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Depiction of Murder-Suicide in Films- Lacanian Psychoanalysis

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Abstract: ***The objective of this paper is to critically analyse the movie The Others (2001) and Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot (2005) using Lacanian Psychoanalytic approach. The paper is to study and analyse the act of murder-suicide as seen in the chosen texts, where a mother murders her children and then commits suicide. In the plot of The Others.Notions of motherhood as seen in present day society versus what is presented through the films are compared. This also includes relationships within a family, family dynamics and who a family can be comprised of in different circumstances. Relations with the husband/ father figures and their part in the event of a murder-suicide are established.***
Methods of parenting as well as beliefs and morals taught within the family as seen in The Others will be examined. Comparisons between how these beliefs in some way either go against or justify the event of a murder-suicide has been drawn. The research aimed to prove with psychoanalytical perspective by Lacanthat the characters Grace and Constance were not villainous or insane as portrayed in the films and their actions were not born out of hateful intentions.
Keywords**: *murder-suicide, horror, Lacan, psychoanalysis, motherhood***

I. INTRODUCTION

There were also a number of murder-suicides which took place in the United States of America and China towards the latter half of 2018 and beginning of 2019. However, the news was comparatively not as widespread across the world. Upon reading a brief opinion on a social media platform about the events which had been taking place, the concept and discussion of a murder- suicide seemed interesting. The specific event of a murder- suicide when a mother kills her children and herself still remains fairly unexplored. Various aspects related to the cause and occurrence of the events has not yet been studied extensively, such aspects could be analysed while doing the research. In the article “silent voices: mothers who kill their children and the women's liberation movement in 1970s Japan.”, 2014, Alessandro Castellini writes- In the mid 1970s Japan saw a clear increment in the number of mothers who executed their very own kids and this made maternal filicide inside media portrayals specifically, the element of a social wonder. Questions have been raised regarding the mother-child bond that couldn't be undeniably acknowledged as the site of a certified (in light of the fact that unique) relationality: 'woman and child', the development contended, 'these days would they say they are doing anything besides expanding each other's "life"? The action word that ribu used to portray the mother's deadly signal was reliably transformed from the dynamic structure korosu (to murder) to the causative aloof structure korosaserareru (to be made to slaughter), so as to propose that the executing should be comprehended as executed against the woman's will (Güruputatakauonna, 1971a: 245, 1971b: 186-187; Chupiren, 1972: 247). This is a significant explanatory move that meant to accentuate that the desire to murder was fuelled by outer social conditions as opposed to originating from a woman's detestable nature or mental precariousness. (20). Texts were chosen which portrayed the instance of a murder- suicide through the plot of the narratives. The chosen texts, *The Others* and *Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot,* both fall under the category of horror. The link between the genre of horror and the act of a murder- suicide appeared to be fascinating since the genre in various ways depicts events which are outside the range of the normal in daily lives, yet they are believed by many to be possible and real. Along similar lines, while even the thought of a mother killing her children in current times seems unnatural and unacceptable in society, such events are still seen to take place. The idea of what is seen as natural is questioned through the event and its occurrence in the films.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The article “Mother Knows Best?”2004, written by Harriet Ritter and Ned Jacobs, discusses the meaning of motherly love. The article states that the word love needs to be more carefully defined. It also seems to have been a mother's love to move her daughters away to make their lives better for all, because of strong elders who suffer emotional pressures and the economical difficulties of supporting 10 kids. The title raises the question about if a mother truly does always know the best as stated largely within the society. It also brings to light the choices that are made by mothers in forming relationships with their children.

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Similarly, in the article "Mother and Child Disunion.", 2004, Bruce Bower writes- Newborn child's sticking and grinning at that point apparently fortify the mother-child bond. So, women are organically arranged to create maternal estimations and experience the ill effects of any child whom they have raised for in excess of a couple of days. The provocative probability emerges that, in many social orders, women receive positive maternal frames of mind simply subsequent to getting control over negative sentiments about the requesting babies that everybody anticipates that them should raise, Wolf proposes, as mentioned by the author.

