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Seminar: Beyond the White, Heterosexual, Able-Bodied, Cis Male Gaze

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Charli XCX's *Boys* (2017) – An Attempt on Creating a Female Gaze?

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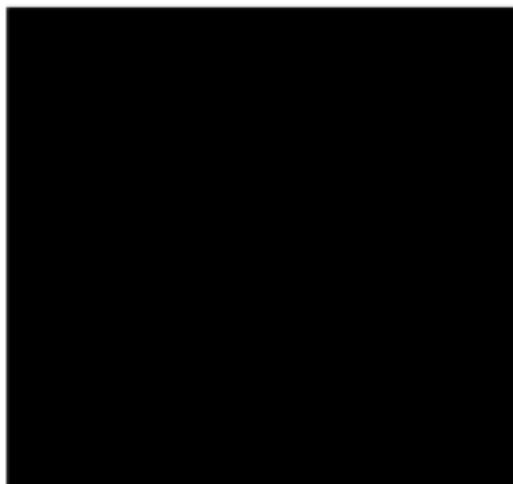


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1. Introduction

Mainstream American Hollywood movies, which are viewed worldwide, are overwhelmingly produced by White men, reaching a total of 95 percent amongst all popular productions (McDougall Jones 2020: n.pag.). Consequently, it is inevitable that their experiences and perspectives are mirrored in the ways movies are produced. Based on these facts, it is undeniable that White men's outlooks influence and normalize their perspective, ultimately establishing their views as representing reality. Within this male view, women are the ones who are looked at, often lacking any kind of character which is compensated through their normative attractiveness. In movies, the objectification of women is perceivable through close-ups on their body parts, attributes which are 'easy on the eyes', and their short speaking time, to name a few examples (McDougall Jones 2020: n.pag.). Tackling these issues by arguing that 'sex sells' is relativizing the magnitude of these entrenched perspectives, by extension allowing women to be reduced to their looks.

Shifting away from mainstream movies, similar observations can be made in the music industry through the production of music videos. Not uncommonly, women are portrayed as the object of a man's desire, appearing in scanty clothing which only showcases women's bodies. The singer Charli XCX and her musical piece *Boys* (2017) appear to break with this tradition. Instead of women, multiple men are featured in the video for her song. Famous male music artists such as Charlie Puth, Joe Jonas, and will.i.am participate in the music video while Charli XCX is serenading her listeners that her mind is completely consumed by one thought – boys (cf. "Boys [Official Video]" 2017).

The work at hand aims to perform a visual analysis of Charli XCX's music video *Boys*. The research question will revolve around to which extent her work can be viewed as an attempt to create an alternative, female gaze. In order to perform an insightful analysis, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) will be worked up. In addition, multiple other works will be considered to establish an understanding of what could construct a female gaze. All findings will be summarized in a conclusory part.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory

In her influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1999), first published in 1975, Mulvey coins the term 'male gaze' and establishes an important groundwork for feminist film theory. Mulvey argues that "the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form" (1999: 833), emphasizing how dominant, male perspectives are mirrored in the ways movies¹ are produced. Using Freud's psychoanalytic theories, she draws attention to the fact that within patriarchal societies humans follow a 'phallogocentric order', ultimately accepting male dominance as the current status (1999: 834). Based on these real-life phenomena, Mulvey outlines the steps and manners in which the male gaze enables the sexual objectification of women in films (cf. 1999).

Before elaborating on these points, Mulvey examines how the viewer gains pleasure by looking. Based on Freud's notion of 'scopophilia', which could be briefly outlined as gaining sexual pleasure and power by looking and thus the objectification of others, Mulvey observes how typical cinema conventions recreate these same conditions (1999: 835f.). She examines that cinema allows the viewer to experience separation from themselves and the film, ultimately fueling and "playing on their voyeuristic phantasy" (Mulvey 1999: 836). In addition, the design of the screening rooms in cinemas reinforces the viewer's role as a voyeur. Mulvey explicitly mentions the contrast in lighting between the dark seats and the light cinema screen, allowing the viewer to feel anonymous and separated from the rest of the audience. Therefore, visual pleasure is derived by the fact that cinematic conditions simulate the sensation that the spectator is deigned a look into the private (1999: 835f.). According to Mulvey, an additional way in which narrative cinema constructs visual pleasure is through "developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect" (1999: 836). This type of visual pleasure is linked to the recognition of the 'human form' on screen which Mulvey links this to Lacan's concept of the 'mirror phase'. The mirror phase is a stage in early child development in which the recognition of the self in

