We of Crimson Feathers: A Webtoon Tackling Repulsive Conformity in Fulfilling the Need for Belongingness

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Abstract

Repulsive Conformity is one's adoption of repulsive attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs for the sake of achieving belongingness. It is a phenomenon I personally have encountered myself, and seen others fall victim of. Although people are not born with repulsive attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs, Maslow defines belongingness as the third greatest human motivation, which allows repulsive conformity to take root. Because repulsive conformity is not well-known, this project aims to create a neon-noir animated webtoon revolving around repulsive conformity, which chiefly relies on the Party-Over-Policy Effect. Specifically, the project will follow Detective Erenio, an officer who joined the San Saul Police because of his admiration for them, only to find a department full of crooked cops. Peer pressured into partaking in their corruption, Detective Erenio tells himself that their ends justify their means. The thesis project will use artistic subversion of expectation on its color progression, violating pre-existing associations with color as a means of enhancing its storytelling.

Conformity, Repulsive Conformity, Party-Over-Policy Effect, Neon-noir, Color Psychology

Introduction

When I was young, I encountered many people whom I chose to be friends with. A tiny few I am still acquainted with today, and most I no longer associate with. Having grown up in an underclass neighborhood, I have befriended a lot of children exhibiting undesirable behavior such as drinking, smoking, bullying, violence, and many similar traits a child should not display. These children were among the "popular kids," a group I wanted to be part of, despite the repulsive behavior their group exhibited. Associating myself with that community pressured me into partaking in their repulsiveness. I do not consider myself a delinquent, but through my active participation in this group, I discovered alcohol, cigarettes, and an affinity to bully. I have also observed many good-mannered children corrupted by their need to belong, just as I was. Although I have departed from that community, it is a fascinating phenomenon to look back to: how one's need to belong reshapes their attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs, to fit the community they find themselves in.

Abraham Maslow (1943) considers belongingness the third greatest human motivation and a pre-requisite to esteem and self-actualization. According to Cohen (2022), our "need to belong" stems from our evolutionary propensity to work together
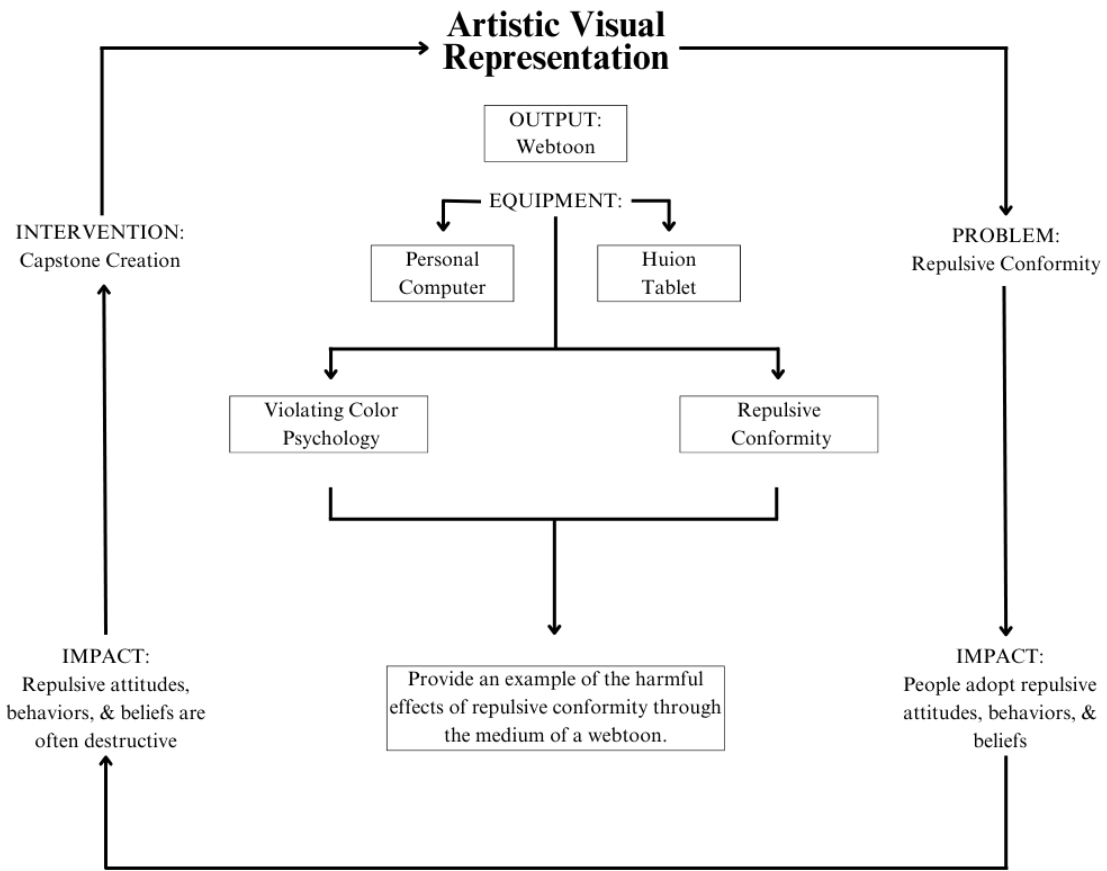
and overcome obstacles as a community. We humans are physically weak animals, and from a primitive standpoint, do not amount to much on our own. Owing to our physical weakness as a species, our need to belong is a primary psychological requirement we must fulfill (Allen, Et. Al, 2021). And despite technological advancement rendering the threats faced by our ancestors no longer a primary issue, our need to belong continues to arouse our motivation and drive our behavior.

