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## Strategic pleasure: Gendered anger as collective emotion in WANTED

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## Strategic pleasure: Gendered anger as collective emotion in ‘Wanted’

E. Deidre Pribram

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**Keywords:** collective emotions, Emotions, gendered anger, imagined communities, socioemotionality, television serials

Much current television analysis focuses on the impending demise of the medium,[1] in which audiences are conjectured to splinter into ever more fragmented, minute bundles of viewers, in the aftermath of a proliferating multi-channel environment and as we move further into the digital era with its ever-enhanced viewing options. However, one of the advantages of digitalisation, in the current environment that forces program providers to compete for proportionately harder-to-come-by content to offer consumers, is the increasing availability of international series. Audiences are no longer necessarily – albeit, in the US still dominantly – confined to national fare, but can seek out programming that originates beyond once largely restricted borders. A pressing issue, then, is how to account for characters and narratives that global viewers engage with and come to care about despite differences of geography and other sociocultural factors.

Jens Eder points out that fictional beings can be depicted in terms of their embodiment, their psyches, and/or their sociality[2] and, of course, emotions exist as a function of all three of these characterological domains. Here, I am particularly interested in considering the sociality of imagined beings: their roles in story worlds in which they interact primarily with or through social institutions and practices, and what this might entail from the perspective of emotions for wide-reaching audiences. To address this issue I first examine what collective emotions might mean for physically dispersed audiences. Subsequently, I consider imagined communities as constituted in significant

ways by collective emotions, and introduce the concept of socioemotionality to reference culturally shared emotions that enable social relations.

Toward these ends, I turn to an international program (for Americans): the Australian serial, *Wanted* (Seven Network, 2016-present), available in the US on Netflix. *Wanted* serves as an interesting example because it was widely received as a remake of the American film *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991). In principle, narratives in which national landscapes play a pivotal role, as they do in both this film and television serial, should render the notion of collective emotions more difficult. Yet *Wanted* successfully mines the emotional terrain of the earlier film.

## Collective emotions

The concept of collective emotions has been utilised in a range of ways, most commonly in the case of face-to-face encounters, such as those occurring in crowds, thought to facilitate the spread of shared emotion through ‘contagion’. The comparable use of collective emotions in media studies concerns co-present viewers, such as audience members watching a film at the same time in the movie theater, suggesting a mutual emotional influence upon the experiences of those present.[3] Julian Hanich acknowledges that collective emotions formulate in a variety of ways beyond co-presence, so that other viewers complement isolated television watching ‘as a latent background expectation’.[4] Here, I foreground the expectations that might entwine non-immediate audience members and explore the ways they can be conceived of as sharing in collective emotions.

That is to say, I focus on collective emotions as they might occur for people who share familiarity with certain televisual characters and stories but do so, necessarily, without the material co-presence of the vast majority of other viewers. The question then becomes what kind of ‘collectivity’ does this entail and which sorts of shared emotional experiences become generated in the absence of physical proximity? Dispersed audiences may well be watching television simultaneously, as in the instance of live events (news, sports). However, in the digital era they are just as likely to be viewing common content in an asynchronous manner, on different days, weeks, or months, ‘along with’ co-viewers as near as next door or as far away as across the globe. Commonality of emotions, I argue, is precisely what binds dispersed viewers together, despite geographically asynchronous experiences.

In their synthesis of existing theories, Christian von Scheve and Sven Ismer work with collective emotions broadly defined as, 'the *synchronous convergence in affective responding* across individuals towards a specific event or object'.<sup>[5]</sup> Parsing their discussion of this definition, a number of its terms warrant negotiation, for my purposes. First, collective emotions among large numbers need not be synchronous: either felt at exactly the same moment or experienced in an identical manner. Therefore, utilising the concept of 'shared' or 'overlapping', rather than synchronous, more accurately encompasses the range of experiences felt by collective audiences. Second, 'convergence' seems too casual or coincidental a descriptor for the processes by which people meet on emotionally mutual grounds. Convergence suggests an already-existing collective to which individuals calibrate themselves versus active collective systems of experiences and expressions that create specific sets of emotional parameters. We would benefit from conceptualisations of collective emotional environments as living sets of relations with which individuals do not simply converge but towards which participants must actively contribute.

