both education and entertainment. New media enables new types of representation and documentary film creation. New media documentaries also change the cultural experience of watching a film. Instead of just watching a new media documentary, the audience interacts with it by observing, navigating, and searching inside the film's surface or space (Ocak, 2012).

The documentary talks about Lovato's trauma and mental health issues. The documentary series lets the audience, mainly her fans, reflect and relate the mentioned stories to theirs. It is triggering for some people who have the same traumatic experiences and who have mental health issues. Since it is produced in a new documentary form, the audience has the time to continue watching or rest first. Therefore, this new form of media is an effective and innovative way to deliver messages to the audience.

Lovato has gained many fans since her first appearance in her singing career. The ages of her fans are also varied. It consists of those who are still

teenagers until those who are already adults. Through new media and a documentary series, Lovato has successfully delivered her stories and values to her fans. Further, an increasing number of people are viewing and following new sorts of documentaries on the Internet (Ocak, 2012). Therefore, a new media in the form of a documentary series is used well in this case.

This documentary series embraces Lovato, her family, her friends, and her team through a near-fatal 2018 overdose that sent the singer and actress to a point of breakdown of her addiction as well as mental health that she had never experienced before. Lovato opens up about failing years of sobriety, taking more extreme drugs, and experiencing horrible sexual assaults that altered her attachment to drugs (Spanos, 2021).

In the first part, "losing control", Lovato opens about overdose moments back in 2018 at the age of 25 years old. She was found unconscious in her house after consuming fentanyl. However, before explaining what happened on her overdose night, she also opens up about some issues she has. Firstly, she had childhood trauma when she witnessed her mother being abused by her father. Her father was abusive and

alcoholic. In the first episode, Lovato shows that she feels guilty for her father's death. She never wanted her father to pass away alone. However, the fact is that he was found for about one and a half weeks after his death.

Further, it was during Father's Day. Therefore, Lovato felt bad because when people celebrate Father's Day, her father rotted alone. Secondly, she had an eating disorder where she would rather eat nothing, and she felt that there was something wrong with her body. When she was little, Lovato was put into a beauty pageant where they were expected to be pretty and have great body looks. Lovato also speaks up about her eating disorder and how her surroundings are very careful with the food they eat whenever she is around. Thirdly, she had an addiction to crack and heroin. After celebrating six years of sobriety on March 16, 2018, two weeks later, she broke her sobriety by consuming drugs.

The second part, "5 minutes from death", talks more about the overdosed night and what happened that night. July 23, 2018, was the night she decided to go back to drugs and alcohol. She celebrated one of her best friend's birthdays and continued the party at her

place. In the documentary series, she admitted that she lied to her friends when she said she wanted to go to bed. At that time, she called her dealer, and that was when everything started. In the morning, she was found unconscious, and that is when her assistant and security asked for help. Because of her overdose night, she suffered some damage, including three strokes, a heart attack, and brain damage; she cannot drive, she has blind spots in her vision, she has pneumonia, and she has multiple organ failures. Lovato was found naked in her bed after she overdosed. That was the moment when everyone in her place thought that she was raped. After being able to communicate, in her documentary series, Lovato also states that she knew her drug dealer raped her. Thus, this made every situation she had even worse.

In the third part, "reclaiming power", Lovato shows her love and support for people affected by her night. As she celebrated her best friend's birthday before the accident, many of her fans blamed her best friends. Her fans thought that they were the reasons that made Lovato break her sobriety. She was the one who decided to be in touch with drugs again.

Therefore, she asked her family, best friends, and people involved to be interviewed. She wanted them to give their point of view and to clear their names. It can be seen that Lovato cares about her loved ones.

Furthermore, in this part, Lovato also breaks down the moment when she experienced sexual assault. She was raped during her Disney TV Journey. Since then, she started to cut herself, stop eating, and throw up as her coping mechanism. However, with the past traumatic experiences she had, and after 18 months of her hiatus, she decided to come back to the music world.

In the fourth part, "rebirthing", Lovato shows how she gains power and strength after her dark moments. She started to do many positive activities that could help her grow and be a better version of herself. At the end of the four-part documentary series, she states that she does not need to hide every feeling she has. Moreover, she also encourages her fans to do positive things in their lives.

Demi Lovato's Posttraumatic Growth

Lovato had traumatic experiences when she was little and a teenager. First, she

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experienced an abusive relationship with her parents. Second, she experienced sexual assault during her career in the entertainment world. Therefore, those traumatic experiences indeed had some impacts on her life. However, those are not always in negative ways. Lovato also takes those traumatic experiences as her fuel to do some positive things. In this case, Lovato's posttraumatic experiences are seen through the five domains. Those are explained as the following.

Personal Strength

The first domain that shows Lovato's posttraumatic growth is her strength. After living through the traumatic experiences for years, she got the courage to gain all the strength to get up and do better things. In the first part, Lovato breaks down some of her traumas, including the one she got because of her violent father and her experience joining a beauty pageant when she was little. However, during her documentary series, she shows how she gains back her strength.

> It's interesting that it took me a quarantine to work of this trauma stuff. I have never really taken the time to, uh, dig deep and do the work on.
> (losing control, 00:05:07)

From the narrative above, Lovato states that her COVID-19 quarantine became one of her moments to work on her trauma. She did some positive things, such as meditating and relaxing. Rather than thinking about the negative thoughts of having trauma, Lovato encourages herself to take the positive sides of it. Living in isolation for months has given some people, primarily the privileged enough, an extraordinary chance to look back on their present circumstances and reset them (Samuel, 2020). She takes advantage of her quarantine time to bring back her confidence and calmness. Further, with the clear elaboration of how she undergoes trauma and mental health in her documentary series, Lovato also states her belief that with all the traumatic pasts she has, she could gain power back.

> … but at the end of the day, I'm responsible for my life choices and hold only myself accountable. And the last two years have been about me doing the work to identify and confront those traumas so I can be my best self and truly be happy.
> (5 minutes from death, 00:19:58)

> That's the best part about of my life today is that I'm in control of it. What I eat is my decision. What I don't

eat is my decision. What I do is my decision. And I'm really, really, really grateful of the team that I have today.
(rebirthing, 00:14:29)

This whole thing is a learning process for me, too, of no longer having any fear and just going forward with what I want to do."
(Part four: rebirthing, 00:26:46)

In the last part of the documentary series, Lovato highlights that those things become her fuel to let go of her hard feelings of traumatic experiences. She gained the power to do things she likes, make decisions, and go forward while living her own life. In the third and fourth parts, Lovato emphasizes her ways of reclaiming her power and starting over her life. Further, through her cheerful words, Lovato can see her traumatic experiences very positively. In addition, individual strengths can work as a shield towards perceived stress and as protective factors for mental health. These strengths support mental health by improving psychological well-being and lowering psychological symptoms (Duan, 2016).

The proof of Lovato's strength is also clearly seen when she first appeared at the 62nd GRAMMY Awards. She sang her comeback song entitled "Anyone" that she wrote and recorded shortly before her overdose night. She claims that she was in denial of needing help. However, Lovato realized she should have asked for help after the incident. It took Demi Lovato nearly a year and a half to feel comfortable performing in public following her overdose (Lafuente, 2020). In the GRAMMY stage, Lovato gained her power and showed the world that it is all right to embrace all past experiences and fold those into power.

In the following picture, Lovato first sang her song as her comeback. At first, it was hard for her as she needed to stop before finishing her first verse. However, she got much support from the audience. Therefore, she was able to start over her song and sang it powerfully and beautifully. In her documentary series, Lovato also states that her song, Anyone, dramatically influences her. She highlights that every lyric she wrote in that song is what she feels.

Image 1. Lovato's first comeback after her 18 months of hiatus

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Relations to Others

The concept of posttraumatic growth by Tedeschi and Calhoun highlights that the positive process of trauma aftermath is not a quick one, but it takes time. For trauma survivors, it might be quite challenging to be open and build trust with other people. However, it does not rule out the possibility of gaining power and change quickly. Intimate relationships are essential for a healthy human life. By investigating them rather than dismissing them, the self-awareness and compassion required for connections and relationships can be strengthened (Brickel, 2017).

In Lovato's case, after living through her traumatic experiences, including her overdose incident, she has been trying to fix her relationship with her surroundings. Those include her relationship with her parents, sisters, friends, and team.

> I'm going to take this time to spend with my family, and get to know my boyfriend and cuddle with my dogs more.
> (rebirthing, 00:03:40)

From the narrative above, Lovato claims she also tries to have stronger and bolder relationships with her family and loved ones. Lovato emphasizes that she spends more time with them and learns from each other. Further, in the following narrative, she explains that her choice does not only affect her but also the people around her. In her documentary series, Lovato states that her best friends were affected by her overdose night. As she is a famous singer with many fans, her best friends were blamed. The fans thought that they were the reasons why she came back to drugs and alcohol.

> I get why after the OD I was so focused on myself, but unfortunately to took me too long to realize how my choices affected the people I really care about who had stuck by me.
> (reclaiming power, 00:03:54)

However, Lovato tried to fix her relationship with her friends and people who were affected by her overdose night. In the fourth part of her documentary series, she insisted and gave her friends a chance to explain their points of view about her overdose night. The fact is that her best friends did not have anything to do with her actions that night. She let them give their explanation and clear their names in public. That is because their friends also got some hateful comments and death threats from her fans. Therefore, Lovato involves her

best friends, family and staff in her documentary series. Here, it shows that she is in charge of fixing her relationships with her surroundings.

New Possibility

After living through traumatic experiences, the bravest decision is to open oneself and believe in the new possibilities that may appear in life. People may be ready to open themselves up to the prospect of a future that is not too controlled by, or caught in, the (unaware) trauma by listening to the past thoughts that remain in the present (Marder, 2006). In this case, Lovato's traumatic experiences let her positively create new possibilities.

> I want to allow myself the ability to live my life in the most authentic form possible, which I just haven't done because of my past and some things that I've needed to work on.
> (Part four: rebirthing, 00:08:54)

Lovato allows herself to find new possibilities in her life that she has not discovered yet. Furthermore, one year after the documentary was released, Lovato also posted a post stating that whenever she wakes up, she is given another opportunity to be who she wants and aspires to be. She has spent most of her life developing in front of the fans. They have seen it all, both good and bad. This shows that trauma gives her positive thoughts about having new possibilities in living life.

Moreover, the following picture shows a picture that Lovato posted on her social media platform (NBC News [@NBCNews], 2018). She posted her thoughts into notes. She shows how grateful she was. In addition, Lovato also states that she will keep fighting. This shows that she has a positive new possibility in her life, especially after her overdose at night.

I have always been transparent about my journey with addiction. What I've learned is that this illness is not something that disappears or fades with time. It is something I must continue to overcome and have not done yet.

I want to thank God for keeping me alive and well. To my fans, I am forever grateful for all of your love and support throughout this past week and beyond. Your positive thoughts and prayers have helped me navigate through this difficult time.

I want to thank my family, my team, and the staff at Cedars-Sinai who have been by my side this entire time. Without them I wouldn't be here writing this letter to all of you.

I now need time to heal and focus on my sobriety and road to recovery. The love you have all shown me will never be forgotten and I look forward to the day where I can say I came out on the other side.

I will keep fighting ❤️

Demi

Image 2. Lovato's post on August 6, 2018
Instagram.com/ddlovato/

Appreciation of Life

For trauma survivors, in taking the positive effects of it, commonly, they tend to

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appreciate everything they have in life. As stated by Tedeschi and Calhoun, those who have been living in traumatic experiences tend to see their present lives as second chances. Therefore, they always try to do better at every chance they have. It works the same for Lovato, especially after her overdose night. She is grateful for everything she has at the moment.

> It's like a nice reminder that it wasn't my time, you know? That there was more life to be lived.
> (5 minutes from death, 00:20:27)

Lovato highlights that her past experiences, including her traumatic ones, have reminded her of the present. She also emphasizes that when things do not work as she expected, the right time has not yet come. Therefore, seeing things from a positive side is needed in overcoming trauma. The research found that increased appreciation for life was the most generally endorsed element of PTG during six months post-discharge, and it was related to higher degrees of perceptual loss and symptoms of depression at that time (Silva et al., 2011).

> I don't think that I would've been able to appreciate the big things that are going to come in

the future has I not been able to appreciate the little things now.
> (rebirthing: 00:02:54)

> In other times of my life, I've always tried to find the good in things, and that's what I did with this. It was like, how can I use this experience to work on myself?
> (rebirthing, 00:03:11)

> I've had a lot of lives, like, my cat — you know? I'm on my ninth life, and I don't know how many opportunities I have left. It's interesting. Life ebbs and flows.
> (rebirthing, 00:27:35)

It can be seen that through her four-part documentary series, Lovato shows how she appreciates her life. She also states that everything she lives in is the one that she should be grateful for. This feeling makes her realize that she has to do what she focuses on in the present and appreciate life even more.

Spiritual and Existential Changes

The last domain of posttraumatic growth is how individuals relate to their spiritual journey. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2018) state that it only sometimes works for those who are believers but also for the non-ones. It can be in

terms of their existence as well.

> I think that God has a twisted sense of humor sometimes.
> (5 minutes from death, 00:13:41)

> I knew that what I had been looking for I hadn't found yet. But what I had been looking for was not in the form of a drug. It was the spiritual growth that I've had over the past – I even want to say, like, seven months. That spiritual growth is what I was looking for.
> (5 minutes from death, 00:14:44)

It can be seen from the narratives above that Lovato also lets her spiritual growth take part in her recovery and posttraumatic journey. Further, she also shows that she needs guidance spiritually to overcome her trauma. Spirituality adds value to a happy life while influencing how these demands are fulfilled (Van Dierendonck, 2012). Moreover, Lovato's spirituality is shown in the following narratives.

> All it did was bring me back to my knees of begging to God for help.
> (reclaiming power, 00:10:12)

> And I'm really, really, really grateful.

> (rebirthing, 00:14:44)

> I am very, very aware of how blessed, lucky I am.
> (rebirthing, 00:15:02)

Thus, Lovato indeed takes her spirituality in charge of her overcoming processes. Besides gaining her power back from the traumatic experiences, she also tries to relate her struggle and the blessing she gets from the spiritual and existential point of view.

Demi Lovato's Identity

Along the way, Lovato overcomes her trauma and mental health; she also explores and discovers her identity. In her documentary series, she also states that she discovered her new identity. She is no longer on track with where society told her to be. In finding her identity, Lovato also shares her journey in being honest with herself and accepting her as she is.

> There's so much more of me that I have yet to explore. And one of the good things about this experience is that I've used this time to look within. And also I feel like I'm actually too queer to marry a man in my life right now. I'm not willing to put a label on it right this second. I think I will get there, but there's a lot of things I have to do for myself first.
> (rebirthing, 00:08:24)

> Life is fluid and I'm fluid, and that's all I know.
>   (rebirthing, 00:27:44)

In the fourth part, Lovato stated that her life is as fluid as hers. Further, she also announced that on her social media platforms. She proudly said that she is a non-binary person and encouraged people, especially her fans, to be honest with themselves and accept themselves well. People have a gender that is neither male nor female, and they may simultaneously identify as male and female or question the concept of not having two genders. 'Genderqueer' or 'non-binary' are umbrella names for such genders (Richards et al., 2016). In this case, Lovato stated at the time that she was "officially changing" her pronouns into they/them as it felt "most authentic and true" (Carras, 2023).

Hence, the trauma experiences she had helped her to find herself. Lovato stated that she is more comfortable with the identity she has right now. Further, she is open to expressing herself in many forms, such as how she dresses up and her appearance.

Global Influence

As a singer and actress who has gained popularity since she was little, Lovato indeed has many fans worldwide. Further,

Demi Lovato has also been open about her experiences with drug addiction and mental health. Therefore, she has been very influential for her fans. Since she creates many popular songs among the fans, those become the reasons why they put so much compassion on her. Moreover, it is also shown that some fans show gratitude to Lovato.

a. To her fans in general

Since she announced her four-part documentary series, Lovato has been gaining a lot of support and gratitude from her fans. There are many of her fans who make Lovato their role model in life. They show how influential Lovato's documentary is for them. Since the documentary series became one of many media Lovato uses to interact and connect with her fans, many fans got helped. With the same mental health and trauma issues, the fans are encouraged in e very positive way. Thus, many fans made posts in X after watching Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil.
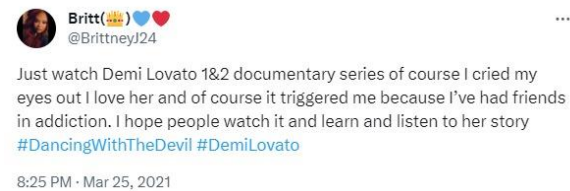
Image 3. Posts of her fans after watching Lovato's documentary series
Twitter.com

In the pictures above, it can be seen that Lovato has been influencing her international fans. She inspires and raises her fans' awareness about self-love. Furthermore, Lovato's stories have shown her bravery and honesty about her mental health and addiction issues, along with her traumatic experiences. Therefore, many fans can relate her stories to their own.

Image 4. Lovato talks about mental health in her concert
Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil

Lovato encourages her fans to be open and honest about mental health issues. As it is a significant thing to be taken care of, she shows her fans that it is okay to ask for help. Therefore, it is evident that she also dramatically impacts her fans, especially when she does positive things. One of them is raising awareness of mental health issues.