We all know the saying: "birds of a feather flock together." It was Donn Byrne (1969) that turned that saying reproducible in a laboratory environment. This experimentation concluded that attraction is a two-way street—both parties must exhibit similarities in attitudes, behaviors, backgrounds, beliefs, and appearances. However, two parties forming a community does not require pre-existing similarities in attitudes, behaviors, backgrounds, beliefs, and appearances to be exhibited. This is observed by what Cohen (2022) calls the party-over-policy effect, where, in essence, individuals who identified with a certain entity continued to identify themselves with said entity even after it no longer exhibited the virtues the two parties shared. This observation shows that the need for belongingness can still be fulfilled through a conformity of attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs.

Donn Byrne's theory is clearly observed in the modern day. It is the behavioral science behind the formation of friend groups, social circles, and tightly knit communities (Ko, et. Al., 2023). Although there are plenty of documented cases supporting this theory by Donn Byrne and the succeeding researchers building upon humankind's need to belong, there is a shortage of documentation regarding individuals conforming to repulsive attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs to fulfill their need to belong. Although Conen (2022) Briefly explores the idea that humanity does indeed conform to groups they trust without regard for the possibility of the group influence being harmful, for themselves and/or to others, he fails to cite any examples of this.

With this background, the thesis paper aims to deliver two things: first, awareness of repulsive conformity and the potential harm it could bring; second, creating a webtoon about the dark side of humanity's need to belong.

The chosen medium is a digital graphic novel—specifically, a webtoon. This medium was chosen on two criteria: it's popularity here in the Philippines, and the malleability of the medium in terms of storytelling. I chose the webtoon format of a digital graphic novel because of its high consumption in Southeast Asia (Naga, Neha, & Vitika, 2022). Webtoons are not printed but are designed to be read on a phone vertically (Princy, 2022). This achieves relevancy in the phone-centric world and allows the story to be consumed conveniently.

**Artistic Visual
Representation**

OUTPUT:
Webtoon

INTERVENTION:
Capstone Creation

EQUIPMENT:

PROBLEM:
Repulsive Conformity

Personal
Computer

Huion
Tablet

Violating Color
Psychology

Repulsive
Conformity

IMPACT:
Repulsive attitudes,
behaviors, & beliefs are
often destructive

Provide an example of the harmful
effects of repulsive conformity through
the medium of a webtoon.

IMPACT:
People adopt repulsive
attitudes, behaviors, &
beliefs

Figure 1: *Artistic Visual Representation of the Webtoon's Overall Method & Concept.*

The creative framework above summarizes the integral parts of the project. The following section is a detailed description of the output the project in the works, the resources being used, target demographic, theories, techniques, problem, impacts, purpose, and solutions.

Attraction does not require pre-existing similarities in attitudes, behaviors, backgrounds, beliefs, and appearances. If party A is sufficiently attracted to party B, then party A will conform to the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that party B finds appealing. Party B exhibiting repulsive attitudes, behaviors, backgrounds, beliefs, and/or appearance is not a foolproof deterrent for party A. And if attraction is sufficient, party A will adopt these repulsive attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs in the pursuit of belongingness.

This project will shed light upon humanity's tendency to sacrifice morality, virtues, and ideals in favor of belongingness. The thesis will call this "repulsive conformity," and will only address attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs, as an individual's background and physical appearance cannot be (or is difficult) to change. The creative output will tell a story on the dark side of humanity's need to belong. Specifically, it will follow Detective Erenio, a man who joined San Saul's police force with an admiration for the San Saul Police Department and a drive to do good, but succumbed to the pressure exerted by the crooked San Saul Police Department, turning him into a corrupt cop.

Data Gathering Method: Desk Analysis Method

The desk-analysis method was utilized for a more detailed comprehension of the project's topic. Articles and published journals revolving around Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Byrne's Similarity-Attraction Theory, and Cohen's Party-Over-Policy Effect were gathered for study, and synthesized for a better understanding of the phenomenon I coined and is currently exploring: repulsive conformity.