Third, affective or emotional 'responding' towards an event or object suggests a top-down model in which those caught up in certain waves of feeling react, rather than act, in largely pre-determined ways prescribed or proscribed by already formulated collectives. We risk behaviorist understandings in which people are triggered to act accordingly, instead of approaches in which participants 'answer back' by negotiating, internally and with others, as part of the collective constitution of specific public feelings. Fourth, 'across individuals' points to a summative or aggregate model in which collectives are little more than the accumulated force of discrete, independently-operating individuals.<sup>[6]</sup> Aggregative models prioritise a bottom-up approach of individuals who remain the fundamental location for emotional existence. As Arjun Appadurai argues, much 'liberal thought imagines large groups as aggregations of individuals (that is, infinite combinations of the number one)'.<sup>[7]</sup> Liberal thought does so because of the fear of lost rationality, embedded in individuals but not in crowds, mobs, or masses.<sup>[8]</sup> Yet infinitely replicable individual, coincidental feelings lacks plausibility; missing are explanations of what renders certain collective configurations of emotions possible within specific sociocultural contexts and conditions.

Additionally, some of the same problems encountered around excessive individuation occur in conjunction with the current prominence of cognitive theories which, oddly, tend to replace cognition for emotionality in a number

of existing theories of ‘collective emotions’. Thus, in such theories emotions often transpire as the outcomes of appraisals, rules, norms, beliefs, and ideologies, rather than emotionality playing a central role in the production and practices of norms and ideologies.[9] Emotions are not only the after-effects of meaning making; instead, they also function as the cultural expressions and negotiations that establish as well as alter meanings and values. Certain perspectives on collective emotions implicitly or explicitly posit pre-existing individuals who somehow select their loyalties, as if from an available playlist, versus individuals who are constituted through their various loyalties and emotional engagements. Our emotional affiliations set our priorities, designating that which we care about and in what ways. Emotions do not follow cognition; they are complexly, simultaneously integrated, along with numerous other sociocultural factors.

One of von Scheve and Ismer’s stated goals is to make evident ‘the social and cultural embeddedness’ of collective emotions.[10] From this vantage point, the prevalent theories they outline barely begin to address how collective emotions continually change in response to sociocultural conditions. We need to account for *doing* things with emotions as practices and performances that generate sociocultural movement, as the etymology of ‘emotion’ suggests, so that we perceive emotional collectives occurring in ways that are vital and dynamic, rendering us into cohorts of variegated, always-changing feeling beings. In the instance of narrative media, how might we explain the constant mobility and unpredictability associated with unexpected hits or failures, unforeseen trends and waves, or make sense of audience investment that comes to pass and then passes?

Social protest studies stands as a disciplinary arena that has proven productive vis-à-vis the complexity of sociocultural emotions. For instance, Francesca Polletta and James Jasper question what emotional factors might prompt people who perceive injustices to translate that, first, into ‘emotional discontent’ and, subsequently, into various forms of political participation in social movements.[11] Their answers include feelings of obligation and loyalty but, also, the *pleasures* found in a sense of solidarity, the ability to create meaningful emotional narratives, pride in one’s strategies (for example, non-violence) or in one’s political community, and the satisfactions lodged in public emotional expression. Similarly, although much of what Deborah Gould designates as affect I consider emotionality,[12] she speaks of social movements engendered by fears and resentments as well as ‘desires, aspirations, senses of belonging’, and euphoria.[13]

## Indigenising genres

With the above considerations in mind, we are better positioned to query how viewers establish and share collective emotions when they watch international series, despite significant sociocultural discrepancies among audiences. For Americans engaging with crime dramas like *Wanted*, emotional connections with the show's Australian audiences are unlikely to be elicited by issues of nationhood, or policies and problems around policing and crime beyond, perhaps, a certain curiosity about national differences, although such themes are available within the series. More plausibly, the transnational pleasures and rewards of collective emotions offered by *Wanted* can be found in the ways themes of nationhood, crime, and policing are explicitly tied to gender.

