

Society's fractured smile: The *Joker* between social deviance and cultural reflection. A sociological and bibliometric analysis of representations of marginality in cinema

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Abstract: The film *Joker* (2019), directed by Todd Phillips, has generated a major cultural and social impact, becoming an object of critical reflection on marginalization, mental health and systemic violence. This paper proposes an interdisciplinary analysis that combines a sociological perspective on cinematic narrative with a bibliometric investigation of international academic reception. The study utilizes a mixed-method approach, consisting of a qualitative sociological analysis of the movie content and a bibliometric analysis assisted by VOSviewer software. For the bibliometric analysis, 87 English-language scholarly articles were selected from the Scopus database, published between 2019 and 2025, using the keywords “Joker” and “movie”. Sociological analysis reveals major themes such as alienation, structural inequality, stigmatization of mental illness, institutional collapse and symbolic violence. These have been interpreted through the theories of Marx, Durkheim, Foucault and Becker. The bibliometric analysis highlights six distinct thematic clusters: translation and language, mental health and stereotyping, narrative archetypes, urban culture and media, the psychology of character and phenomenological representation. The co-occurrence map reflects the deeply interdisciplinary nature of the research and provides empirical support for sociological interpretation. The *Joker* functions as a cultural artifact that reflects contemporary social crises and generates a plural academic reception. The integration of sociological and bibliometric analyses validates the relevance of the film as a source of critical knowledge and as a tool for the symbolic representation of deviance, marginalization and fragility of social systems.

Keywords: *Joker*, sociological analysis, bibliometric analysis, mental health, marginalization, VOSviewer, cinema and society, social deviance, cinematic realism, cultural representation

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Introduction

Cinema serves as a vital medium for reflecting and interrogating the social realities that shape individual and collective identities. Through narratives, visual language and cultural representations, cinema strives to depict - often in nuanced and complex ways - the multiple experiences of people in their social contexts. By addressing significant societal dilemmas, films possess the ability to challenge, critique, and inspire dialog about prevalent issues - such as identity, class relations, gender dynamics, and psychological phenomena - that affect diverse communities today.

A significant dimension of the role of cinema is outlined in the analysis of psychological phenomena. Such a dimension is reflected in diverse societies. The way in which Turkish cinema, through its depiction of psychological counselling and therapy, reflects societal perspectives on mental health is a suggestive example. This kind of portrayal encapsulates cultural attitudes towards psychological issues and offers implicit critiques of the systems surrounding them, revealing fundamental prejudices and misunderstandings within society (Gençoğlu 2019). Thus, cinema becomes a canvas for exploring complex social realities, influencing viewers by raising awareness and encouraging dialogues about mental health (Gençoğlu 2019).

Cinema has the capacity to encourage critical engagement with civic and community issues. This world of the screen allows the audience to engage with and evaluate controversial moral dilemmas without the immediate weight of judgment often found in reality. This non-judgmental space encourages critical reflection on the social norms and behaviours portrayed in films, ultimately aiding in the evaluation and potential reform of civil structures (Dong 2022). By offering nuanced interpretations of characters' actions, the films stimulate discussions about empathy, responsibility, and the moral structure of society, revealing complexities woven into our social structure (Ibidem).

The intercultural dynamics of cinema continue to illustrate its role in navigating social realities and have been explored in various artistic productions. How an audience receives a movie can significantly influence the understanding and interpretation of cultural narratives. Moreover, globalization is reshaping cinematic expressions, leading to new social and cultural phenomena that resonate differently with different demographics. Thus, cinema reflects changing social realities

as its narratives interact with different cultural contexts, fostering both understanding and confusion in audience reception (Quan and Chen 2023).

In contemporary times, the evolution of movie consumption has transformed the way audiences perceive and interact with cinema. There is growing recognition of the importance of viewing outside the traditional cinema, through online channels; this new type of viewing facilitates interaction with films, highlighting that diverse viewing platforms can alter the social dynamics around film consumption (Aveyard 2016). The accessibility of cinema through these varied mediums invites wider audience engagement and creates new avenues for critical discourse about the social issues presented in films. Thus, the way we watch films shapes our understanding of and interaction with their thematic content, demonstrating the adaptive nature of cinema in reflecting ongoing social change.

The study of cinematic representation has illustrated that popular films often mirror the social and political issues of their time. Various scholars have observed that cinema not only entertains, but also educates audiences about pressing concerns rooted in social dynamics, highlighting themes of class and gender (Staat 2019). The narratives created in these films resonate with the historical and contemporary legacies rooted in society, inviting critical reflections on the current state of various demographic groups and their lived experiences (Ibidem).