Image 5. Lovato's fan shows her gratitude for her existence
Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil

In the documentary, Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil, there are some clips of her unreleased 2018 documentary series. In those clips, some fans show and state that the songs she wrote have impacted their lives so much. Some say they can relate to what Lovato put in her lyrics. They find comfort through the words Lovato puts in her songs. Besides the fact that her songs are relatable to most of her fans, Lovato's songs are also influential in bringing positive changes. For example, some songs whose lyrics encourage people to keep fighting the different battles in their lives.

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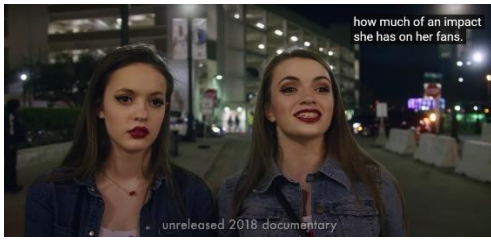
Image 6. Lovato's fans show how
impactful she is to her fans
Demi Lovato: Dancing with the Devil

On the night she overdosed, Lovato got much support from her fanbase. Further, there was also a hashtag that showed their support. It was through #HowDemiHasHelpedMe. The trending of this hashtag shows how good her relationship with her fans is. She got non-stop support from her fans all around the globe. Further, many fans give proof of how Lovato has helped them. Those are seen from the posts they posted with the hashtag #HowDemiHasHelpedMe.

Elishia Faith Peña
@Elishia_Faith

#HowDemiHasHelpedMe At a young age I struggled with depression and bulimia. No1 ever knew, not even the people closest 2me. With Demi's music she taught me that a disorder doesnt define who I am. U can over come these battles no matter how hard theymay seem. That u are not alone

11:24 PM · Jul 31, 2018
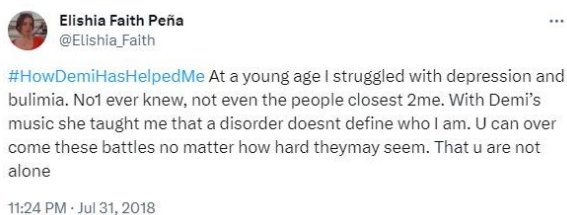
Image 7. A post of Lovato's fan
Twitter.com

Makayla Schaar
@MakaylaSchaar1

#HowDemiHasHelpedMe Demi has and always will be my queen. Through all my depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, mental and emotional abuse, and dealing with men who treated me like I had no worth, she was there with her music and advice. She saved me. Love you Demi💜

9:20 AM · Jul 27, 2018
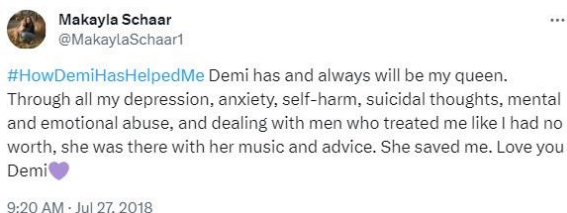
Image 8. A post of Lovato's fan
Twitter.com

It can be seen that Lovato has positively impacted her fans. It is through the songs that she wrote and sang. Even though Lovato herself struggles with mental health and trauma issues, it does not stop her from having a positive influence on her fans. Because her songs are being listened to by people and her fans worldwide, the messages she wants to say through her songs are well delivered, and thus, she has helped many of her fans.

b. To the non-binary community

In the documentary, Lovato states that her identity is neither male nor female. She is a non-binary person. With that being said, Lovato indirectly shows her bravery in being honest to herself. Thus, some impacts influence the non-binary community. On her social media, X, Lovato posted a video where she came out as a non-binary person along with the caption.

Image 9. Lovato's post on X
Twitter.com

Even though Lovato has mentioned her identity in her documentary series, she still emphasizes that through her post on X. In her post, she also attaches a video where she speaks up about the comfortable thing and situation she feels as a non-binary person. Yet, she also mentions that she is not an expert on that. Therefore, she also lets some of her relatives who have more knowledge about non-binary identity to also share their thoughts. In that video, Lovato encourages her fans to love themselves as they are, no matter what their gender and identity are.

CONCLUSION

With the trauma and mental health issues that Lovato has been through, her life story can influence many people. The traumatic experiences have brought some positive changes in her life. Those are seen as posttraumatic growth (PTG). In Lovato's case, her PTG domains consist of five. Those are personal strength, relationships with others, new possibilities, appreciation of life, and spiritual and existential changes. Furthermore, those five domains were found in her documentary. Moreover, through her changes of posttraumatic growth, Lovato was able to find her own identity as a non-binary person. She was able to be honest with herself and discover more things to reveal her identity. Lovato also has much influence, especially on her fans. With her popularity and fame, she could bring positive influence and encourage her fans to be able to love themselves, be aware of their mental health, and explore themselves freely. Lovato also has had some influences on the non-binary community since she announced her identity in her comeback. Therefore, through her documentary, she could embrace all her life issues, and struggles, and spread good motivations.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and

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revision, and publication process in general.

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Understanding People's Perceptions of Tesla

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ABSTRACT

This research presents society's perceptions of Tesla through comments from the videos on their official YouTube channel. This research is focused on the perceptions of society through comments sections from four different videos. This research uses Poststructuralism as an approach that is supported by deconstruction theory by Derrida. From the deconstruction theory, this research employs the concept of difference to find out about many perceptions of Tesla in society. This research applies a qualitative descriptive technique, in which the author reports and analyses existing data. The data is taken from the comment section of four different videos from Tesla's YouTube channel. From analyzing the data relating to the theory, it is found that Tesla has several perceptions in society which are that Tesla is a high-tech innovation, Tesla is environmentally friendly, Tesla is expensive, Tesla is high-maintainable, and Tesla is a family car. These new perspectives show that the car has been accepted into society and plays a significant role in society.

Keywords: *electrical vehicles; environmentally friendly; environmental impact; perception; Tesla*

INTRODUCTION

Tesla is currently a globally recognized producer and dealer of electric automobiles. The technology, design, quality, and popularity of its goods surpass those of most countries worldwide. Tesla has been at the forefront of promoting and developing the

electric car sector, refreshing people's awareness of them. Tesla has the potential to alter the world on its own, according to certain perspectives (Shao et al., 2021). Moreover, Tesla's impact goes beyond car production to encompass advances in renewable energy technologies. Tesla's solar products, such as the Solar Roof and Solar Panels, as well as energy storage solutions like the Powerwall and Powerpack, aim to transform how energy is created, stored, and used. Tesla envisions a more sustainable and linked future for transportation and energy systems by combining renewable energy sources with electric automobiles.

The electric car has experienced rapid growth in recent years, with more and more automotive manufacturers investing in the development of electric car technology. In this context, Tesla, as one of the leaders in the electric car industry, has succeeded in stealing the attention of the people with the advanced technological innovations of its cars. The firm was formed in 2003 by two Silicon Valley engineers Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning, who sought to prove that "electric vehicles can be better, faster and more fun to drive than gasoline cars" (Wu, 2023). The company

is known for its focus on technological innovation and the development of electric cars. Since its inception, Tesla has succeeded in creating a number of electric car models that combine advanced technology with superior performance, creating an image as a company driving change in the automotive industry. Tesla's application of technology in the automotive industry has had a significant impact and created changes in the way society views electric cars.

Tesla faced early difficulties in gaining broad acceptability, owing to the impression that electric vehicles could not compete with fossil-fuel-powered vehicles in terms of range, speed, and comfort. One of the campaign's key components is an emphasis on environmental ideals and sustainability. Tesla has been successful in capturing the attention and sympathies of people who are increasingly worried about the environmental effects of fossil-fuel automobiles. Tesla is attempting to persuade people that electric vehicles through the way the company advertise the car. Electric automobiles are getting more popular in general because they are more ecologically friendly, and people are growing more

concerned about lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, the use of rechargeable batteries, autonomy, greater performance, and other characteristics are the major highlights in an endeavor to separate itself from its automobile industry competitors. However, there are still barriers to the expansion of the electric car market, such as high battery pricing and the requirement for charging infrastructure (Gujarathi et al., 2018).

Tesla, being an innovative technology business, has employed social media as one of the primary venues to introduce the car. Tesla connects directly with its audience through social media, disseminating information about the latest products, innovative technologies, and the company's beliefs and goals. Through its social media, Tesla shows fascinating footage of Tesla cars in action, sophisticated autonomous technology, and other innovative features that set their electric cars apart. Tesla also uses social media to communicate good customer experiences and testimonials regarding Tesla vehicles. Those testimonials represent client pleasure and promote the car. Tesla also utilizes social media to disseminate

information about the company's social initiatives and charitable efforts. This includes funding environmental initiatives and giving to charitable organizations.

Social media comments show a variety of customer perspectives on items in general, particularly Tesla products and electric vehicles. Some customers like Tesla's ingenuity and cutting-edge technology, viewing it as a symbol of environmental sustainability. Positive experiences with Tesla vehicles are also mentioned, while some people raise concerns about charging infrastructure and expensive prices. While many people appreciate the company's objective of sustainable transportation, other political and critical viewpoints shape customer attitudes. Overall, social media comments provide valuable insight into how Tesla as a car has left some impact on people's attitudes and ideas about electric vehicles.

The study of people's perceptions can help to understand how Tesla impacts public opinion regarding electric vehicles and environmental sustainability. This study can help the Tesla, the newest type of car, to influence people's attitudes and perceptions regarding

environmental concerns and sustainable mobility.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a Poststructuralism approach. The core argument of poststructuralism is that language (and all other types of communication systems, such as pictures and video) are less perfect at communicating our thoughts and ideas than we may believe. Most mediums of communication are prone to misrepresenting us or fostering alternate interpretations of what we were attempting to say when we initially said, wrote, or recorded anything. Poststructuralism examines what this entails for the process of evaluating cultural works, as well as whether it is ever feasible to arrive at a final interpretation of a certain film, book, or other cultural source. Beyond that, it questions whether it is ever possible to arrive at objective truth in a society where much of our thinking about the world is done through language, or whether the implicit biases surrounding race, gender, and other concepts present in our linguist and other communicative systems may shape our understanding of the world as well.

Poststructuralism encourages individuals to evaluate if language, like any other human invention, may have defects and biases. It urges individuals to consider if language (or other kinds of communication) might occasionally fall on someone and express something completely different from what we intended. Furthermore, it encourages individuals to explore if those languages are susceptible to many of the same ideological prejudices, such as gender, racism, and class, as other human institutions. Derrida's notion of undecidability is based on his concepts of difference and difference. Essentially, he contends that it is in the nature of language to generate meaning only in relation to other meanings, against which it assumes its importance. As a result, an attempted connection between language and the world it addresses will never result in stable meanings. Meaning is derived from the numerous significances we assign to words. Derrida utilizes the French term difference to demonstrate that using a language that is both postponing and diverging cannot lead to a stable or transparent meaning. Each definition and clarification must be defined and explained in turn; meaning is always elusive in the future (Agger, 1991).

To support the Poststructuralism approach, this research employs the thing theory and the practice theory. Thing theory is a school of critical theory that studies human-object interactions in literature and culture. It draws on Heidegger's difference between objects and things, which holds that an object becomes a thing when it can no longer perform its common purpose. For example, an automobile, which is commonly used for transportation, serves a distinct purpose in society. An automobile may tell which social class someone belongs to. When an object breaks down or is mistreated, it loses its socially encoded worth and becomes available to us in new ways due to the suspension of habit. The thing theory was developed by Bill Brown (2001), who produced a special issue of critical inquiry on the subject and released a monograph titled *The Sense of Things*, as Brown explains in his article. The thing theory began to address the density of items when they stopped operating when the drill broke, when the automobile stalled, when the window became filthy, and when the flow of production and distribution, consumption, and exhibition was halted (Brown, 2001). However, for the time being, the tale of objects establishing themselves as things is the story of an altered connection to the human subject, and hence of how the term labels less an item than a certain subject-object relation.

Practice theory takes into account the behavior associated with the activities performed in this process. Practice theory states that the consuming item is immediately duplicated in daily life. As a result, it is critical to understand customer behavior in the context of daily life and details. Practice theory studies the link between objects, skills or competence, meanings, and practices. It also highlights the significance of habitual behaviors, as well as the social and customary aspects of consumption (Shove et al., 2012). The ideas of practice theory may be utilized to study consumption patterns and pose more abstract questions regarding the links between the various practice components. These include investigating the meanings associated with behaviors and objects, as well as the consequences of these connections, and the 'fixity' and 'fluidity' of consuming habits and everyday consumer routines (Shove and Walker, 2010). Furthermore, practice theory is founded on the study of consumer sociology, which

examines the collective order in purchasing patterns, the social construction of the concept of need, and how these behaviors become normal and change (Watson and Shove, 2008). As a result, practice theory aids in the development of the concept of emergent and co-constitutive links between objects and acts, as well as the emulation of social discourse on the meaning of luxury (Potavanich, 2015).

The researcher will analyze the comments from four YouTube videos on Tesla's YouTube Channel titled *Tesla Roadster: Everyday* (2011), *The First of Their Kind: Tesla Roadster and Model S* (2011), *My First Ride in Model S* (2011), and *The Electric Family* (2017) using Poststructuralism approach. To support the approach, the thing theory by Brown and the practice theory by Shove are employed. The comments are the main data to be analyzed in this research.

This study uses a qualitative research design. Adi (2011) emphasizes the relevance of qualitative inquiry in literary and social science research. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in various respects. Depending on the study's objectives, qualitative research can be done utilizing a variety of approaches. Qualitative research requires readers to be informed about the purpose of the study, mention specific designs, carefully reflect on the researcher's role in the study, draw from an ever-growing list of types of data sources, follow specific protocols for data recording, analyze the information through multiple steps of analysis, and mention approaches for documenting the findings. The qualitative technique is ideal for the author's current research since it allows the author to provide the results of the author's examination of the available data. In other words, by doing this qualitative study, the researcher is provided sufficient guidance to investigate the answers to the research issues that the researcher intends to address.

The researcher analyzed the data using the poststructuralism approach. The researcher analyzed data and recorded findings linked to the thing theory and practice theory.

DISCUSSION

In our digital age, the amount of data produced by diverse sources is continually expanding. Texts from social media, news, product reviews, articles, and other documents

are all rich sources of information that must be understood and analyzed effectively. This is the moment for word clouds to become an effective and engaging tool for visualizing terms that appear often in data. A word cloud allows us to rapidly discover the key patterns and topics in the text. The following discussion will look at word clouds' potential as a strong analytical tool, their usefulness in a range of sectors, and how these visualizations may give insight into patterns and perspectives amidst the stream of data that is the digital age.

According to the word cloud surrounding the Tesla advertising, the perspective of the observer and those who watch it is separated into numerous perceptions.

Image 2. The Result of Wordcloud from the Video titled The First of their Kind: Tesla Roadster and Model S (2011)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMM6vAqzRss

Image 3. The Result of Wordcloud from the Video titled My First Ride in Model S (2011)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0uwUWGFFYc

Image 1. The Result of Wordcloud from the Video titled Tesla Roadster: Everyday (2011)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoXW9I1T79g

Image 4. The Result of Wordcloud from the Video titled The Electric Family (2017)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=He7NPWU6qAU&t=1s

Tesla is Innovative and High Technology

Tesla's unique leadership in the automobile sector has cemented its status as a pioneer in the development of electric vehicle technology. The firm has successfully adopted a variety of new technologies that set it apart from its competitors and acquired a reputation as a pioneer in this industry.

One of Tesla's distinguishing innovations is its autonomy, or self-driving system. Tesla has achieved semi-autonomous features by merging modern sensors, cameras, and artificial intelligence, allowing the car to drive itself in some scenarios. Despite ongoing legal and ethical concerns, this action demonstrates Tesla's dedication to building safer and more efficient automobiles. Furthermore, quick charging is one of the aspects that distinguish Tesla as a pioneer. Tesla's Supercharger network enables people to charge their vehicles more quickly than traditional charging. This effort promotes the adoption of electric vehicles by solving one of the primary obstacles: insufficient charging infrastructure.

Equally essential is the usage of sophisticated batteries in Tesla automobiles. Large-capacity batteries and advanced power management technology allow Tesla vehicles to go further and function more efficiently. This invention helps to shift the public's perspective of electric vehicles from just city vehicles to more practical and effective possibilities.

Overall, with revolutionary technologies like as autonomous systems, quick charging, and upgraded batteries, Tesla has established itself as a business at the forefront of electric vehicle development. Their daring to innovate and explore new areas in the automobile sector has helped to shift the global transportation paradigm, resulting in good developments towards sustainability and energy efficiency.

From the comments, a lot of users relate Tesla with the technology, electric cars, batteries, and touchscreen technology. It shows new perceptions of Tesla have been created. Relating it to the theory, the thing theory which is proposed by Brown and the practice theory by Shove, gives the idea that Tesla is a car with the action of the users by relating to the words mentioned above after watching the

YouTube videos, shape new perception from those actions. The result of the new perception is that Tesla is perceived as an innovative and high-tech car that is electric due to its being powered by batteries.