*Wanted* is an interesting case study in that it was perceived as an Australian remake of the American film *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991). For instance, in the Australian edition of *The Guardian*, Sinead Stubbins refers to 'the prevalent comparisons' made between the television serial and the 'landmark film'.<sup>[14]</sup> Complicating international reception of the Australian series, we might well wonder why an Australian production entity would choose to update the premise of an American film, 25 years after the fact. At the time of its release in the US, *Thelma and Louise* became a cultural sensation. Its success was attributed to the film's canniness in tapping into women's anger surrounding gender mistreatment, especially sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Most obviously, both narratives feature women on the run: in *Thelma and Louise* (Geena Davis) and Louise's (Susan Sarandon) case from the law; in *Wanted*, Lola (Rebecca Gibney) and Chelsea (Geraldine Hakewill) are chased by police forces as well as lethal criminals. Both narratives also develop out of issues circulating around gender; from rape and sexual harassment in the film to spousal abuse in the television series. And both the landmark film and the television serial set their stories against the backdrop of iconic national landscapes. Tom O'Regan, for instance, points to mediated narratives that emphasise 'landscape as character', a commonality of both American and Australian productions.<sup>[15]</sup>

Yet treating landscapes as specific national characters should serve as an impediment for transnational viewership. For Americans, *Thelma and Louise* readily resonates with the figure of the outlaw cowboy, while its landscape bears the mythic cinematic history of the Western genre, for example, the

women drive through John Ford's Monument Valley. American media saturation may well make such national myths familiar to global audiences. However, a similar sensibility to the details of Australian historical and mediated iconicity would not exist for many Americans watching *Lola and Chelsea* drive north from Sydney through Queensland in season one. Stubbins tacitly references this limitation, in her review of the program, when she writes that *Wanted* proves 'the Akubra is just so much cooler than the cowboy hat'. [16] If Americans recognise the Akubra worn by Chelsea (Lola sports a baseball cap) as distinctly Australian, it is much less likely that many could access the nuances of its history and symbolic value in the second-nature manner afforded to them by the cowboy hat.

Starting out as strangers waiting at the same bus stop, Lola and Chelsea are forced to go on the run together following their happenstance involvement in a brutal shootout and murder in Sydney, which authorities believe Lola has committed. Initially preoccupied with the circumstances of their endangerment, the series does not depict the women bonding until episode 3 of season one, titled 'Us and Them'. The development of their relationship makes up the central motif of season one, a luxury afforded by the expansive duration and particular structure of the television serial. Indicating the importance of a distinct landscape to the series, as much as in the case of *Thelma and Louise*, Lola and Chelsea first get to know each other when running out of gas causes them to walk through, and then camp out in, the iconic Australian bush, an activity that takes up the bulk of the episode and proves pivotal in defining 'Us and Them'. Yet, the specific resonances of the bush and other Australian sites traversed remain opaque to many non-Australian viewers.

A number of scholars have noted that Australian film and television remain preoccupied with American genres, working through a process of 'indigenising' them in order to create an Australian 'sense of national specificity' within globally familiar genres. [17] Such indigenising applies especially to the hybrid of traditionally masculine genres that compose *Thelma and Louise* and *Wanted*: the Western, road movie, and outlaw narratives (manifesting, for example, in Australia's history of bushranger films). Australian narrative tension around well-established genres renders *Wanted* more accessible to American viewers and to other international spectators familiar with American genres. At the same time, however, seeing *Wanted* through American generic eyes arguably simplifies comprehension of the Australian viewing experience. The television series' adaptation of the genres that underlie *Thelma*



*and Louise*, conducive to global audiences, obscures the specificities of an Australian perspective for international viewers, seeming to diminish national differences via the application of 'global' genres.

While transnational translation might well inhibit certain rewards associated with viewing *Wanted* for Americans, returning to the notion of gendered anger that *Thelma and Louise* taps into helps explain the ability of *Wanted* to travel, as its female heroes do.[18] To account for the series' collective emotional pleasures, I suggest that its potential viewership is constituted by the imagined community of women and men (in the sense of their gendered identity rather than other categorical affiliations), circulating around gender issues as the narrative problem, and generating televisual anger as the elicited collective emotion. Next, I turn to the concept of imagined communities to further trace how non-co-present collective emotions might come into being and coalesce, at least for a time.