Sociological interpretations of contemporary films offer profound insights into the complexities of modern society, engaging the audience in reflective processes about race, gender, class, social issues and cultural dynamics. By analysing films through a sociological lens, we identify patterns that not only reflect social change, but also provoke dialogue and critical thinking about pressing social issues.

Contemporary movies often act as mirrors reflecting various socio-political landscapes. A key role of cinema is its ability to portray issues ranging from micro-aggressions to systemic injustices in modern society. Even complicated issues, such as racism or the stigmatization of mental illness, can be more openly addressed. For example, the effectiveness of multimedia strategies, such as videos that address racism, in raising awareness when integrated into educational settings has been researched. This approach encourages audiences to actively engage with the content and reflect on their social positions, thereby strengthening critical discourse on racial inequality in the arts

(Ogunyemi et al. 2020). Engaging with these themes through film cultivates empathy and reframing viewers' perceptions of prevailing social narratives.

The representation of marginalized voices, especially in films from regions with a high degree of social precarity, illustrates how cinema can challenge dominant narratives and evoke collective memory and recognition. Films with characters from working-class backgrounds provide a lens through which social inequalities are examined, leading to a more nuanced understanding of marginality (Hadj-Moussa 2008). Such films advocate for recognition and a re-examination of social norms and expectations, illustrating the transformative power of cinematic storytelling.

The role of technology in filmmaking influences how sociological narratives are shared and understood. It becomes especially important to emphasize the importance of integrating new technologies into film production, resonating with the evolving ways in which audiences consume content in today's digital landscape (Harmash, Timlin, and Khymych 2023). Understanding film as part of a broader technological framework allows sociologists to explore how these innovations influence social perceptions and interactions with cultural products.

Film serves as a powerful platform for collective learning and social engagement. Viewing films as a shared experience enhances dialog and critical analysis among viewers, fostering a sense of community and collaborative reflection on contemporary issues (Beban and Korson 2025). This shared experience amplifies the impact of the themes presented in the film, encouraging a broader discourse about the societal challenges presented.

Portrayals of violence and its realism in films offer critical commentary on social attitudes towards aggression and conflict. The aesthetic elements used to depict violence can create a false sense of realism, potentially desensitizing audiences to real social violence while provoking discussions about morality and ethics (Bender 2014). This approach highlights the role that films play in shaping social perceptions of violence, often reflecting and influencing cultural mores. Examining cultural heritage through cinema emphasizes how films can interact with historical narratives to inform contemporary discussions of cultural identity. The ways in which representations of past struggles are transposed allow viewers to re-frame their understanding of current social structures and their implications (Guirao 2018). This historical framing plays a crucial role in

promoting critical engagement with current issues. At the same time, such a mechanism can operate on a multitude of issues, including those relating to mental health, through film productions that revisit issues in a variety of newer contexts or using other artistic media.

Contemporary sociological interpretations of film highlight ongoing struggles against systemic inequalities evident in various portrayals of race and class. For example, the representation of black women's experiences in contemporary films invites reflection on intersectionality and the multiple nature of oppression. Insights derived from studying these narratives emphasize the need for a nuanced understanding of the social dynamics and impact of representation in media. The implications of cultural representations in shaping social narratives can be identified, revealing their influence on public perceptions and activism around social injustices (Mithani, Cooper, and Boyd 2020). Through critical analysis of films, sociologists can decipher the complex interplay between media representations and the lived realities of marginalized communities, enhancing societal awareness and advocacy efforts.

The sociological interpretation of contemporary films serves as a vital mechanism for understanding complex societal issues. By inviting audiences to confront and reflect on their perceptions, films illuminate the underlying structures that shape everyday experiences. This critical engagement promotes greater awareness and dialog about issues of race, gender, class, inequities, and cultural representation. As film continues to evolve with technological advancements and global dynamics, the need for sociological analysis remains essential to bridge the gap between entertainment and meaningful social discourse.

Bibliometric analysis of film-related articles can provide meaningful data that enhance our understanding of trends, themes and the academic landscape around film. This analytic approach uses quantitative methods to systematically collect and analyse bibliographic data to produce useful information for researchers and practitioners in film studies and beyond. This type of analysis enables statistical assessment of film-related literature and scholarly productivity. By focusing on publication trends or the frequency of topics and keywords, researchers can discern changes in interest over time, identifying topics that are gaining ground in scholarly discussion and those that may be declining. A critical advantage of bibliometric analysis is that it facilitates interdisciplinary connections in film studies. By analysing identified networks, researchers can uncover

relationships between disparate works and trending themes across fields. This interconnectedness is vital in film studies, where the exploration of film intersects with fields such as psychology, cultural studies, technology and sociology.

