

Women Representation in Crisis Memes – Humour and Beyond: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

During social, economic or natural crises, people embrace unpredicted personal attitudes and social behaviour. Amid the absurdity of the Covid-19 pandemic context, humour could be detected as means of adaptation and coping mechanism as well as a platform of social critique. As a result of the intricate nature of human communication and technological advancement, variable forms of humour are produced. Memes are humorous viral forms of expression based on mutation and intertextuality. Surfing a number of pandemic memes on a variety of websites, it has been noticed that particular social and psychological outlines are employed when representing the impact of the pandemic on the social behaviour and personal attitude of women. Based on Attardo & Raskin's (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), and Machin & Mayr's (2012)

iconography and attributes semiosis, the paper attempts to reveal the ideological bearings of the pragma-semiotic structure in selected pandemic memes. Examining the representation of women in 30 memes on Covid-19 pandemic, the study reveals that memes are not mere digital artefacts with humorous bearing; they are digital relics of profound pragmatic and semiotic bearings. They are built mainly on incongruous scripts that construct distorted, dehumanized, or unstable identities of the represented female figures. The satirical effect is heightened by employing visual templates of semiotic iconographies with negative social and personal attributes. Hence, memes have proven to be stance-building arenas that contribute to the recursive construction and recognition of social identities.

Keywords: pandemic, humour, memes, semiotics, gender

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1. Introduction

During socio-political crises, economic collapses, as well as natural disasters and pandemics, peculiar personal attitudes are adopted along with a re-configuration of the collective social behaviour. Interestingly, humour could be detected in the Covid-19 pandemic context. Amid life-preserving measures, such as precaution actions, lockdown, work from home, and home schooling, humour rises as both a psychologically effective coping mechanism as well as a mirror reflecting underlying social ideologies. Humour is a universal communicative activity that occurs in all types of social interactions and contexts. As a result of the intricate nature of human language, communication and imagination as well as technological advancement, variable forms of humour have been produced. Digital forms of humour are disseminated over the Internet. Memes are digital artefacts of a more profound pragmatic and semiotic bearings than mere humorous viral forms of expression based on participatory production, re-mix and intertextuality. Pandemic memes depict the impact of the problematic context on incongruous personal and social behaviour. Surfing a number of websites, it is noticed that women are represented in a variety of contexts within a personal behaviour and social attitude of a particular psychological import. The question raised here is: how these representations are part of continuous anti-feminist grotesque distortions of the female image. Hence, the study is a pragma-semiotic analysis of selected pandemic memes conducted as an attempt to highlight the underlying tenets of their production in addition to the intended effects of their visual reception.

1.1. Theoretical Background

1.1.1. Memes

Defined by Wiggins (2019), the internet meme is “a remixed, iterated message” dispersed and reproduced by digital culture members. It depends on remix and parody within an intertextual framework for the purposes of sarcasm and social critique. Humour is the superficial salient context within which an internet meme posits a deeper implicit argument. Ironically, the term is a mutation of a number of concepts. Initially coined by Dawkins (1976), a meme refers to a socio-cultural replica - be it a cultural value, social concept or attitude, fashion, artistic style - that undergoes a process of transfer and change. The term also echoes the Greek “enthymeme” where the essentials of the argument are set with unstated conclusions left to the audience to infer. Hence, memes are regarded in two perspectives: as an argumentative artefact semiosis and a socio-cultural commodity. For the analysis of memes, Shifman (2013) proposes a tripartite typology of mimetic dimensions comprising: content, form, and stance. Content refers to the thematic input or ideas and concepts conveyed by the meme; form is the “physical incarnation of the message”, i.e. the visual framework; stance is the import of the content with respect to foregrounded/ backgrounded addressees, interpolated or marginalized referents. Semiotics and intertextuality are the frameworks where stance and content are recursively constructed within a selected form: a viral video, graphics interchange format (GIF), or an image macro.

In terms of form or structure, memes are based on “templatability” and “situational deployment” (Rintel, 2013; Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2018). Based on

pre-existing templates with common cultural concepts, situations and affinities, memes undergo textual/visual changes to input particular ideas ranging from personal emotional expression, social identity representation to collective stance building. Meme templates are paradoxically “glocal” ready-made forms of expression. Some templates are limited within the constraints of a particular community, others have trespassed the borders of a particular culture and become globally recognized with local mutations. Hence, locality remains the key word to the functional construction of memes.

Varis and Blommaert (2015) set forth that internet memes are semiotic signs. An inherent textual/visual argument is semiotically constructed, usually if not always, as an expression of an ideological practice. Stance also resides in intertextuality manifested in the selection of remixed content or referents. Internet memes also feature a process of “re-semiotization”; i.e. iterative instances of semiotic expression “involves an entirely new set of contextualization conditions and thus results in an entirely ‘new’ semiotic process, allowing new semiotic modes and resources to be involved in the repetition process” (p. 36). Remix is a requisite component for the production and virality of internet memes. Explained by Wiggins (2019), remix means that a portrayal of a particular person, or a basic idea about an event, place is maintained along the various versions of the meme, concurrently featuring changes or modified portrayals of the same content. Such visually/textually re-mixed form of communication, alongside the humorous effect it produces and a particular core context sustained, renders an inspiring alternative to redirect mode of communication in various contexts. Popular culture referents assists in maximizing the reception of the meme’s message.