Tesla and Environment

Some people who examine the environmental impact of Tesla may be more worried about the broader impact of electric vehicle adoption on the environment and society. They regard Tesla as a pioneer in the electric car revolution and expect that as more people transition to electric vehicles, there is bound to be a bigger beneficial influence on lowering air pollution and other negative effects of fossil fuel-powered transportation.

On the other hand, some people believe that the environmental effect of Tesla should be evaluated in the context of the overall electric vehicle sector. It can compare Tesla to other electric car makers in terms of sustainability, production efficiency, and trash management. This comparison will allow them to make better-educated judgments about Tesla automobiles' total environmental effect. When it comes to resources, some customers may be interested in learning about the origins of the raw materials used to make Tesla vehicles, as well as how the manufacturing process affects the environment. People's impressions of the broader supply chain and sustainability procedures of electric car manufacturers may influence their opinions on the environmental effect of Tesla vehicles.

People's impressions of the environmental effect of Tesla are often impacted by the company's openness and transparency in communicating information about its sustainability initiatives, recycling methods, and efforts to lessen environmental consequences. People are more inclined to support brands that actively promote sustainability and environmental responsibility. Overall, people's attitude about the environmental effect of Tesla goods varies greatly. Some regard it as a step towards sustainability and environmental preservation, while others may be more critical in assessing certain aspects of electric automobiles' environmental effects. In light of climate change and other environmental concerns, raising awareness and discussing the environmental effects of Tesla products and

electric vehicles, in general, is becoming increasingly crucial in accelerating the transition to sustainable transportation.

From the comments, a lot of users relate Tesla with the environment, climate, and gas. This demonstrates that new perceptions of Tesla have emerged. In relation to the theory, the thing theory offered by Brown and the practice theory proposed by Shove, it presents the concept that Tesla is a car, with the action of the users by linking to the phrases listed above after viewing the YouTube videos, shapes new perceptions from those actions. The result of the new perception is that Tesla is related to the environment. People should consider Tesla which is environmentally friendly due to it does not produce any exhaust emissions compared to the fuel gas car. Gradually, Tesla helps to reduce the GGH which causes climate change in society.

Tesla and the Charging Technology

People's perceptions of Tesla's auto charging infrastructure represent their opinions and experiences with the availability, simplicity of use, and dependability of charging stations for Tesla electric vehicles. Some customers may be pleased with the availability of Tesla's charging network. They may claim that there are numerous easily accessible Tesla charging stations in various locations, such as highways, retail malls, hotels, and other public places. This widespread availability might offer people confidence that long-distance travel in a Tesla vehicle would be hassle-free because charging stations are always available along the route.

However, some customers struggle to use Tesla's charging infrastructure. Some places may have fewer charging stations or longer distances between them. This raises issues about long-distance travel and the reliance on less established charging networks in particular areas.

In addition, people's perceptions of charging station dependability and charging time are significant. Some customers may have had a favorable experience with a charging station that consistently works well and charges rapidly. Others, however, may encounter issues such as non-functioning charging stations, long lines, or delayed charging, resulting in disappointment and discomfort.

People are also concerned about how easy it is to utilize

charging stations. Some customers may find the charging process at a Tesla station simple and straightforward. Some Tesla charging stations even offer automated capabilities that allow the car to charge itself without the need to exit the vehicle. However, others believe that more instructions or modifications to the user interface are required to make the charging experience more seamless.

The quality of customer care given by Tesla influences people's impressions of its charging infrastructure. Efficient response and support with technical difficulties or charging concerns can boost people's trust in the Tesla brand overall. People's impressions of Tesla's automobile charging infrastructure might vary greatly based on their own experience and geographic region. While some customers may be pleased with the availability and convenience of the use of Tesla charging stations, others may encounter issues and limits that Tesla and the electric vehicle industry as a whole need to address.

From the comments, a lot of users relate Tesla with the electricity and batteries. It demonstrates that new perceptions about Tesla have emerged. In relation to the theory, the thing theory offered by Brown and the practice theory by Shove presents the concept that Tesla is a car, with the action of the users by linking to the words listed above after viewing the YouTube videos, form new perception from those actions. The result of the new perception is that Tesla is related to the charging technology due to Tesla is powered by a battery, and it uses electricity to charge the car.

Tesla is Expensive

Individual perspectives and demands may influence how Tesla automobiles are perceived in terms of price and performance. Some people may believe that Tesla automobiles are relatively expensive when compared to conventionally powered vehicles. They did, however, notice Tesla vehicles' better performance, such as quick acceleration and the capacity to travel great distances on long-lasting batteries. This attitude may originate from the belief that the increased price is justified by the amenities and innovation offered by Tesla vehicles.

On the other hand, some customers may perceive the cost

of Tesla vehicles as an investment in future technologies. The customers think that electric cars will be the trend of the future and that having a Tesla automobile gives you access to more sophisticated technology and environmental sustainability than traditional vehicles. For the customers, increased prices may be justified by the long-term advantages of reduced emissions and reliance on fossil fuels.

However, some people have a negative perception of Tesla vehicles since the price is seen as too excessive for the level of performance given. They may compare Tesla vehicles to other companies that provide electric vehicles at lower prices while providing comparable or superior performance. Price is the most important consideration for them when deciding whether or not to purchase a Tesla vehicle.

Other beliefs include that the cost of Tesla vehicles is more of an investment in brand reputation and image. Some customers regard Tesla as a premium brand with a modern and inventive image. Price is not an issue for them since they place a higher value on social standing and brand value, both of which are seen to improve

personal prestige and reputation.

Finally, some buyers see the cost of Tesla vehicles as long-term value. They see it as a long-term investment that will save money on gasoline and maintenance because electric vehicles have reduced operating expenses. For them, the longer-term economic benefits outweigh the greater initial price.

People's impressions of Tesla vehicles based on pricing and performance might differ and be impacted by a variety of personal characteristics and preferences. For some users, Tesla's greater performance and technical innovation may balance its higher pricing, but for others, the price may be the most important factor in determining if a Tesla automobile meets their demands and budget.

From the comments, the people relate a lot that Tesla is expensive, electricity, rich, and money. It demonstrates that new perceptions about Tesla have been developed. In relation to the theory, the thing theory offered by Brown and the practice theory proposed by Shove, suggest that Tesla as a car, along with the actions of the users after viewing the YouTube videos, form new perceptions. In order to own a

Tesla, people should own a lot of money because the car is considered a luxury product, and it is only able to reach the rich. The price is also high because of the newest technology that the car uses to power the car. The result of the new perception is that Tesla is perceived as an expensive car.

Tesla is a Family Car

One of the YouTube videos is titled The Electric Family (2017). Tesla has become a popular choice for families in recent years. The primary reason is a combination of innovative technology, outstanding performance, and appealing design. Tesla automobiles provide a number of advantages for families seeking an electric vehicle alternative for their everyday requirements.

Tesla automobiles are a popular choice for families due to their safety features. Tesla's innovative safety features include automated braking systems, accident avoidance, and parking help. These elements increase the safety of all family members while on the road. Aside from that, Tesla vehicles have ample interior room and passenger capacity for large families. The Model S, Model X, and Model Y have a flexible seating configuration and a large trunk, making it convenient for families to bring baggage or everyday equipment. Impressive performance and acceleration appeal to families searching for an enjoyable driving experience. Even though it is a family car, the Tesla delivers great performance and quick acceleration.

When it comes to automobile shopping, many families also prioritize environmental sustainability. Tesla automobiles are ecologically beneficial since they emit no pollution during operation. Families that use electric cars may help to reduce environmental consequences and ensure the planet's sustainability for future generations. Tesla's integrated entertainment system and high connection make driving more fun for the entire family. They can easily communicate and have fun while travelling. Not to mention, some Tesla models include autonomous features that can assist minimize stress while driving and boost comfort for both the driver and passengers. Tesla's vast and sophisticated charging network allows families to travel long distances without running out of juice. The availability of adequate charging infrastructure is an added

benefit for Tesla car owners. With the qualities listed above, Tesla automobiles are an appealing option for families seeking an ecologically responsible, safe, comfortable, and high-powered vehicle. Tesla automobiles have the potential to become increasingly popular as sophisticated and stunning family vehicles as electric car technology and infrastructure continue to advance.

From the comments, people also relate Tesla with family, husband, mom, children, dreams and future. It indicates that new perceptions of Tesla have emerged. In relation to the theory, the thing theory offered by Brown and the practice theory by Shove presents the concept that Tesla as a car with the action of the users by linking to the words listed above after viewing the YouTube videos, form new perceptions from those actions. When people consider Tesla as a family car, they relate the car to its capacity and also the sustainability of the car. The Model S, for example, can seat up to five people and two children (with an optional rear-facing jump seat) and has a large trunk and front trunk ("frunk") for storage. The Model X is a bigger SUV that can seat up to seven people and has even more storage. The

Model 3 and Model Y, while significantly smaller, nonetheless provide comfortable seats for families of four or five and have plenty of cargo room. Tesla vehicles routinely obtain excellent safety ratings from safety groups, because of their strong structural designs and smart driver-assistance technologies like Autopilot. These features can provide families with an added layer of peace of mind as they travel.

In general, while Tesla is known for its elegance and performance, its practicality, safety, and adaptability make it an attractive option for families looking for an electric vehicle, and it has become the new perception that Tesla is perceived as a family car.

Tesla and Its Image

People's opinions on Tesla's brand image reflect their overall views and impressions of the brand. Many people identify the Tesla brand with innovation and modern technology. This corporation is regarded as a pioneer of the electric car revolution and in offering the most recent innovations in the automobile industry. The brand image connected with this breakthrough promotes Tesla as a contemporary, progressive

brand that appeals to buyers searching for cutting-edge automobiles. Additionally, Tesla's brand image is frequently connected with environmental sustainability. Tesla has become a symbol of ecologically friendly electric vehicles, helping to lessen negative environmental consequences. People who are concerned about environmental concerns frequently regard Tesla as a brand dedicated to helping the earth by lowering exhaust emissions and reliance on fossil fuels.

Many buyers associate Tesla's brand image with exceptional performance. Tesla vehicles are noted for their quick acceleration and long battery life, resulting in a thrilling and high-quality driving experience. This powerful brand image associated with performance captures the attention of people who value performance and driving comfort. Tesla is typically regarded as a premium and respected brand. Tesla automobiles are a sign of luxury and distinction due to their comparatively expensive price and reputation as cutting-edge technological brand. This unique brand image appeals to customers searching for an automobile that adds value in terms of social standing and lifestyle.

From the comments, a lot of users relate Tesla with the environment, expensive, electric cars, batteries, and family. This indicates that fresh perspectives on Tesla have evolved. In regard to Brown's thing theory and Shove's practice theory, proposes the premise that Tesla, as a car, develops new perceptions of users' activities by linking to the terms stated above after viewing YouTube videos. The result of the new perception shows that people relate Tesla with the environment due to producing zero exhaust emission, the price which is expensive due to the use of the newest technology, the electric car due to the use of a battery to power the car, the battery which is powered the car using a kind of charging technology, and the family due to its wide capacity and safety.

CONCLUSION

The new perceptions of Tesla have been found through analyzing the comments on Tesla YouTube videos in the Tesla YouTube channel According to the discussion, several perceptions are found after analyzing the comments. Those perceptions are that Tesla is not only perceived as a car but also as a high-tech innovation due to the highly advanced technology to build the car.

Another perception is that Tesla is related to the environment due to the car produces zero exhaust emissions. The next perception is Tesla is related to the charging technology, due to the use of batteries to power the car. Tesla is also perceived as the most expensive car due to its high price in the market and also due to the use of the newest technology to power the car. People also view Tesla as a family car due to its capacity and the safety of the car. From those perceptions, it can show that Tesla has been accepted by the people into the society as not only a transportation but also more than that. It also shows the success of Tesla as a company in penetrating society with the newest and highest technology that the company uses.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and revision, and publication process in general.

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The Portrayal of Female Villains: A Representation Study on *Cruella*

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ABSTRACT

The portrayal of female villains in media and movies has evolved significantly, as evidenced through the lens of Stuart Hall's representation theory and film analysis concepts. Traditionally confined to one-dimensional roles perpetuating gender stereotypes, contemporary cinema showcases multi-dimensional characters like those in *Cruella*, challenging societal norms and defying traditional gender expectations. By employing narrative and non-narrative film analysis techniques, these characters are revealed as agents of subversion and empowerment, embodying a new archetype of female villains characterized by individual agency and autonomy. However, despite this progress, the lingering impact of gender stereotypes persists, influencing how female villains are depicted on screen. Thus, ongoing critical analysis and advocacy for more diverse and authentic representations of women in media remain crucial.

Keywords: *female villain; film analysis; gender stereotype; portrayal of female antagonists; representation*

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the moral binary between heroes and villains has shaped societal judgments, where heroes embody ideal values and villains represent antithetical, negative traits. This dichotomy, deeply rooted in fairy tales and children's literature, has often portrayed

villains as purely evil, lacking any complexity or redeeming qualities (Kokoroski, 2012). Female villains, in particular, have been portrayed as rejecting societal norms, challenging patriarchal structures, and representing a threat to masculinity. These characters, ranging from mythological figures like Medusa to modern cinematic portrayals, often intersect themes of sexuality, power, and morality. As Beverly Gross argues, the portrayal of women as "bitches" has evolved, reflecting broader societal changes in the perception of female power and aggression (Gross, 1994). The femme fatale, one of the most well-known archetypes of female villainy, epitomizes the subversion of traditional female roles and the rejection of moral virtue. Yet, the portrayal of female villains has evolved, with recent cinematic depictions offering more nuanced and sympathetic interpretations. Notably, Disney has contributed to this trend, revamping classic female villains like Maleficent, Cruella de Vil, and others by providing them with backstories that humanize their motivations.

For example, Disney's *Maleficent* (2014) reimagined the character not as a purely evil figure but as one shaped by betrayal, adding depth to her villainy. Similarly, *Cruella* (2021) transformed the notorious animal killer into a more complex, relatable figure. In contrast to her original depiction as a fashion-obsessed villain in *101 Dalmatians*, Cruella's backstory reveals her as a misunderstood anti-hero, whose ambition and creativity were shaped by hardship and injustice.

This evolution of female villains is also part of a broader cultural shift. Historically, female villains were often portrayed as mentally unstable, morally corrupt, or as femmes fatales, as seen in films like Basic Instinct and Double Indemnity. However, modern depictions, like Cruella, move away from these simplistic representations, offering more developed characters who embody female empowerment and challenge traditional gender roles. The character of Cruella, for instance, is not only a villain but also a symbol of independence and resilience.

The shifting portrayal of female villains reflects broader changes in societal attitudes towards women, power, and morality. The trend of providing backstories and motivations to female villains

allows for a more nuanced exploration of their characters, moving beyond stereotypes of female villainy as purely evil or malevolent. In doing so, films like *Cruella* highlight the complexities of gender, power, and morality, offering a more mature and multifaceted portrayal of women in villainous roles.

The case of Cruella underscores the evolving nature of film as a reflection of societal values and ideologies. While traditional films often depict women waiting to be rescued by men, modern films increasingly feature strong, independent female characters who navigate challenges and assert their agency. The film's portrayal of Cruella marks a departure from the traditional villain archetype, illustrating how female characters in film are being redefined in contemporary media.

In conclusion, the portrayal of female villains has transformed significantly, particularly in recent years. Characters like Cruella demonstrate how the traditional villain archetype is being deconstructed and reimagined, offering a more complex and empowering representation of female agency. As the portrayal of female characters in media continues to evolve, it

reflects the ongoing changes in societal attitudes towards gender, power, and morality.

METHODOLOGY

Creswell (2009, 26) identifies three primary research methodologies for conducting analysis: qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed research. The utilization of each methodology is contingent upon the specific inquiry and its objective. Throughout this study, the primary subject of analysis is a narrative work in the form of a film titled "Cruella." As to McKee (in Ida, 2011), narrative literature encompasses a wide range of mediums such as written works, pictures, videos, photos, graphic design, song lyrics, and more, all of which serve the purpose of conveying meaning. This study employs a qualitative methodology, as suggested by Creswell (2009, 258), "the process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, collecting data, setting analyzing the data, building from particular to general themes and the last will be making the interpretations of the meaning of the data". Qualitative research method is a valuable tool for investigating and comprehending the significance attributed by individuals or

groups to social or human issues.

The paradigm of post-nationalist American Studies is central to this research as it allows for an examination of characters like Cruella within broader global and cultural contexts, rather than limiting the analysis to traditional nationalist frameworks. Post-nationalism, as Rowe (2000) suggests, challenges the concept of American Exceptionalism by recognizing the United States as a multicultural entity, where various ethnic and cultural identities intersect (Rowe, 2000, 23). This paradigm shifts the focus from a singular national identity to a more inclusive and critical perspective that embraces the diversity of voices, including those historically marginalized in American narratives, such as ethnic minorities and women (Rowe, 2000, 6).

In the context of this study, post-nationalist American Studies provides a useful framework for analyzing how female villains, particularly Cruella, are portrayed in global media and how these representations interact with broader themes of gender, power, and identity. By moving beyond the nation-state as the primary determinant of identity, this approach allows for a more nuanced exploration of how cultural products, like films, reflect and influence transnational discourses on gender and societal norms.