Cinematography plays an indispensable role in mirroring and shaping social realities, challenging viewers to confront ingrained prejudices, power dynamics and trends in society. It not only serves as a reflection of society, but also acts as an active participant in the discourse surrounding social, cultural and political issues, allowing the audience to navigate the complex landscape of modern life. Be it interpretations of personal trauma, explorations of social action or uplifting narratives of community resilience, cinema is an art form deeply entwined with the human condition and social consciousness. As we contemplate cinema's contributions to society, its multiple roles continue to evolve, adapting to new technologies, cultural shifts and audience needs. The dynamic social fabric in which these narratives are woven illustrates that a quest to understand and improve the human condition remains at the heart of the cinematic experience. Such a quest invites both reflection and action in a rapidly changing world.

The movie *Joker* (directed by Todd Phillips, 2019) has generated a significant cultural and social impact, becoming not only a cinematic phenomenon, but also a catalyst for debates on mental health, social inequality and systemic violence. Far from being merely an “origin story” for a villain from the DC Comics universe, *Joker* proposes an intense narrative with deep sociological valences: the alienation of the individual, the dissolution of moral norms, social marginalization and the effects of dehumanization in an urban context.

The sociological analysis of the film makes it possible to explore how the figure of the “misfit” is constructed as a product of an oppressive, dehumanizing system in which failed social policies, economic precariousness and the empathic rupture between individuals lead to deviance, rage and violence. *Joker* can thus be interpreted as an implicit critique of late capitalism and the erosion of social solidarity. In parallel, a bibliometric analysis of the scholarly literature generated around this movie (or in which it is used as a case study) can reveal the directions of academic interest in the *Joker* phenomenon. This dual approach - sociological and scient metric - offers an original and inter/trans-disciplinary perspective on the relationship between popular culture, cinema and social science. The combination of these two methods makes it possible to contextualize the impact of film, in the

social and theoretical spheres, and to identify the thematic networks of authors and disciplines that have been concerned with this subject. At the same time, we can arrive at a better understanding of how the *Joker* is integrated into global academic discourse.

The overall objective of the paper is to conduct an integrative sociological and bibliometric analysis of the movie *Joker* in order to understand its cultural, social and academic impact.

Specific objectives derive from the approaches of each method. The sociological analysis of the film aims to identify and interpret the main social themes (poverty, marginalization, mental illness, violence) and to investigate how the character Arthur Fleck reflects real social dynamics. At the same time, we propose to correlate the message of the film with relevant sociological theories (e.g. labelling theory, Marxist alienation, Durkheimian anomie). The bibliometric analysis maps the international scholarly output addressing the *Joker* from different perspectives (sociological, psychological, philosophical or cultural) and identifies the dominant themes and keywords in the analysed literature. The interpretation is based on the detection of thematic clusters and research trends by analysing the co-occurrence of terms using the VOSviewer program.

Linking the two dimensions allows us to compare the theoretical interpretations in the scholarly literature with the findings of our own sociological analysis and to assess the extent to which academic discourse reflects (or ignores) the social dimension of film.

Methodology

Research design: This paper utilizes a mixed-method research design, combining two complementary approaches: (1) a qualitative sociological analysis of the narrative and visual content of the film *Joker* (2019) and (2) a bibliometric analysis of the relevant scholarly output, in order to identify the directions of academic interpretation and its theoretical impact in the international literature. This dual methodological approach allows not only to investigate the symbolic and social content of the film, but also to understand how it is perceived, analysed and integrated into international scholarly discourse.

Qualitative sociological analysis: The qualitative analysis of the film *Joker* was carried out using thematic content analysis and narrative analysis, focusing on social representations of marginalization, mental illness, symbolic violence and identity crisis. The approach is anchored

in classical and contemporary sociological perspectives, such as anomie theory (Durkheim), alienation theory (Marx) and labelling theory (Becker), with a particular focus on the construction of social deviance in urban space and the individual-society relationship.

The source analysed is the film *Joker* (directed by Todd Phillips, USA, 2019), watched in its entirety and interpreted in relation to the socio-cultural context of its emergence and the dynamics of the main character - Arthur Fleck - as a product and symbol of social dysfunction.

Bibliometric analysis

Sources and selection criteria: for the bibliometric analysis, the Scopus database was used, due to its broad, interdisciplinary coverage and export functionalities for the VOSviewer software.

The selection criteria were as follows: keywords “Joker” and “movie” (combination used in the “title, abstract, keywords” field), articles written in English, publication period from the release date of the movie (October 2019) to the present (2025) and document types (scientific articles, excluding editorial reviews, conference notes and non-refereed material). Following the application of these criteria, 87 articles relevant to the area of interest were identified and selected.