Dancygier & Vandelanotte (2017) argue that memes are viewpoint-driven

multimodal constructions. The interaction between the visual and the textual in the composition of the meme provides a multimodal constructional meaning that can be signalled even if other parts of the full construction are missing. For a meme to successfully achieve its constructional meaning, it is based on viewpoints, attitudes, clichés that are shared with the addressee. Upon such shared viewpoint, a new viewpoint, usually an ironic one, is construed. Hence, internet memes cannot be examined as individual artefacts. They are part of a complex sociocultural chain that is shared among a discourse community. The sociocultural elements employed in the construction of the meme provide prompt wealth of meaning-making settings and instant viewpoint manipulating and shifting frames.

Though originating in a virtual community, memes have a profound social impact. Procházka (2016) highlights the inherent cohesive function of memes among the members of the virtual community. It is argued that the shared memetic content corresponding to the interests or ideology of a specific community maintains communal cohesiveness and conformity. The ideological content that memes spread expands a community without even noticeable active participation of its members.

1.1.2. Humour

Humour is a socio-cognitive activity, detected in various forms of interaction and diverse social contexts. It has gained the attention of scholars of different disciplines: psychology, sociology as well as linguistics.

In his study of the psychology of humour, Martin (2006) maintains that for the production and reception of humour, particular cognitions and sensory processes are at work; concepts, utterances, or actions are playfully and ingeniously regenerated into a humorous verbal/nonverbal semiotic

products. To accomplish such semiosis, humorous utterances/actions are received and undergo a cognitive - sensorial process to be appraised by the receivers as comic, resulting in an emotional response or vocal behaviour of laughter. From a sociological perspective, humour has various interestingly conflicting social functions; as a source of mirth and positive feelings, humour may function as an affable means of in-group solidarity and cohesiveness, while at other times manifest coercive antagonism. Humour is greatly purposeful in contexts where serious and direct mode of communication bears the risk of being provocatively confrontational (Mulkay, 1988).

With more scrutiny, scholars have examined humour within the frameworks of Superiority Theory and Relief Theory. These approaches explore the psychic and social impact of humour in terms of the target or the “butt” of the joke and the producer. Originating in Classic Greek philosophy of Aristotle and Plato, later emphasized by Hobbes, the Superiority Theory sets the feeling of superiority in the core of humour. “Superiority theories ally humour principally with ridicule and the enjoyment of one’s own superiority in pinpointing the foibles or weaknesses of another” (Dadlez, 2011, p.2). In other words, people find pleasure in mocking others’ vulnerabilities or misfortunes. The Relief (Release) Theory takes an opposite turning. Freud (1905) views humour in terms of a “tension-release model”. At times of distress and agitation, laughter becomes the expressive route of excessive negative emotional and cognitive energy expenditure. Jokes function positively as a “catharsis” of suppressed hostile and crude impulses especially against people who are superior to us, reducing intimidating psychic energy (Lippitt, 1991).

Most scholars agree that incongruence and oddity lie in the heart of the production of humorous acts. The degree and intensity of idiosyncrasy has a

direct impact on the cognitive and sensory reception of humour. Within the cognitive framework of the Incongruity Theory, humour results of sensory/cognitive perception of an incongruous situation violating our mental configurations and expected models. The first philosopher to use the word incongruous to analyze humour was James Beattie (1779). The cause of laughter is “two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them” (p. 320). For Schopenhauer (1818/1844), humour arises as a result of the incongruity between a concept and a perception that are supposed to be of the same thing. Arthur Koestler (1964) coined the term ‘bisociation’ as the core of creativity, perceiving humour, among other forms of creative activities that are “dynamic and unpredictable”. The term “bisociation” refers to an ingenious cognitive instance that brings together “incompatible frames of reference” or matrices. In the same vein, Michael Apter (1982 & 2005) adopts the term “synergy” to describe a conscious mental activity where the “incompatible” characteristics of two entities are associated to construct a “paradoxical” identity. He maintains that humour involves intrinsic “cognitive synergy”. In Greimas’ 1966 account of the structure of jokes, as explained by Attardo (1994, p.63), jokes are composed of two isotopies, or semantic constructions. A “connecting term”, brings about such “collision”, allowing the movement from the initial “mundane” isotopy to the second unexpected one. Typical verbal humour is based on lexical ambiguity whereby the disjunctive occurs along the disambiguation process of the two senses of the connecting term. Referential humour is based on the meaning of the text; disjunction occurs whenever a new topic is introduced (Attardo, 1994, pp 94-95).

Following a cognitive-linguistic trajectory, humour is examined as a linguistic activity in Raskin’s (1985) Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH), developed into Attardo & Raskin’s (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). Raskin (1985) is the first to overtly provide a linguistic framework of humour. The main hypothesis of the SSTH is the following: “a humorous text must be compatible with two different scripts that are either opposite or overlapping” (Raskin 1985, p.99). Raskin chooses “script” to designate a dynamic cognitive structure. As elaborated by Attardo (2001, p.2), a script is a complex of information on the structure of a given entity and its constituents, the habitual process of a particular activity, or the organization of specific relationships. Scripts also include how entities relate to each other in a conventional routine. Hence, established scripts are evoked by the selection of particular lexical items. Script overlapping refers to the process of combining scripts in a way that stretches of text “are compatible with more than one “reading,” i.e., would fit more than one script”. Opposition refers to “local

antonymy” where “two linguistic entities whose meanings are opposites only within a particular discourse and solely for the purposes of that discourse” Raskin (1985, p.108). Raskin also introduces the “semantic script-switch trigger”, i.e., the element of the text that causes the transfer from the first to the second script represented in the text. Triggers belong to either ambiguity or contradiction (114).