¹ In the essay, Mulvey establishes that she does not take female led movies into further consideration (1999: 838). Her focus lies on male lead movies, particularly by looking into the productions of Hitchcock and Sternberg.

a mirror is crucial for the development of the ego (1999: 836). Limited by their motoric abilities, Mulvey explains how a child views their misrecognized image as a more perfect one. Similarly, it is elaborated how cinema allows for the “temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego” (Mulvey 1999: 836). Overall, the pleasure associated with scopophilia in general derives from the sexual objectification of the images on screen, while narcissistic scopophilia works on the spectator’s idealistic identification with the presented image (1999: 836f.). Understanding the ways in which visual pleasure is derived from in narrative cinema is a crucial aspect for the workings of the male gaze.

One of Mulvey’s most intriguing arguments in her essay is that sexual disbalance between females and males is coded into narrative cinema, in which the female is assigned a passive role while the opposite applies for the male (1999: 837). This passive female role is not only observable based on the objectification of their looks, but also on the lack of narration and development of female characters in films. In this sense, female roles solely serve as an object for the desire of a man. Simultaneously, Mulvey argues that the depiction of the attractive female represents a threat for the male character and the development of the film, as women “freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (1999: 837). The female character is not only the object of erotic desire for the male character, but also one for the spectators. The sexual objectification of women in movies is for example observable through close-ups on specific body parts, often not showing the actress in her entirety (1999: 837).

In contrast to females in films, male figures have different functions. Set in the narrative, the male character is attributed an active role, one which is meant for the progression of the story (1999: 838). Mulvey describes that “the man controls the film phantasy [sic!] and also emerges as the representative of power [...] as the bearer of the look of the spectator” (1999: 838). With this description it is highlighted that men do not have to be sexually objectified in order to be ‘looked at’. Instead, their power in movies is mirrored by playing a crucial part in the development of the plot, often observable through multiple camera and filming settings. Ultimately, all these factors lead to the identification of the spectator with the male lead, resulting in viewing the film through a heterosexual and male perspective. This stark contrast between the roles of males and females in films reinforces the idea that women function as sexualized objects, their main

purpose being to be looked at. Advanced cinematic functions and editing partially contribute to establish and strengthen these power dynamics (1999: 838). Therefore, the male character “is free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action” (Mulvey 1999: 839).

Mulvey’s essay engages with the discussed topic through a highly psychoanalytic outlook. In essence, it revolves around how narrative cinema enables to create pleasure for the viewer, overwhelmingly by putting the male lead as a figure for identification and progression of the film while the female serves “as the perfect to-be-looked-at image” (Mulvey 1999: 842). Naomi McDougall Jones’ article “Returning Our Heads Inside the Fight to Dismantle the (White) Gods of Hollywood” (2020) explains in a comprehensible manner how to observe the male gaze in films. For this purpose, she outlines four observations, heavily based on the findings of the filmmaker Nina Menkes. Her first point revolves around the fact that males are the ones who are looking, while the female character is looked at (McDougall Jones 2020: n.pag.). Therefore, the male perspective is taken on, often to observe the female. McDougall Jones highlights how even though in these shots women are shown, they are for example muted although they are speaking, reducing the actress solely to her looks. As a second argument, it is discussed how actresses’ bodies are segmented, displaying their body parts instead of their faces. McDougall Jones argues how these shots are particularly dehumanizing, since facial expressions are indicators of emotions and identity. Therefore, the sexual objectification of women is clearly observable as they are never shown in their entirety. McDougall Jones continues her arguments by looking into cinematic features such as lighting. She remarks how for female characters lighting is utilized from the front, allowing their faces to appear soft and without imperfections. In addition, shots such as close-ups of females are predominantly in front of two-dimensional surfaces, disconnecting them from the narrative. Lighting, when males are on screen, is skillfully employed to portray them as human as possible, focusing to highlight their facial features and emotions. Furthermore, the male character moves in three-dimensional, real-life environments. Lastly, McDougall Jones describes how the workings of the male gaze are recognizable through the use of female nude scenes. According to her, this type of usage is an example of sexual objectification, given that the nude scene does not contribute to the progression of the story line (2020: n.pag.). In addition to the ways the male gaze is operating in films,

McDougall Jones makes mention of how female producers are also partaking in the reproduction of the male gaze in their movies. She argues that this is to be expected since male producers are predominantly influencing the film-making industry, rendering their views and techniques as a standard practice (2020: n.pag.).