Additionally, research on color theory, color psychology, narrative shapes, and symbolism were done for the benefit of a creative output that better connects with the intended audience, and leave a lasting impact. Specifically, I studied the psychology of associating certain colors with certain things and concepts, and the literary technique: subversion of expectation, which I plan on implementing in the color progression of the thesis project. This helped me pick the Neo-Noir genre, which I found appropriate to tell a story that relies on breaking the pre-existing association of colors with ideas.

Target Audience

I do not have an intended target age group or nationality, as repulsive conformity, according to my observation during the tests Cohen (2022) conducted formulating his Party-Over-Policy Effect, repulsive conformity does not occur more often in one age group or race over another. Thus, I believe most will be able to relate to the thesis project and derive a lesson from repulsive conformity.

That being said, I do want to reach those working in law enforcement, as the thesis project depicts scenes that would be familiar in their field, and situations that they would have likely encountered. I hope that the thesis project will be able to give them a peak into the consequences of corruption, police brutality, and abuse of power that some of their peers commit.

Design Process

The decision to make this output began with a lookback to my old self—someone who sought belongingness in the wrong people. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to realize how bad of a decision it was to associate myself with delinquents. Yet my admiration for them blinded me, which piqued my curiosity as to why. This catapulted me into a deep dive, exploring articles around belongingness and attraction of human beings. Such perusing led me to a realization: although we know humans adopt the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of the people or person they want to associate with, there is little documentation on humans adopting attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of repulsive people they are attracted to; such phenomena does not even have a name. This lack of substance led me to naming the phenomenon myself for use only to the extent of this thesis project: repulsive conformity. My message was then clear: to communicate the dangers of repulsive conformity, and the destructive consequences it yields for oneself, and for others.

With my topic at hand, I began coming up with a medium in which I could best express my message. I had a fascination for noir films and video games at the time, having recently watched John Wick, several Batman movies, Love Death + Robots' Popsquad, and after playing through the interactive video game, The Wolf Among Us. I

realized then that repulsive conformity and the noir genre (specifically, neon-noir) were a perfect pair. The story's plot was written shortly after, supplemented by further research on color theory, color psychology, narrative shapes, symbolisms, and further studies on related works and literature.

The webtoon will use color schemes that possess pre-existing meaning invoked by color psychology. These pre-existing meanings will be betrayed as the story goes on—essentially creating a "plot twist" in the medium of color in aid of delivering the lesson. This violation of color psychology is inspired by the irony of the characters' status—cops, who are expected to uphold and serve justice, but instead breach it.

The color progression of the story depends on how Detective Erenio sees the world around him: the vibrant blues and golds of San Saul Police Department depicting his righteous view of them; the sickly, desaturated yellows of the crime-ridden San Saul and its vibrant neon nightscape; and the desaturated colors at the end of the story, symbolizing the transitioning view of himself and San Saul. The webtoon will also be animated to create a more dynamic storytelling experience, and to make the characters feel more alive. Finally, it will have a soundtrack, which helps enhance the actions, emotions, and atmosphere of the story.

The thesis project aims to culminate into an animated webtoon following Detective Erenio's journey in discovering the destruction and havoc he caused on the lives of others because of his partaking in repulsive conformity. This webtoon will feature the culmination of my research and experience on repulsive conformity.

Pre-Production Stage

The pre-production stage is the thesis project's preparatory stage, where the color palettes, art direction, character design, narrative shape, and story were decided. A Gantt Chart was also created in the interest of time management and efficiency.
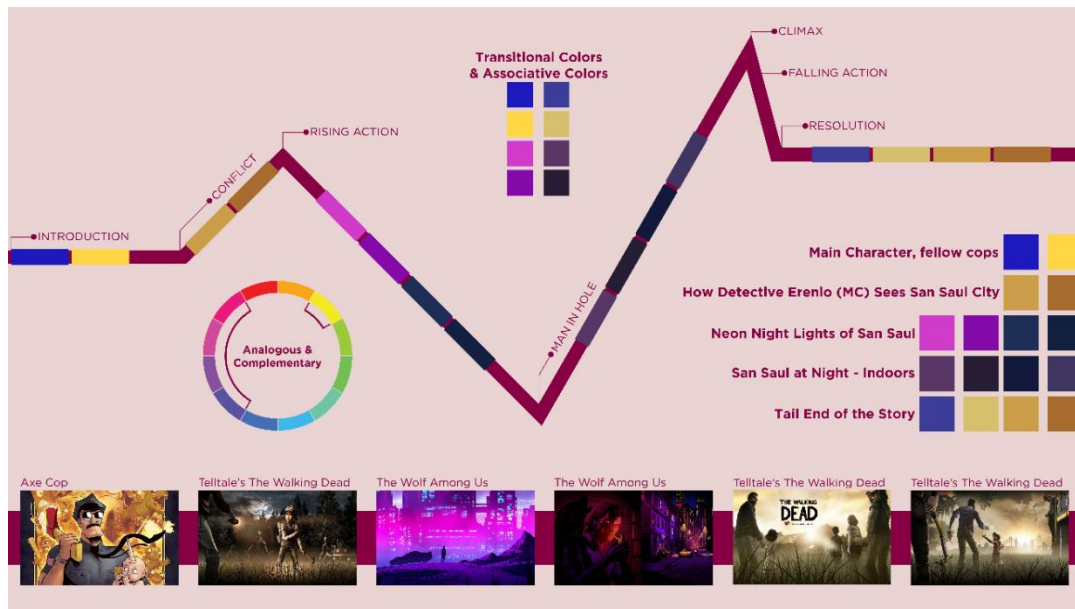