Within a broader scope, Attardo & Raskin’s (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), further elaborated in Attardo (1994), Attardo (1996) & Attardo (2001), includes the introduction of Knowledge Resources (KRs), that are employed for creating a joke. In addition to the SSTH’s Script opposition (SO), the KRs, in their hierarchical order, are as follows: Logical mechanism (LM), Situation (SI), Target (TA), Narrative Strategy (NS), and Language (LA). LM parameter is the playful logic employed. LMs are clustered into: actant mappings, consequences, faulty reasoning, and juxtaposition. Further instances within each cluster are arranged in the following table

Table (1) Logical Mechanisms

Actant mappings	Consequences	Faulty Reasoning	Juxtaposition
<p>Similar Potency Mapping Actants are replaced with similar agentive potency</p> <p>Differential Potency Mapping Actants are replaced with either greater or lesser agentive potency</p> <p>Role Exchange The normative roles of participants in a script are exchanged</p> <p>Role Mirroring two juxtaposed scripts where participant roles mirror each other</p>	<p>Consequence A consequence of some event is presented, leaving a prior incidents to be concluded</p> <p>Implied consequence A situation is represented with an innate consequence, left to be inferred</p>	<p>Obvious error Failing to identify something remarkably evident or salient</p> <p>Exaggeration Amplification of some characteristics or salience of an element.</p>	<p>Juxtaposition Two scripts co-occur in the same situation.</p> <p>Sequence Two scripts are temporally ordered.</p>

Source: adapted from Attardo et al. (2002, p.8)

The SI includes the contextual underpinnings of the joke. Target refers to the individuals, social groups or institutions selected as subjects for ridicule. NS might be synonymous to “genre”, the textual framework of the joke such as “a simple narrative, as a dialogue (question and answer), as a (pseudo-)riddle, as an aside in conversation”. Language KR is also responsible for the “trigger”, the linguistic element that links the two compatible scripts manifesting opposition or ambiguity.

1.1.3. Crisis Humour

Humour is recognized for its role in coping with life stress and adversity. Martin et al (1993) commend that humour allows some psychological distancing from distress and less serious view of hardships. Humour allows a psycho-cognitive shift to a less stressful perspective of the situation rendering it more manageable. Further elaborated, their study conclude that humour functions as “event –enhancing” and “self-protective” due to affecting one’s “cognitive appraisal”, casting a more positive projection of stressful events rather than focusing on the negative aspects. Additionally, satire underlying some humour expression is manifest in crisis situations. Ranging from the gently comic to the more radically bitter, satire during crisis time has multiple functions; inform and accommodate, mitigate a serious impact, or a more confrontational attack and disdain for the sake of transformation. Of high relevance to the scope of the current research is Rintel (2013) study of crisis memes. Despite being ghoulishly frivolous forms of dark humour incongruently accompanying the crisis context, Rintel underscores their significance as forms of freedom of expression that manifest sociocultural divides and multiplicity of voices. They are based on situational deployment, image macros of recurrent templates or commonly recognized situations with a superimposed text, or snowclone, that is a verbal pattern that is

mutated or re-mixed to fit into the context of the crisis.

1.1.4. Critical Discourse Analysis: Iconography & Attributes Semiosis

Memes are essentially instances of digitally constructed semiospheres, or semiotic spaces where the affordances of the employed visual and textual semiotic modes are realized. According to the Piercian semiotic modal, semiosis refers to the whole triadic interaction between the representamen, i.e. the form that the sign takes, the object, or the referent that it stands for and finally the interpretant or the sense evoked by this unity of both the form and referent (Chandler, 2007). Taking this broad spectrum to the finer perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Machin & Mayer (2012) explain that social semiotics critically examines how semiotic choices in a particular discourse - as per selected activities, values and identities - bear an array of associations that not only reflect but also shape a network of social relations in which individuals are embedded as part of the dominant social ideology. The relationship between the form and the object, or signifier and signified in Saussurean terminology, would take an iconic mode whereby the signifier is shown to bear a sensory or conceptual resemblance to the signified, in other words, manifest similar characteristics or attributes (Chandler 2007). Such attributes communicate particular values and ideas about the referent evoking specific interpretants.

1.2. Previous Research

Humour has been the subject of applied studies by scholars in various linguistic fields. Oaks (1994) examines how grammar participates in the creation of humour via structural ambiguity; Bucaria (2004) analyzes some forms of linguistic ambiguity in English in newspaper headlines resulting in voluntary or involuntary humor; Hay (1995), Crawford

(2003), Kotthoff (2006), and Holmes (2006) among others incorporate gender in their sociolinguistic examination of humour. Interestingly, humour as a distinctive discourse feature is the topic of significant studies in computational linguistics. Scholars attempt to introduce computational models for the automatic recognition of the features of humour in texts; Loehr (1996) introduces the integration of a pun generator with a natural language robot, Binsted & Richie (1997) present computational rules for punning riddles, Taylor & Mazlack (2004) explore computational recognition of wordplay in jokes, Mihalcea & Strapparava (2005) explore computational approaches applied to recognize verbal humour. In the same vein, Mihalcea & Pulman (2007) investigate automatic humour recognition, observing two basic features of humorous text: human-centeredness and negative polarity that prove consistent in verbal humour.

