

Dialogic Construction Of Marginalization, Mental Illness, And Class Conflict In *Joker* (2019): A Textual Analysis Of Film Dialogue

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Abstract: *This study examines how cinematic dialogue in Joker (2019) constructs social meaning around marginalization, mental illness, and class conflict. Using qualitative textual analysis of the film's complete dialogue transcript, the study applies Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power. The analysis addresses four research questions focusing on violent subjectivity, ideological class divisions, mental illness representation, and identity transformation. Findings show that Arthur Fleck's transformation into Joker is discursively produced through shifts in language, from hesitant and deferential speech to assertive and authoritative expression. Dialogue reveals how institutional neglect and social exclusion shape violent subjectivity, while class conflict emerges through contrasting speech patterns between elite and marginalized characters. Mental illness is framed as both an individual condition and a structural outcome of systemic failure. The study demonstrates that dialogue operates as a key site of ideological struggle, where recognition, power, and identity are negotiated. It contributes to film studies and media discourse research by highlighting the central role of language in constructing cinematic social critique.*

Keywords: mental illness representation, class conflict, symbolic violence, dialogism, identity transformation

Introduction

Cinema has long functioned as both a reflection of and an intervention into contemporary social realities, articulating ideological tensions around class, identity, and institutional power (Ryan & Kellner, 1988). Among the most salient concerns in contemporary Western societies are the intersecting problems of social marginalization, mental health stigma, and widening economic inequality, issues that converge with particular intensity in Todd Phillips's (2019) film *Joker*. The film traces the transformation of Arthur Fleck, a mentally ill and socially isolated aspiring comedian, into the iconic criminal figure known as the Joker. In doing so, it raises critical questions about the role of social structures in producing violence and about how cinematic dialogue can articulate these complex relationships.

The scholarly significance of examining *Joker* extends beyond film criticism into broader debates about media representation and its social consequences. Research consistently demonstrates that media portrayals of mental illness shape public attitudes and reinforce stigma. Klin and Lemish (2008), in a comprehensive review of two decades of research, found that representations of mental disorders in broadcast media and film are predominantly negative, emphasizing violence, unpredictability, and dangerousness. Riles et al. (2021) extended this line of inquiry through a 30-year content analysis of popular films, documenting persistent patterns of stigmatizing mental health portrayals from 1990 to 2019, even as some positive representations have emerged. Pirkis et al. (2006), in a review, also found that portrayals of mental illness on screen are common, usually negative, and have a cumulative impact

on how the public perceives and seeks help for mental health issues. Eisenhauer (2008) further demonstrated how visual media construct what she terms a “culture of stigma” by encoding mental illness as a visible marker of social difference. Collectively, these studies establish that cinematic representations of mental illness carry substantial weight in shaping public understanding.

Parallel scholarship has examined how cinema engages with class conflict and ideological reproduction. Ross (1998) demonstrated that since the silent era, American cinema has actively shaped ideological visions of class relations, alternately amplifying and containing class consciousness depending on broader political currents. Kellner (1993) articulated a multi-perspectival approach to film ideology, arguing that films are not mere reflections of social reality but active participants in constructing ideological understandings of race, class, and gender. James (2003) critiqued the systematic repression of class analysis in film and cultural studies, arguing that middle-class academic discourse routinely obscures the material dimensions of social hierarchy. These frameworks are directly relevant to *Joker*, which foregrounds economic inequality through the stark contrast between Arthur's poverty and Thomas Wayne's wealth, and which explicitly critiques austerity through its depiction of mental health service cuts.

Methodological advances in film discourse analysis provide essential tools for the present study. Rossi (2011) established a framework for the discourse analysis of film dialogue, emphasizing that cinematic language operates according to conventions distinct from everyday conversation. Chepinchikj and Thompson (2016) demonstrated the productive application of conversation analysis to cinematic discourse, illustrating how verbal and non-verbal features function together to construct meaning. Bamberg (2011), in a foundational article on narration and identity construction, argued that self-narratives serve as primary instruments through which individuals navigate constancy and change, agency and subjection, a framework directly applicable to Arthur's discursive transformation across the film.

Despite this body of scholarship, significant gaps remain. Existing analyses of *Joker* have examined its thematic content, its class and political dimensions (Zaid, 2022; Uysal, 2023), its psychoanalytic and neoliberal implications (Bainbridge, 2021), and its construction of social invisibility (Saidi, 2023), but none has subjected the film's dialogue to systematic linguistic analysis. The specific words, speech patterns, and discursive strategies through which the film constructs its representations of marginalization, class conflict, and mental illness remain underexamined. Moreover, existing studies tend to treat these dimensions in isolation rather than examining how they intersect and reinforce one another through dialogic structures.

