ABSTARCT

The Meaning of Stigma and Discrimination Toward a Transwoman Character in the Series Squid Game Season 2 (A Reception Analysis of the Character Hyun-Ju by Transwomen Viewers in Urban Areas)

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This study aims to explain how transgender women viewers in urban areas interpret the stigma and discrimination experienced by the character Hyun-Ju in Squid Game Season 2. This issue is critical, as the representation of transgender women in media remains limited and often fails to reflect their lived realities. Utilizing a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm, this research employs Stuart Hall's reception analysis with a decoding model. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with five transgender women who had watched Squid Game Season 2. The informants in this study were relatively homogeneous, sharing similarities in education, residence, employment, and communal living, which shaped how they interpreted the stigma presented in the series. Findings reveal that four informants positioned themselves in the negotiated reading category, perceiving Hyun-Ju's portrayal as not merely stigma but as discrimination similar to what they experience, including difficulties accessing public restrooms, social exclusion, and rejection. One informant adopted a dominant hegemonic reading, recognizing both stigma and discrimination in Hyun-Ju's portrayal but viewing them as less severe compared to personal lived experiences due to older age and broader life challenges. This study highlights the importance of fair and authentic representation of transgender women in media, emphasizing not only narrative inclusion but also the need to feature transgender actresses to foster dialogue, reduce stigma, and build public empathy toward transgender lives.