The article "Postnatal Depression", 1998, written by J. P. Richards and Peter Talbot mentions that we are an extremely socialised primate species, who have developed a knowledge of our internal drives and ideas so that every human behaviour and sickness, even mental disease, shares biological, psychological and social variables so closely intertwined that dividing them into two becomes pointless in order to exclude some. (1658)

In the article "SUICIDE.", 1954, written by Don D. Jackson he says that the depressed individual, unable by his consciousness to express hateful or killing desires to a loved object (initially the mother) turns them against himself, according to the psychoanalytical theory. The combination of a conditioned personality with a triggering internal stress generally results in suicide. (89)

In the article "Motherless.", 2008, Betty Ruddy writes- The pain these heroines may have had without mothers to guide them is not said anything about. Rather, the mother's absence is a sign of separation from her, as an early connection which is developmentally essential. Mother killing is a concrete tool from at least the days of the fairy tales we're still reading to kids in German and English. But in true reality of the world, most of us live with mothers and they never get as simple as in fairy tales or Victorian novels. (41)

In the article "The Evil Stepmother and the Rights of a Second Wife", 2007, Christopher J. Eyre writes- The idea that a person lives alone, without ordinary experience, outside of ordinary practicality, and slightly immoral at least. In other words, a male has taken on the whole role of women in society-a continuous sexual position, simply women, is likely outside of the social experience. (224-225) Gaps in the current research

The current research and information available on the topic of murder-suicide is limited. Research on the specific case being studied between the mother and child is further restricted. Information on the event is not available in spite of their occurrence. Motherhood is often only associated with the joys that it is expected to bring among women and the changes that take place in the lives of those involved. Emerging fields in terms of motherhood and women's right include Planned Parenthood or rights pertaining to termination of a pregnancy. However, current studies done on motherhood or parenting are not inclusive of the act of a murder-suicide. Even while dealing with research on issues such as post partum depression and its effects on the mother, the basics of mental health are covered while extreme cases such as the murder of a child by their mother is yet to be explored in an in depth manner.Research on the genre of horror as linked with the chosen topic is also inadequate.

III. METHOD

A. *Focus of the research*

1) Engage in a textual analysis, focus on psychoanalytical perspective of the films *The Others* and *Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot.*
2) Analyse the texts from a psychoanalytic approach.
3) Critically discuss the event of a murder-suicide where a mother kills her child and then commits suicide herself.
4) Understand how the genre of horror plays a role in bridging the gap between what is perceived as normal and the unacceptable from a psychological point of view.
5) Study the depiction of women characters as evil or psychologically insane within the texts.

B. *Research Design*

The methods and design used for the study of this research have been done through critical content analysis of the chosen texts based on the psychoanalytical view delineating murder-suicide. A qualitative analysis as well as a textual analysis has been done for the paper in order to close read the films *The Others* and *Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot*. Different articles related to the topic will be read for the better understanding of the subject. A qualitative analysis of these articles have also been done for the purpose of the research in order to determine their requirements in the paper and how they can be used to support arguments made as well as the limitations. A textual analysis discourse analysis will be done of both the films as well. This includes interpretations of different aspects in the texts. Extensive study on the topic will also be done.