The present study addresses these gaps through a systematic textual analysis of the complete dialogue transcript of *Joker*. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism and Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic violence, the analysis is guided by four research questions: (1) How does the film construct the relationship between social marginalization and violent subjectivity through Arthur's dialogue? (2) How does dialogue articulate class conflict and reproduce ideological divisions between the elite and the marginalized? (3) How does the film use dialogue to represent mental illness as both an individual condition and a consequence of institutional neglect? (4) How does the transformation from Arthur to Joker emerge through shifting patterns of language, recognition, and narrative authority? The study contributes to scholarship at the intersection of film studies, discourse analysis, and media representations of mental health by demonstrating how cinematic dialogue functions as a site of ideological critique.

Literature Review

Dialogism and Film Discourse Analysis

If class and stigma are ideological problems, they are also interactional problems, because cinema stages social relations through talk, voice, and multimodal exchanges that invite viewers to recognize,

evaluate, or reject subject positions in real time. Bakhtin (1981) provides a foundational theoretical vocabulary for understanding why cinematic discourse can be consequential. In his account, the novel is structured by the interaction and dialogical interanimation of voices, stratified across social, generic, professional, and national languages, each bearing a distinctive worldview. This concept of heteroglossia, the coexistence of multiple social languages within a text, can be productively extended to film, where competing speech types and registers organize the audience's interpretive engagement (Stam, 1992). The Bakhtinian tradition also emphasizes that open forms encourage active engagement rather than passive consumption, allowing spectatorship to be conceptualized as a dialogic relation in which viewers negotiate multiple possible readings rather than simply absorbing a singular ideological message.

Methodologically, the analysis of cinematic dialogue has been advanced by several complementary approaches. Rossi (2011) provides guidance for discourse analysis of film dialogues, emphasizing the unique characteristics of cinematic language, which operates according to its own conventions distinct from everyday conversation. Chepinchikj and Thompson (2016) demonstrate the application of conversation analysis to cinematic discourse, showing how verbal and non-verbal features, including prosodic and paralinguistic elements, work together to construct meaning. Their approach is particularly valuable for understanding how Arthur's uncontrollable laughter functions alongside his verbal utterances to construct his character and provoke responses from others. Dynel (2011) further distinguishes between film dialogue and polylogue, providing conceptual clarity for analyzing multi-party interactions in cinema and for understanding how films construct social interactions between protagonists and various institutional interlocutors.

These discourse traditions justify a move from thematic summaries of *Joker's* social critique to methodologically explicit analysis of how critique is produced through cinematic talk, interactional positioning, and the orchestration of competing social voices within a single film text. The dialogic perspective further motivates inquiry into how language constitutes and reflects the protagonist's evolving subjectivity, leading to the following research question:

RQ1: How does the film construct the relationship between social marginalization and the emergence of violent subjectivity through Arthur's dialogue?

Class and Ideology in Cinema

Film scholarship on class has long treated cinema not as a passive mirror of social reality but as an active ideological site in which meanings of class struggle are produced through the interplay of texts, institutions, and audiences. Kellner (2020) argues that media culture, including film, television, and popular music, provides the symbolic materials out of which people forge their identities, including conceptions of class, ethnicity, race, and nationality. In his account, media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, and who is allowed to exercise force and violence, positioning cinema as a pedagogical and ideological practice rather than a neutral reflective surface. Ryan and Kellner (1988) similarly maintain that Hollywood cinema is deeply entangled with the politics and ideology of its historical moment, with films actively constructing rather than merely representing social reality.

Historical scholarship further frames class as a persistent concern in film studies. Ross (1998) demonstrates how silent-era cinema engaged directly with class conflict, shaping ideological visions of class relations in American society. His archival approach reveals that during periods of intense class struggle, films served to either amplify or contain class consciousness depending on their ideological orientation. James (2003) extends this analysis by examining the repression of class in film and cultural studies, arguing that middle-class academic discourse has often obscured class analysis. His critique is relevant to understanding how *Joker* makes class visible through its portrayal of Gotham's economic inequality and the stark contrast between Arthur's poverty and Thomas Wayne's wealth.