Furthermore, while the paradigm originates from American Studies, its application in this research extends beyond the U.S. context to include global influences in media and culture. The character of Cruella, as analyzed in this study, exemplifies post-nationalist ideals as she transcends national boundaries and operates within a consumer culture that reflects global trends in fashion, class, and gender dynamics (Cairns & Johnston, 2014). By doing so, the research questions examine not only the character's role in American media but also her relevance within a larger, post-nationalist consumer culture that affects global audiences.

This approach is vital for understanding how films like Cruella challenge traditional narratives of villainy and engage with feminist and post-nationalist critiques. It situates the character within a broader conversation about how media reflects diverse identities, power structures, and societal changes, making

the analysis relevant in both American and global contexts.

Representation Theory

The theory applied within the topic, which is the representation theory by Stuart Hall, analyzes the villain character of the movie Cruella. To find how Cruella is represented in the movie and why Cruella is represented as an image of a Villain in the movie. The approach and theories are applied to answer the research problem. In addition, representation is a crucial step in the process by which meaning is created and exchanged among culture members.

This section focuses on the practices of representation, a crucial aspect of cultural studies. Representation connects meaning and language to culture, and it involves using language, signs, and images to represent the world meaningfully. There are three different accounts or theories: reflective, intentional, and constructionist approaches to representation. Reflective language reflects existing meanings, while intentional language expresses the speaker's intended meaning. Constructionist language is constructed in and through language, with the constructionist approach being the most significant in recent years.

Representation involves the production of meaning through language. The word "represent" can be translated as "to describe or depict" something, "to symbolize," "stand for," or "substitute for." In Christianity, the cross represents the suffering and crucifixion of Christ, while the figures in the painting of the crucifixion of Christ represent the story of Cain and Abel. The constructionist approach to representation challenges the very nature of representation, as it questions the very nature of meaning and how language is used to convey meaning. In this research, the present writer chooses the constructionist approach to understanding the process of representation. Hall (13) argued that representations are not simply reflections of reality but are actively constructed through a complex interplay of differences, power, and cultural practices. This research analyzes the representation of a Villain in a movie who is portrayed by society's standards and has different meanings to interpret the portrayal of Cruella.

Fiske (1987) explains the relationship between television and culture. Culture is the generation and

circulation of meanings and pleasures within a society, and television is a bearer and provoker of meanings and pleasures in that society. In the process of cultural interactions, "meanings, consequently, will always change, from one culture or period to another" (Hall, 1997, 61). Facilitated by media technologies, the cultural globalization process has not only been transforming contemporary American society but also attracted the attention of global communication scholars and practitioners to the cultural changes in America.

Hall (1997) applied this theory to analyze how movie forms represent race, class, gender, and sexuality in various ways and how these representations affect the identities and relations of different social groups. He also criticized the dominant or hegemonic representations that tend to marginalize, stereotype, or exclude the voices and experiences of the oppressed or subaltern groups (Hall, 1997, 236).

This theory is used to answer the problem in the analysis chapter on how Cruella being represented as a female villain with the use of constructionist representation creates meaning by connecting three different orders of things: the conceptual world, the present writer's internal thoughts, and the signs that are structured into languages (Hall, 1997, 45). The present writer utilizes the language system as a tool to transmit how movie forms represent race, class, gender, and sexuality in various ways and how these representations have an impact on the identities and relationships of various social groups. The author also uses the female villain characters in the movie to translate what representation means.

Stereotyping

Central topics about differences between power and cultural practices are represented as "Other." To establish a connection between those words is the use of stereotyping. Power and Ideology: Hall argues that cultural representations are not neutral but reflect the dominant ideologies and power relations in society. Stereotypes often align with these dominant ideologies and serve to maintain existing power structures. They can reinforce social hierarchies and perpetuate unequal power dynamics by marginalizing or stigmatizing certain groups (Hall, 1997, 237).

Othering and Difference: Stereotypes are closely linked to the "the Other" concept in Hall's representation theory. Stereotyping contributes to the process of "Othering," where marginalized or different groups are positioned as outside the dominant norms. Stereotypes simplify and essential the identities and experiences of "the Other," reinforcing their difference and inferiority in relation to the dominant group (Hall, 1997, 237). Hall also wants to understand more precisely how gender, race, ethnic groups, or social status are represented from the analysis of pictures, newspaper and magazine articles, TV shows, and movies. The stereotype concept that Hall proposed had clear ramifications for film studies, particularly in terms of character analysis, criticism of the inaccurate portrayal of socially marginalized groups, a new perspective on film history, and even drawing attention to the social function of stereotypes in some specific situations.

One of the ways stereotypes works is by giving the impression that there is this or that. However, stereotypes are also challenging to avoid. This situation is the same as the portrayal of a female as the villain character in a

movie and became a favorite because, villain characters in films have distinct characteristics that have been ingrained for a long time, particularly male villains, such as the Joker. Although the Joker is described as an evil and psychopathic character, his character is a mortal enemy of Batman and has a character that is no less famous than the main hero character, Batman. Joker's character is like his fans, despite his character seeming more psychotic and wilder.

In specific fictional works, the Villain has a distinct function, often serving as the hero's accent to highlight just how valiant the hero is. The heroic heroes will be less effective without enemies, and the story will appear flat and lifeless. It draws attention to the idea that the villains give the hero a conflict to fight and a motivation to fight. (Faria, 2008, p. 53). (Paula Soares Faria 2008, The Journey of the Villain in the Harry Potter series: an archetypal). The term "villain" often conjures images of individuals engaging in "sneakiness, backbiting, innuendo, mudslinging, bullying, domineering, quarrel-picking, and cruelty," while the protagonist typically embodies "pluck, cockiness in an underdog, audacity, humor,

satire, honest man-to-man slugging, and nonviolent pressure" (Bergstrand & Jasper, 2018, p. 230). Villains are created to evoke intense feelings of dread and hatred in audiences. They deflect blame, turning anxiety and irritation into outrage and motivation, and transforming worry into anger (Gamson, 1992, p. 29). Additionally, villains serve to reinforce negative attitudes toward outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The stereotype that a female character could be a villain may not be as popular as a female who has a good and gentle nature because society generally prefers women to have a loving nature, so that stereotype is still produced continuously (Connell, 2005). Eventually, the assumption arose that when women behave not as they should, like not gentle feminine, they would be considered monsters. The concept of a monster, in this case, Monstrous women, a given name by Rosi Braidotti (1994) in her book entitled Embodiment and Sexual Difference in a Contemporary Feminist Theory, refers to the inherent nature of something that is seen to be of lower or inferior status, hence deviating from the society definition of what is considered "normal" (Chelsea Picken). The result is 'extreme othering,' which is an extreme relation since people labeled monsters are incapable of living in harmony with society and living according to what society wants.

To see Cruella as a villain, especially a female villain representing her character in the movie, Stuart Hall's theory of representation highlights how movie narrative and images are imbued with ideology and how this can be resisted. In the context of female villains, Hall's binary form of representation can be seen in the example of Prince Phillip and Maleficent in Disney's Sleeping Beauty, where Phillip is the hero and Maleficent is the Villain. However, recent 21st-century fairy tale narratives have offered more complex representations of female villains, imbuing them with agency, institutional power, and well-developed narrative arcs (Natalie et al., 2022).

According to Stuart Hall's representation theory (Hall, 1997, pp. 18-20), movie representations are not neutral or objective but constructed through selection, emphasis, and interpretation. Cruella's representation as a villain is not inherent to her character but instead constructed through various cultural codes and conventions. That means Cruella

is represented through many background reasons, not merely as a villain with the opposite characteristics of the protagonist. Cruella's portrayal as a villain often reinforces stereotypes and norms. Her ambition, assertiveness, and lack of maternal instincts are often associated with negative feminine traits, while her male counterparts are often depicted as heroic or sympathetic. Overall, Cruella's representation as a villain is not simply a reflection of her character but rather a product of constructed cultural stereotyping and conventions that shape our understanding of gender, morality, and culture. The present writer uses the construction of otherness, stereotyping, exclusion, and power as the notions of stereotyping proposed by Hall to identify representative practices to address the second primary problem, which is why Cruella is not being portrayed as a stereotypical female villain.

Film Analysis

To analyze this film to answer the two main problems in this research through this film analysis concept, it would take some methods with the same methods to analyze them. Analyzing literature and movies entails evaluating and understanding various narrative and aesthetic expression modalities. Although the two media have clear distinctions, there are also many ways that similar analyses can be conducted. Even though they are two different mediums, each with its distinctive qualities, literature, and film have several components in common that lend themselves to comparable analytical methods. To completely recognize and analyze the aesthetic merits of each, one must have a working knowledge of the story, the characters, the themes, the symbolism, and the creative decisions made by the authors of each work (Adi, 2016, p. 53). The approach has two parts: extrinsic, which covers social, cultural, economic, and philosophical factors, and intrinsic. At the same time, intrinsic research focuses on the movie or several movies to identify a pattern. Treating a movie as an "art film" rather than a mainstream story is typical (Adi, 2016, p. 57).

Within the scope of literary studies, research about popular fiction in the form of film intrinsically tends to not be carried out and is considered difficult because it could be considered film studies. In literary studies, films that are studied intrinsically are

the same as intrinsic studies of novels. However, in the film, the elements are different from the novel even though the pattern is almost the same, which are characterization and point of view, editing and narrative structure, and style of language (Adi, 2016, 59).

Based on the explanation of the theoretical frameworks above, the use of theoretical framework from representations by Stuart Hall to analyze the stereotyping of female villains portrayed in a movie until film analysis concept to analyze this research. The concept of othering in Stuart Hall's explanation of aspects of society has the power to stereotype society. This leads to a constructionist portrayal of Cruella through films that represent how women become villains just by looking at how they dress, behave, or speak. The male gaze by Laura Mulvey states that film becomes one of the tools to satisfy the portrayal of women in the eyes of men, how females see another female, and how females see themselves (Mulvey, 1975). The portrayal of Cruella is to satisfy some genders, which gives rise to stereotypes of how female villains should be seen or portrayed. Therefore, female villains have the characteristics to be called

villains. Through films, females can also be viewed with a view that is focused on the satisfaction of men's views, females towards females, and females towards themselves, which impacts real and daily life.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative analyses are performed by two main aspects in the film on both the story and the storyline. It is a process of analyzing the film through. Combining the story and the storyline (Ida, 2011, p. 92). This process is conducted to give an understanding of how the story and the storyline are structured. During this process, the narrative units have been chosen to analyze to find any evidence provided.

Those narrative units are the storyline or the plot itself and the characters. The characters become the important unit to be analyzed as the stereotype is displayed by them. The plot or the storyline is also important for the analysis because it shows the stereotypes of female villains in the film. The character is analyzed through the storyline of the film. After finishing with the character and the storyline, the plot is deemed important for the present writer to continue the analysis

as it shows the stereotype, and this becomes the base of character analysis.

Non-Narrative Analysis

The non-narrative part of the work is providing the writer with a deeper understanding of the underlying meaning. Evidence that cannot be found in the narrative is currently unavailable. The non-narrative elements selected for this research include shot composition, camera angle, and color, including how the characters look such as their clothes, hair, and make-up. Given that the focus of this study is a film, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of the camera in shaping specific shots and perspectives. To enhance the analysis, the writer must carefully select specific frames to effectively portray the depiction of Cruella being represented as a villain, as each shot category carries significant importance. Angle, as another non-narrative feature, is likewise affected by the camera location. According to Giannetti, angles in film can be classified into five main categories: bird's-eye view, high angle, eye-level shot, low angle, and oblique angle (Laura Mulvey, 13). In addition to shots and perspectives, color plays a crucial role that is equally significant. The effects of color boosting are frequently observed following its application. Every color process tends to specialize in a specific base hue. Color in film often operates on a subconscious level, evoking intense emotions and conveying specific expressions. Visual artists have used colors for symbolic purposes since ancient times. The Color symbolism is likely to be culturally acquired, while the implications are quite similar in various communities (Giannetti 25). The way characters dress and are portrayed to match their characters also represents how the characters are portrayed on their characteristics. Nevertheless, these non-narrative elements will assist the writer in carrying out the analysis, with its scope being constrained by the character's connection to stereotypes, specifically those related to female villains.

DISCUSSION

Female as Villain Characters in Movies and Media

Cruella de Vil is a fictional character who is widely recognized as one of Disney's most infamous female antagonists. She is notorious for her fixation on Dalmatian fur and her readiness to abduct

pups to fashion a coat from their distinctive markings. The etymology of her name directly incorporates the terms "cruel" and "devil". The character in the new Disney live-action picture, Cruella, is presented with an original narrative approach. The film features Emma Stone as the notorious dog thief before the events in *101 Dalmatians*. It takes place in 1970s London, where the main character, known as Estella at the time, is employed as a fashion designer for the renowned Baroness von Hellman, portrayed by Emma Thompson. Their connection rapidly becomes chaotic, prompting Estella to embrace her mischievous nature, resulting in a fierce power struggle between the mentor and the apprentice. The movie seeks to anthropomorphize the character and furnish her with a past that elucidates her motivations and actions. Furthermore, it delves into the concept of how an individual might transform into a malevolent character and the influence that society exerts in molding human conduct. The portrayal of Cruella as a female antagonist holds great significance as it defies conventional gender norms and assumptions. She is a formidable, self-reliant lady who exhibits fearlessness in pursuing her desires. The complexity and multi-

dimensionality of her persona enhance her relatability and captivate listeners, making her more interesting.

In the context of a fairy tale, Cruella De Vil the change of perspective has two effects. First, it contributes to multi-perspectivity by moving away from the one-sided account of the story. Cruella's actions are motivated, and she transforms from a flat two-dimensional character into a more rounded character. Secondly, it also promotes the reimagining of gender roles that are portrayed by villains. By making the villain have a background story, the focus shifts from the inactive villain character to a more active female. At the same time, she is not depicted as being pure evil anymore, resulting in her character becoming an ambiguous antagonist. Cruella is depicted as a nuanced and intricate individual who challenges conventional gender conventions and societal expectations imposed on women. Her identity is not determined by her interactions with men, and her transformation into Cruella involves accepting her authentic self and defying societal norms around femininity.

The variety of images that are being displayed in popular

culture and the mass media with some commercial advertising images illustrate the use of racial, cultural and gender stereotypes towards female villains. Female villains in films are portrayed with their distinctive characteristics, often depicted through elements such as black clothing and red lipstick to emphasize their villainous nature. But at the same time, the modern villain in movies with the same characteristics was given a background story to complete their background character and was not seen as a flat two-dimensional character. Hall identifies the significance of this ambiguity in relation to how we reference our interpretations and adoptions of other stereotypes from other images seen in media (Hall, 1997, p. 225-283). As mentioned before, from three accounts of representation, constructionist is chosen to analyze this object, because this approach has been recognized in the social character of language. This approach gives advantages in analyzing the meaning through language that is represented by someone (Hall, 1997, 10-11). In this study, three representations are shown in the movie.

Female as Other

Hall (1997) highlights "representational practices: of different of different people "which we call stereotyping:", focusing on differences of representation according to race and ethnicity, as well as gender: "what is said about racial differences could equally be applied in many instances to other dimensions of difference, such as gender, sexuality, class and disability" (Hall, S., 1997, p. 255). Every individual who is attached to a certain stereotype is seen as 'other' and usually 'unacceptable'. Stuart Hall states that stereotyping sets a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', the 'normal' and the 'pathological', the 'acceptable' and the 'unacceptable', what 'belongs' and what does not or is 'other', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' us and them (248). The representation of another may simply mean that someone or some people are unacceptable in the opinion of the larger community. Female in media and movies is a powerful means to convey information about gender roles in society and various studies have revealed that television advertisements contain gender—stereotypic ideas and images (Lavine et.

al. 1999, p.1049). Such images of females have powerful effects: images of gender in popular culture shape our understandings of femininity and masculinity. According to Peach, such images construct and prescribe how females should look, feel, and act, and how they will be seen by others (Peach 1998, p. 119). Images of gender in popular culture contribute to the 'making' of females (Zoonen 1995, 315).

'Someone Says my wife looked like a man'; 'Somebody says my sister looked like a gorilla' (Hall, S., 1997, p. 232) – Hall shows quotes from black athletes regarding their performance at the 1988 Seoul Olympics and the perception of spectators. These quotes ascribe stereotypically masculine athletic attributes to black female athletes. Consequently, their athletic prowess is not acknowledged and admired independently, but rather linked to male, aggressive, and animalistic qualities, which is derogatory. In many cases, female villains are portrayed as having stereotypically male qualities, such as being aggressive, violent, and ruthless. This is often done to make them seem more threatening and to reinforce gender norms and stereotypes. However, this portrayal can also be seen as

problematic, as it reinforces the idea that women who exhibit these qualities are deviant or abnormal. It is important to acknowledge that there are instances of female antagonists who defy these stereotypes and are depicted as intricate and multi-dimensional characters. These characters can be perceived as defying conventional gender roles and societal expectations. From the start, even her name was portrayed as evil, Cruella De Vil. The name "Cruella de Vil" is not an acronym, but a portmanteau of the words "cruel", "devil", and "evil" (Mooney, 2021). The name "Cruella de Vil" has become synonymous with a person who is cruel and evil. Her characteristics with a fur coat and monochrome hair represent her two sides, wicked and kind.