In strong relevance to the current study, studies on crisis humour examine the subtle association of humour and specific pandemic contexts. Park & Park (2010) show how the 19th century cholera pandemic cartoons have provided satirist with the opportunity to underscore the disagreement between doctors on the diagnosis and treatment of cholera. Humour has provided an arena for socio-political critique: public mistrust of the medical profession and their ineffective treatment as well as political attacks on government policies. Torres et al (2020) have compiled an inventory of Covid-19 English and Tagalog humour scripts. Despite the fact of the incongruent concoction of humour and the Covid-19 outbreak, social media platforms are crammed with COVID-19 related humour scripts on social medial platforms. The study examine different pandemic-related forms of humour, such as: conversational, knock-knock, lyrical, narrative, one-liner, question and answer. They depict a variety of humour types: clean humour, self-deprecatory humour,

malicious sexist humour, aggressive or put down humour and national or ethnic humour. They maintain that humorous discourse can depict and recount the changes in peoples' lives as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Dynel (2020) study on Covid-19 face mask memes, it is observed that the examined memes do not depend on ready templates. Rather, they depend on photos of real people wearing the mask, particularly shockingly bizarre ones which indicate multivocality in meme production, generation and circulation.

Another relevant of research inspects memes as repertoires of social identity representations. Underlying the digital context is a bedrock of social identities that are positively/negatively depicted. Employing memes in political satire and improving political engagement is examined by Kulkarni (2017). The power of memes in various socio-political contexts in Egypt, Uganda and India is detected by El Khachab (2016), Kasirye (2019), Rastogi & Kashyap (2019) respectively. More specifically, gender practices are also underscored in meme studies. In their cross-cultural examination of memes in four languages, Nissenbaum & Shifman (2018) conclude that the examined memes sustain the hegemonic practice of foregrounding males and dominant ethnic groups while marginalizing females and minorities with low-frequency stereotyped manifestations. Likewise, Nee & De Maio (2019) examine gender framing in Hillary Clinton memes during 2016 presidential race. They demonstrate the way memes loaded with social dogmas about female political figures are manipulated to discredit Clinton, foregrounding physical weaknesses and reversing positive traits as a woman and as a politician. Harlow et al (2018) present a feminist critique of selected political memes, targeting Kim Davis, the anti-gay county clerk of Kentucky. They maintain that they feature traditional "anti-feminist rhetoric" by targeting Davis physical appearance and employing "slut humour".

To conclude this section, the current study incorporates multiple research veins: a critical examination of gendered crisis humour whereby memes are manipulated as negative semiotic constructions of female identities.

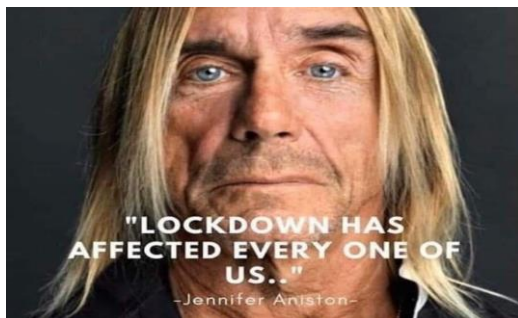
2. Methodology & Analysis

30 memes on Covid-19 are selected for analysis from a variety of British and American websites and blogs. Memes are arranged - according to their thematic content – into four groups: personal care and beauty, parenting, disposition and attitude, and finally work from home. Examined memes include an image macro

or a scene from a popular TV series or film that is fitted to the current pandemic crisis. In addition, a textual comment - a punch line or disjunctive is added to manifest the semantic as well as textual opposition. The analysis process includes the pragmatics of humour based upon Attardo’s (1994, 2001, 2002) GTVH; detection of script opposition overlap and the incongruent logical mechanism employed. A semiotic analysis inspects the visual element or the iconic signifier used as a meaning-making bedrock to reveal their critical underpinnings. Semiotic tools are: iconography and attributes, adapted from Machin & Mayer (2012).

2.1. Group 1: Beauty and Personal Care

Fig (1)



<https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/19048>

Fig (2)



<https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-survival/coronavirus-memes-april-13/>

Fig (3)



<https://bestmememakerapp.blogspot.com/2020/10/good-summer-memes.html>

Fig (4)

Coming out of quarantine like



<https://art-sheep.com/corona-memes>

Fig (5)



<https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/g31803505/coronavirus-social-distancing-memes/>

Fig (6)



<https://www.sammichespsychmeds.com/10-hilarious-before-after-pandemic-memes/>

Fig (7)



<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-8177049/People-make-memes-look-feel-quarantine.html>

Fig (8)