Tools and procedures: The bibliometric analysis was carried out using the latest version of the VOSviewer software, which allows visual mapping of relationships between terms, authors and publications. Data export from Scopus was done in a format compatible (CSV) with VOSviewer, including the necessary metadata: title, authors, abstract, keywords and references. Co-occurrence analysis, using the keywords in the abstract and title as the unit of analysis. A minimum threshold of at least 5 occurrences was set for the inclusion of a term in the network. Thematic clusters were identified based on similarity between terms and co-occurrence relationships.

Methodological limitations: It is important to note that the bibliometric analysis is limited by the accuracy of the metadata indexed in the Scopus database and the variability in the terminology used by the authors. Also, the exclusion of other databases (e.g. Web of Science, Google Scholar) may affect the comprehensiveness of the analysis, but it was a methodological choice justified by consistency and accuracy. In addition, the analysis does not investigate the full content of the articles, but only the metadata and the thematic distribution.

Synergy between methods: The two approaches - qualitative and quantitative-bibliometric - are used in a complementary logic. If the sociological analysis provides interpretative depth on the content of the movie, the bibliometric analysis provides a global picture of its academic reception and the theoretical trajectories that have accompanied it in the scholarly literature. This combined approach allows for a complex understanding of how a cultural product such as the *Joker* functions simultaneously as a symbolic narrative and as an object of scholarly reflection.

Results

For the movie *Joker*, a sociological analysis framework can integrate multiple theoretical perspectives due to its complex content; in a succinct form, a sociological analysis based on multiple theoretical paradigms can identify relevant theoretical directions, key concepts integrated, social dimensions addressed, and themes captured cinematically. These will be summarized in Table 1. Relevant sociological theoretical directions used in the analysis:

Table 1: Relevant sociological theoretical directions used in the analysis

Theoretical direction	Social framework	Key concept	Practical application
Cultural Marxism Conflict theory Karl Marx (Musto 2010)	Structural inequality and social alienation	Alienate	-Social exclusion of the lower classes; -The elite's contempt for the masses (Thomas Wayne is a symbol of the ruling class); -Absence of social services reveals the collapse of psychological assistance.
Labelling and deviance Labelling theory Howard Becker (Becker 2018)	Symbolic interactionism	Deviance as a result of social labelling	-Arthur is labelled "weird", "crazy", which leads him to internalize this deviant identity; -Society creates the "Joker" through marginalization and stigmatization.
Sociology of emotions and symbolic violence Pierre Bourdieu (Samuel 2013)	Habitus and symbolic capital	Habitus, cultural or symbolic capital; Symbolic violence	-Arthur does not possess the necessary capital to be socially recognized; -His whole identity crisis reflects a lack of symbolic validation; -Everyday militias function

			as forms of symbolic violence.
Representing madness Michel Foucault (2020)	Social control and normalization	Power and the discourse on madness	-The film illustrates how society decides who is “normal” and who is “dangerous”; -Lack of medical treatment is a form of systemic exclusion.
Popular culture and media – coding / decoding Stuart Hall (Shaw 2017)	Cultural studies and media theory	Encoding decoding / model	Joker can be read as: -The dominant reading: a strong social critique; -Oppositional reading: the glorification of violence; -Negotiated reading: portrayal of a victim transformed into an anarchic symbol. The media message of Joker is not fixed; it allows for multiple interpretations. -Audiences decode the character and narrative through their own social positions; -Highlights the power of media in shaping, challenging, or reinforcing dominant ideologies.

Qualitative content analysis

The movie *Joker* is an artistic representation laden with social, political and psychological meanings. Beyond its fictional narrative, the movie functions as a mirror of structural tensions in contemporary societies. Through a sociological analysis of the film's content, we can identify key themes such as social inequality, marginalization, the collapse of public services, the effects of ignoring mental health, and the role of the media in shaping collective perceptions.

This interpretation is based on a qualitative approach to narrative content, focusing on five recurring themes. Their interpretation is supported by classical and contemporary sociological theories, such as anomie theory of Émile Durkheim (Serpa and Ferreira 2018), social stigma of Erving Goffman (Schumacher, Corrigan, and Dejong 2003), alienation of Karl Marx (Musto 2010), the discourse of power and normalization of Michel Foucault (2020) and the transformation of

reality into a “spectacle” through the media of Jean Baudrillard (Kellner 2011).

This analysis has sought to identify evidence of the presence of the identified themes from theoretical bases; in addition to direct observation of the narrative thread of the movie, the script of the movie, available online (<https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/movies/joker-2019-transcript/>), was used, from which relevant passages were extracted. Each selected example is accompanied by a commentary from a sociological perspective.

