

## **Film characters' values and audience engagement: an empirical investigation**

Danica Renn-Giles (Royal Holloway University of London, UK)

Panel 12 – FEMALE CHARACTERS

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### **Abstract**

Many screenwriting scholars suggest that film narratives express social or personal values. This is arguably achieved through the values represented by the protagonist's main goal (see e.g., McInerney 2013). Also, it is often suggested that viewers engage with these values by comparing them with their own (see e.g., Cattrysse 2010). However, these ideas haven't been tested empirically yet. Hence, the present work seeks to provide a complementary piece of evidence by empirically investigating the following hypothesis: The more a film protagonist's values (as perceived by viewers) align with viewers' values, the more viewers like the film.

To identify the content of protagonists' and viewers' values, the Schwartz Theory of Basic Human Values (1992) will be employed, which defines ten value types, such as power (control or dominance over people and resources) and benevolence (preservation and enhancement of the welfare of close others), that have been empirically validated by numerous cross-cultural studies. Two groups of study participants will be asked to read the plot summaries of two different mainstream films (one film per group). Each film will express a different value type (the values expressed by the films will be determined by pilot work). Participants' own values and how much they liked the film will be measured with self-report questionnaires.

The proposed paper will present the study design in more detail and the results. It builds on my paper 'Character Values and Film Success: A Psychological Perspective' presented at the SRN Conference 2018 in Milan, outlining the theoretical psycho-narratological model underlying this work.

**Keywords** – character values, audience values, film popularity, empirical study

**Danica Renn-Giles** (Royal Holloway University of London, UK) is a psychologist with a long-standing interest in screenwriting and the application of psychological insights to character design. Having completed a BSc and MSc in Psychology at the University of Tübingen (Germany) and worked as a behaviour change consultant with the private and public sector, she is now pursuing an interdisciplinary PhD in psychology and screenwriting at Royal Holloway University of London (UK), supervised by Prof Anat Bardi and Adam Ganz. She is also a regular guest lecturer for the MA Screenwriting at Royal Holloway and has worked as story and audience insight consultant for StoryFutures, a government-funded initiative helping to develop R&D projects with creative businesses focusing on immersive technologies.

danica.giles.2017@live.rhul.ac.uk