## Imagined cultures

Given a concept that has been so extensively cited, it is noteworthy how little Benedict Anderson has to say about imagined communities. His canonical book details the major factors enabling the establishment of nations, his principal example of an imagined community, but how the 'imagined' portion of the equation functions is dealt with in rather sparse terms. Thus, his definition of an *imagined* community as the circumstances in which members 'will never know most of their fellow-members, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion', remains the familiar quote.[19] The creation of an 'imagined reality', in the modern era, requires certain shared factors, such as a common vernacular language, education that is similar for all, and mass media (initially novels and newspapers then, later, radio and television).[20] Applying Anderson's terms, gender is an imagined culture held together by members who identify with femininity, masculinity, or non-binary forms of gendered identity. Those (most of us) who align with a particular gendered formation, do so in solidarity with a majority of unknown, never-to-be-met or heard-of others. But that shared sense of connection ('communion') renders it pleasurable, at moments euphoric as Gould notes, even when awareness of that imagined culture is triggered by unpleasant events.

Clearly, not every woman identifies with all other women, nor do all women achieve shared recognition over the same events. But a sizable number of non-co-present participants, indeed transnationally, can experience gendered culture coming into focus in such a way as to make it a powerful event. Recognition of a social position shared in the image of communion with unknown others may occur through one of the ‘forms’ Anderson specifies as establishing imagined collectives: mass media.[21] Anderson references imagined attachments and imagined fellowship,[22] indicating the necessity of emotionality in the creation of imagined cultures. In his chapter, ‘Patriotism and Racism’, he begins a discussion of collective emotions affiliated with nationhood, including fear, hatred, and love but shortly thereafter veers back to the importance of common vernacular languages in the founding of nationhood. However, Sukhmani Khorana picks up the notion of imagined cultures as emotional communities.

Khorana examines co-present collective viewing, in a manner similar to Hanich. She focuses on film screenings that include discussion, following the viewing, between audience members and those involved in the making of the film. Khorana contends that media hold ‘interest in facilitating a performance of affect’.[23] Such media performances encompass the emotions performed within a film, those felt experientially by viewers in collective screening situations, as well as those shared through emotional expression in discussions following. Thus, Khorana suggests that imagined communities of collective film viewers constitute an emotional community.[24] While these may not be well-defined, clearly demarcated, or strongly adhering collectives, because they are temporary, nonetheless they are bound together by ‘feelings of community’ in a given situation for a certain length of time.[25] Therefore, media audiences as collectives may be amorphous and temporary but, equally, they form recurring emotional communities when like-minded or like-hearted people move from program to program. This is not dissimilar to the structure of political activism as described by social movement theorists such as Polletta and Jasper, and Gould.

Khorana turns to Barbara Rosenwein for her notion of emotional communities. Rosenwein addresses co-present group members and, as a historian, those primarily in existence in the medieval era. She regards emotional communities as overlapping with social groups; where a social community exists there also necessarily occurs an emotional collective, whatever the specific emotions evoked. Of particular interest in Rosenwein’s formulation, for my purposes, is her admonition to guard against seeing a singular, overriding

emotional tenor, tone, or tendency applicable to a whole society over the entirety of an era (for example, modernity's 'civilizing process'). Instead, Rosenwein reaches towards the complexities of socioemotional existence, arguing that emotions occur in a 'more labile and historically contingent' manner than historians, and others, normally credit.[26] It is the 'complexity of emotional life' that renders emotions so productive and necessary in managing sociality.[27]

Complexity ensures that people live in and move among emotional communities on a regular basis, adjusting their feelings, appropriately or inappropriately, as they shift among social venues, for instance, 'from taverns to law courts' in the Middle Ages or among home, work, and mediated life in the modern era.[28] Rosenwein insists on a sense of the non-solidity, changeability, and negotiated uses of emotions as people step in and out of various emotional communities, moving through multiple ways of feeling on an 'ordinary,' daily – or longer-term – basis. Rosenwein's conception invigorates collective emotions as active, living entities, which are always fluid, multiple, specific, and changing. People continuously move through emotional communities, adopting and dispensing with collective emotions in a seemingly 'natural,' automatic manner that, actually, is socially and historically contingent. Rosenwein's configuration of emotional communities, and the collective emotions they generate, proves conceptually exciting because it stresses the multiple, simultaneous possibilities available in all social circumstances. Every social location affords plural emotional communities and, therefore, a multiplicity of collective emotions.