Within the context of neoliberalism, Mazierska and Kristensen (2018) examine what contemporary

cinema tells us about neoliberal capitalism, exploring whether filmmakers are able to imagine alternatives or merely reproduce hegemonic frames. Their edited volume positions the moving image as a central cultural technology for interpreting the effects of neoliberal economic policy on social life, affect, and aspiration. For *Joker*, these class and ideology literatures provide a basis for reading the film's social world as structured by unequal power relations that are expressed through symbolic classification, public spectacle, and everyday interaction. The film's explicit critique of austerity and social service cuts positions it as an intervention into contemporary debates about neoliberal governance. This motivates the following research question:

RQ2: How does dialogue in the film articulate class conflict and reproduce the ideological divide between the elite and the marginalized?

Media Representation of Mental Illness

The representation of mental illness in media has been extensively documented as a significant factor shaping public attitudes and reinforcing stigma. In their comprehensive review of two decades of research, Klin and Lemish (2008) found that media descriptions of mental illness are frequently distorted through inaccuracies, exaggerations, and misinformation, with the result that media perpetuate misconceptions and stigma among audiences. Their analysis reveals that portrayals consistently emphasize violence, dangerousness, and unpredictability, contributing to public fear and discrimination against individuals with mental illness. Similarly, Pirkis et al. (2006) reviewed fictional film and television portrayals and concluded that on-screen representations of mental illness are frequent and generally negative, producing a cumulative effect on public perceptions and on the likelihood of people with mental illness seeking appropriate help. They call for collaboration between the mental health sector and the screen industries to counter negative portrayals and to explore the potential of constructive alternatives.

Within popular cinema specifically, Riles et al. (2021) conducted a 30-year content analysis of the most popular films emphasizing mental health and documented stigmatizing potential that extends well beyond the commonly noted associations of mental illness with danger. Their analysis reveals that characters with mental illness are disproportionately connected to risky health behaviors, various forms of aggression, and adverse reactions to adversity. The same study also identifies a relative dearth of portrayals that display non-culturally dominant social identities and their intersections with mental health identity, foregrounding representational inequality as a stigma mechanism that operates through absence as well as through stereotype. Eisenhauer (2008) adopts a critical visual culture approach and argues that an apparently isolated artifact becomes intelligible as stigmatizing only when placed within the context of the overwhelming number of other depictions that collectively create what she terms a “visual culture of stigma”. This insight is particularly relevant to *Joker*, where Arthur's uncontrollable laughter serves as a visible marker of difference that invites social sanction.

Harper (2008) raises important questions about the limitations of anti-stigma critique, arguing that media images of mental distress can be positive and sympathetic while simultaneously containing sexist, racist, and other problematic elements that are not commonly identified by campaigners. He proposes that critics pay closer attention to how the particular form or genre of any media text influences its treatment of psychological distress. De Filippis et al. (2023) reinforce this call for industry responsibility, arguing that the cinema industry possesses both the power and the obligation to convey inclusive, anti-discriminatory, and culturally sensitive messages about mental health. These perspectives establish that the study of mental illness representation in film requires attention not only to surface-level content but also to the discursive and generic structures through which stigma is organized and sustained. This leads to the following research question:

RQ3: How does the film use dialogue to represent mental illness as both an individual condition and a consequence of institutional neglect?

Symbolic Violence and Identity Transformation

Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence provides a sociological account of how domination can be reproduced through meaning systems that appear legitimate and natural, thereby making it particularly useful for reading films that stage inequality as an everyday experiential order rather than as overt coercion. Bourdieu and Wacquant (2004) define symbolic violence as the imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning upon groups in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. Bourdieu (1991) further argues that language itself is a form of domination, functioning as an instrument of power and action through which social hierarchies are maintained less by physical force than by forms of symbolic domination. This framing foregrounds discourse as a key analytic site for understanding how classed and stigmatized subjects come to accept social divisions as normal, even when such divisions are the source of their suffering.

Weininger (2005) elaborates Bourdieu's approach to social class and symbolic violence, emphasizing how cultural capital operates to maintain social distinctions. His analysis demonstrates how seemingly neutral judgments of taste and behavior function to exclude the working class from positions of power and status. This framework illuminates how Arthur's social awkwardness and failed attempts at humor mark him as culturally deficient in the eyes of Gotham's elite. Samuel (2013) extends Bourdieu's theory by applying symbolic violence to the study of collective identity and social movements, advocating a shift from negotiation models to domination models when interpreting identity politics and resistance. His work informs the present study's analysis of how Arthur's transformation into Joker represents a rejection of the symbolic order that has marginalized him.