1. *Theme social and economic inequality.* The theoretical description traces the clear division between the elite and the underprivileged masses and the lack of access to basic public services.

“It’s day 18 of the garbage strike, with 10,000 tons of garbage piling up every day” - symbolizing the collapse of public services and the impact on the entire urban population.

“Even the nicest sections of the city are looking like slums” - indicates the level of decay affecting the middle and upper classes.

“Renters in the metro area are certain to feel the pinch...” - suggests rising living costs directly affecting vulnerable residents.

“Thomas Wayne... I’m gonna lift them out of poverty...” - top-down elitist discourse is a paternalistic approach to poverty.

2. *Theme of alienation and marginalization.* This follows how Arthur is excluded from social networks, misunderstood, treated as an anomaly.

“The other guys... they think you're a freak...” - certifies Arthur’s exclusion from the professional space, stigmatized by peers.

“You don’t listen, do you?... All I have are negative thoughts...” - confirms the feeling of not being heard, reflects isolation and deep alienation.

“You were the only one that was ever nice to me” - identifies the only gesture of empathy in a generally hostile social context.

“You live down the hall... I really need you to leave...” - describes the moment that demystifies the fantasy of the connection with Sophie; from this moment on, the isolation becomes complete.

3. *Mental health theme* focuses on criticizing the way society ignores mental distress and dismantles support services.

“You’re on seven different medications.... Surely, they must be doing something.” - reflects a mechanistic approach to psychiatric treatment without real empathy.

“They’ve cut our funding.... Social Services is part of that.” - plays the institutional collapse directly affecting people in need.

“How am I supposed to get my medication now?” - exposes the dangerous dependence on the public system with no alternatives for vulnerable people.

“My mother was delusional.... She was a sick woman.” - suggests a transgenerational inheritance of undiagnosed psychological trauma.

4. *Media and public image* follows how the media exploits Arthur's vulnerability for entertainment.

"Check out this joker..." followed by a humorous playback of the clip - the ridicule of mental suffering is revealed.

"You just wanted to make fun of me..." - deconsecrates Arthur's awareness of media instrumentalization.

"You may have seen that clip of our next guest..." - reveals how the media turns a marginal individual into a public spectacle.

"They don't give a shit about people like me." - offers an inside reflection on the institutional ignoring of the excluded.

5. *Violence as a form of protest*. This theme follows how the Joker resorts to violence as a reaction to marginalization and accumulated suffering.

"I killed those guys because they were awful." - violence is justified as a reaction to a world perceived as profoundly unjust.

"You get what you fucking deserve!" - this is the moment of symbolic explosion; crisis turns into revolt.

"Have you seen what it's like out there, Murray?... Nobody's civil anymore." - portrays the decline of social cohesion and legitimizes extreme anger.

"Isn't it beautiful? [referring to Gotham burning]" - represents the moment when the Joker sees social chaos as a form of liberation and recognition.

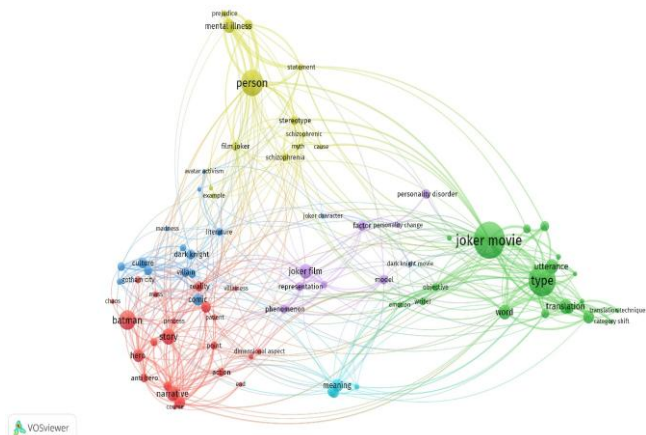
The thematic analysis of the movie *Joker* reveals the complexity of interactions between the individual and society in the context of a system marked by structural dysfunctions. Arthur Fleck becomes a metaphor for the marginalized, a product of social neglect, economic inequality and a media culture that exploits individual suffering for spectacular purposes. Through these themes, *Joker* can be understood as a sociological text in its own right, an exemplary case of the intersection between art, psychology and social reality. The movie provokes essential questions about social responsibility, empathy and the functioning of institutional structures. These themes not only reflect reality but amplify it, providing a platform for debate and critical reflection.

Bibliometric analysis

The map, generated using VOSviewer software, represents the co-occurrence networks of the terms extracted from the titles, abstracts and keywords of the 87 scientific articles selected for analysis (Figure 1). The size of the nodes signals the frequency of occurrence of terms, and the connecting lines indicate the thematic relationships (co-occurrences). The colours differentiate thematic clusters, i.e. groups of

terms that occur together frequently and reflect distinct fields of research.