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C. Lacan's Psychoanalytical Approach

This includes the theory presented by Lacan of mother child relations, which involves the dyadic and triadic stages. It also involves the Mirror Stage as proposed by Lacan. The basic idea of the theory is the recognition of the child being a separate body from that of its mother.The mirror level, a theory suggested by Lacan, may help explain the separation that occurs between the mother and the child at a young age..Lacan explores the concept of a mirror stage in his paper Mirror Stage (1949), which occurs between the ages of 6 and 18 months and occurs when a child begins to distinguish between themselves and others when he sees his reflection in the mirror. From birth in the real stage, the baby was led by needs and lived in harmony with the mother. This path, according to Lacan, is never complete and can result in anxiety, neurosis, and psychosis. The theory's central concept is that the infant does not recognise itself as a separate being from its mother at birth. The mother's body and her own body are seen as one by the infant, so there is no sense of othering at this point. When a child reaches the age when the mirror stage begins, they begin to differentiate themselves from their mother. That is, they begin to regard the two bodies as distinct individuals. Since they were traditionally considered to be one and not two entities, this indicates how the infant is in several ways being removed from the mother. This sort of separation between the mother and the child is seen in the case of both mothers, that is Mary Winchester and Constance Welch in *Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot*. It is also noted in *The Others* where the need for children to become one with the mother is seen.

IV. CONTENT ANALYSIS

The films *The Others* and *Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot* certain common themes are seen. A highly patriarchal notion of motherhood is seen within the films regarding the expectations from a woman in her role as a mother. The respective characters of Constance and Grace have been deemed as villainous or insane for killing their children. The role of society and institutions of family and marriage are seen to play a role in the act of murder-suicide where a mother kills her children and then commit suicide. The importance of faith and belief in the film are seen to play an important role. The feelings and situations of Grace and Constance are seen to be similar in terms of dealing with the life of young single mothers and the possibility of postpartum depression. Despite Grace and Constance being made to feel guilty about their actions, through various instances in the film we see how they were caring towards their family and their actions did not stem from a place of villainy or insanity as stated.

In the book *The Horror Reader,* Ken Gelder, defines horror as a form of cultural production in society, they have their own 'politics', in the sense that they are never represented to the world in a neutral way. . In film and fiction, horror has been one of the most spectacular and controversial genres–its wild excesses, enjoyed by some, disheartened by many others. As mentioned both the films, *The Others* and *Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot* fall under the genre of horror. The portrayal of an act where a mother kills her child through the genre of horror can have a variety of significance. In both texts, there are no fictional creatures seen. The character, Constance Welch who is also known as the woman in white is a ghost but is portrayed as a human being. The other characters in the episode that are seen to interact with her are unaware of the fact that she is in fact not a living being. Even her actions discussed are the ones that focus on events that happened while she was still living. Her actions after death are shown to be the cause of the life that she had to live while she was still alive. Thus this shows the bridge between the real and the supernatural since after life is something that is known to have contradictory beliefs. The act of a mother killing her children is seen as so scandalous and horrifying that it cannot even be shown in a fictional horror film, despite it being important to the plot. While various horror films have portrayed other grotesque and gory images and events; but somehow the notion of a mother killing her children seem to surpass all of that and the actual act of a mother murdering her children is not seen in either of the films.

The representation of patriarchal ideas and notions are seen in the films. As a result, the women characters have been villainized within the episode as compared to the men. The names of the mothers in the films can also be considered. Mary's name has religious connotations which are mentioned later. In the same way, the names of Constance and Grace also hold various connotations which can indicate the values that have been set on them. For the name Grace these may include aspects of being grateful as per the etymology of the word. It also includes notions of charm, elegance and politeness, all of which a woman is expected to be in a patriarchal society. Similarly, Constance comes from the word 'constant', the etymology of which states it means standing firm. Thus it shows how a woman is expected to be stable and persistent in terms of continuing their typical womanly duties, irrespective of their wishes.

Other than the comparison between John and Mary Winchester, one can also look into the difference between Mary and Constance as mothers; not as a comparison between the two women but rather to understand how society views mother and how they have been portrayed within the episode. If one is to compare the kind of mothers that Mary and Constance were, there is no concrete evidence to argue that Mary was the better mother; definitely not simply because she did not happen to kill herself or her children.