Identity transformation, in turn, can be framed as a narrative and discursive process through which subjects reorganize self-understanding in relation to belonging, memory, and temporality. Venn (2020) explicitly frames the problem of change in subjectivity through the concept of narrative identity, tying identity transformation to belonging and temporality while noting the theoretical difficulty posed by the mechanisms through which subjects change. Bamberg (2011) offers a discourse-oriented account in which identities are created on the spot when speakers position themselves and others in relation to culturally available master narratives, making narrative and interaction key media of identity work. These perspectives support reading cinematic identity shifts as reorganizations of narrative time and self-interpretation rather than as abrupt psychological switches. In *Joker*, Arthur's adoption of the Joker identity represents a fundamental re-narration of his life story, a shift that is linguistically marked by changes in pronoun usage, modal verbs, and the movement from hedging language to categorical certainty. This leads to the final research question:

RQ4: How does the transformation of Arthur into "Joker" emerge through shifting patterns of language, recognition, and narrative authority across the film?

Method

This study employs qualitative textual analysis as its primary methodological approach to examine how dialogue in Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019) constructs social meaning. Textual analysis is a well-established method in media and communication studies that involves the close, systematic examination of texts to identify patterns, themes, and interpretive possibilities (McKee, 2003). As Fursich (2009) argues, media texts present a distinctive discursive moment between encoding and decoding that warrants scholarly engagement in its own right, because the narrative character of media content, its potential as a site of ideological negotiation, and its impact as mediated reality necessitate interpretation independent of production intentions or audience reception. The approach is particularly suited to examining how films construct meaning through their formal and linguistic features, and it allows the analyst to move between micro-level dialogue patterns and macro-level ideological structures.

Data Source

The data for this analysis consist of the complete dialogue transcript of *Joker* (2019), directed by Todd Phillips and starring Joaquin Phoenix. The transcript was obtained from the film's official subtitle file, which captures all spoken dialogue in the film. This source was selected because it provides a comprehensive record of the film's linguistic content, enabling systematic analysis of dialogue patterns across the entire narrative arc. The transcript includes all character utterances, stage directions relevant to speech delivery (such as notations of laughter, pauses, and vocal quality), and contextual markers that indicate the social setting of each exchange.

Analytical Framework

The analysis is informed by two primary theoretical frameworks that together enable attention to both the interactional organization of dialogue and its ideological functions. First, Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogism provides tools for understanding how dialogue constructs meaning through the interaction of different voices and social languages. Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, the coexistence of multiple social languages within a text, is particularly valuable for analyzing how *Joker* constructs social divisions through contrasting speech patterns, registers, and evaluative stances. In a Bakhtinian framework, each utterance carries traces of its social origin and is oriented toward other utterances, making dialogue an inherently ideological medium through which competing worldviews are staged, contested, and evaluated (Bakhtin, 1981).

Second, Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic power provides a framework for understanding how language functions to reproduce social hierarchies. Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, symbolic power, and misrecognition illuminate how seemingly neutral linguistic choices can function to maintain class distinctions and marginalize those who lack the cultural resources to participate in legitimate discourse on equal terms. Together, these two frameworks allow the analysis to trace how individual dialogue exchanges both reflect and reproduce the broader structures of class domination, institutional neglect, and social stigma that the film represents.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded through several stages designed to ensure systematic coverage of the transcript while remaining sensitive to emergent patterns. First, the complete transcript was read multiple times to develop familiarity with the dialogue and to identify initial patterns of interest. Second, dialogue segments were coded thematically according to the four research questions that guide the study: social marginalization and the emergence of violent subjectivity; class conflict and ideological division; mental illness as an individual condition and an institutional product; and identity transformation through shifting language patterns. Third, coded segments were analyzed for specific linguistic features, including vocabulary choice, speech register, pronoun usage, modal verbs, hedging and intensifying language, discursive strategies such as questioning and self-narration, and paralinguistic markers noted in the transcript (such as laughter and vocal quality). Fourth, patterns were identified across the film's narrative progression, tracing how Arthur's speech changes over the course of the story and how other characters' linguistic treatment of Arthur shifts in response. Finally, findings were synthesized and interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks and the existing scholarship reviewed above.