<https://www.sammichespsychmeds.com/10-hilarious-before-after-pandemic-memes/>

Table (2): Analysis of Group 1 Memes

Fig	Script	LM	Incongruity Trigger	Iconography & Attributes
1	Male/Female Opposition	Juxtaposition Differential Potency mapping	A quote by Jennifer Aniston emphasizing the effect of the lockdown on people in the US is superimposed on the image of Iggy Pop. Both celebrities share some physical attributes: blue eyes and long blond hair. The direct speech of Aniston opposes Pop's silent image. The inferred consequence is effect of the lockdown on women, being unable to go to beauty salons renders them a masculine look.	Iggy Pop is a heavy-metal rock music musician and singer who performs on stage bare-chested, famed for his self-harming and audience-offending wild behaviour.
2	Human/Non-human Opposition	Mirrored Roles	A husband-wife dialogue about enjoying company during the quarantine	Grogu is the infant of the unnamed species. Physically,

			juxtaposes a scene from <i>The Mandalorian</i> (2019). In mirrored roles, the wife’s reply echoes Grogu or Baby Yoda’s words.	he is characterized by his green wrinkled skin, long pointed ears, wide eyes and small face
3	Human/Non-human Opposition	Mirrored Roles	The script man taking his wife “to get pampered” after the lockdown is juxtaposed with the scene from <i>Harry and the Hendersons</i> (1987). The wife and Harry, or the Bigfoot character in the film have mirrored roles.	Big foot is the hairy ape-like cryptozoological creature
4	Overlap	Exaggeration Similar Potency Mapping	The scripts show how women look like after the quarantine	Greek-Cypriot model Sophia Hadjipanteli is known for her excessively thick untrimmed eyebrows. The other scripts employ unidentified participants with exaggerated features such as awkward hair colour, unequal damaged eyelashes and strangely applied fake nails.
5	Overlap	Mirrored roles	The weird haircut scene of Sian Clifford or Claire in the BBC comedy-drama series <i>Fleabag</i> (2016–2019) mirrors a self-given lockdown haircut	Claire is a conformist with perfectly maintained appearance and composure. In a moment of loss of control over her life, the depicted scene features Claire’s miserable look after getting a disastrous “look-like a pencil” haircut.

6	Young-Old Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	At the beginning of the quarantine, women look like the beautiful young smiling woman. Sometime later, they turn into Ann Ramsey in <i>“Throw Momma from the Train”</i> (1987) with her short hair, wrinkled face, sagging skin and sharp facial gestures, The two scripts juxtapose in striking opposition to show the consequences of the quarantine.	Ann Ramsey features the nightmare mother adopting an overbearing attitude, constantly scolding and offending her son, and putting him into unstoppable most-ridiculous situations of guilt
7	Real-Re-mix Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	Before and after quarantine scripts are signified by Da Vinci’s masterpiece Mona Lisa juxtaposing the opposite distorted remix portrait to show the consequences of the quarantine on women	The iconic attributes of the Mona Lisa: her glowing complexion, smooth skin well-arranged hair and enchanting smile, famous posture of the right hand resting on the left wrist, are all substituted by a pathetic look, messy hair, under-eye circles and a hand with long coloured nails and holding a glass of wine as sign of innocence lost.
8	Male-Female Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	At the beginning of the quarantine, women are similar to Andrea del Sarto’s (1513-1514) Renaissance portrait of lady Lucrezia di Baccio del Fede,. At the end of the quarantine, they become The Sailor Boy (1969) portrait by the Columbian artist Fernando Boter	The beautiful young with her slim body contrasts with the satirically inflated grotesque male figure

2.2. Group 2: Parenting and Home Schooling

Fig (9)



<https://www.familyvacationcritic.com/quarantine-memes-only-parents-will-understand/art/>

Fig (10)



<https://www.digitalmomblog.com/quarantine-memes/>

Fig (11)



<https://dailymemes.art/hqm/funny-covid-19-restaurant-memes/>

Fig (12)



<https://www.familyvacationcritic.com/quarantine-memes-only-parents-will-understand/art/>

Fig (13)



<http://www.dumpaday.com/funny-pictures/morning-funny-meme-dump-30-pics-12/>

Fig (14)



<https://babe.hatchcollection.com/the-memes-getting-us-through-quarantine/>

Fig (15)



<https://www.sammichespsychmeds.com/10-hilarious-before-after-pandemic-memes/>

Table (3): Analysis of Group 2 Memes

Fig	Script	LM	Incongruity Trigger	Iconography & Attributes
9	Overlap	Similar potency substitution	Mothers’ pathetic condition during the quarantine, allowing their children to do crafts and artwork on their faces and clothes. are depicted as Lady Gaga who is photographed in a deplorable state.	Lady Gaga in this photograph is believed to be drunk, wearing excessive makeup, extravagant outfit and colourful wig. She is known for her flamboyant provocative costumes and outrageous behaviour.
10	Overlap	Similar potency substitution	Mothers’ reaction to the consequent stay-home upon receiving a close contact Covid notification is depicted in Carrie-Ann Moss - Trinity in <i>The Matrix Resurrections</i> (2021) fighting scene at the Simulatte Coffee Shop	In this particular scene, Trinity rejects her fake life as a Tiffany, the wife and mother of three.
11	Overlap	Similar potency substitution	The excited Opera Winfrey script “You get the car, Everybody gets the car” (Car giveaway episode, September 13 th 2004) is substituted with the home-schooling script Winfrey’s original words are replaced maintaining her excitement and exaggerated reaction.	Winfrey is famous for her excited yells and emotional shouts.
12	Overlap	Similar potency substitution	The words of Debra Jo Rupp, Kitty Foreman of <i>That '70s Show</i> (1998), originally complaining about her son’s ungrateful attitude while pouring liquor in a blender cup, are substituted by a complaint that children are never going back to school again.	Despite being a caring and protective mother, Kitty’s dark side shows a drinking problem, irrational attitude and frequent impulsiveness and rage fits.
13	Overlap	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	The punch line includes two scripts; the first part - “It may take a village to raise a kid”, a proverb that highlights the difficult task of raising children that requires multiple parties involved. The second part	Annie is a misfortunate broke lovelorn lady who suffers business and relationship failures that leads to her cynicism and drinking attitudes.