2.2 Alternative Lenses – The Creation of a Female Gaze

Having discussed what constructs the male gaze and how it operates in films, it is arguably more important than ever to think of alternative gazes, ones which deviate from that of a solely heterosexual and male outlook. Going beyond the male gaze could imply to think of a queer or a female lens, amongst other perspectives. The following part will revolve around an attempt on constructing a female gaze.

Malikka Khanna's article "Gazed and Confused How Do We Define the "Female Gaze" in Film?" (2019) gives insight on how to approach the construction of a female gaze and the therewith connected problems. Khanna brings in the argument that if the male gaze revolves around building the male lead as the subject of the plot and the female character as the sexualized, to be looked at object, the female gaze could initially be understood as the reversal of this mechanism (2019: n.pag.). However, what is crucial for the construction of any oppositional gaze is to understand that the male gaze is not solely the creation of narrative cinema, but rather a reflection of societal conditions. Consequently, establishing a feminist perspective by the sexual objectification of men in films and comparable media is not sufficient as it does not affect established power dynamics (2019: n.pag.). Closely related to this argument, Khanna discusses how one cannot speak about the existence of a single female gaze. She exemplifies this point by stating that experiences of females differ – a female gaze constructed by White and heterosexual women would arguably deviate from that of transsexual women (2019: n.pag.). Therefore, the inclusion of diverse and marginalized people in front of and behind the camera is an important step for the construction of an oppositional female gaze (2019: n.pag.). An interesting perspective Khanna represents is that in order to fully comprehend the construction of any female gaze, one must go beyond factors such as the sexual objectification of women in films. Her point is that the objectification of females in films

is not solely based on reducing them to their looks, but rather disconnecting their figure from any kind of “history, agency, or inner world” (Khanna 2019: n.pag.), all important aspects for the construction of a character. Knowingly omitting these features with the support of cinematic settings results in what Khanna refers to as an ‘objectifying vision’. Based on this observation, an attempt to describe what the female gaze stands for could be outlined as an attempt to ‘humanize’ objectified characters, meaning to equip them with their own stories, emotional life, and purpose (2019: n.pag.). Similarly, the cinematographer Ashley Connor compares how “[t]he ‘male’ gaze seeks to devour and control” while “the ‘female’ gaze is more a frame of mind, where approach to subject and material is more emotional and respectful” (Telfer 2018: n.pag.). Joey Soloway and their notion of ‘feeling seeing’ is also a fitting description for the construction of a female gaze as it emphasizes to create emotions through characters instead of them solely serving for the purpose of being looked at (“The Female Gaze” 2016: n.pag.).² As described by Nashrah Haque, this would imply “to subvert the patriarchy’s ability to use women as props in the service of the male narrative” (2021: n.pag.), ultimately by reconfiguring women from the characteristics and cinematic techniques they are currently equipped with.

3. Analysis of Charli XCX’s Boys

In an interview with the magazine *Billboard*, Charli XCX mentions that one of the reasons behind the production of her music video to the song *Boys* (2017) was “to kind of flip the male gaze on its head” (“How Charli XCX Created ‘Boys’” 2017: 2:08 – 2:11). For this purpose, she directed her music video by featuring multiple male artists, predominantly from the music industry (cf. “Boys” 2017). As Charli XCX stated that her music video functions to flip the male gaze, a visual analysis of the music video will investigate the question if her work could be seen as an attempt on creating a female gaze, or ultimately, a product of the female gaze. A close visual analysis of the musical piece *Boys* reveals in

² In the original source, Soloway is still referred to as ‘Jill’. Out of respect for the creator, their chosen name and pronouns have been utilized.

which ways the artist is simultaneously successful and unsuccessful in the creation of an alternative female gaze.