If we now apply these ideas not solely to material social locations but to imagined ones as well, we can return to *Wanted* and the specific collective emotion of gendered anger. The two lead characters manifest their anger concerning gendered circumstances in quite different ways. Lola has been on the run for over two decades, wanted by the police on manslaughter charges in the death of her viciously abusive partner, as well as wanted by members of his family who seek revenge. Isolated but extremely independent, Lola is a tough, capable person. These traits cause her very young, male supervisor at the grocery store where she works as a cashier to describe her to the police as: 'uncooperative, disrespectful to management, general pain in the ass' (season one, episode 2). Due to her experiences, a deep mistrust of others is a prominent feature of her gendered anger. In turn, others underestimate her, disbelieve her capabilities (thinking she must be a professional criminal), and/or see her as excessively 'dangerous' (the police in particular).

In contrast, Chelsea, an accountant who specialises in ‘compliance’, feels suffocated by the people in her life who want to overprotect her, beginning with her affluent father. As a result of being excessively sheltered, she has grown extremely timid, risk-averse, and lacking in self-confidence. If Lola cannot trust others, Chelsea fails at trusting herself. As she explains to Lola, since Chelsea’s mother died when she was a child, Lola is the first person ‘who’s treated me like more than some helpless little girl’ (season one, episode 6). Lola recognises the ‘strength’ and ‘loyalty’ Chelsea possesses that others miss (season two, episode 6). Chelsea’s anger over her particular gendered circumstances manifests in indirect ways, such as embezzling the peculiar sum of \$33,476 from her accounting firm, money she does not need, or by shoplifting lipstick. As Chelsea tells her father, ‘I’m not scared of dying, I’m scared of living’ (season two, episode 6).

Although the series provides psychological backstories for its two leads, it takes pains to portray their attributes, actions, and anger, *not* as psychological flaws that need to be individually ameliorated, but as compulsory to their very survival in the depicted world the program establishes, that is, as a function of sociality in Eder’s terms. Events and people encountered by the pair function towards justifying, rather than undermining, the reasonableness of the women’s respective feelings: deep mistrust or a feeling of being smothered. Virtually everyone Lola comes across, either from her past or the present, actively tries to kill or harm her. And those seeking to help Chelsea, like the ostensibly well-meaning Detective Josh Levine (Stephen Peacocke), rob her of autonomy and her own powers of decision-making. Thus, the series validates their (and audiences’) feelings of gendered anger, presenting their felt experiences, not as individual character flaws, but as accurate interpretations of the imagined social world they inhabit. In a psychologically rather than socially driven narrative, Lola and Chelsea’s attributes would be regarded as characterological fault lines requiring address; instead, the series locates their personality traits as the result of social conditions.

One of the series’ reviewers refers to Detective Josh Levine as a ‘good cop’, in contrast to the numerous bad cops who populate the story world.[29] Similarly, another reviewer describes Josh as ‘a rookie detective [who] has their interests at heart’.[30] These assessments misread the gendered intent of the program. As Lola tells her imprisoned father, a small-time thief who has been behind bars, on and off, for decades:

If the clean cops catch me, they're going to put me away. If the dirty cops catch me, they're probably going to kill me. And the stupid thing is, none of this has got anything to do with me (season one, episode 4).

In a rare attempt at explaining the circumstances she finds herself in, Lola makes a distinction between clean and dirty cops. Josh certainly belongs to the former category; however, that does not render his character equivalent to 'good cop' or 'good guy'. He, too, is out to punish Lola for the death of a corrupt cop that occurred as she struggled to save Chelsea's life and her own. In other words, Josh deviates from the parallel character, Detective Hal Slo-cumb (Harvey Keitel) in *Thelma and Louise*, whom the audience is meant to recognise as good cop, even if Louise and Thelma fail to do so in time, to their detriment and resulting in their demise. Hal's good guy status is staked on his understanding of *why* the women have acted as they have. Underlying the film is the suggestion that if only they had listened to him in time, all might have been well.