Figure 1. Bibliometric map of co-occurrence of terms in the analysed articles (VOSviewer)



Green Cluster - Translation, language and discourse analysis

Central terms: “joker movie”, “type”, “translation”, “utterance”, “word”.

This cluster reflects the academic interest in linguistic analysis and language translation issues related to the *Joker*. Terms specific to translation (“category shift”, “translation technique”) and linguistics (“utterance”, “word”) appear, suggesting research that analyses: how the *Joker* was translated into different languages/cultures, the typology of lines or expressions used, and the cultural adaptation of the messages conveyed through language.

Fields involved: translation, applied linguistics, semiotics, cultural studies.

Yellow cluster - Psychology, mental health and stereotypes

Central terms: “person”, “mental illness”, “schizophrenia”, “stereotype”, “myth”.

This area revolves around representations of mental disorders in film. Relevant terms suggest: analysis of how the *Joker* cinematically represents mental illness (especially schizophrenia), the impact of these representations on stigmatization (“prejudice”, “stereotype”), and the relationship between mental illness and violence in the narrative.

Fields involved: psychology, psychiatry, sociology, media studies and film.

Red cluster - Narrative structure and archetypes

Central terms: “story”, “narrative”, “batman”, “hero”, “anti-hero”.

This cluster analyses the movie *Joker* from a narrative and mythological perspective: the opposition hero vs. anti-hero (*Batman - Joker*), the evolution of the main character and the moral and philosophical dimension of the story.

Fields involved: literature, narratology, philosophy, myth and archetype studies.

Blue cluster - Cultural and urban dimension

Central terms: “culture”, “comic”, “gotham city”, “villain”.

It highlights a line of research that positions *The Joker* in the context of pop culture and the fictional urban space of Gotham: the link to comics, fan culture and the cultural impact of the movie and the representation of the city as a symbol of social alienation.

Fields involved: cultural studies, imaginary urbanism, media studies, visual sociology.

Purple cluster - Narrative psychology and personality change

Central terms: “joker movie”, “personality disorder”, “model, factor”.

This area focuses on: psychological models applied to the Joker character, exploration of personality disorder and identity change, and the influence of environment and trauma on character development.

Fields involved: clinical psychology, psychoanalysis, film and psychology.

Cyan cluster - Meaning and phenomenology

Central terms: “meaning”, “phenomenon”, “representation”.

Suggests an interest in: the cultural and philosophical significance of the movie and how the Joker is interpreted as a social and artistic phenomenon.

Fields involved: philosophy, hermeneutics, aesthetics, semiotics.

Narrative analysis

The visualization reveals the complexity of the *Joker*'s academic approaches, positioned at the intersection of several research fields, such as:

Psychology and mental health: to understand how character reflects and influences perceptions of mental disorders.

Narratology and comparative literature: exploring narrative structure and modern mythologies.

Translation and linguistics: highlighting the interest in conveying the message in different cultural spaces.

Cultural and Media studies: addressing the symbolic influence of the Joker character in contemporary culture.

This map is an example of how a single cultural product, such as *Joker*, can become a hub of interdisciplinary content, offering multiple angles for research and reflection.

Translation and Applied Linguistics (Green Cluster)

The densest cluster is centred on the terms “joker movie”, “type”, “translation”, “utterance” and “word”, indicating a major concern for the linguistic dimension of film. Studies in this field investigate strategies of translation and cross-cultural adaptation of lines, expressions and registers of language, as well as the discursive typology used in the film. Translation techniques, the phenomenon of category shift, as well as the semantic and pragmatic implications of dialogues are frequently analysed.

Psychology, psychiatry and representations of mental illness (Yellow Cluster)

This cluster focuses on the term “person”, “mental illness”, “schizophrenia”, “stereotype” and “myth”, suggesting a line of research interested in how the movie *Joker* portrays mental disorders, especially schizophrenia. The authors examine the impact of these representations on the stigmatization of people with mental disorders, as well as the relationship between mental illness, violence and marginalization. It highlights a critical approach to the myths perpetuated by popular culture about mental health.

Narratology and the study of archetypes (Red Cluster)

Terms such as “story”, “narrative”, “batman”, “hero” and “anti-hero” compose a narrative cluster, reflecting an analysis of the movie from the perspective of story structure and evolution. The research focuses on the dynamic between the *Joker* and *Batman*, the narrative trajectory of the anti-hero, and the functions of modern archetypes in character construction. Themes of action, moral conflict and identity construction within the fictional universe are also explored.