As described by Charli XCX herself, her aim with the production of the music video was to reverse the male gaze. A first look into the video reveals that the viewer can take her statement literally. The male celebrities in front of the camera can be observed performing and doing things which typically females do when they are sexually objectified in films or music videos (cf. "Boys" 2017). This can be observed in multiple scenes in the music video, whether that be washing a car (2017: 0:07), seductively looking into the camera (2017: 1:02) or partial nudity while operating a machine (2017: 0:13). In this sense, the artist is knowingly positioning the male participants as sexualized and to-be-looked-at objects. Therefore, when considering that Charli XCX aims to reverse the male gaze, this method and approach is successful. However, when asking the question if the same methods could be considered as establishing a female gaze, the same approach cannot be evaluated as positively. Khanna's observation is that reversing the male gaze to objectify men does not have the same consequences as the male gaze objectifying women does. This can be confirmed as socially constructed power dynamics remain untouched. Having discussed that a female gaze aims to 'humanize' the usually objectified person in front of the camera, the actions and things the male celebrities do in the discussed scene do not mediate their inner emotional life or evoke deep emotions in the viewer. However, Charli XCX's vision to put men into a position which is stereotypically occupied by women raises the viewer's awareness to recognize how deeply sexualized certain performances for the camera are.

Beside the typical, sexualized things the men are doing in the video, the camera work additionally reinforces their objectification. One of the ways in which the camera operates is through close-up scenes on the men's body parts. For a split-second, the frame only consists of a tattooed, naked male torso (2017: 0:09). In a later scene, one can detect how the camera first captures the entire face of a man and then proceeds to only film the eyes followed by the lips (2017: 1:02 – 1:03). Although Charli XCX's music video does not overly engage in shooting close-ups thus potentially overusing this type of setting, the segmentation of the male body cannot be denied. Similarly to females in music videos and films, one can detect that certain body parts are highlighted through the camera angle.

Consequently, the person performing for the camera is not shown in their entirety. Based on the fact that in these split-second scenes the body is segmented, an important body part is missing in the frame. As the face is knowingly left out, the viewer does not experience any kind of emotion and expression from the shown person. In the second discussed excerpt of the video, showing the head first in order to zoom into specific parts of the face, gives the impression that the initial recording of the face is a means to an end. It appears as if the head has been only filmed first in order to ensure a smoother shot and transition in order to avoid the blatant display of the sensual facial parts. Overall, it is apparent that the artist Charli XCX is aware that close-ups are typical cinematic features which serve the sexual objectification of females. Reversing this perspective and applying it to males draws attention to the workings of the male gaze. However, the reversal of the male gaze is not a sufficient tool for the construction of a female gaze.

A close visual analysis of Charli XCX's music video reveals additional cinematic settings typically deployed within the male gaze. A strongly apparent feature is the recording of the male participants against monochromatic backgrounds. In some of the scenes, the background is held in neutral colors (cf. 2017: 0:21, 0:31, 2:17). In other scenes, the predominant background color is in pink tones (cf. 2017: 0:02, 0:39, 0:42). Although the utilized colors might be a stylistic choice and an aesthetic decision, the use of pink is striking as it is stereotypically connoted as an 'unmanly' and 'feminine' color. In the observed scenes, the male celebrities are in front of a two-dimensional space, precisely a monochromatic background. Within these short examples, they are not greatly moving around in the space. In fact, many of the males in the video are either performing one simple type of directed action or are just 'exhibited' for the camera. Therefore, one could consider them as 'props', just as females in music videos and films tend to be. Moreover, the simple background design of the analyzed scenes does not allow to make further indications regarding a story line or what is supposed to be mediated by the scenes, besides the sexualized images of men. The simplicity in the set design could be seen as the sexualization going beyond the mere depiction of the males, by depriving them from any details which could indicate a personal story or their emotions besides the actions they are instructed to perform. Taking all these observations into consideration, it becomes repeatedly apparent that Charli XCX is utilizing typical features of the male gaze and applying them to the men in front of the camera. Although this attempt could be

seen as a striking one to highlight how sexually laden and dehumanizing this gaze is, it is not a sufficient approach for the construction of a female gaze. This approach is particularly inadequate knowing those attempts to construct a female gaze aim to humanize rather than objectify, trying to overcome methods and techniques which allow the sexual objectification of humans in films and music videos.