*Wanted* purposefully uses Josh's character to critique such a patronising perspective. He views one of the pair as wholly guilty (Lola) and the other as entirely innocent (Chelsea), and he is wrong on both counts, resulting in perceiving them in the same limited ways as the series' imagined world-at-large does. Josh harms them on the basis of both criteria – guilt and innocence – and, therefore, fails to have their best interests at heart. On the second of Josh's thwarted attempts to arrest Lola, with his gun drawn as she is about to drive off, he naively assures her that, as a cop, he can help her – even though Chelsea and Lola have just *rescued him* from the same forces they are running to evade.[31] Lola responds to Josh's claim of safe haven and assistance with the statement, 'Right now, you're just another guy with a gun in my face' (season one, episode 6). Josh is the eighth man (and one woman) in season one who has trained his gun sights on Lola. In regarding Lola as a 'loose cannon' from early on (season one, episode 2), Josh fits securely into the malign imagined social world of the series, rather than being singled out as an exception, like Hal in *Thelma and Louise*.

In Chelsea's case, Josh's determination to consider her innocent misses the point of her character as imagined being. Josh blames Lola, the guilty party in his mind, for the poor decisions he believes they have made, choosing to view Chelsea as completely under Lola's destructive influence. For example, after arresting Chelsea for the first time, he tells her: 'I know this isn't you, Chelsea. You've been led along by Lola Buckley and now you're in way over your head and you're not cut out for this' (season one, episode 5). His

words offend and anger Chelsea, causing her to enact a clever plan to engineer an escape from his custody, if only temporarily, in order to prove she is an independent-thinking woman making her own decisions, as well as competent instead of in over her head.

Josh's attitude positions Chelsea as too weak to make her own decisions, and as incapable of committing the duo's apparently illegal acts via her free will. Yet audiences witness numerous occasions when Chelsea is encouraged to leave Lola's company but she resolutely and autonomously determines to stay. Further, Chelsea embezzled the money and shoplifted lipstick prior to encountering Lola, as Josh well knows but chooses to ignore. Josh, then, becomes 'just another guy' who wants to overprotect Chelsea.

Gender is an imagined community in the sense that it is populated, in significant measure, by those never met or ever heard of, but who exist in each other's minds in the image of communion. We also know, following Khorana and Rosenwein, that communities, whether imagined or physically co-present, are underpinned by collective emotions. That is, imagined communities need to be emotionally experienced in order to exist. As Joseph de Rivera notes, 'the reality of a narrative of a people's collective identity must be felt' to be believed in.[32]

Collective emotions like gendered anger coalesce over 'a specific event or object' in von Scheve and Ismer's definition, like the imagined world of a narrative and the imaginary beings who populate it. Here, we are dealing with the doubly imagined, first, in Anderson's sense of imagined communities and, second, in terms of fictionalised narratives. Collective emotions are produced around fictional mediated worlds and then dissipate but, as the thread connecting the landmark film to the television serial indicates, they can re-form, as occurs between the American *Thelma and Louise* and the Australian *Wanted*. The emotional community is constituted around gendered anger as a collective emotion, with the television series piggy-backing upon the earlier film.

Mediated events generate moments of solidarity, similar to those posited in social movement theory, because they are recognised and shared. Although transitory and fluid, collective emotions are also potent because, as *Wanted* and its invocation of *Thelma and Louise* makes evident, imagined communities have the ability to re-form. Popular, mediated storytelling offers up gathering points that generate social imaginaries for what it may be possible or prohibited to feel. Such socioemotional imaginaries become the grounds upon which collectives rehearse what emotions are accessible to them, the

ways they may be or cannot be experienced, expressed, and enacted, and with which affiliated meanings based on specific sociocultural sites and circumstances.

## Socioemotionality

Operative when the focus of emotional experiences and practices surrounds social relations, socioemotionality is a state of being applicable to either material or fictional beings. Socioemotionality encompasses public sentiments – collective emotions – whether occurring among imagined or co-present communities. The complexity of social life is enabled by the complexity of emotional relations, and vice versa. Socioemotionality designates experiences, expressions, or any kind of emotional behaviors that work to constitute, maintain, alter, or impede social relations.

I argue ‘socioemotionality’ is a much-needed frame of reference in order to differentiate from largely individualistic accounts of emotionality, whether embodied or psychological. Of course, visceral embodiment and psychic engagement are always integrated factors in socioemotionality. However, socioemotionality occurs when a social category is generated, that is, when an emotion is widely felt and culturally shared. Mediated fictional narratives, particularly in popular or vernacular modes of storytelling, serve to secure community through felt commonality.