Figure 1. Glenn Close as Cruella De Vil in her costumes from *101 Dalmatians* (1995)

Figure 2. Catherine Miller
(Cruella's stepmother)

In the movie, even since she was a child the way she behaves always represented "cruel", hence the name Cruella. Her character was inspired by one of the popular Hollywood actresses in the 1950s, Talulah Bankhead (Solomon, 1995). Her childhood was quite awful, as an unruly child she was sent away to convents and expelled twice because she was once throwing ink at a nun, and another for coming onto one. Although Bankhead maintained the image of herself as a character, there is a more serious side to her that is not as well-known. Despite her drinking, smoking, and multiple relationships with men and women, Bankhead was also a trailblazing political thinker who spent more than three decades promoting causes she believed in. In her biography of the Bankhead family, Deep South Dynasty (2022), historian Kari Frederickson concludes that although Tallulah was largely progressive toward race, she did "maintain many of the class pretensions of the

southern elite." Despite being a "conventional liberal anti-Communist," Bankhead dared to criticize "those standing in the way of equality, her own family included."

Figure 3. I am a woman. Hear me roar.

A similar scene also appears in *Cruella*, when she is put into a prestigious private school, and is expelled because of what the school said is misbehavior, but she was fighting against her bully because she is being teased for being a weird child. Even when she was still a baby, she realized she did not fit in society because of her appearance, even without further explanation of the way her visual is being portrayed

people always look differently towards her because stereotyping reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature (Hall, 1997, 257).

Figure 4. Even when I was born, I was different" (Cruella, 2021, minute: 00:00:43)

in real life, similar dynamics manifest repeatedly in various environments, such as schools, workplaces, politics, and other areas of society.

Media Impact of Gender Stereotypes

Media consumption plays a significant role in shaping societal preconceptions. External factors, including the media, influence perceptions of the world and contribute to the formation of attitudes toward other people and places. The media is among such sources of influence. Given how much media is exposed to in our society, it would be difficult to remain unaffected by what is seen as cultural standards, such as how to think and behave in accordance with gender

stereotypes that are widely disseminated. The influence of popular media on viewers and how gender representations in the media distort viewers' understanding of reality. In today's highly mediated world, access to mass media from various nations has become increasingly widespread, though it is important to acknowledge that access may vary depending on factors such as geography, technological infrastructure, and socio-economic conditions. The significance of the country of origin of the media is sometimes overshadowed by the universal messages that are being sent by the media. In a similar vein, given the volume of Western media that is distributed globally, viewers everywhere should think carefully about how Western culture and ideas are portrayed to avoid reinforcing or emulating untrue preconceptions or even unfavorable views of the West (Goodall, 2016).

In "Cruella," the character of Cruella de Vil offers a modern representation that both engages with and subverts traditional gender stereotypes. Historically, female villains in media, including earlier iterations of Cruella, have been portrayed in a way that emphasizes their

appearance, with traits like beauty and fashion being central to their identity (Zuckerman et al., 1980). The 2021 film challenges these stereotypes by giving depth to Cruella's character beyond her obsession with appearance. Estella's transformation into Cruella showcases not only the archetype of the "evil fashionista" but also delves into complex motivations of ambition, creativity, and rebellion against societal norms (Smith et al., 2013).

While the character initially aligns with common gendered villainous traits—such as using her fashion as a weapon—her progression as a character illustrates a move toward empowering her agency rather than reducing her to mere stereotypes of beauty or villainy. Cruella's journey highlights both the societal pressures she faces and the way she chooses to reclaim her identity through defiance, which distinguishes her from earlier, more one-dimensional portrayals of female antagonists (Baker & Raney, 2007).

The film "Cruella" delves into the prevalent issue of discrimination within the fashion business, especially her gender. The film depicts the objectification, marginalization, and inferior treatment of women in the industry. Katie Walsh, a critic, argues that "Cruella" offers a critical perspective on the fashion industry's inherent sexism, which often marginalizes women and reduces them to mere objects of beauty. Because Disney has actively contributed to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, which has an impact on children's and teenagers' performance as well as their mental and physical health (10). (Sarah Coyne, Eric Rasmussen, David A Nelson, Pretty as a Princess: Longitudinal Effects of Engagement With Disney Princesses on Gender Stereotypes, Body Esteem, and Prosocial Behavior in Children, Society in Research for Child Development, June 2016). Young girls are negatively impacted by traditional Disney princess movies. A study including 198 pre-schoolers evaluated their level of interaction with Disney Princess culture and was published in Child Development. Coyne's study showed that girls, who interacted the most with Disney princesses, showed worse self-esteem about their bodies as time went on. Poor body image is a serious problem among young girls and can be a major precursor for developing an eating disorder later in life "Disney Princesses represent some of the first examples of exposure to the

thin ideal," (Coyne, 2016). According to Coyne's research, girls who connected with Disney princesses the most eventually displayed worse body esteem. Adolescent girls often struggle with poor body image, which can be a key risk factor for eating disorders in later life. Disney princess animated films frequently feature unrealistic and idealized depictions of female form and beauty, such as small waists, enormous breasts, wide eyes, and batting eyelashes. These images reflect a society that places a great emphasis on physical attractiveness. A lot of young girls identify with fairy-tale princesses because they are often praised for their extraordinary beauty, and they want to look like them (Bispo, 2015).

Cruella offers a distinctive and subtle portrayal of a contemporary female antagonist through the transformation of Estella into Cruella. This transformation is driven by pivotal moments in the film, showcasing her shift from an innocent, ambitious young woman into a ruthless and empowered figure.

For instance, early in the film, Estella struggles to fit into societal norms and suppresses her rebellious nature. In one scene, Estella faces constant humiliation in her job as a cleaner at Liberty Department Store (timestamp: 00:18:00), illustrating her attempt to conform to societal expectations. However, her natural creativity shines through when she spontaneously redesigns a window display, which becomes her first act of defiance against the rigid system around her.

The transformation intensifies after she discovers the Baroness's role in her mother's death (timestamp: 00:51:00). This revelation marks a turning point for Estella, fuelling her desire for revenge and pushing her to embrace the persona of Cruella fully. One crucial scene is when Estella, now Cruella, crashes the Baroness's black-and-white party, arriving in a dazzling red dress, making a bold statement and publicly challenging the Baroness's dominance in the fashion world (timestamp: 01:08:00). This moment symbolizes her rejection of societal norms and her shift into a more confident, rebellious figure.

Cruella's evolving fashion choices also visually represent her transformation. Her initial modest outfits gradually give way to more daring, edgy, and rebellious designs, culminating in the dramatic fashion showdown scene where Cruella stages a public display

of her work by setting a dress on fire to reveal a striking new creation underneath (timestamp: 01:22:00). This act not only symbolizes her creative genius but also her willingness to embrace her darker side in her rivalry with the Baroness.

These moments illustrate how Estella's personal struggles and emotional pain contribute to her evolution into Cruella, blurring the lines between heroism and villainy. The character's complexity is further heightened as she navigates her relationships with Jasper and Horace, who question her more aggressive and vengeful behavior (timestamp: 01:30:00). Her journey portrays her as a multi-dimensional antagonist, one whose actions are driven by personal trauma and ambition, rather than pure malice.

The movie challenges conventional gender norms and expectations by presenting a sophisticated and diverse female antagonist who is not characterized solely by her interactions with males, but rather by her autonomy and aspirations, establishing people as 'different' is a selfish act to make oneself feel as if you are more included and have a place in society in comparison to those who do not because they are

unique and how is the representation of 'difference' linked with questions of 'power'.

Showing Obedience

Initially, in the movie, audiences see Estella's male superior disregard her. Estella, subsequently adopting the name Cruella, is employed as a caretaker at the most stylish department store in London. Despite her aspiration to pursue a career as a fashion designer, she was offered a position as a caretaker at London Liberty. She requested her superior provide her with an opportunity to pursue a career as a fashion designer, but her superior displayed scepticism and disregarded her request.

> The Boss: I gave you your job description. Don't go outside the boundaries of your engagement. Please.
> (Cruella, 2021, minute: 21.56.00)

The word "Please" signifies the desire of her supervisor for her to comply with his instructions by being submissive. Linda Pollock (1989) asserts that early modern England exhibited a distinct sociocultural framework. These included the concepts of hierarchy, social status, and gender. Individuals possessed both awareness of

their social position and comprehension of the anticipated attributes linked to being male or female, as well as the specific connotations associated with the phrases 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Men were required to occupy positions of leadership, utilizing their discernment and power, while women were expected to exhibit compliance, modesty, and submission.

Dyer (in (Hall, 1997, 258) Representation; Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices stated that,

We are always 'making sense' of things in terms of some wider categories. For example, on how we become to 'know' something about a person by thinking of the roles which he or she performs: is he/she a parent, a child, a worker, a lover, boss or an old age pensioner? We assign him/her to the membership of different groups, according to class, gender, age group, nationality, 'race', linguistic group, sexual preference and so on…

The remark above indicates that even during the early modern period, women were recognized for their adherence to male authority. This comment is consistent with Estella's firsthand experience residing in early modern England when she was required to adhere to her employer's instructions and comply with their authority. It is no different from how females were treated in the early modern era of America where they were seen as incapable human beings and second citizens that have no rights.

Figure 5. The Boss is talking to Estella (Cruella, 2021, minute: 21.58.00)

Furthermore, the boss's facial expression indicates his assertiveness towards Estella as he raises his eyebrows. Inattentive to her presence, he diverts his attention to the object in his hand, disregarding Estella. In addition, the camera angle that tilts downward slightly effectively portrays the boss character's immense might, aligning with Kraft, R.N's (1987) finding that low angles imply strength, dynamic movement, and dominance. Hence, the boss utilizes his authority to attain his desired objectives, specifically, he seeks Estella's compliance.

Domestic Worker

Estella tenaciously pursues her aspiration to become a fashion designer. Subsequently, she once again requests her boss for an opportunity to pursue a career as a fashion designer. In the following moments, she endeavors to persuade her superior:

Figure 6. The Boss asked Estella to clean the bathroom floor properly (Cruella, 2021, minute: 22.53.00)

Estella   : Sir, I just wanted to say, I really am a dab a hand with the Needle.

The Boss   : Why are you talking and not cleaning?

…

The Boss   : Did you do all the bathrooms according to the regulations that I gave you? Soap, water, mop, bleach, polish?" In that order?

Estella   : Yes

Estella suggests her skill in sewing and designing to her supervisor by claiming to be highly proficient with a needle. Instead of replying to Estella, he inquired, "Have you adhered to all the prescribed regulations while cleaning the bathrooms?" Do you need soap, water, mop, bleach, or polish? The boss's response suggests that gender preconceptions are influencing this situation. Social roles dictate that a man must always be the family's leader and the primary provider of income, with women typically being viewed as housewives, nurturers, and caregivers. It also occurs in political contexts, when men are typically perceived as belonging to higher echelons of the national political system, while women are supposed to operate at the local level. Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny (2011) asserted that conventional gender norms prescribe that family responsibilities are commonly perceived as 'feminine', with caregiving duties and ordinary household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry being closely linked to femininity.

In contrast, tasks that are not part of a regular pattern, such as do-it-yourself projects, outdoor work, and general upkeep, are commonly associated with the concept of 'masculinity'. Hence, individuals comply with these gender norms by carrying out domestic duties that correspond to their assigned gender roles. Cleaning is closely linked to

femininity, which is why women consistently identify it with cleaning. Moreover, the perpetual association of women with cleaning significantly influences society's perception of women. Estella is subject to disdain from her supervisor in this scenario.

Female are Less Intelligent

Due to multiple rejections, Estella persists in her efforts to persuade her supervisor to grant her an opportunity as a fashion designer. She attempts to persuade her boss by asserting, "I am of the opinion that beneath the exterior of that rigid, ill-fitting suit, there resides a compassionate individual who desires to provide an exceptional young person with another opportunity." In addition, rather than affording her an opportunity, he displays rudeness towards her by instructing her to "thoroughly clean my office." "When you arrive tomorrow, please remember to bring a brain" (Cruella, 2021, minute: 25.20.00). Stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power that are usually directed against the subordinate or excluded group (Hall, 1997, p. 258).

It is evident that Estella's supervisor is displaying rudeness by using offensive language against her, stating "when you come tomorrow, try, and remember to bring a brain." The behavior is inappropriate, although Estella is his subordinate. The supervisor perceives Estella as intellectually inferior due to her previous occupation as a caretaker. Expectations and chances in education are biased toward one gender over the other.

In the 1970s, gender stereotypes were widespread in the United States workplace, leading males to harbor conventional perceptions about women that influenced their behavior towards female coworkers. During this time, men perpetuated gender stereotypes against women in the workplace. Hentschel, T., Heilman, M. E., & Peus, C. V. (2019) found that women often faced limitations in their possibilities because men believed that women were less competent than men and should not be given equal opportunities for career progression. Estella's encounters conform to gender stereotypes, since her male superior viewed her, as a woman, to possess lesser competence compared to men.

Figure 7. The Boss is angry with Estella. (Cruella, 2021, minute: 25.20.00)

Moreover, her superior refused to provide her with chances for professional progression. Figure 3 reveals that the boss' facial expressions and actions demonstrate a lack of respect for Estella. For instance, the boss lifted his eyebrows while speaking to Estella, implying his superiority over her. Based on her boss's treatment, it is evident that he perceives females as less intellectual than men in a male-dominated workplace. This event exemplifies a scenario that could result in the rise of a dominant female figure, the prevailing gender stereotype, which portrays women as less clever than men, may compel women to mimic masculine traits to conform and succeed.

Stereotypes and the unequal power relations between gender and sexuality are perpetuated by images. As demonstrated by Goffman (1979), Hall et al. (2013), and De Lauretis (1984), gender representation matters, particularly when it comes to patterns. Put differently, discourses about gender and sexuality are articulated by the repeated recurrence of representations in different media rather than by solitary pictures. The media is perceived as a platform for the ongoing debates on the meaning of many identities, such as gender or sexual orientation, age or sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, or any combination of these characteristics. Instead, gender and sexuality are concepts that emerge from our interactions with the world around us (West & Zimmerman, 1987) Gender and sexual identities are learned and performed within the constraints imposed by various societal components, including family, friends, schools, religious institutions, and media. From birth, individuals are subjected to expectations regarding gendered roles.

Unfeminine Representations and Acts of Madness

Males were perceived as powerful, sensible, and in charge. The main cause of women adopting male energy to live in society—including as a character in a movie—is gender stereotypes. Female is frequently subjected to rigid demands from society regarding their duties, behavior, and looks. Females who do not conform to these standards risk being called "unfeminine" or

experiencing negative social consequences. One of the factors is that stigma from society can further isolate people with mental illnesses, making it harder for them to ask for assistance or be accepted. Because they defied gender standards, women have been labeled as "mad" for ages. Disparities like race and gender have also been crucial in shaping how lives with disabilities are portrayed. According to Garland-Thomson (1997), gendered and racialized perceptions of physically disabled female bodies led to the portrayal of women in American freak shows as "exotic and sexualized others". Gender is a major factor in the creation of a mad female's life in Cruella, especially when it comes to the inappropriate and unfeminine ways these ladies act out and represent being mentally ill women. When her friends confront Cruella about her cruelty, she finds it hard to admit the horrible, repulsive otherness that her methods of embodying and acting out mad womanhood have come to represent. She states that she is dead because of Cruella's lack of empathy. The idea that damaging interpersonal encounters have a terrible quality that awakens the hideous within all of humanity—a potentiality present in both the "other" and the self—is clearly emphasized by this instance. Consequently, one could read Cruella's portrayal as partially relying on long-standing stereotypes that a woman who behaves erratically is mentally ill, a danger to others, and ought to be institutionalized. However, when a guy acts violently, it's more frequent for him to be portrayed as a "natural born killer," someone who is violent or awful by nature, and whose motivations do not need much thought. However, when a woman acts aggressively, it appears as though she has broken gender standards, and her transgression must be understood and explained.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the representation of female villains in media and movies has evolved to reflect a more nuanced and complex understanding of gender dynamics. Through the exploration of characters like those in Cruella, Female antagonists in film often subvert traditional norms and become symbols of empowerment and agency. However, the persistent presence of gender stereotypes highlights the need for continued critical analysis and advocacy for more diverse and authentic portrayals of women in media.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and revision, and publication process in general.

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Exposing Modern Discrimination: Reflecting on Struggles of the African-American Depicted in *Judas and the Black Messiah*

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ABSTRACT

The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is expected to reduce the injustices faced by African Americans. However, life after the Act proves to be not easy. The issues of oppression experienced by African Americans in the past continue to recur. This is because some discrimination against black people is done in a more latent way, called modern discrimination. Therefore, it is important to discuss modern discrimination against African Americans as depicted in Judas and the Black Messiah movie This article aims to analyze the causes of modern discrimination against African Americans. In this research, the researcher used a qualitative method through library research. The main data was taken from the dialogue of Judas and the Black Messiah movie, while supporting data came from articles, books, and online sources. The researcher applied a post-nationalist perspective, Critical Race Theory, and modern discrimination theory. The research findings identify four key factors explaining modern discrimination against African Americans: normalization of discrimination, exploitation of minority interests to support white dominance, adaptation of African-American stereotypes to fit white demands, and the intersectionality of multiple sources contributing to discrimination.