In addition to the discussed cinematic features which the artist Charli XCX uses in order to reverse the male gaze and deploy it on males, one can discern another important and typical characteristic of the male gaze. In many of the scenes, the viewer can experience that some of the male celebrities are partially nude. Early in the video, it is observable how one of the male participants is not wearing a top while operating a machine and then seductively looking into the camera (2017: 0:13 – 0:16). In another, shorter clip, another topless man dancing around while carrying a guitar is seen (2017: 1:10). Shortly after this clip, another male celebrity is featured without a shirt playing with puppies (2017: 1:16 – 1:18). As a last example, a tattooed man is posing on a blow-up swimming pool toy in a pool of plastic balls wearing only bathing trunks (2017: 1:48). The fast-paced clips catch the viewer's eye because of the men's nudity. Besides the last-mentioned scene, there is no plausible reason why the featured men in the music video are not wearing more clothing. In many of the discussed scenes, there is no actual need for partial nudity in order to fulfill the tasks and perform the directed actions. Based on these observations, it is obvious that the artist wants to draw attention to the workings of the male gaze. As discussed in the theoretical part of this work, the non-essential exhibition of partially or fully nude females is a striking indicator of the male gaze. Similarly to when women appear nude in films or music videos, the nudity of the male celebrities does not contribute to the development of a story or the progression of a plot. In this aspect, it is again very similar to the ways female characters are depicted in films and music videos. It could be argued that, as the nudity of females in media is supposed to please the male audience, the artist aims to please the female spectatorship by presenting the male celebrities in a partially nude way. This approach could be encapsulated as an effort to accentuate the manner of functioning of the male gaze. Based on these findings, the same approach cannot be titled as satisfactory for the construction and workings of the female gaze. Nudity itself is not explicitly a 'bad thing'. The construction of the female gaze does not strive to prohibit nude scenes. However, it does

aspire to utilize nudity in a way which is relevant for the plot, the progression of the story, or the portrayal of emotions. As all these enumerated aspects are not established when exhibiting the men, Charli XCX's intellectual approach to her music video cannot be categorized as a work exemplary for the female gaze.

The thus far discussed scenes in Charli XCX's music video *Boys* have been primarily examples which demonstrate the artist's awareness of the male gaze and how it operates in films and music videos. Thus, as stated by herself, one of the reasons for the creation of the analyzed music video is to reverse the male gaze and apply it to men. Although Charli XCX clearly states her personal aim, her approach in reversing the male gaze could result in ways which unconsciously construct a female gaze. This point is particularly observable when closely analyzing the male cast of the music video. As a first point, it is discernable that the featured men in front of the camera are diverse. Although the majority of the men in the video are White, one can detect that the video also features Black men (cf. 2017: 0:11, 0: 24, 0:31, 0: 35, 0: 44 – 0: 46) and Asian men (cf. 2017: 0: 53, 1: 49). Featuring these ethnically diverse men is an important deviation from the typical workings of the male gaze. In many movies and music videos, the to be looked at and sexually objectified women are White. Considering this fact, it is obvious that this type of representation suggests that White standards of beauty are socially more desirable than other features from different ethnicities. Therefore, Charli XCX's approach to cast and feature men who are ethnically diverse is an important step for a more inclusive representation. By going beyond the depiction of White men, the singer and director does not only criticize flawed societal standards of beauty, but also takes a stand about the importance of inclusion and representation. Doing so, one can reason that this approach could be seen as a sufficient one when discussing the construction of a possible female gaze.

Beside depicting ethnically diverse men in her music video, Charli XCX uses the theme of diversity also in regard to different aspects. One of these aspects of diversity can be observed when considering the looks of the male celebrity cast. Despite the cinematic depiction of men who most likely would be described as normatively attractive (cf. 2017: 0:00 – 0:03, 0:09, 0:014, 1:32), the artist chooses to work with males who arguably would not be described likewise. As a starting point, not all the male participants have bodies

which would necessarily qualify as socially desirable, best analyzable in the scenes in which partial nudity is utilized. The spectator can witness how a heavier man is standing in a small blow-up pool while holding two bottles (2017: 0:05). Similarly, a different male is dancing around with a guitar while being topless and not having an athletic and stereotypically attractive upper body (2017: 1:10). Using her platform and reach to depict men who are not corresponding to societal beauty standards is a vital step in order to achieve diversity and inclusion. Proceeding in such a manner, this aspect of Charli XCX's music video cannot be described as reversing the male gaze. In comparison, the showcasing of different body types deviating from a societal standard could be ascribed as a characteristic more assignable to the construction of a possible female gaze. While the male gaze relies on exhibiting perfect body types for them to be sexually objectified, the artist's attempt showcases how her approach aims to be more diverse, inclusive, and ultimately, humanizing. In this sense, the depiction in Charli XCX's music video *Boys* is an image which represents a more realistic perspective of the world. The conscious decision to make use of one's platform in order to highlight that different body types besides a societal standard exist is an important approximation for the construction of the female gaze.