Cultural and Media studies (Blue Cluster)

This cluster integrates terms such as “culture”, “comic”, “gotham city” and “villain”, suggesting an interdisciplinary approach to film in the context of popular culture. Gotham City is analysed as a symbolic space of social alienation and urban chaos, and the Joker is viewed as

a cultural phenomenon that transcends cinematic boundaries, with notable influence in public discourse, social activism and digital culture. The intersection between media studies, visual sociology and comics analysis is noted.

Character Psychology and identity shaping (Purple Cluster)

The terms “joker movie”, “personality disorder”, “model” and “factor” define a cluster oriented towards the psychological analysis of the main character. The studies explore the application of clinical models to the Joker’s behaviour and motivations, investigating elements such as personality disorder, identity change, trauma, and environmental factors that influence deviant behaviour.

Hermeneutics and phenomenology (Cyan cluster)

Terms such as “meaning”, “phenomenon” and “representation” indicate an interpretative and philosophical dimension. This cluster brings together research focusing on the meaning of film as a cultural object, modes of representation of reality and the aesthetic reception of film as a social phenomenon. Approaches include hermeneutical, semiotic and aesthetic perspectives.

The co-occurrence map highlights the deeply interdisciplinary nature of academic research on the *Joker*. It is analysed not only as a cinematic product, but as a cultural, psychological, narrative and linguistic phenomenon. The six identified clusters provide a broad picture of current scholarly concerns and emphasize the relevance of the Joker film to debates on identity, mental health, popular culture and intercultural communication.

Sociological perspective

If we look at this map from a sociological perspective, we can extract a number of relevant interpretations and research directions about the social reality reflected in the *Joker* and the way the movie is perceived as a form of cinematic realism.

The sociological analysis of the *Joker* based on the co-occurrence map of different terms used in scholarly articles suggests that the *Joker* has frequently been analysed through a sociological lens, particularly in relation to a number of themes.

Social marginalization and inequality: the connections between the terms “person”, “mental illness”, “society”, “reality”, “stereotype” and “prejudice” outline a vision of Joker as a victim of a dysfunctional social system. The film is often cited as a critique of social exclusion and society's treatment of the vulnerable (the mentally ill, the poor,

individuals without institutional support). The Joker becomes the symbol of the alienated individual, ignored by social institutions, and his story offers a critical commentary on the degradation of public services, economic inequality and extreme individualism in contemporary capitalist societies. The terms included in this area indicate a research direction focused on the stigmatization of people with mental illness. Inspired by Erving Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, we can affirm that the movie explores the effects of social stigma applied to the deviant individual, in this case, the protagonist Arthur Fleck.

Cinematic realism and the representation of the social: the terms "reality", "phenomenon", "representation", "meaning" (in the cyan cluster) indicate that researchers have also focused on the dimension of social realism in film. Although inspired by comics, the *Joker* is treated by the authors as a social realist social drama movie, not just as fiction. We can find themes associated with realism. Gotham City is seen as a real metropolis in decline, similar to New York in the 70s and 80s. Economic inequality, urban violence, the collapse of social institutions and indifference to suffering are all presented in a hyper-realistic manner. The movie is thus perceived as a mirror of social reality rather than pure fiction. This perception is supported by the sober visual style, the grey aesthetics and the absence of surreal or fantastical elements. Within the semantic cluster of cinematic realism, film is analysed not as escapist fiction, but as a symbolic construction of social reality. In the spirit of the theory of social reality proposed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), the movie *Joker* can be interpreted as a 'symbolic universe' that contributes to the social construction of the real, providing a recognizable framework for experiences of alienation and structural injustice. The restrained visual style, the decrepit urban image of Gotham and the oppressive atmosphere are reminiscent of neorealist aesthetics, in which violence, alienation and marginalization are presented as systemic rather than individual phenomena. The *Joker* thus distinguishes itself from other productions in the DC universe by its explicit rejection of the fantastic, choosing instead to anchor itself in a recognizable reality marked by the collapse of social institutions.

Stigmatization and social myths about mental illness: in the yellow cluster, the terms "myth", "schizophrenia", "stereotype" and "cause" suggest that the film is also analysed in relation to how society creates myths and stigma around mental illness. Some scholars criticize the

film for reinforcing the idea that people with mental illness are violent, dangerous or uncontrollable. Here a conflict arises between the perceived realism of the movie and the social responsibility of cinema: the movie appears realistic, but can reinforce harmful stereotypes while both reflecting and distorting reality.