Keywords: *African Americans; critical race theory; Judas and the Black Messiah; modern discrimination*

INTRODUCTION

Over five centuries, the African-American community has been subjected to acts of racial hatred. The injustice faced by the African nation is still one of the most important issues in understanding 'the definition of multiculturalism' that American society is proud of in describing its civilization. Historical documents show that the beginning of their suffering was when the first black Africans were brought to Virginia in 1619.

At first, they were considered contract servants for a few years who had the opportunity to gain their freedom at the end of the contract. By the 1660s, they began to be locked into a lifelong system of involuntary servitude (Hamby, 2010, p. 19). The slavery system restricted their movement because they were seen as the property of slave masters and experienced discrimination from white Americans. However, over time, former slaves and some white people in the North American region wanted to abolish the slavery system throughout the Americas. Therefore, Congress passed the 13th Amendment to the American Constitution, which declared the abolition of the slavery system in all American territories in December 1865 (Hamby, 2010, p. 148).

Unfortunately, African Americans still experience several acts of discrimination. The era of the slavery system that discriminated against African Americans is replaced by the term Jim Crow era. The Jim Crow era (1877-1965) was the enactment of the "separate but equal" law that was unequal when they differentiated public facilities between blacks and whites and eliminated the voting rights of most blacks by imposing a poll tax. It extends to all areas of Southern society's life at that time (Hamby, 2010, p. 197). It marked the beginning of the civil rights movement that aimed to abolish segregation. The rise of the Civil Rights Movement to achieve equality and end segregation for the African-American community in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ending the Jim Crow era.

Still, those do not immediately end all forms of discrimination or violence against African Americans. The violent incidents experienced by African Americans are

contradictory to the idea of American multiculturalism. When it comes to African-American identity, there is a double standard in defining individual freedom and legal policies that often work against them. Indeed, the discrimination of white Americans against African Americans during the cruelty of slavery has been abolished, African-Americans still experience discrimination today, which is known as modern discrimination.

Cortina (2008) describes modern discrimination as a prejudicial or biased act manifested in a latent way that often goes unnoticed since it has a plausible explanation for one's discriminatory actions. Modern discrimination may be difficult for the targets to identify, and this ambiguity can make it challenging for individuals to notice whether discrimination has occurred and what the motivations behind it might be.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits all forms of discrimination and segregation based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin, does not prevent the acts of discrimination against African Americans. As an illustration, it can be seen in the case of the Selma-to-Montgomery march in March 1965. The march aims to commemorate and protest the brutality of white Alabama state police in the killing of Jimmie Lee Jackson. The tragedy began in February 1965 when Jackson participated in a protest calling for justice for the Alabama state government to give voting rights to African Americans in Alabama and throughout the South.

The initially peaceful march suddenly became a tragedy when unprovoked white police used excessive force to stop the march. The police beat them, fired tear gas, and even shot Jackson. At the time, Jackson was shot while trying to protect his mother from rioting police officers and activists (Franklin & Evelyn, 2011). The tragedy certainly shakes the attention of the American public regarding the acts of violence that continue to plague African Americans and demonstrate civil rights violations.

They experience negative attitudes from whites in so many ways, as also depicted in Judas and the Black Messiah movie. The movie was released on February 12, 2021, and was directed and produced by Shaka King. The movie is a biographical drama of the American Black Panther Party, Fred Hampton. The movie is seen from the point of view of the

true story of FBI informant O'Neal, who infiltrates the Black Panther Party and becomes involved in Hampton's murder plan.

One example of modern discrimination can be seen in this movie when Fred Hampton was arrested by the local police and accused of stealing $70 worth of ice cream. Without an arrest warrant, Hampton can only surrender when his hands are suddenly cuffed. This scene subtly reflects modern discrimination through the misuse of police authority against the African-American community, despite the government's passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. According to the modern discrimination theory by Triana et al. (2015), modern discrimination is often subtle and ambiguous, leaving the target unsure whether they are being discriminated against and unclear about the perpetrator's intentions. This ambiguity requires victims to accumulate several ambiguous incidents before recognizing the discrimination.

This scene subtly reflects modern discrimination through the misuse of police authority against the African-American community, despite the government's passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. According to the modern

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From the explanation above, ideally, African Americans are guaranteed a life free from discrimination through the enactment of the Civil Rights Act. In reality, life after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is anything but easy. The issues of oppression experienced by the African-American community in the past continue to recur. This is because some discrimination against black people is done in a more latent way. Therefore, it is important to discuss the roots of modern discrimination against African Americans. For a more in-depth discussion, modern discrimination is also depicted in the movies Judas and the Black Messiah. The article presents the causes of modern discrimination against African Americans.

METHODOLOGY

This study comes under the American Studies discipline, and it is conducted from the

Post-Nationalist perspective. According to Rowe in Post-nationalist American (2000), he states that the meaning of American identity needs to be considered in the context of global studies and minority groups, such as ethnic, women, and gender studies, African Americans, Asian Americans, and other minority groups. The reinterpretation is not only based on the standards of white American dominance but also needs to embrace the minority perspective as the whole of Americans.

Moreover, this study also employs Critical Race Theory (CRT) by Delgado & Stefancic to examine the subject of modern discrimination. As they state, CRT is required to challenge the inequitable practices of people of color against white American domination and to examine the relationship between race, racism, and power, even though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 safeguarded against discrimination (2017, p. 4. As they state, CRT has six basic tenets (pp. 8-11): (1) Racism is ordinary, not aberrational (2) Interest convergence (3) Social construction (4) Differential racialization and its consequences (5) Intersectionality and anti-essentialism (6) Voice of color.

Moving on to modern discrimination theory, Triana et al. (2015, p.2) state that Modern discrimination is often subtle and has many meanings. As a result, the target may be unsure whether there is discrimination or not. They may also not know the reason for the perpetrator. Because of this ambiguity, it is possible that targets must accumulate multiple (ambiguous) events to know whether there is discrimination.

During the analysis of the data, this study employs the qualitative method through library research. Qualitative research is a method that emphasizes descriptive analysis through various data collection, such as text and others, so that the problem studied has a meaning that can be interpreted (Creswell, 2016). In analyzing the data, the primary data of the study is chosen from the dialogues of Judas and the Black Messiah movie.

The first step in collecting data is watching the movie to find the selected dialogues. Second, the researcher is taking notes by focusing on dialogues. Third, the researchers collect all the data into categorized folders related to the research topic. Therefore, the selected data is being created. Moreover, this

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research also relies on secondary data by examining academic articles, books, internet sources, and other readings related to the research topic.

Talking about analyzing the data, first, the researcher prepares the selected data of dialogues for analysis. These data have been sorted into different categories based on the general idea of the research theme. Second, the researcher reads and reviews all the data. This step offers a general understanding of the information. Third, the researcher codes all the data by categorizing the pieces of dialogue in accordance with CRT theory and composing analytical comments that represent the findings of a category. By applying CRT, the researcher explores how these dialogues reflect systematic discrimination that continues to affect African Americans in more subtle forms. The analysis reveals how discrimination persists, though it is not as overt as in the past. Fifth, the researcher presented the arguments of the analysis interpretation into a more detailed narrative by connecting modern discrimination theory and the post-nationalist perspective. Modern discrimination theory helps the researcher to explain

how the discriminatory acts may appear rational or justified on the surface but are, in fact, biased. These acts are subtle and often ambiguous, making them harder to recognize as discriminatory, aligning with the points made in CRT. Moreover, this research also relies on secondary data by examining academic articles, books, internet sources, and other readings related to the research topic.

DISCUSSION

In detailing the problematic issues of African-American discrimination, the movie will serve as a window that reveals the harsh journey of the African-American community despite the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Therefore, there are three basic tenets to explain the cause of modern discrimination toward African Americans.

Racism is Ordinary, not Aberrational

According to this point, the act of injustice is difficult to overcome because it is not aberrational. Even though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, black people in America still face various forms of discrimination daily. More importantly, the acts of injustice that they endured are often considered normal in the

daily lives of white Americans. This can be seen in the following analysis of the movie's dialogue that follows.

> Police : "Hey, Williams,
> Officer 1 is that Harriet
> Tubman?"
>
> Police : "You made it
> William out. You're
> good."
>
> (00:57:47-00:57:51)

The police, as part of the civilian government, occasionally disrespect black culture. Black women dressed in attire reminiscent of the abolitionist Harriet Tubman are made fun of by the white police officers. The police officers' actions are extremely underestimating toward blacks as if they do not regard Harriet Tubman as a figure worthy of respect for her efforts to abolish slavery. Furthermore, they demean blacks as if they do not respect the principles contained in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits various forms of racial discrimination. This also results in modern discrimination, where black people continue to experience various forms of discrimination even though slavery has been abolished.

Although at first glance, the dialogue may seem like an ordinary joke. A deeper analysis using modern discrimination theory reveals that this behavior can be categorized as a form of modern discrimination. Mockery, which falls under modern discriminatory behavior, can also be found in the research by Ellemers and Barreto (2015), who explain that instead of discrimination being done explicitly, it now tends to be done implicitly towards the target. They also point out that modern discrimination has become more subtle, for example, by making jokes that ridicule cultural practices (pp. 142-143). Hence, modern discrimination practices are difficult to recognize since they do not seem like discriminatory actions from the outside. However, by understanding the motives behind such behavior, it can be concluded that they still do not acknowledge the equality between black and white Americans, as reflected in the behavior of demeaning the abolitionist figure Harriet Tubman.

In addition, as a government official, the police should be the first party to ensure protection for the black community. However, they become the primary perpetrator of racial discrimination when referring to the movie. They create discomfort in the black community by making sarcastic

comments to black women who resemble Harriet Tubman. Another instance of discrimination carried out by the FBI and white police against the black community can also be observed in the dialog where Fred Hampton is suddenly arrested by the police without an arrest warrant.

Hoover   : "I want him off the street. Charge him with something. Anything. But get his Black ass off the street."

Deborah   : "Y'all don't see there's kids in here? Huh? Of course, you're gonna wait till you get to a free breakfast program to pull something like this! Bunch of cowards! You disgust."

Hampton   : "Show some discipline. Tell Rush to get me a lawyer."

Interviewer : "What was he arrested for?"

O'Neal   : "Ice cream. Yeah, he was accused of taking 70-something dollars' worth of ice cream."

(00:46:29-00:47:02)

The police's arrest of Fred Hampton constitutes an act of discrimination when referring to the first basic tenet of CRT. Discrimination still occurs, but it is disguised with the concept of equality expressed in the rules where the police arrested Hampton on charges of theft. Police misconduct in Hampton's arrest was discovered when the police suddenly apprehended him without an arrest warrant. He is unaware of the reason behind his arrest, which is proven to have been planned by Hoover.

The background of Fred Hampton's arrest in the movie takes place in 1969, which is after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In reality, the black community is supposed to be free from legal oppression and guaranteed their freedom from acts of discrimination. Nonetheless, discrimination continues to be a daily occurrence for the black community because it is seen as normal or non-deviant, as seen in the case of Fred Hampton. As a result, discrimination has become more prevalent in the modern era.

It is called modern discrimination because those who practice it have a reasonable reason for doing so. According to the movie, the false charges against Fred Hampton, the Director of the FBI under Hoover's orders, show that the white government still has a way to go before fully embracing black equality. Hampton is falsely accused of stealing $70 worth of ice cream, as reported by O'Neal's dialogue. Therefore, modern discrimination proves difficult to address because it is carried out by institutions with seemingly logical reasons for engaging in subtle acts of discrimination.

The scene where Hampton was arrested on false charges without a warrant also occurs in the everyday lives of African American communities. The case of Terry v. Ohio (1968) serves as an example reflecting the abuse of police power to undermine the freedoms of black people. Quoted from Mackey (2023), the incident began when a Cleveland police detective, Martin McFadden, searched for three black men suspected of planning a robbery at a store. Two of them, John Terry and Richard Chilton, were found to be carrying firearms.

Eventually, they were convicted for possessing concealed weapons.

Dissatisfied with the court's decision, Terry appealed, claiming that their search and arrest were illegal. In 1967, this case was brought to the US Supreme Court to challenge the police actions that violated Terry's constitutional rights. As stated in the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution, unjustified police actions without a warrant in conducting searches, arrests, and seizures are prohibited.

In the end, the judgment of the US Supreme Court delivered on June 10, 1968, said that the 'stop and frisk' procedure, when individuals are stopped for interrogation without a reasonable suspicion based only on belief, is considered legitimate and does not violate the Fourth Amendment. This ruling caused controversy because it may allow police to target particular groups with discriminatory intent, a practice known as racial profiling.

Interest Convergence

The analysis of this point focuses on white people's interests. This tenet explains that racial equality for Blacks overlaps with white people's desires. The progress of oppressed black people through reparations provided by white groups is uncertain. This is

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because, without realizing it, the benefits received by African Americans are only utilized as a tool for the interests of white people.

In the context of this movie, interest convergence can be found in the relationship between Roy Mitchell and O'Neal, where their interests intersect with each other. First, for O'Neal, joining the FBI gives him protection from the legal consequences of his actions as a car thief. For him, being cleared of his criminal charges, receiving special treatment from Mitchell, being valued by Mitchell, and even Mitchell's acts of kindness toward him are considered significant achievements, leading O'Neal to consider Mitchell as a role model in his life. On the other hand, for Mitchell, O'Neal is a tool to penetrate and monitor the activities of the Black Panther Party, which is considered a threat to national security. Mitchell provides benefits to O'Neal just to make the FBI's plan to destroy the Black Panther easier by utilizing O'Neal as a pawn or part of the FBI's strategy.

Interviewer : "What made you think you could trust Roy Mitchell?"

O'Neal : "Uh, I'd rode around in his car. I had dinner with him at his dinner table. You know, he was, at one point, for me, he was like a role model when I didn't have one, you know? We had very few role models back then. We had Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali. I had an FBI agent."

(00:24:48-00:25:14)

Mitchell :"Come on in, make yourself at home in the den."

(00:24:37-00:24:39)

Mitchell :"No, no, sit down. You're a guest. If you want a taste of good stuff, there's a bottle of scotch in this bottom cabinet there. You can help yourself."

(00:26:53-00:27:02)

O'Neal explains that he has barely had a role model in his

life. However, he finds out that Mitchell saved his life from prison for car theft and impersonating a federal officer. Moreover, O'Neal, as a black citizen, is invited to a fancy dinner at a restaurant with FBI agents. As understood, the movie is set in 1968, a period when conflicts between white police and the FBI escalated. Nevertheless, O'Neal feels accepted by Mitchell as a white FBI officer, who invites him to dine without considering the criminal case involving him.

Furthermore, Mitchell treats O'Neal as his guest in a polite way when inviting him to his home. As Mitchell said, "make yourself at home in the den … no sit down. You're a guest" emphasizing that Mitchell respects him as a guest and appreciates his presence. Therefore, all of Mitchell's actions, which granted O'Neal a break on the legal matter and even led to them becoming work colleagues, made Mitchell feel like a role model in O'Neal's life.

O'Neal not only escapes prison sentences but he is also given a car by Mitchell, which he previously wanted and obtained through theft. O'Neal gains various benefits, and he also earns income as an FBI spy, achieving prosperity. As a result, Mitchell starts to

serve as a role model for O'Neal for saving his life in a trying situation.

There is no such thing as a free lunch. Something desired and needed by O'Neal overlaps with the FBI's interests as a white people. Rather than a genuine desire to help, all the kindness shown to O'Neal by Mitchell only serves to facilitate the FBI's plan to overthrow Fred Hampton, deputy chairman of the Black Panther Party's Illinois chapter.

Mitchell : "Hello."

O'Neal : "Hey, Listen. I'm out Roy. I'm out!"

Mitchell : "Calm down. Calm Down Bill."

O'Neal : "Don't you tell me to fucking calm down, all right? I was almost killed, man! Now, Fred's in jail, I did the damn job, and I'm out!"

Mitchell : "No, that's not how it works."

O'Neal : "What the fuck do you mean that's not how it works? Why don't you give me one good reason?"

Mitchell : "Because, as I've mentioned, it's a year and a

half for the stolen car, and five years for impersonating a federal officer. And if you run, I will hunt you down. You understand …"

O'Neal : "Man, shut the fuck up!"

(01:04:01–01:04:33)

The above dialogue explains that Mitchell threatens not to let O'Neal go freely when he wants to leave the mission. This is because O'Neal owes him a debt of gratitude for freeing him from various legal troubles. The interest convergence from the basic tenet of CRT led to modern discrimination. Modern discrimination deals with subtle discrimination, which can be observed in O'Neal's case. O'Neal's advantage aligns with the interest of the white elite. Black interests will only be accommodated if they align with white interests. The sympathy, kindness, and decency shown by Mitchell to O'Neal mean nothing.

This is an example of modern discrimination because O'Neal is used as a pawn or instrument by the FBI to achieve its goals indirectly using black informant. Initially, he agrees to be an informant to gather information about the Black Panthers. However, over time, he becomes uncomfortable with his role as an informant because he has completed his job when Fred Hampton is imprisoned. As O'Neal said, "Now, Fred's in jail, I did the damn job, and I'm out!" with the imprisonment of Fred Hampton, the FBI had reached its limit to overthrow the Black Panther. However, it seems like Mitchell disagrees with O'Neal's way of thinking and won't let him quit.