Results

RQ1: Social Marginalization and the Emergence of Violent Subjectivity

The film constructs the relationship between social marginalization and violent subjectivity through a progressive erosion of Arthur's communicative agency. Initially, Arthur's dialogue is characterized by deferential speech patterns and aspirational rhetoric. When he declares his ambition to become a comedian, his mother's dismissive response, "Don't you have to be funny to be a comedian?", exemplifies the systematic invalidation he experiences. The dialogue reveals that marginalization

operates not merely through physical violence but through the denial of discursive recognition.

Arthur's pivotal observation, "Is it just me, or is it getting crazier out there?" functions as both a diagnostic statement and a premonition of his own trajectory. The social worker's perfunctory response, "It is certainly tense", demonstrates the institutional failure to engage substantively with his distress. This communicative gap between Arthur's experience and institutional acknowledgment creates what Bakhtin would term a "heteroglossic" space where multiple social languages collide without reconciliation.

The emergence of violent subjectivity is linguistically marked by Arthur's shifting pronoun usage and modal verbs. His early dialogue is replete with hedging language ("I think", "maybe", "I hope"), whereas his post-transformation utterances demonstrate categorical certainty. When he declares, "I used to think my life was a tragedy, but now I realize it's a fucking comedy", the shift from epistemic uncertainty to declarative certainty signals the consolidation of his violent subjectivity. The profanity itself marks a breach of previous linguistic constraints, indicating that violence emerges simultaneously as a social practice and a discursive rupture.

The subway murders mark a critical turning point in Arthur's discursive evolution. When he shoots the three Wall Street brokers, the act is preceded by his uncontrollable laughter and the explanation "I have a condition". The violence emerges not from calculated intent but from the breakdown of communicative channels. The film thus positions violent subjectivity as the product of accumulated misrecognition, where the failure of language to establish meaningful connection produces a subject who can only express himself through action rather than speech.

RQ2: Class Conflict and Ideological Division

The film articulates class conflict through dialogic structures that reproduce ideological divisions between the elite and the marginalized. Thomas Wayne's televised statement that those who have not "made something of their lives" are "nothing but clowns" operates as a crystallization of neoliberal meritocratic ideology. This utterance is subsequently reappropriated by protesters as a rallying cry, demonstrating how elite discourse can be inverted into counter-hegemonic resistance.

The dialogue systematically constructs class positions through lexical choices that encode social distinction. Wayne's vocabulary, "decent, educated", "good, decent", positions the wealthy as moral subjects while implicitly pathologizing the poor. Conversely, Arthur's dialogue with the Arkham clerk reveals the material conditions underlying his psychological distress: "They cut all those [programs]" he notes, with the high-pitched voice modulation indicating both irony and desperation.

The ideological divide is further reproduced through what Bourdieu would term "symbolic violence" embedded in everyday interactions. When Alfred dismisses Penny as "delusional" and "a sick woman", his clinical terminology masks class-based contempt. The dialogue reveals that class conflict is not merely about economic redistribution but about the power to define reality itself. Arthur's confrontation with Thomas Wayne, "I don't know why everyone is so rude", exposes the normative violence of elite discourse, where the refusal of recognition is naturalized as social etiquette.

The protesters' chant, "Fuck the rich. Fuck Thomas Wayne", represents a linguistic inversion of the established order. The profanity functions not merely as affective expression but as a deliberate violation of bourgeois linguistic norms, signaling the emergence of a counter-public that refuses the terms of elite discourse.

Wayne's campaign rhetoric further illuminates the class divide. His promise to "lift them out of poverty" and his assertion that "I'm their only hope" reveals the paternalistic logic of elite governance. The dialogue positions Wayne as a figure who speaks for the marginalized without speaking to them, embodying what Spivak termed the subaltern's inability to represent themselves. Arthur's eventual rejection of this representational economy, his refusal to be spoken for, marks his entry into the realm

of political violence.

RQ3: Mental Illness as Individual Condition and Institutional Neglect

The film represents mental illness dialogically, oscillating between individual pathology and structural critique. Arthur's journal entry, "I just hope my death makes more sense than my life", positions mental distress as an existential condition requiring narrative coherence. However, the subsequent revelation that he has been "on seven different medications" reframes his condition within a biomedical model that the film simultaneously deploys and critiques.

The social worker's announcement that "they've cut our funding" and that "this is the last time we'll be meeting" explicitly links Arthur's psychological deterioration to institutional abandonment. Her acknowledgment that "they don't give a shit about people like you, Arthur" represents a moment of systemic critique that the film positions as both accurate and insufficient. The dialogue suggests that institutional neglect is not merely a failure of resources but a structural feature of a system designed to manage rather than care for the mentally ill.