			juxtaposes home schooling as a more challenging task that mothers need a whole “winery” to help them overcome it. The visual provides a mirror image of mothers as Kristen Wiig, Annie of <i>Bridesmaid (2011)</i>	
14	Overlap Sweet-Harsh Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	Parenting during the lockdown script overlaps with two other scripts: 1st and 3rd day of parenting during the lockdown. On the first day, mothers are similar to Julie Andrews in <i>Mary Poppins (1964)</i> . Two days later, mothers become Miss Agatha Hannigan, Carol Burnett in <i>Annie (1982)</i> .	Mary Poppins is the sweet angelic nanny; gentle, cheerful and fairly stern. Miss Agatha Hannigan is the head of the orphanage who, ironically, hates children; hard-drinking, chain-smoking, negligee-wearing lecherous pathetic woman.
15	Overlap Protector-Abuser Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	Mothers home-schooling their children scripts overlap with two opposite scripts of Carol Baskin and Joe Exotic of the true crime Netflix documentary series <i>Tiger King (2020)</i> .	Carol Baskin is the animal rights activist with her famous sweet catchphrase. Joe exotic is the convicted animal abuser and murder plotter known for his expletives.

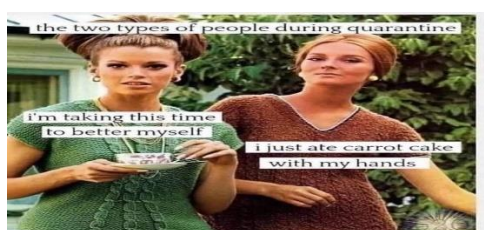
2.3. Group 3: Attitude and Disposition

Fig (16)



<https://weheartit.com/shrefameshal/collections/179514437-coronavirus-memes>

Fig (17)



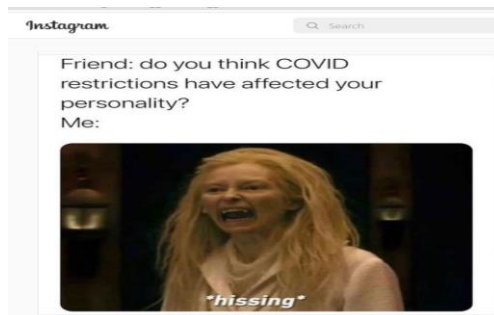
<https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-survival/covid-19-memes-2645929842/>

Fig (18)



<https://wvpress.org/convention/wvpress-extra/coronavirus-memes-from-2020/>

Fig (19)



https://www.instagram.com/p/CMbomxbFR3w/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=f32ef130-dd94-4da7-bf02-8edf81c26baf

Fig (20)



<https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/g31803505/coronavirus-social-distancing-memes/>

Fig (21)

Me trying to pull together an outfit post-quarantine after not leaving my house for four months



<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/coronavirus/hibernation/find-the-light-humorous-side-to-covid19-with-some-of-the-best-memes-online/news-story/380eebf94c4df0fe3c313f3510e62f79>

Fig (22)



<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-8177049/People-make-memes-look-feel-quarantine.html>

Fig (23)



<https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/g31803505/coronavirus-social-distancing-memes/>

Fig (24)



<https://living.alot.com/entertainment/quarantine-memes-so-funny-we-could-just-cry--17638>

Table 4: Analysis of Group 3 Memes

Fig	Script	LM	Incongruity Trigger	Iconography & Attributes
16	Useful-Useless Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	Two scripts juxtapose in opposition. The first one presents how people make good use of their free time during the lockdown. The other script is "me" is mirrored	Ina Garten is a celebrity chef who hosts the Food Network cooking show, <i>The Barefooted Countess</i> ; author of cooking best sellers as

			in Ina Garten making and drinking her famous massive cocktail in striking opposition with the script above.	well as an Emmy Award nominee and winner for the best Daytime Service Show. Ironically, all these attributes are obscured. The meme highlights, through repeated patterning, an elderly overweight lady accompanying a massive cocktail glass.
17	Overlap	Similar Potency substitution	The retro humour meme, i.e. vintage illustrations that often show “traditional” American women - coiffed, starched, and cheerful models from the 40s, 50s, and 60s – are used to depict how women spend their time during the quarantine.	"Retro" implies ironic stance towards the past; partially nostalgic and partially cynical. The desire to revive the past and recall some of its features is triggered by discontent with the current affairs.
18	Overlap	Similar Potency Substitution	The original words by Betty White, Elka Ostrovsky of the American sitcom <i>Hot in Cleveland</i> (2010-2015), are replaced by a worldwide call to day drinking in two juxtaposed scripts	Elka Ostrovsky is a widowed 80-year-old caretaker, a heavy drinker and marijuana user.
19	Natural/Unnatural Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	A friends dialogue about the effect of Covid restrictions juxtaposes an audio-visual script from the TV series <i>What We Do in the Shadows</i> (2019). The reply is given via Tilda Swinton as Tilda , the Vampire Council leader in through the onomatopoeia “hissing”.	Tilda appears as a quintessential vampire with her pale face, long pointed fangs. A hissing sound, employed to show disapproval and heightens the fearful effect of the scene, belongs originally to such creatures as snakes and owls. In the pop culture, vampires are demonic isolationist night creatures who are hurt