Furthermore, modern discrimination occurs when someone from a minority group is recruited by a majority group to collectively achieve their goals. O'Neal is freed from legal charges, while the FBI obtains confidential information through O'Neal. However, O'Neal feels trapped and unable to leave the situation. Ideally, if someone has done their job and wants to leave, then they have the right to leave the job. However, unlike O'Neal's case, he is forced to continue his work as an informant even though the FBI's goal of imprisoning Fred Hampton has been accomplished. This is because Mitchell, as a majority group, uses his power to pressure O'Neal to remain loyal to the FBI. Mitchell exploits O'Neal's lack of power, justifying his actions as if to protect O'Neal from

the negative influence of the Black Panthers when it is the FBI that is framing them.

Differential Racialization and Its Consequences

This part focuses on how African Americans are racialized as the minority group by white Americans, the dominant group, and how this is changed to suit white interests. Over time, the stereotypes of African Americans are modified in response to the demands of the white American community. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) claim that because black people were perceived as ignorant, irreligious, and simple-minded during the time of slavery, the white community intervened to rescue black people from the shadows of their existence. This would justify the slavery system implemented in America.

Nonetheless, several movements advocating for black equality emerged following the abolition of slavery, as black people desired the freedom to pursue their interests without being constrained by the color of their skin or any other characteristic that set them apart from white people. It was evident that some white people felt their position as the dominant group was under threat. The black community was, therefore, portrayed as a violent, dangerous, and peace-threatening group during the civil rights movement in the 1960s. If someone was portrayed as simple, weak, and backward, how could they logically become a dangerous person. Hence, stereotypes instilled in the black community tend to originate from mistakes. An analysis of the movie's dialog can also prove this.

> Mitchell :"Don't let Hampton fool you. The panthers and the Klan are one and the same. Their aim is to sow hatred and inspire terror. Plain and simple. Now, I'm all for civil rights, but you can't cheat your way to equality. And you certainly can't shoot your way to it."
>
> O'Neal :"Yep."
>
> (00:26:09-00:26:38)

The dialogue above makes it quite evident that Mitchell is comparing the Black Panthers to the KKK and telling O'Neal that they are a dangerous organization that is inciting terror in the community. Furthermore, Mitchell states that, as part of the white community, he supports civil rights but not in a cheating way, saying, "Now I'm all for

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civil rights, but you can't cheat your way to equality". As is well known, the civil rights movement emerged in response to discrimination and inequality experienced by minority groups, such as African Americans. In this context, the Black Panthers emerged in response to various forms of intimidation and discrimination by local police officers and community service programs, including the free breakfast program.

Angela : "The first thing that the black panther party did, of course, in Oakland, was to set up an armed patrol in order to ensure that Black people were not harassed and intimidated by local police department."

(00:02:15-00:02:25)

Bobby : "Yeah, we armed. We are armed propaganda union, but we spend most of our time working with these programs, serving the people, free medical clinic, free breakfast children program, the inter-communal institute in liberation schools, free legal aid,

education for the community."

(00:02:41-00:02:56)

It is evident from the conversation above that Black Panthers have only one goal to defend the rights of the Black community, which are still unaddressed despite the 1964 Human Rights Act. The dialog also implies that the Black Panther is trying to do everything possible to shield the black community from white police brutality and intimidation, as well as to give them access to public services like free health clinics and education. They did whatever it took to support the rights of African Americans. In addition, the FBI's accusation that the Black Panther Party is a dangerous group and commits terror is a false accusation.

Fred : "Somebody define war for me."

Palmer "War is a violent conflict between two or more parties."

Fred : "Would you say we at war with the pigs, comrade palmer? Well, how about politics? How would you define politics, Brother Winters?"

Winter : "You know, elections."

Fred : "Elections can be part of politics, certainly. But we in the party ascribe to Chairman Mao's definition of politics. He said, war is politics with bloodshed, and politics is war without bloodshed. So, how we win this war? What's our most lethal weapon? Guns? Grenades? Rocket launchers?"

O'Neal : "[murmuring] These niggas got rocket launchers?"

Fred : "The people. There's strength in numbers. Power anywhere there's people. And in order to overthrow this racist, fascist, nefarious U.S government, it's gonna take everybody."

(00:13:03-00:14:37)

The Black Panthers are not a terrorist organization, unlike what the FBI claims; instead, they use "the people" power to draw public attention to the racial issues that they are fighting for. Put another way, instead of returning violence with violence, the solidarity and support of "the people" is needed to overcome various forms of violence and injustice.

Based on the explanation above, white American elites see the African Americans represented by the Black Panther Party as a dangerous group. This is because they are concerned that the BPP could dominate society's perception of minority group issues, threatening socio-political change in the United States. This also contributes to the modernization of discrimination, which occurs in this context when the Federal Bureau of Investigation carries out various discriminations against Black Panther political activists and organizations, such as describing them as a terrorist group.

Minority issues will be terrorists when they speak out against injustices and use self-defense to prevent the violence they encounter. The FBI's criminalization of black Panthers, such as the false charges against Fred Hampton, would not appear to be discriminatory. The FBI's designation of the Black Panthers as a terrorist organization that needs to be destroyed justifies such discriminatory actions. Furthermore, the FBI begins its unjust activities against the Black Progressive Party (BPP) on the pretense of being

unbiased and exclusively supporting white interests.

In the O'Neal-Mitchell conversation, Mitchell states, "Now, I'm all for civil rights, but you can't cheat your way to equality," which suggests that, although he is a member of the white elite, Mitchell supports all initiatives related to the fight for black equality. To convince O'Neal that the BPP deserves to be exterminated, Mitchell seems to speak neutrally, as if the criminalization of the BPP is the right course of action rather than an action biased against a particular group.

Intersectionality of Race and Classes

Oppression or any form of discrimination experienced by an individual cannot be understood through just one aspect, such as race. Discrimination experienced by an individual is often caused by multiple overlapping sources, such as sexual orientation, gender, class, and other identity markers. This concept is illustrated through the character of O'Neal in the movie Judas and the Black Messiah.

In the movie, O'Neal faces various forms of discrimination without realizing it. This is because the discrimination experienced is quite complex and done subtly, as explained in the concept of modern discrimination. Modern discrimination is hard to spot directly because it does not look like typical discriminatory actions. O'Neal's unawareness that he is a victim of discrimination is because O'Neal has been manipulated by the FBI as an informant to destroy the Black Panther party movement. As expressed by O'Neal, "Um, you know, he was, at one point, for me, he was like a role model. When I didn't have one, you know?" (00:24:57-00:25:04) confirms that O'Neal considered Roy Mitchell, the FBI agent, as a role model who helped him in every way.

However, when using the lens of intersectionality and anti-essentialism analysis, it can be found that modern discrimination also occurs in O'Neal's character. It is known that O'Neal is a black man, and of course, his racial identity makes him vulnerable to surveillance and oppression by authorities, as depicted in the movie where O'Neal is immediately followed by a police car right after he successfully steals a car. However, one category of oppression does not only come from racial identity. The experience of discrimination is

also influenced by his social class identity, which comes from a less privileged economic background.

O'Neal was involved in a car theft case and then arrested by FBI agents, which later influenced his motivation to work for the FBI. It can be said that his financial instability was one of the factors affecting his decision to work as an FBI informant. This is because by becoming an FBI informant, O'Neal gets various facilities that were previously difficult for him to get, such as being paid a certain amount of money, a car, and a guarantee of freedom from the sentence that trapped him. On the other hand, the FBI, aware of O'Neal's vulnerability, eventually exploited the situation and forced him to choose to become an FBI informant.

> Mitchell : "You're looking at 18 months for the stolen car and five years for impersonating a federal officer or you can go home."
>
> (00:08:43-00:08:56)

The FBI oppressed O'Neal as a vulnerable individual for their benefit, which was to destroy the Black Panther Party. Additionally, O'Neal

also experienced complex identity conflicts. He was caught between his racial identity as an African-American man and, on the other side, his loyalty as an FBI agent. This situation reflects the complexity of intersectional identities where O'Neal is trapped between different loyalties.

> Hampton : "I need everybody to repeat after me! I am a revolutionary!"
>
> O'Neal : *with the crowd* "I am a revolutionary!"
>
> Hampton : "Put a fist in the air for Comrade Jimmy Palmer. Jimmy Palmer died a revolutionary death. He stood face to face toe-to-toe with pig Daley's henchmen, and made the greatest sacrifice one could ever make."
>
> O'Neal : "Right on!"
>
> (01:16:00-01:17:50)

O'Neal unconsciously feels like he has become a part of the Black Panther Party. He has felt like a part of the group, as evidenced by repeating Hampton's revolutionary calls and showing support for the BPP. It further strengthens

Hampton's support for the BPP's struggle.

O'Neal   :"What can I do for you?"

Mitchell   :"You've been to Hampton's apartment, right?"

O'Neal   :"Right."

Mitchell   :"A lot of guns there?"

O'Neal   :"Of course."

Mitchell   :"Good. I need you to draw me a blueprint of the place."

O'Neal   :"All right, well, if you're aware, then I don't understand."

Mitchell   :"You don't have to understand, Bill. You just have to draw me that blueprint."

O'Neal   :"Listen, Roy. You got him, man. You know, you won. What more do you want? Are you gonna kill him, Roy?'

Mitchell   :"I saw you, you know."

O'Neal   :"What"

Mitchell   :"That day at the speech. I watch you. I remember thinking to myself, either

this guy deserves an Academy Award or he really believes this shit."

(01:37:10-01:39:03)

Man   :"Check this out, man. I got this article I want you to read right here. Yeah. Right. It's the article in this paper. Very important. I need you to let the Chairman read it tomorrow night. (Show sleeping pills) And put that in his drink."

O'Neal   :"I don't know what the fuck you talking about, man. Fuck outta here with that shit."

Man   :"My mistake."

O'Neal   :"All articles and shit."

Man   :"No, no. It's all good. That's my mistake. No, I guess I had the wrong guy. Sorry about that. Lemme get out here."

O'Neal   :"Hey! Who are you, man?"

Man   :"Don't worry about it. Just go back inside."

> O'Neal :"Nigga, I'm not gonna poison him, you hear me?!"
>
> (01:42:05-01:43:16)

O'Neal does not want to harm Fred and believes that what the FBI has done to get rid of the BPP has gone too far. As O'Neal tells Mitchell, Fred has already been in jail, and he does not understand why the FBI wants to kill him. Additionally, his loyalty to the struggle of fellow black people is evident when Mitchell suggests that O'Neal seems to support what the BPP stands for and is part of them, almost implying that if what Mitchell sees is O'Neal's act as a BPP member, then O'Neal deserves an Academy Award.

At the bar, a man gives O'Neal an article and asks him to give it to the Chairman. He also offers sleeping pills to put in the Chairman's drink. O'Neal firmly rejects the offer and asserts that he won't poison the Chairman. This dialogue shows that O'Neal refuses to harm Hampton and feels that the FBI's actions have crossed a line. He also shows his loyalty to the struggle of fellow black people by refusing to poison Hampton's drink.

Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that O'Neal experiences conflict with his intersectional identity and unknowingly becomes a victim of modern discrimination reproduced by the FBI institution. As mentioned by Ellemers and Barreto (2015), it is difficult for victims to realize they have experienced discrimination because people tend to think that discrimination is always obvious. However, modern discrimination is different as it is done more implicitly.

The FBI seems to be on O'Neal's side, represented by Mitchell, who helps O'Neal avoid criminal charges and then gives him a job and even a car. Unknowingly, O'Neal becomes a tool to strengthen the power structures that oppress African Americans; only it is done subtly and covertly. That is, the FBI profiles the BPP as an anarchist group, endangering national security, and uses O'Neal as an informant to destroy the BPP, which is an example of discrimination done subtly and covertly. Essentially, the presence of O'Neal's overlapping identities, power manipulation, and internal conflicts create discrimination in a more subtle and hidden form, in line with the concept of modern discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Savery has been abolished and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is considered a historic milestone that should have put an end to racial discrimination in the United States. However, despite more than sixty years passing since the enactment of this law, unfortunately, the reality faced by African-American communities still reflects ongoing inequality and discrimination. They are still far from the ideal of racial equality. It is because discrimination is manifested in subtle ways, which is known as modern discrimination. Modern discrimination may be difficult for the targets to identify whether discrimination has occurred. Through the analysis of Judas and the Black Messiah movie by using Critical Race Theory, this study found that four factors explain the causes of modern discrimination experienced by African Americans. First, every day, African Americans continue to encounter diverse types of discrimination since it is not aberrational. In the movie, white Americans, represented by the police force and the FBI, still do not acknowledge the equality between black and white Americans. They cause unease within the black community through their use of sarcastic remarks directed at them. Second, social and legal changes for blacks usually happen not just because of justice but also because of politics, economics, or strategies that help the dominant group. The changes that minority groups want only to happen when they are in line with the interests of white groups, and the interests of minority groups are just used as pawns in increasing white domination. Third, the stereotype of African Americans is modified in response to the demands of white Americans. When white people feel their position as the dominant group is under threat whenever blacks speak out against injustices, blacks are portrayed as violent or terrorist organizations, as depicted by the Black Panther Party. Fourth, discrimination experienced by blacks is often caused by multiple overlapping sources, such as gender, class, and other identity markers. Therefore, someone is not aware that he/she is a victim of discrimination since it is quite complex and done subtly. Modern discrimination can be done because it is overlapping with their identities, power manipulation, and internal conflicts that create discrimination in a more hidden form.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

Herewith the author declares that this article is totally free from any conflict of interest regarding the assessment, review and revision, and publication process in general.

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Delineating Toxic Masculinity in Tana French's *The Witch Elm*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the concept of toxic masculinity in *The Witch Elm* (2018), a novel by Tana French, using R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Amy Wharton's sociology of gender frameworks. The research focuses on the protagonist, Toby, who shows toxic masculine traits such as emotional suppression, independence, aggression, and vulnerability avoidance. The study uses qualitative descriptive analysis, examining key scenes in the novel in which these behaviors manifest, especially in relation to family and romantic partners. Through this analysis, the findings reveal how toxic masculinity not only contributes to Toby's deteriorating mental health but also isolates him emotionally, resulting in damaged relationships and increased psychological distress. Ultimately, the article concludes that toxic masculinity extends emotional isolation, reinforcing harmful gender norms that prevent men from seeking support or expressing vulnerability. The research contributes to a broader discourse on how societal expectations of masculinity negatively impact individual males while continuing gender inequality. The study highlights the importance of challenging these norms to foster healthier emotional expression, stronger relationships, and more fair gender dynamics in society.

Keywords: *gender; hegemonic masculinity; masculinity; sociology of gender; toxic masculinity*

INTRODUCTION

The depiction of masculinity in literature often reflects and critiques prevailing societal norms, providing insight into how gender roles shape behavior. In contemporary literature, toxic masculinity has emerged as a central theme, explored to highlight its harmful effects on men and society. Toxic masculinity refers to cultural expectations that demand men exhibit traits such as dominance, independence, aggression, and emotional oppression (Connell, 1995). These expectations limit men's emotional expression and create unhealthy power dynamics in personal and social relationships (Harrington, 2020). Tana French's *The Witch Elm* (2018) vividly illustrates this dynamic through its protagonist, Toby, whose adherence to masculine ideals of resilience and control exacerbates her psychological deterioration. After an attack of violence, Toby clings to emotional repression, isolating himself and refusing help, which ultimately leads to his downfall. His behavior exemplifies hegemonic masculinity, a culturally dominant form of masculinity that maintains male power through detachment, control, and emotional aggression (Connell, 1995).

Tana French's unique Irish heritage enriches this exploration by introducing a bicultural critique of toxic masculinity. The American background of French reflects the individualistic and stoic ideals of American masculinity, while its Irish roots emphasize community and interpersonal relationships. This dual perspective allows *The Witch Elm* to highlight the conflict between the ideals of gross American individualism and Irish cultural values, revealing how toxic masculinity breaks personal and relationship well-being (Smith, 2022). The bicultural lens of French makes Toby's psychological revelation not only a personal crisis but also a critique of the broader cultural norms that shape male identity, reflecting how the historical context of Irish nationalism has influenced the representation of modern masculinity (Beatty, 2016).

Toxic masculinity not only in men but also in their relationships, reinforces gender inequality and promotes emotional isolation. Studies show that emotional repression—a toxic center of masculinity—correlates with higher levels

of depression, anxiety, and strained interpersonal relationships (Oliffe & Phillips, 2008; Rosida et al., 2022). In addition, cultural expectations of male independence prevent men from seeking help, deepening emotional struggles (Grieve et al., 2019). The French novel reflects this dynamic as Toby's oppression leads to his mental disorder eventually. The novel thus serves as a poignant illustration of how the cultural demands of masculinity, especially the avoidance of vulnerability, cause heavy psychological victimization in men.

While toxic masculinity has been widely studied in sociology and psychology, its portrayal in contemporary fiction is still less explored. *The Witch Elm* provides a critical case study, offering a nuanced depiction of masculinity in crisis. Through the lens of Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and the historical context of Irish nationalism (Beatty, 2016), this study aims to examine how society's expectations of masculinity shape Toby's relationships and mental health. By focusing on specific moments in which toxic masculinity manifests in the novel, this analysis will reveal how France critiques

destructive gender norms that contribute to Toby's emotional isolation and deteriorating mental state.