The representation of Arthur's pseudobulbar affects, his uncontrollable laughter, is particularly significant. When he explains "I have a condition" to the Wall Street brokers, his utterance is met with physical violence, demonstrating how visible mental illness invites social punishment. The film thus represents mental illness as simultaneously a biological condition (the neurological disorder), a social construction (the stigma attached to aberrant behavior), and a structural product (the lack of adequate care).

The Arkham records reveal that Penny "suffers from delusional psychosis and narcissistic personality disorder" and was "found guilty of endangering the welfare of her own child." This diagnostic language, "delusional," "narcissistic," "endangering", positions mental illness within a juridical-penal framework that the film critiques. Arthur's response, laughter that transforms into tears, embodies the inadequacy of diagnostic categories to capture lived experience.

The film's treatment of mental illness extends to intergenerational trauma. Penny's delusional belief that Thomas Wayne is Arthur's father, and her subsequent institutionalization, frames Arthur's own mental illness within a genealogy of maternal failure. The dialogue between young Penny and Dr. Stoner reveals the historical dimensions of psychiatric violence: "Your mother adopted you while she was working for us. Then she was arrested and committed to Arkham State Hospital." This revelation positions Arthur's condition not as individual pathology but as the inheritance of systemic violence.

RQ4: The Transformation of Arthur into Joker

The transformation from Arthur Fleck to Joker is enacted through systematic shifts in language, recognition, and narrative authority. Initially, Arthur occupies a position of discursive subordination, his speech marked by hesitation, stammering, and deference. His request to Murray, "Can you introduce me as Joker?", represents a pivotal moment of self-naming that constitutes his new identity.

The transformation is marked by three linguistic shifts. First, there is a shift from reactive to proactive speech. Early Arthur responds to others' utterances, Joker initiates discourse. His statement on the Murray Franklin Show, "I killed those three Wall Street guys", is delivered without hedging, demonstrating his assumption of narrative authority. Second, there is a shift from private to public speech. Arthur's journal entries and therapy sessions represent private discourse; Joker's televised confession transforms private experience into public spectacle.

Third, there is a shift from seeking recognition to denying its necessity. When Murray asks, "You think that killing those guys is funny?" and Arthur responds, "I do, and I'm tired of pretending it's not," he rejects the demand for justification. His subsequent statement, "Comedy is subjective, Murray", appropriates the language of postmodern relativism to legitimize violence. The punchline, "You get

what you fucking deserve", represents the culmination of his discursive transformation, where the joke structure is deployed to deliver judgment rather than amusement.

The final scene with the therapist demonstrates the consolidation of his new identity. When asked to explain the joke, Arthur responds, "You wouldn't get it." This refusal to explain marks his assumption of epistemic authority and his withdrawal from the economy of recognition. The repetition of "That's life", first as Murray's sign-off, then as Arthur's ironic commentary, signals his appropriation of mainstream cultural codes for subversive purposes.

The film thus constructs the Joker's identity not as a psychological breakdown but as a deliberate discursive performance. Arthur's transformation is enacted through language that progressively refuses the terms of social integration, culminating in the assumption of a name, "Joker", that embodies the inversion of social order itself. The closing scene, where Arthur dances on the police car amidst the chaos of Gotham, represents the full realization of his new identity: a figure who has transcended the need for recognition and exists purely as spectacle.

Discussion

The analysis reveals that *Joker* deploys dialogue as a sophisticated mechanism for exploring the relationship between individual pathology and social structure. The findings demonstrate that the film constructs violent subjectivity through the progressive erosion of communicative agency, articulates class conflict through dialogic structures that reproduce ideological divisions, represents mental illness as both individual condition and institutional product, and enacts identity transformation through systematic shifts in language and narrative authority.

RQ1: Marginalization and Violent Subjectivity

The findings for RQ1 align with and extend existing scholarship on media representation of mental illness and violence. Klin and Lemish (2008) document how media portrayals often link mental illness with violence, but *Joker* complicates this narrative by positioning violence as a product of social marginalization rather than individual pathology. The film's dialogic construction of Arthur's violent subjectivity, through the erosion of communicative agency, the failure of institutional recognition, and the eventual embrace of action over speech, challenges simplistic associations between mental illness and violence.