				or even killed by daylight.
20	Overlap	Mirrored roles	Starting a conversation after the lockdown is mirrored into the dialogue between Annie Mumolo as Barb and Kristen Wiig as Star in <i>Barb & Star Go to Vista Del Mar</i> (2021).	Barb and Star are a pair of eccentric middle-aged Midwestern women whose life story is marked by marriage failures and a life-long intimate friendship within the small world of their retail job and suburban “talking club”, where chattering, giggles and trivial conversations are most common.
21	Overlap	Mirrored roles	Another consequence of the long quarantine time is the loss of convenient dressing up style. This is mirrored in the two scripts by Ashley Tisdale <i>Red Carpet</i> misshapes for the premieres of <i>The Incredibles</i> (2004) and <i>Ice Princess</i> (2005) respectively.	Superficially, eccentric costumes might be considered as an attention-seeking sign. However, Chaney (2014) regards it as a sign of escapism and identity loss. It reflects an intentional attempt to transcend life regularities and break habitual rituals as catharsis.
22	Overlap Mental Health- Disorder Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	The beginning of the quarantine and after one month scripts are mirrored into Britney Spears juxtaposed scripts: an early age image 1998 at the beginning of her career and Pears herself shaving her hair in 2007.	The meme depicts two extremely conflicting phases in Spears life reflecting manifest mental deterioration, from The “Princess of Teen Pop” to a diagnosed “bipolar”.
23	Overlap	Mirrored roles	A dialogue about quarantine weekend plans is juxtaposed with <i>Downtown Abbey</i> (2019) dinner script. The female partner of the dialogue mirrors the elderly Maggie Smith, or Violet Crawley. In	Violet Crawley, the matriarchal figure fails to recognize what a weekend is because of the socio-temporal gap that separates her from younger Crawleys, being a British aristocrat of the early

			obvious error, the original words by Violet Crawley, who fails to understand what a weekend is, are re-mixed in the dialogue.	20 th century, before the term is used by middle class workers. These social attributes are employed to make the effect of the quarantine salient.
24	Human-Nonhuman Opposition	Differential potency mapping	Women during the quarantine are depicted as a Barbie figure.	The original Barbie known to showcase various social roles with its adult female figure, costumes and accessories. The quarantine edition is labelled as “a realistic Barbie” portraying a female non-essential worker in the company of wine

2.4. Group 4: Work from Home

Fig (25)



<https://thehoneycombers.com/bali/funny-coronavirus-memes/>

Fig (27)



<https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/g31803505/coronavirus-social-distancing-memes/>

Fig (26)



<https://www.elle.com/uk/life-and-culture/g31803505/coronavirus-social-distancing-memes/>

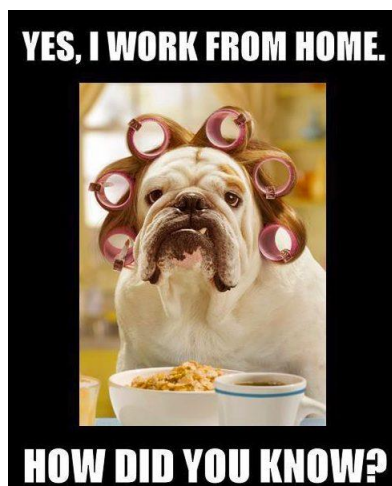
Fig (28)

Work from home



<https://www.chanty.com/blog/work-from-home-memes/>

Fig (29)



<https://www.chanty.com/blog/work-from-home-memes/>

Fig (30)



<https://moneywisemoms.com/the-best-work-from-home-memes/>

Table 5: Analysis of Group 4 Memes

Fig	Script	LM	Incongruity Trigger	Iconography & Attributes
25	Formal-informal Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	Two pairs of scripts are juxtaposed: 1 st day of zoom meetings at the beginning of the lockdown and later zoom meetings. How female participants look like in the two scripts is depicted by two opposing scripts of Amy Poehler. The first one is Amy Poehler as Leslie Knope (the fictional deputy director in her formal attire and setting in the NBC mockumentary sitcom <i>Parks and Recreation</i>); the second is Amy Poehler herself dressed up and behaving in an eccentric informal way during the 2015 Emmys Awards celebration.	Leslie Knope is the fictional character who represents women working online at the beginning of the quarantine; she is a positive character who advocates gender equality manifesting ambition and hard work. During the 2015 Emmy Awards celebration, Amy Poehler shows up in a hoodie, aviator sunglasses, golden rings and a chewing gum. She is even caught asleep during the celebration.
26	Beauty-Ugliness Opposition	Juxtaposition Mirrored roles	Two scripts are juxtaposed; working at the office and working from home. Female employees at the office would look as charming as a young black woman. Working from home, they would look like	The young black woman, showing how women look like when they are office, manifest physical attributes in evident contrast with Rasputia. A template of Black charm with long straight hair and fine