A persistent tendency in emotion analyses, whether collective or otherwise, regards emotions as clear, self-evident, and unified categories. For instance, commentators speak of ‘anger’, ‘fear’, ‘love’, ‘pride’, or any number of other recognised emotions as if the nomenclature references stable entities or experiences. In this supposition, naming anger or hate or joy is taken as sufficient. In contrast, socioemotionality insists upon the polyvalence of any emotion category.

Hanich reminds us of the plurality of kinds of laughter found when audiences view films, including ‘aggressive, nervous, degrading, evaluating, embarrassed, shocked, disgusted, irritated or contagious’, to which one could add joyful, curious, self-satisfied, intimate, achingly funny, and happy laughter.[33] However, plurality applies not only to emotion-related behaviors, such as embodied responses, but to the category of emotion itself. Any and every emotion is beset by rampant pluralism: an endless array of potential manifestations. In the case of mediated emotions, what are the potentially

vast available arrangements that emotions such as anger or fear or love can take and, therefore, the emotional positions that audiences can take up? To borrow a mediated analogy, we would benefit from conceiving of an emotion category like a genre. Just as each genre can generate innumerable instances of specific works, so any emotion can afford a multiplicity of manifestations. Like a genre, a particular emotion is not a single work, but provides the conditions for a series of possibilities within certain parameters. Thus, gendered anger is only one form of the larger generic category of anger. At the same time, gendered anger incorporates a plurality of aspects and a proliferation of possible configurations. As example, we can look to one account of anger that has implications for, overlaps with, and helps elucidate gendered anger.

Sarah Sorial distinguishes what she identifies as ‘moral anger’ from other forms. Moral anger arises in response to various forms of injustice and may bear ‘strategic political value’ by motivating public debate and in addressing the causes of perceived inequity.[34] Attending to what I label socioemotionality, Sorial argues that expressions of anger are ‘abundant’ in the public sphere and can function as a kind of performance there towards the redressing of injustices.[35] However, she points out that ‘to prevent people from expressing anger in public deliberations is to also compound the injustice these individuals and groups may have suffered’.[36] Therefore, moral anger in the public sphere ought to be managed in certain ways.

First, participants must ‘recognise one another as equals’ and be given equal opportunity to express their positions.[37] Second, care must be taken to accommodate different modes of expression. Public deliberation tends towards ‘assertive and confrontational speech rather than speech which is tentative, exploratory, or conciliatory ... this privileges [white, upper-middle-class] male styles over female’.[38] Finally, moral anger is ‘associated with a sense of certainty or confidence about what happened’.[39] Moral anger as a form of socioemotionality may be linked to confidence; those lacking in confidence concerning the merits of their claim, or who doubt their claims of injustice will be taken seriously, tend to respond with other emotions, such as fear or anxiety.[40]

Sorial’s attributes of moral anger apply readily to *Wanted*, in which gendered anger is a form of strategic, public, moral feeling. For instance, Lola and Chelsea are prevented from expressing anger about the injustices done to them, thereby compounding the injustices suffered. Indeed, the series establishes a theme concerning the inability to speak. The lead characters recurrently fail when they attempt to explain themselves, their circumstances,



or their experiences to others. Chelsea, in particular, often stands on the verge of utterance, without quite succeeding. More often than not, Lola opts for silence due to the futility of being heard.

In terms of Sorial's specifics, the pair are not recognised or treated as equals. For instance, head dirty cop Ray Stanton (Nicholas Bell) refers to Lola as 'You stupid, stupid girl' (she is an approximately fifty-year-old woman), because he believes she has made a grave error in her dealings with him when, in fact, she ingeniously sets him up (season one, episode 6). Similarly, clean cop Josh describes Lola and Chelsea going on the run as 'so stupid', without listening to why they were forced to do so: pursued by dirty cops, members of criminal cartels, and a hired assassin (season one, episode 5).

With regard to Sorial's criterion of accommodating different modes of expression, Josh is assertive and confrontational when he first questions Chelsea, in marked contrast to her tentative style. On several occasions, Chelsea attempts to explain what has transpired but, in the gender differentiated manner Sorial outlines, she fails to speak definitively or answer questions assertively. Lola, more jaded through experience, does not even attempt to provide an explanation to authority figures, instead, remaining silent. As she tells Chelsea, who continues to believe the police will help them and keep them safe, 'You're not learning' (season one, episode 6).