Sticking to the argument of diversity and societal standards of beauty, one can discern that Charli XCX's work includes several men who are diverse in regard to their looks. The theme of diversity is not only observable regarding ethnicity and body types, but also other aspects of the men's physical appearances. Briefly outlined, these findings could be summarized as further bodily features which deviate from normative beauty standards. As a first example, the spectator can witness that a few of the male celebrities are heavily tattooed (cf. 2017: 0:12, 0:45, 1:20, 1:34, 1:49). In addition, another man is featured who has albinism (2017: 1:08). Based on these observations, one can argue that the artist's music video serves as a space in which the representation of diverse men plays a crucial role. In this regard, it does not matter if the men's diversity arises from personal choices such as tattoos or conditions which they do not have control over. Despite these differences, the parallelism in both cases arises from the fact that atypical bodily features are underrepresented in media. Consciously deploying men which deviate from societal standards of beauty suggests to be aware that beauty is a highly subjective perception. In this sense, Charli XCX's music video functions to emphasize that particularly Western

beauty standards do not define beauty. Considering the artist's effort to emphasize diversity in media, her procedure could be defined as an attempt to construct a gaze from a female outlook.

The last discussed examples have demonstrated how Charli XCX's approach to feature a diverse male cast could be outlined as an approach to the construction of a possible female gaze. A close visual analysis of the dealt with music video reveals an additional way which could be identified as an attempt to build a female gaze. Although the artist's work deploys a number of scenes which have been addressed as a method to reverse the male gaze by turning men into the sexualized objects in front of the camera, other scenes do not rely on the sexual objectification of men. Instead, a multitude of the filmed scenes could be described as conveying a personal, emotional, and intimate image of the men. In one of the scenes, a man is destroying a guitar (2017: 1:35). A different scene shows a man who is playing with a soccer ball (2017: 0:38). One of the scenes features a man holding a baby (2017: 1:20). Lastly, another male participant is shown riding a bike and doing tricks (2017: 0:23). Looking into these examples, it appears as if the viewer is allowed to catch a glimpse into the personalities of the men. Despite the observation that Charli XCX's *Boys* is predominantly shaped by men conducting sexually laden actions which typically females are obliged to do in films and music videos, some of the actions allow to draw conclusions which cannot be ascribed to the same method. The consulted examples go beyond the sexual objectification of men. This is best done by enabling them to perform actions which could be ascribed as conveying a personal story. The viewer can witness the male celebrities' characters as they are able to express their personalities. Although they are still being filmed in front of a background which deprives them to be allocated in regard to a setting, story, and space, the men are still free to act for the camera. To conclude, one can claim that deviating from reversing the male gaze and applying it to the featured male celebrities results in ways and methods which could be described as a convergence towards the creation of a possible female gaze.

Analyzing aspects in regard to the male celebrity cast of the music video *Boys* has demonstrated that besides the reversal of the male gaze, different sufficient approaches can be found which can be viewed as means and methods for the creation of how a possible female gaze might look like and what it could consist of. Albeit an analysis of

the male participants has resulted in productive approaches for the making of a female gaze, there are other aspects which must be carefully considered. Particularly, some problematic points arise because of the male cast's celebrity status. Shortly after the release of the music video in 2017, the Internet has been fludded with articles which listed all the participants and their identities (cf. Bate 2017, Tse 2017, Kile 2017). In her article "We Need to Talk About Charli XCX's Very Important "Boys" Video" (2017) Michelle Kim brings up multiple issues connected to the males' celebrity status. First and foremost, she discusses how the featured males are not anonymous and thus cannot be treated like 'props', the way females are usually treated in music videos (Kim 2017: n.pag.). Kim refers to an important point of discussion with her observation. The men in the analyzed video are all celebrities and most likely, not an unknown face for the viewership. Since they are prominent persons, one cannot compare their position to females whom the audience is unfamiliar with. Therefore, it could be argued that the males' fame protects them from being treated how women are. Moreover, Kim argues that Charli XCX's video serves to expose "many different dream-dude templates besides the ones pop culture tends to show" (Kim 2017: n.pag.), especially in order to fuel the female teenage fandom audience. Such being the case, the video functions as a space in which the appearance of the male celebrities is celebrated and idolized. It could be assumed that providing the audience with many different types tries to please the preferences of everyone, particularly an adolescent female audience. Consequently, solely focusing on the male cast could lead to the important messages the artist aims to convey with her work getting lost or not being prioritized by the audience. Accordingly, one can conclude that an analysis regarding the diversity of the male celebrity cast could be viewed as sufficiently creating an alternative, female gaze while acknowledging that problematic points of view could arise because of the males' celebrity status.