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The theory proposed by Lacan, known as the mirror stage can help explain the separation that occurs between the mother and the child at an early stage. The basic idea of the theory, as discussed is the process of beginning recognition of the child being a separate body from that of its mother.Lacan says that this journey is never complete and can lead to psychosis. This sort of separation between the mother and the child is seen in the case of both mothers, that is Mary Winchester and Constance Welch in *Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot*. In the case of Mary, she was forcefully taken away from her children by a force outside of their control. Clearly it separated her from her two young children, Sam Winchester who was only 6 months old and Dean Winchester who was four years old. Mary was killed in the very first episode, within the first five minutes of the long running series. She is seen to be violently killed, and the cause of her death was not explained in the episode. However, it is understood that her sons and husband have spent the last twenty two years of their life in search for the thing that killed Mary. For the brothers, that had been their whole lives up to this point in the present. They were raised like warriors and hunters in order to search for the thing that had killed their mother and to defeat it, once it was found. While it is understood that this happened because John Winchester, their father was determined to find out what had killed his wife; it is also seen that at some point Sam and Dean themselves chose to follow the lifestyle taught to them by their father. This is because they too wanted to find out the cause of their mothers death; reflecting of their untimely separation from their mother, in physical form and otherwise which results in their need to arrive at reason and some form of resolution for not only what it was that killed their mother but rather what caused a divide between them and their mother. In the process of being separated from their mother, they also began to gain their own identity as individuals, as understood in the theory proposed by Lacan. Their whole identity as warriors is rooted in the fact that their mother was taken away from them and their lives are seen to revolve around that one incident which took place several years ago.

Though the story of separation of Constance Welch and her children is different from that of Mary's, the underlying concept remains the same. As seen in the episode, Constance seems to lack the courage to go home to her children because she is guilty for what she has done. When Sam forces her to face them, it is revealed that the spirits of her children had been waiting for her to return for over twenty years since after their death. This shows how they wished to be reunited and become one with their mother as they previously were. Thus, it is clear that they too disliked the forceful separation from their mother, and longed for her to return, even after death in their afterlife.

Postpartum Depression is a form of major depression that begins within four weeks after mental disorder, according to the DSM-5 manual for diagnosing mental disorders. In both the texts it is suggested that the mother kills herself because they are horrified by the fact that they have killed their children. However, on close analysis it becomes obvious that it is not likely to have been that way. If the mothers did kill themselves out of guilt, it's because society has set norms and rules about how one should protect their child and murder is not one of them. However, it is still likely that both Grace and Constance, who are likely to have been suffering from PPD, could have wanted to end their own life and not want to leave their children behind in a world that they themselves did not wish to be a part of.

However, suffering from PPD does not in any way justify portrayal of the character of a villainous woman or that of a mad woman as seen in the case of the two texts. As Grace and Constance both loved and cared for their children, they took actions to ensure their safety and what they did was not out of hatred or insanity.Through this we understand have various themes within the genre of horror such as supernatural elements, family dynamics and relations, forms ofphysical and mental diseases such as photosensitivity and hysteria, presence of committed crimes.

V. CONCLUSION

The films *The Others* and *Supernatural, Season 1 Episode 1, Pilot* have various themes within the genre of horror such as supernatural elements, family dynamics and relations, forms of physical and mental diseases such as photosensitivity and hysteria, presence of committed crimes.

However, the primary focus of the research study is the act of murder-suicide in films where the mother kills her children and then commits suicide. Focus is also given on the representation of women characters of the film as well as how their personalities have been portrayed, inclusive of the relationship that these women who are also mothers share with their children. A psychoanalytic view of the film has been looked into in terms of mother and child relations as stated by Lacan. The meanings of motherhood and acts of a mother and how they are viewed in society have been discussed. The role of Constance and Grace as mothers in the respective films has been analysed. Since the event of the murder-suicide has been given primary focus, it is the circumstance of the mother that has been given importance. Thus, the possibility of postpartum depression in the characters of Grace and Constance has been studied.