The analysis reveals how linguistic markers signal Arthur's transformation. The shift from hedging language to categorical certainty, from reactive to proactive speech, and from seeking to denying recognition, all demonstrate how dialogue constructs subjectivity. This finding supports Bakhtin's (1981) contention that identity emerges through discourse, while also demonstrating how the denial of discursive recognition can produce violent alternatives to speech.

The subway murders scene is particularly significant for understanding how the film constructs the relationship between marginalization and violence. Arthur's uncontrollable laughter and his explanation "I have a condition" precede the violence, suggesting that the breakdown of communicative channels, his inability to make himself understood, is what precipitates the shooting. This interpretation resonates with Bainbridge's (2021) reading of *Joker* as a text deeply embedded in neoliberal logics of exclusion, where the withdrawal of institutional support creates the conditions under which violence becomes the only available form of self-expression.

RQ2: Class Conflict and Ideological Division

The findings for RQ2 demonstrate how *Joker* articulates class conflict through dialogic structures that reproduce ideological divisions. Thomas Wayne's televised statement, that those who have not "made something of their lives" are "nothing but clowns," exemplifies what Bourdieu (1991) terms symbolic violence: the imposition of meaning that is experienced as legitimate. Wayne's vocabulary of "decent"

and "educated" positions the wealthy as moral subjects while implicitly pathologizing the poor, naturalizing class distinctions through seemingly neutral descriptors.

The analysis extends Kellner's (1993) multiperspectival approach to film ideology by demonstrating how class conflict is constructed at the level of dialogue. The contrast between Wayne's confident pronouncements and Arthur's hesitant speech, between elite vocabulary and working-class vernacular, creates a dialogic structure that makes class visible as a linguistic phenomenon. This finding supports James's (2003) argument about the repression of class in cultural studies, demonstrating how *Joker* makes class explicitly visible through its dialogic construction.

The protesters' appropriation of Wayne's "clown" epithet represents what Ross (1998) identifies as a recurring pattern in class conflict: the inversion of elite discourse into counter-hegemonic resistance. By embracing the label that Wayne uses to demean them, the protesters transform symbolic violence into symbolic power. This dynamic illuminates how *Joker* positions Arthur's transformation within a broader social movement, suggesting that his individual violence is symptomatic of collective grievance.

RQ3: Mental Illness Representation

The findings for RQ3 reveal how *Joker* dialogically navigates the tension between individual and structural framings of mental illness. The film oscillates between representing Arthur's condition as biological (the pseudobulbar affect), as social (the stigma he experiences), and as structural (the institutional abandonment documented by the social worker). This oscillation complicates Riles et al.'s (2021) finding that film portrayals typically reinforce stigma, suggesting instead that *Joker* offers a more nuanced representation that implicates social structures in the production of mental distress.

The analysis supports Eisenhauer's (2008) critique of the visual culture of mental illness stigma while extending it to examine how dialogue constructs stigma. Arthur's explanation "I have a condition" is consistently met with violence or dismissal, demonstrating how visible mental illness invites social punishment. The film thus represents stigma not as an unfortunate byproduct of mental illness but as a constitutive feature of how society responds to difference.

The intergenerational dimension of mental illness representation, Penny's institutionalization and its effects on Arthur, positions mental illness within what De Filippis et al. (2023) call for: a more responsible approach to mental health representation that acknowledges systemic factors. The Arkham records reveal that Penny was "found guilty of endangering the welfare of her own child," positioning her mental illness within a juridical-penal framework. Arthur's inheritance of this legacy suggests that mental illness is not simply an individual condition but a product of systemic violence that spans generations.

RQ4: Identity Transformation

The findings for RQ4 demonstrate how Arthur's transformation into Joker is enacted through systematic shifts in language, recognition, and narrative authority. This finding aligns with Venn's (2020) analysis of narrative identity, which emphasizes how narratives provide robust structures for identity construction. Arthur's adoption of the Joker identity represents a fundamental re-narration of his life story, from tragedy to comedy, from victim to agent.

The three linguistic shifts identified in the analysis, from reactive to proactive speech, from private to public discourse, and from seeking to denying recognition, support Bamberg's (2011) argument about the role of narration in the constitution of self and identity. Bamberg contends that narration enables subjects to position themselves agentively relative to dominant discourses, and Arthur's journal entries, his televised confession, and his final refusal to explain all represent narrative practices through which he constructs his new identity.