			Rasputia Latimore in <i>Norbit</i> (2007).	facial features opposes the image of the old Black women with typical enlarged wide open nostrils and large lips. The character also bears the attributes of as the overweight abusive wife who commits almost all seven sins.
27	Overlap	Mirrored Roles	Using virtual workspaces such as Slack during the quarantine is mirrored in juxtaposing a scene from <i>The Good Place</i> (2016-2020) by Simone Garnett (Kirby Howell-Baptiste) who believes her surroundings to be hallucinations of her dead brain.	In season 4, Simone Garnett dies and becomes the experimental Good Place's second test subject. When she arrives, she is in complete denial of her surroundings, believing them to be hallucinations of her dying brain.
28	Expectation-Reality Opposition Overlap	Juxtaposition Mirrored Roles	Two scripts about work from home are juxtaposed: The first is the "Expectation" script features a preoccupied male figure working on the computer; the second is "Reality" featuring a woman working while engaged in cooking as well.	The male figure bears the cognitive attributes of concentration and focus as well as the physical attributes of the convenient workplace setting: a desk, a computer and well-lit room with no obvious distraction. On the other hand, the female figure bears a group of contrasting attributes: workplace attributes include the formal costumes, the lap top and head phones; the physical setting is a kitchen, a cooker and a sauce pan. Multitasking attributes are implied.
29	Human-Nonhuman Opposition	Differential potency mapping	A white Bulldog is mapped into a work from home script, having breakfast, drinking tea and wearing hair rollers	In addition to the distinctive facial features of the bulldog, it is known for its laziness and need of moderate exercise.

30	Human-nonhuman Opposition	Mirrored roles	Mothers having a home zoom meeting and a toddler is around are mirrored into Kristen Bell or Eleanor Shellstrop and its pet lizard, in Season 3, Episode 7 of <i>'The Good Place'</i> (2018). Awkwardly, the lizard is standing on Eleanor's head while the latter does not show any sign of disturbance or discomfort.	Eleanor rightfully pairs with the iguana as both have some shared attributes: lethargic and lazy.
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3. Results & Discussion

Upon the analysis of the selected memes, the following results are reached. Regarding the pragmatic structure of the memes, it is remarked that they all depend on templatability. They are based on scenes from selected movies or TV series as visual settings as well as iconographic semiotic resources to endorse both the explicit humorous impact and the underlying social meaning potential.

To achieve the satirical effect, the examined memes employ incongruous scripts to create script opposition or overlap – almost the same number - and a variety of distorted logical mechanisms as the source of humour. The most depicted logical mechanisms are mirrored roles, juxtaposition and similar potency

substitution respectively. Opposition along with juxtaposition allow either distorting the female identity (male/female), dehumanizing her (human/nonhuman) or fluctuating inconsistent nature (formal/informal – mentally stable/disordered – beauty/ugliness). Overlap provides direct framing of female identities within the attributes of employed characters in mirrored roles or similar potency substitutions. The impact of the intended framework is heightened via the iconographic attributes retrieved visually by the employed scene.

Female identity construction is related to a variety of iconographies and their attributes as shown in the analysis. The construction of female identities is categorized in the following table:

Table (6) Categories of Female Identities

Identity	Number
Women As male figures	4
Women dehumanized	5
Positive female figures	13
Negative female figures	18

A number of female figures lose their identity to either male or dehumanized identities. Three male figures employed to depict women roles bear negative attributes

of awkward behaviour: Iggy Pops and Joe Exotic, grotesque obesity: The Sailor Boy portrait while only one positive figure depict a virtually diligent worker

maintaining authenticity while working from home. Dehumanized depictions of women include negative physical attributes and traits of: wild animals such as the giant hairy ape-like Big Foot and the unnamed species Groggu, carnivorous creatures as vampires, and lazy pets as the bulldog. The Barbie doll is also used to signify women's condition during the quarantine.

Positive female figures are employed to signify women's condition at the beginning of the pandemic quarantine. Positive figures bear such common physical attributes as: young age, beauty, smiley face, slimness and sweet calm behaviour. Ironically, some positive figures bear underlying negativity. They either refer to unrealistic identities such as artistic portraits (the Mona Lisa and lady Lucrezia di Baccio del Fede and image templates of unknown identities or have negative bearings within their positivity/backgrounded traits such as Trinity, Oprah Winfrey and Ina Garten.

Negative female identities manifest the following attributes: old age, obesity, silliness, mental disorder, ugliness, drinking habits, fierce behaviour, awkward inconvenient attitude, inauthenticity, and obsolescence.

4. Conclusion

Though the study is limited to the representation of women in 30 memes on Covid-19 pandemic, it can be concluded that memes are not mere digital artefacts with humorous bearing. Meme production is based upon genuine choices or creation of a particular semantic/visual framework as the core of the semiotic message. Intertextuality or re-mix is carefully tailored to bring about incongruent scripts for the successful achievement of semantic opposition/overlap, the core of humour. The success of the meme as a stance building arena, and social identity recursive construction tool, depends mainly on collective recognition among the members of the discourse community of shared social values and common perspectives that are re-mixed in memes. It is hoped that the study adds to the study of memes as instances of participatory digital culture in general, gendered discourse and humour in particular. It is recommended to conduct further contrastive research on memes and other digital forms of expression in various communities to provide rich sociocultural and linguistic insights as well.

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