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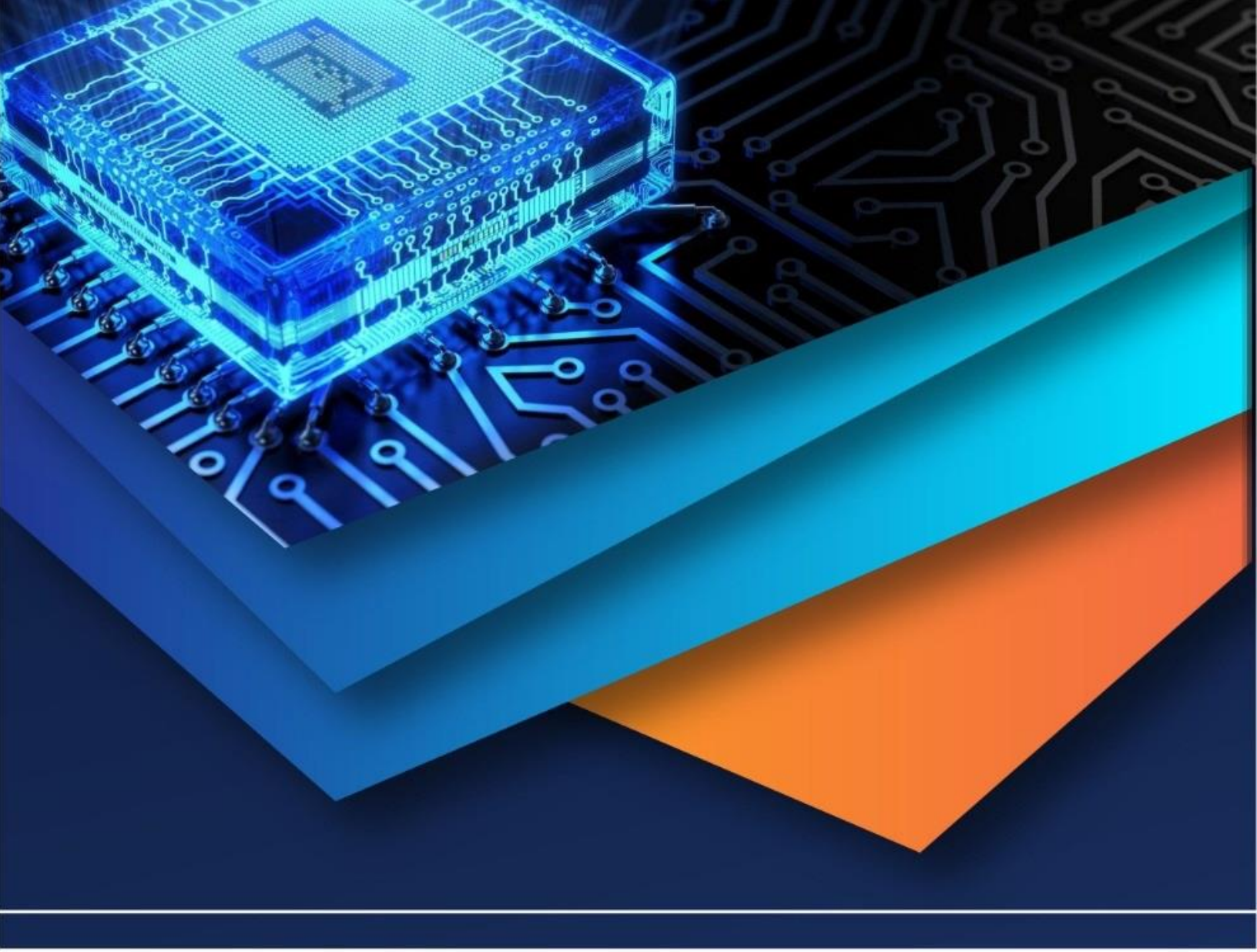

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