Finally, the link Sorial draws between moral anger and confidence applies to Lola. She relies on her intelligence and courage to outwit others. If people threaten Lola she does not give in; she gets angry and takes action. Lola exhibits self-assurance about the correctness of her claims and maintains her right to feel anger, and act upon it, when she or someone else is treated unjustly. Lola's confidence and competence are her saving graces, that which has kept her safe all these years. At the same time, they mark her *social* vulnerability in the imagined world of the series. Her self-assertion is what causes her young boss to label her an uncooperative pain in the ass, and leads Josh to judge her, erroneously, as a loose cannon.

In his analysis of nationalism expressed via football, Ismer rightly contends that individuals belong to a plurality of imagined communities. However, he argues that, in everyday life, people seek 'to solve possible conflicts of loyalty' among their various identities or affiliations.[41] On the contrary, in watching mediated, popular narratives we do not work to solve the sometimes contradictory, plural imaginary cultures to which we belong; instead, we seek out such practices as a means by which to live our contradictory, complex affiliations, emotional and otherwise. Mediated and other social

practices do not function to unify the multifarious aspects of our sociocultural existences so much as they sustain those contradictions, enabling us to juggle conflicts while living amidst clashing emotional identities and loyalties, as exemplified by the push and pull of nationality versus gender in *Wanted*.

Popular aesthetics is a particularised exercise. It seeks to move people through stories based on specific contexts and conditions. Every film or television series may well depict quite different formulations, causes, implications, and outcomes for any socioemotional representation it undertakes. The gendered anger in *Wanted* is a form of socioemotionality: a collective emotion shared by an imagined community concerning a particular spectrum of social relations. Socioemotionality helps to locate the strategic pleasures found in mediated, public performances of the difficult and unjust.

## Author

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## Notes

- [1] Gripsrud 2010, p. 13.
- [2] Eder 2010, p. 24.
- [3] Hanich 2018. Hanich rightly points out that materially co-present collective viewing experiences have been neglected in cinema studies. However, in television studies the case is quite different. Early analyses, under the influence of cultural studies, emphasised viewing situations (Brunsdon & Morley, Hobson). Indeed, one of the criticisms of early cultural television studies is that it stressed the viewing environment to the neglect of programming, for instance, regarding women's domesticity as routine repetition, and then transposing that characteristic onto programming such as soap operas.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p. 279.
- [5] Von Scheve & Ismer 2013, p. 406; italics in original.
- [6] Sullivan 2014, pp. 270-271; Harding 2019.
- [7] Appadurai 2009, p. 239.
- [8] *Ibid.*, p. 240.
- [9] Gould 2010, p. 24.
- [10] Von Scheve & Ismer 2013, p. 407.
- [11] Polletta & Jasper 2001, pp. 286-287.
- [12] Pribram 2018; Pribram 2019.
- [13] Gould 2010, p. 29, 35; see also Harding 2019.
- [14] Stubbins 2016, n.p. For additional comparisons of *Wanted* to *Thelma and Louise* see Buckmaster 2017; Burke 2017; Byrnes 2016; Dale 2016; Davis 2016; and Nealon 2016.
- [15] O'Regan 2002, p. 149.
- [16] Stubbins 2016, n.p.
- [17] O'Regan 2002, p. 151; Limbrick 2007, p. 77; Murphy et al. 2001, pp. 75-77.
- [18] Netflix maintains a strict policy against revealing viewer ratings, making it difficult to know how well *Wanted* has performed with American audiences (Adalian 2018, p. 90).
- [19] Anderson 1991, p. 6.
- [20] *Ibid.*, p. 23, 135.
- [21] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- [22] *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- [23] Khorana 2019, p. 243.
- [24] *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- [25] *Ibid.*, p. 246.
- [26] Rosenwein 2002, p. 831.

[27] Ibid., p. 842.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Davis 2016, p. 3.

[30] Blundell 2016, p. 17.

[31] By the end of season two, Josh believes both of them, Lola included, although he cannot 'talk them down' from imminent death at the hands of police, as he claims (season two, episode 6).

[32] De Rivera 2014, p. 218.

[33] Hanich 2018, p. 190.

[34] Sorial 2017, p. 122.

[35] Ibid., pp. 121-122.

[36] Ibid., p. 122.

[37] Ibid., p. 125.

[38] Ibid., p. 126.

[39] Ibid., p. 129.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.