The main research questions discussed in this article are: How does toxic masculinity affect Toby's behavior and relationships in *The Witch Elm*? This study aims to explore how ideals of masculinity—such as independence, aggression, and emotional repression—contribute to Toby's psychological disorder and strained relationships. As such, this analysis will contribute to a broader discussion of the cultural and psychological consequences of toxic masculinity. The portrayal of French masculinity, informed by its American-Irish background, highlights the need for a healthier model of masculinity that emphasizes openness and emotional vulnerability (Smith, 2022). The following sections will focus on key moments in the novel where Toby's toxic masculine traits are evident and how these traits shape his emotional and interpersonal fall.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the concept of toxic masculinity in The Witch Elm (2018) by Tana

French. This analysis is based on R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, which provides a framework for understanding how society's expectations of masculinity shape male behavior and contribute to emotional isolation as well as relational struggles. In addition, insights from Amy Wharton's gender sociology are integrated to highlight how gender roles are socially constructed and maintained through cultural practices.

Data were collected by a thorough reading of the novel's content, and then data such as narratives and dialogues relevant to the issue of toxic masculinity were collected in an analysis table. In the data analysis stage, the data that has been collected is analyzed using the theory of toxic masculinity. Furthermore, the results of the analysis were linked to existing studies using a gender approach.

DISCUSSION

Tana French's *novel The Witch Elm* offers an intricate depiction of toxic masculinity, both through its protagonist Toby, and the dynamics between the various characters. By examining these interactions, we gain a deeper understanding of how toxic masculinity manifests in behaviors such as emotional oppression, manipulation, aggression, and independence. These traits are in line with R.W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, which encourages men to dominate, avoid vulnerability, and maintain control. Amy Wharton's gender sociology further contextualizes these behaviors as social constructs, showing how they are reinforced by cultural norms. French's unique American-Irish heritage adds another layer to this analysis, allowing him to critique how these toxic masculine ideals are shaped by American individualism and Irish relational dynamics. By investigating key scenes from the novel, this discussion will explore the cultural influences that shape Toby's behavior and relationships, describing how these toxic norms lead to emotional isolation and mental decline.

Toby and Susanna: Manipulation and the Need for Control

In one of the novel's pivotal moments, Toby's relationship with his cousin Susanna becomes strained after the discovery of a skull in the family garden. Faced with the possibility that his life may spiral out of control, Toby's toxic masculine traits begin to surface more clearly. His immediate response is not to

address the situation directly or engage in a meaningful conversation but rather to manipulate Susanna into supporting him.

The tension in the scene is palpable as Susanna tries to confront the reality of the situation. She states: *"We need to figure this out, Toby. We can't just pretend it didn't happen. Something's buried here, and we have to deal with it."* (French, 2018, p. 189).

Toby's response, however, is to deflect the conversation: *"Come on, Susanna, you know I'd never let anything bad happen to us. We've always looked out for each other."* (French, 2018, p. 190).

This dialogue illustrates a key element of toxic masculinity—Toby avoids taking responsibility and instead appeals to family loyalty. According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity emphasizes dominance and control over situations. Toby's manipulation of Susanna reflects this need for control, as he tries to emotionally coerce her into siding with him rather than addressing the problem head-on. By using their familial bond as leverage, Toby reinforces the toxic masculine ideal that men should use emotional manipulation to avoid appearing vulnerable or culpable.

However, Susanna resists Toby's manipulation, showing her awareness of his tactics: *"This isn't about loyalty, Toby. Stop trying to guilt me into covering for you. We need to face this together, or not at all."* (French, 2018, p. 191).

This exchange highlights the limitations of toxic masculine behaviors when confronted with someone who refuses to comply. Toby's inability to openly discuss the issue, coupled with his need to manipulate Susanna, reveals his reliance on toxic masculine traits to maintain control. Connell (1995) argues that such behaviors reinforce power imbalances in relationships, preventing meaningful emotional engagement and creating further alienation between the characters.

Toby and Melissa: Emotional Suppression and Relationship Breakdown

Toby's relationship with Melissa is another clear example of how toxic masculinity leads to emotional isolation and the breakdown of intimacy. Following his traumatic attack, Toby becomes increasingly withdrawn, refusing to share his emotions

with Melissa despite her efforts to help him. This dynamic reflects Connell's assertion that hegemonic masculinity demands emotional stoicism, even when openness could lead to healing.

In one scene, Melissa attempts to reach out to Toby, hoping to help him process his trauma. She gently asks: "You've been distant, Toby. I'm worried about you. Can we talk about what happened?" (French, 2018, p. 78). Toby, uncomfortable with the idea of vulnerability, shuts down the conversation:
"There's nothing to talk about. I'm fine, Melissa. We need to move past this." (French, 2018, p. 79).

This refusal to engage emotionally reflects a key trait of toxic masculinity—emotional suppression. Connell (1995) notes that men are often socialized to see vulnerability as a sign of weakness. Toby's need to suppress his emotions rather than share them with Melissa illustrates this mindset. He believes that by maintaining emotional distance, he is preserving his sense of masculine strength. However, this behavior only serves to isolate him further, preventing any real emotional connection with Melissa.

Melissa, growing increasingly frustrated, pushes back: "You're not fine, Toby. I can see it. I just want to help, but you're not letting me in." (French, 2018, p. 80). Toby, again deflecting, responds: "I don't need help, Melissa. I've handled worse, and I'll handle this too." (French, 2018, p. 80).

Toby's belief in self-reliance—another aspect of toxic masculinity—becomes apparent. According to Connell (1995), men are often conditioned to believe that they must deal with problems on their own, without seeking emotional or practical support. Toby's insistence that he can "handle" his trauma reflects this toxic masculine ideal, even though it prevents him from accessing the support he needs. This emotional suppression ultimately creates a rift between him and Melissa, as she feels increasingly shut out and powerless to help.

Toby and Leon: Fragile Masculinity and Friendship

Male friendships are often portrayed in literature as spaces where emotional vulnerability is limited, and *The Witch Elm* is no exception. Toby's interactions with his childhood friend Leon reveal the fragility of masculinity, especially when one man tries

to offer emotional support to another. Leon's concern for Toby's mental health is met with defensiveness, as Toby perceives any offer of help as a threat to his independence.

In an essential scene, Leon tries to broach the subject of Toby's well-being: "You've been acting strange lately, mate. I'm worried about you. You don't have to go through this alone." (French, 2018, p. 142). Toby immediately rejects this offer of support: "I'm fine, Leon. I don't need anyone's help. Stop trying to make this into something it's not." (French, 2018, p. 142).

Connell (1995) explains that hegemonic masculinity discourages men from seeking emotional support, particularly from other men. Toby's fragile masculinity becomes evident—he perceives Leon's concern as an attack on his independence rather than as a genuine offer of help. Toby's rejection of Leon's support reflects the toxic masculine belief that men should be entirely self-reliant, even at the cost of their mental health.

Leon, determined to help, tries again: "It's okay to admit you're struggling. We all go through tough times. That doesn't make you weak." (French, 2018, p. 143). Toby,

however, remains defensive: "I'm not struggling, Leon. I don't need you analyzing me. Just drop it." (French, 2018, p. 143).

This exchange highlights the fragility of Toby's masculinity—any suggestion that he might need help is seen as a threat to his sense of self. Connell (1995) notes that toxic masculinity often leads to the rejection of emotional vulnerability, even in friendships where support is readily available. By refusing Leon's offer of help, Toby isolates himself further, reinforcing the toxic masculine ideal that men must "handle" everything on their own.

Toby and Hugo: Avoiding Vulnerability in Family Relationships

Toby's relationship with his dying uncle Hugo provides another example of how toxic masculinity fosters emotional avoidance, even within close family relationships. Hugo, aware of his terminal condition, repeatedly tries to engage Toby in conversations about his impending death, hoping to prepare him for the future. However, Toby consistently avoids these discussions, reflecting his discomfort with vulnerability and emotional confrontation.

In one scene, Hugo gently says to Toby: "We should talk about what's going to happen when I'm gone. It's important that you're prepared." (French, 2018, p. 108). Toby, uncomfortable with the subject, responds dismissively: "There's no need to talk about that now, Hugo. We'll deal with it when the time comes." (French, 2018, p. 108).

This dialogue illustrates a key aspect of toxic masculinity—Toby's refusal to confront emotional realities, particularly those that involve vulnerability. Connell (1995) argues that men are often conditioned to avoid discussions of death, grief, or illness, as these topics force them to acknowledge their own emotional fragility. By deflecting Hugo's attempts to engage in meaningful conversation, Toby reinforces the toxic masculine ideal that men must remain emotionally invulnerable, even in the face of profound personal loss.

Hugo, sensing Toby's discomfort, tries to push further: "I just don't want you to feel unprepared, Toby. It's okay to talk about these things." (French, 2018, p. 109). Toby, still resistant, replies: "I'm not thinking about that, Hugo. Let's just focus on the present." (French, 2018, p. 109).

Toby's avoidance of emotional vulnerability prevents him from forming a deeper connection with Hugo during his final days. Connell (1995) highlights how the suppression of emotions not only isolates men but also deprives them of the opportunity to engage in deeper, more authentic relationships. By refusing to confront the impending loss, Toby denies both himself and Hugo a chance for emotional closure, demonstrating the damaging effects of toxic masculinity on familial relationships.

Toby and His Mother: The Strain of Control and Aggression

Toby's interactions with his mother exemplify the toxic masculine traits of control and aggression. After the attack, she expresses her concern for him, which is met with Toby's irritation and defensiveness.

> "You've been so distant lately, Toby. I'm worried about you. I feel like I don't know you anymore," she says gently, seeking to connect (French, 2018, p. 143).
> Toby responds sharply, "I told you, I'm fine. Stop worrying about me!" (French, 2018, p. 143).

This response illustrates a classic example of toxic masculinity, where emotional vulnerability is perceived as a threat. Connell (1995) explains that men often respond to perceived emotional intrusion with aggression, aiming to reassert control over the situation. In this case, Toby's aggressive dismissal of his mother's concern not only alienates her but also highlights his need to maintain a façade of strength. His emotional outburst reflects the internalized belief that expressing vulnerability equates to weakness.

When Toby's mother persists, trying to understand his emotional state, Toby grows increasingly hostile: "I don't want to talk about it, just stop asking!" (French, 2018, p. 144).

Toby and the Police: Defensiveness and Distrust of Authority

Another moment where toxic masculinity is evident in *The Witch Elm* occurs during Toby's interaction with the police, following the discovery of a human skull on his family's property. Rather than cooperating or showing concern for the investigation, Toby becomes defensive and confrontational, perceiving the police's questions as a direct challenge to his integrity and control over the situation.

As the police officers calmly question him about the skull, Toby's irritation quickly escalates: "Why are you asking me this? I didn't do anything wrong! You're acting like I'm a suspect!" (French, 2018, p. 215).

The officer responds patiently, "We're simply following up on the discovery, Mr. Hennessy. There's no need to be defensive." Toby, still agitated, retorts: "It sure feels like you're accusing me. I didn't ask for this mess, and now you're all over me like I'm guilty!" (French, 2018, p. 216).

Toby's hostile reaction reflects the toxic masculine belief that any challenge to one's authority or autonomy must be met with aggression and defensiveness. Connell (1995) explains that hegemonic masculinity encourages men to distrust external authority figures, especially when those figures threaten their sense of control or challenge their position of dominance. Toby's outburst against the police is a clear manifestation of this mindset, as he interprets the investigation not as a neutral inquiry but as an affront to his status.

This defensiveness also speaks to the fragility of Toby's sense of self, as any implication that he might be implicated in wrongdoing sends him into a state of emotional volatility. Rather than remaining calm and cooperative, Toby's toxic masculine instincts compel him to fight back against perceived threats, even when no direct accusation has been made. This behavior undermines his credibility and escalates the situation unnecessarily, illustrating the destructive nature of toxic masculinity's emphasis on dominance and control.

Toby and Hugo: The Avoidance of Mortality and Emotion

Toby's relationship with his uncle Hugo is further complicated by Toby's refusal to engage in emotionally charged conversations, especially those that deal with mortality. Hugo, who is terminally ill, tries multiple times to discuss his impending death with Toby, hoping to prepare him for what's to come. However, Toby's avoidance of the topic demonstrates another core aspect of toxic masculinity—denial of vulnerability, especially in the face of death and loss.

In one particularly emotional moment, Hugo says: "We should talk about the future, Toby. I won't be here much longer, and I want you to be prepared for that." (French, 2018, p. 109). Toby, visibly uncomfortable, replies: "There's no point in talking about that now, Hugo. Let's just focus on the good days we have left. Why make things harder by dwelling on it?" (French, 2018, p. 110).

This avoidance of discussions about death reflects Toby's deep discomfort with emotional vulnerability. Connell (1995) argues that toxic masculinity conditions men to avoid facing emotions like fear, grief, or sadness, as these are seen as weaknesses. In this scene, Toby's refusal to engage with Hugo's impending death mirrors his broader reluctance to face his own emotional fragility. Rather than embracing the opportunity for a deeper emotional connection with his uncle, Toby deflects, focusing instead on superficial distractions.

Recognizing Toby's discomfort, responds with gentle persistence: "Talking about these things doesn't make it worse, Toby. It's important. I don't want to leave things unsaid." (French, 2018, p. 110). Toby, still resisting, says: "I don't need to think about that, Hugo. Let's just enjoy the time we have now. I'm

not ready to deal with any of that." (French, 2018, p. 111).

Toby's toxic masculinity prevents him from forming a deeper emotional bond with Hugo in the final stages of his life. Connell (1995) explains that the avoidance of vulnerability often leads men to miss out on meaningful relationships, as they prioritize emotional self-preservation over connection. Toby's inability to face the reality of Hugo's mortality deprives him of the chance to engage in a healing conversation about death, loss, and love. This emotional distance not only harms Toby but also leaves Hugo without the closure he seeks in his final days.

Toby and His Cousins: Aggression and Rivalry

Toxic masculinity also manifests in Toby's interactions with his cousins, where competition and aggression often define their relationships. In a scene where family tensions rise over the secrets that have been uncovered, Toby's defensive posture escalates into outright hostility, as he feels threatened by their accusations.

When one of his cousins, who has uncovered some damaging information, confronts Toby, they say: "You've always had everything handed to you, Toby. Now that things are falling apart, you can't handle it." (French, 2018, p. 230). Toby reacts aggressively, "What the hell is that supposed to mean? Don't act like you know me or what I've been through." (French, 2018, p. 230).

This exchange highlights the toxic masculine trait of interpreting criticism or challenge as a personal attack. Connell (1995) describes how men are often conditioned to respond to rivalry or confrontation with aggression, as a way to reassert dominance. In this scene, Toby's reaction is not to engage in a conversation or address the accusations calmly but to lash out, using anger to shield himself from vulnerability.

The cousin continues to press: "We all know you've skated by your whole life, Toby. You're only freaking out now because you've never had to deal with anything hard." (French, 2018, p. 231). Toby, unable to contain his frustration, shouts: "Shut up! You don't know what you're talking about. Just keep your mouth shut!" (French, 2018, p. 231).

This moment reflects the way toxic masculinity fosters

competition and rivalry within families, particularly among male relatives. Connell (1995) argues that toxic masculinity encourages men to see their peers, even family members, as rivals rather than allies. Toby's aggression toward his cousins reveals his fragile masculinity, as he feels his sense of entitlement and superiority are being questioned. Rather than engage in a constructive dialogue, Toby defaults to aggression, further straining his family relationships and isolating himself.

Throughout *The Witch Elm*, Tana French portrayed the damaging effects of toxic masculinity on Toby's relationships and mental state. His inability to express vulnerability, reliance on control, and aggressive responses to emotional situations create patterns of isolation and self-destruction. By refusing to confront his emotions and refusing help from those who care about him, Toby exemplifies the dangerous consequences of toxic masculine ideals as defined by Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. The use of the American-Irish background by French enriches this critique, highlighting how cultural expectations from both sides of

the Atlantic reinforce this destructive behavior. Ultimately, *The Witch Elm* serves as a powerful commentary on the need for a more open and emotionally supportive model of masculinity that prioritizes mental health and fosters genuine human relationships.

CONCLUSION

The Witch Elm provides an intriguing exploration of how toxic masculinity affects the protagonist Toby's actions, relationships, and emotional health. Through his behavior characterized by emotional suppression, control, aggression, and an aversion to vulnerability, the novel shows how the social pressures of hegemonic masculinity negatively affect men and those around them. As Toby's relationships deteriorate, especially with his family and romantic partner, it becomes clear that these traits lead to emotional isolation and psychological decline. The analysis, which is based on R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, reveals that this behavior is not only personally damaging but also serves to enforce destructive gender norms. By showcasing Toby's internal struggles and his outward effects, the novel offers a critique of traditional masculine ideals and underscores the importance

of embracing openness and emotional vulnerability. This article contributes to the ongoing discussion about the need to dismantle toxic masculinity and promote a healthier and more balanced model of masculinity that fosters emotional well-being and positive relationships.

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