Protest, activism and collective identity: terms such as “avatar activism” or “mass” in the blue cluster indicate another sociological dimension, the *Joker* as a symbol of collective revolt movements. In some analyses, the Joker character is interpreted as a “radical populist” figure (someone who channels the frustrations of the masses against the elites). The film reflects contemporary social and political tensions - polarization, the collapse of social solidarity, anarchist movements - in a symbolic but easily recognizable form for today's audiences. Another central element in the cluster of terms is the social dynamics of protest and revolt. Terms such as “mass”, “avatar activism” and “chaos” suggest an interpretation of the Joker character as a symbol of collective violence and the rift between the masses and the elite. In line with the anomie theory formulated by Émile Durkheim (1897) and further developed by Robert Merton (1938), the movie can be interpreted as an allegory of the breakdown of social norms, where the lack of coherence of shared values generates chaos and extreme deviance. Thus, the Joker becomes a symbol of the individual who responds to marginalization through an extreme form of existential protest, channelling the frustrations of the excluded masses. The emergence of pro-Joker movements in the movie reflects the idea of collective identification with deviance, a phenomenon that can be sociologically explained by social contagion theory by Le Bon (1895) or social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979).

Moral ambiguity and social responsibility: the movie *Joker* is perceived by scholars not only as entertainment, but as a cinematic work of profound sociological relevance. It is cited in the literature as an example of cinematic social realism that reflects themes of alienation, the collapse of social services, the stigmatization of mental illness, inequality and mass revolt. It also raises ethical questions about the responsibility of media representations and their effects on social perceptions. Although the film is perceived as realistic, some authors emphasize the risk of spreading ambiguous messages, particularly in terms of the association between mental illness and extreme violence. This ambiguity has generated debates on the ethical responsibility of cinema in the construction of social images. From a

sociological perspective, this can be interpreted as a conflict between the educational and the spectacular function of visual art: The *Joker* proposes a compelling but controversial image of social reality.

In cultural and sociological studies, cinema is an essential medium for understanding how social reality is perceived, interpreted and symbolically reconfigured. The film *Joker*, directed by Todd Phillips, is an emblematic example of cinematic social realism, offering a dense narrative about marginalization, deviance and the collapse of social cohesion.

Conclusion

Sociological conclusions: The film *Joker* (2019) is an example of cinematic realism with profound sociological valences, highlighting the effects of social marginalization, the collapse of public services and the stigmatization of mental health. The figure of Arthur Fleck is constructed as a social product of exclusion, institutional dysfunction and lack of symbolic capital. The character becomes a metaphor for the alienated individual unrecognized by society.

The key themes identified in the movie are alienation, violence, mental illness, structural inequality and the media as a tool of humiliation. The *Joker* is not just a story about individual deviance, but about the social production of deviance in a dehumanizing urban context in which the individual is reduced to the function of a symptom of systemic failures. The co-appearance map validates this interpretation, highlighting the concentration of terms around concepts central to the sociology of deviance, exclusion and collective identity.

Methodological conclusions: The application of a mixed design (sociological analysis and bibliometric analysis) proved to be effective in exploring not only the narrative content of the movie, but also how it has been reflected and debated in the international scholarly literature. The bibliometric analysis, based on 87 articles from the Scopus database and processed with VOSviewer, provided a clear map of the thematic structure of *Joker* research, while validating the importance of the sociologically identified themes.

The complementarity between the qualitative (thematic content, narrative) and quantitative (co-occurrence of terms, clustering) approaches led to a multifaceted and contextualized understanding of the topic.

Thematic conclusions from bibliometric analysis: The bibliometric map revealed six major thematic clusters: film translation and

discourse - concern for the cultural adaptation of the language of film; psychology and stereotypes of mental illness - focus on schizophrenia, stigma and social myths; narrative structure and anti-hero - archetypes analysis (*Joker* vs. *Batman*); the urban dimension and pop culture - Gotham as a symbol of social alienation; psychological character modelling - personality disorders and trauma; phenomenology and representation - *Joker* as a cultural phenomenon with multiple levels of interpretation.

It confirms that the *Joker* is a point of interdisciplinary convergence, being analysed in the context of psychology, sociology, philosophy, translation and media culture.

Academic and cultural implications: The *Joker* becomes a critical platform for social debate, provoking reflections on the responsibility of social systems, moral ambiguity and the legitimacy of violence as a reaction to exclusion. The research around the film contributes to strengthening a framework of analysis in which cinema is treated not only as entertainment, but as a sociological artifact, mirroring the realities and conflicts of the contemporary era. It highlights the need for ethical responsibility in the representation of mental health in the media, given the risks of perpetuating dangerous stereotypes. The interdisciplinary analysis of the film demonstrates the potential of cinema to function as a tool for civic education, social awareness and theoretical reflection, especially in educational or activist contexts.

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