The self-naming moment, "can you introduce me as Joker?", is particularly significant for understanding identity transformation. This request represents what Martin-Jones (2006) identifies in his analysis of national identity in cinema: the power of naming to constitute identity. By requesting this introduction, Arthur actively constructs his new identity rather than passively receiving it. This finding extends scholarship on identity transformation in cinema by demonstrating how dialogue functions as the primary medium through which such transformations are enacted. The analysis also illuminates how the Joker identity represents a rejection of the symbolic order that marginalized Arthur. His appropriation of Murray's sign-off, "That's life," signals his assumption of cultural authority and his transformation from object to subject of discourse. This dynamic supports Samuel's (2013) extension of Bourdieu's theory to social movements, demonstrating how symbolic violence can be subverted through the appropriation of dominant cultural codes.

The film's closing moments, with Arthur dancing triumphantly amidst the burning city while the crowd cheers him on, suggest that his transformation resonates beyond the individual to become a collective fantasy of retribution. The dialogue that precedes this moment, his final joke, his refusal to explain, his adoption of Murray's sign-off, constitutes a complete inversion of the social order. What began as a story about one man's search for recognition ends as a meditation on the violence inherent in systems that deny such recognition, and the monstrous figures that such systems inevitably produce. This analysis demonstrates that *Joker* deploys dialogue as a sophisticated mechanism for engaging with pressing questions of social justice, mental health, and political violence. The film's dialogic architecture reveals the extent to which language is not merely a medium of communication but a site of power, where the ability to name oneself, to be recognized, and to command narrative authority constitutes the fundamental stakes of social existence. Arthur Fleck's transformation into the Joker is ultimately a story about the violence that ensues when these stakes are denied, when the marginalized are rendered speechless, and when the only remaining option is to embrace the identity that society has already imposed.

The significance of this analysis extends beyond the specific case of *Joker* to broader questions about how cinema functions as a medium of social critique. The theoretical frameworks employed in this study, Bakhtin's (1981) dialogism and Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic violence, prove particularly productive for analyzing film dialogue. Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogic interaction provide tools for understanding how different social languages coexist and conflict within a film, while Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and symbolic violence illuminate how linguistic choices reproduce social hierarchies. The findings also have implications for understanding the relationship between media representation and social change. While *Joker* has been criticized for potentially glorifying violence, this analysis suggests that the film's violence is positioned as a symptom of systemic failure rather than a model for emulation. The dialogue consistently frames Arthur's transformation as a response to social conditions, marginalization, institutional abandonment, class contempt, that precede and provoke his violent acts. This framing invites viewers to consider the social roots of violence rather than attributing it solely to individual pathology.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals how *Joker* complicates straightforward readings of its protagonist. Arthur is neither purely victim nor purely villain but a figure who occupies an ambiguous moral position. The dialogue constructs this ambiguity through its oscillation between sympathetic and disturbing representations, between explanations that invoke social causation and statements that claim individual agency. The study's focus on dialogue also contributes to methodological discussions in film studies, demonstrating the value of attending closely to the linguistic dimensions of film. Dialogue is not merely a supplement to the visual but a constitutive element of cinematic meaning. Future research might extend this approach to examine how dialogue interacts with other cinematic elements, such as music, editing, and cinematography, to construct meaning.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focuses exclusively on dialogue and does not systematically examine visual, musical, or other auditory elements that also contribute to cinematic meaning. Film operates through multiple modes, and limiting the analysis to dialogue restricts the scope of interpretation. Second, the study examines dialogue within the narrative text but does not incorporate production context such as directorial intent, script development, or industrial conditions, nor does it include audience reception. These dimensions are important for understanding how meanings are constructed and interpreted beyond the text itself. Third, the analysis is interpretive and shaped by the researcher's theoretical orientation. Although the study follows a systematic coding process and is grounded in established frameworks, alternative theoretical approaches may produce different interpretations of the same dialogue.

Future research should extend this work by adopting a more integrated approach. Scholars should combine dialogue analysis with visual, sound, and editing analysis to produce a multimodal understanding of meaning construction. Research should also incorporate audience-based methods, such as surveys and in-depth interviews, to examine how viewers interpret representations of mental illness, class conflict, and violence. In addition, production-oriented studies that draw on scripts, interviews, and industry context can provide insight into how these meanings are shaped during the filmmaking process. Comparative studies across similar films would further help determine whether the observed dialogic patterns are specific to *Joker* or reflect broader trends in contemporary cinema. These extensions would strengthen the methodological depth of textual analysis and improve its connection to social interpretation and media effects.

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