4. Conclusion

The work at hand has dealt with the research question to which extent Charli XCX's music video *Boys* could be viewed as an attempt to create an alternative, female gaze. For this purpose, a close visual analysis of the discussed music video has been performed. In order to give an insightful analysis, multiple theoretical frameworks have been considered, most importantly Mulvey's male gaze theory. Having established what makes up the male gaze, it has been discussed how the creation of a possible alternative, female gaze could look like. For this undertaking, various contemporary notions about the construction of the female gaze have been considered. Proceeding in this manner has demonstrated that there is not a set of established characteristics for the counterpart of the male gaze. However, it has been concluded that a female gaze does not aim to reverse the male gaze, but rather attempts to equip females in films and music videos with characteristics, stories, and emotions they are typically deprived of. Taking Charli XCX's music video as the object of a visual analysis has resulted in ambivalent findings, which plead for and against the creation of an alternative, female gaze.

As stated by the artist herself, many of the scenes from the music video are reminiscent of what could be described as reversing the male gaze and applying it to males. A multitude of scenes have been discussed, which demonstrate the workings of the male gaze in films and music videos and how the artist utilizes them for the featured male celebrity cast. An omnipresent example for this purpose is for instance that the male participants are seen doing sexually laden actions which typically females perform in music videos and films, such as washing a car or seductively looking into the camera. The artist uses further typical aspects of the male gaze and applies them to the males. One of them is for example by deploying partial nudity, although the directed actions do not require it. Closely related to this observation, it is additionally discernable how the artist segments the males' body parts, for example by making use of cinematic settings such as close-ups. Other cinematic settings and the set design of the music video such as monochromatic backgrounds enable the artist to detach the cast from aspects such as conveying a story or emotions. To summarize, Charli XCX deploys multiple characteristic features of the male gaze in order to sexually objectify men. Overall, all these procedures to reverse the male gaze cannot be viewed as a sufficient approach for

the construction of a female gaze. In this sense, they rather function to emphasize the typical sexual objectification of women in films and music videos.

Despite Charli XCX's frequent utilization of the typical male gaze characteristics, which allow for the sexual objectification of the men in the video, there are attempts which could be argued as successful when discussing the creation of a female gaze. These attempts are particularly observable in regard to the male celebrity cast. When considering the male celebrities closely, one can observe that the artist strives to feature diverse men. Diversity is a reoccurring theme in the production of the music video, as Charli XCX exhibits men who are ethnically diverse and have bodily features and characteristics which deviate from normative beauty standards. The artist's efforts to use her platform and reach to represent a more inclusive and humanizing image of the participants could be characterized as an efficient method to create a female gaze, as it aims to go beyond the Western mass representations of pop culture. Simultaneously, problematic points of discussion arise because of the male celebrities' fame. One could argue that their celebrity status protects them from being anonymous, sexualized 'props' while typically the featured females remain unfamiliar for the audience. Similarly, as the men are famous, it could be argued that this aspect fuels the idolization and celebration of them, particularly by the targeted teenage female audience. Solely focusing on the male cast could lead to crucial messages such as the sexual objectification of women being neglected by the audience. Therefore, these approaches adequate for a successful creation of an alternative, female gaze must be carefully considered and possible arising problems must be acknowledged.

Closely analyzing and evaluating Charli XCX's music video *Boys* has illustrated the difficulties when discussing the creation of a cinematic gaze from a female perspective. While some attempts can be accredited as the workings of a female gaze and how it could be constructed, other methods cannot be considered as successfully. Based on these observations, there is no clear-cut affirmative answer if the artist's work could be seen as an attempt to create a female gaze or ultimately, as a product of the female gaze.

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