**Figure 2:** *Color Progression & Narrative Shape*

The narrative shape that the creative output will exhibit is a variation of the Man in Hole story arc. According to Troilo (2021) who took inspiration from Kurt Vonnegut, story shapes are drawn across two axes: the top of the axis is dubbed "Good Fortune" while the bottom, "Ill Fortune"; the horizontal axis is the BE axis: Beginning, and End. The Man in Hole story begins with the character in a fortunate position in life. Something devastating will happen to the character, which is denoted by the large drop in the narrative shape (see Figure 1 above), plunging the character to ill fortune. This is the narrative "hole," which the character will spend the story getting out of.

The color progression of the creative output is symbolic of how the main character, Detective Erenio sees the world around him. of the creative output begins with saturated colors.
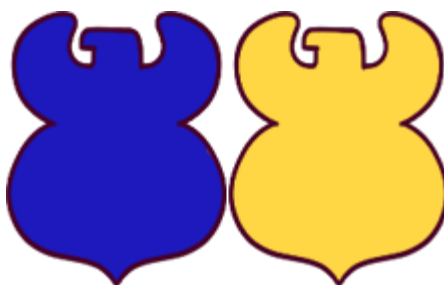

Figure 3: *Colors of the Main Characters and Their Peers*

The main character and his fellow cops will be given the iconic blue and gold— blue for their uniform, and gold for their badges. Blue and gold are traditional colors of law enforcement. The saturation symbolizes how Detective Erenio sees himself and the San Saul Police Department: righteous servants of justice who can do no wrong. This high saturation will be prevalent in every scene involving the San Saul Police Department.
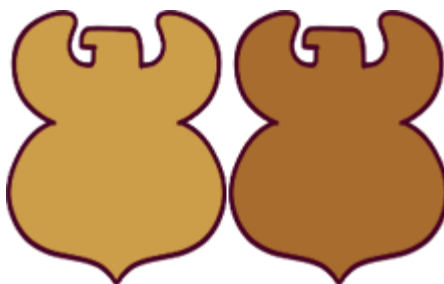
Figure 4: *Colors of San Saul in Daylight*

The high saturation of the main characters and will be contrasted by the desaturated colors of San Saul in daylight. During sunset and sunrise, the City of San Saul will be colored in shades of desaturated yellow, as they are associated with sickness and crime.
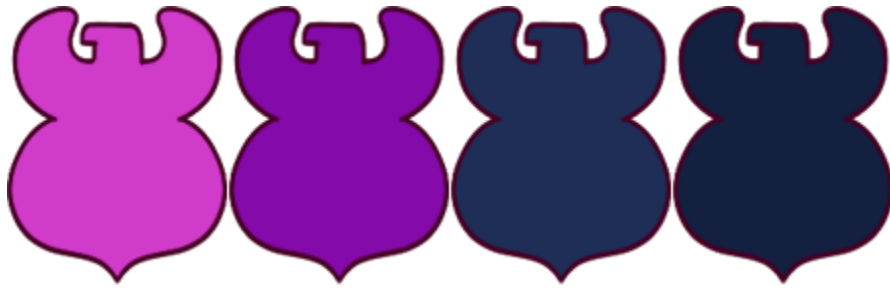
Figure 5: *Colors of San Saul at Night - Outdoors*

By nightfall, San Saul's colors will then be replaced by high saturation pinks, purples, and blues, which appeals to the color palette of the neon-noir film genre, popularly associated with crime-centric stories (MasterClass, 2021b).

Figure 6: *Colors of San Saul at Night - Indoors*

Because the indoors will not be as well-lit by the neon lights of the streets, their colors will take on desaturated pinks, purples, and blues if they are without indoor lighting. The high saturation of pink will spill in through windows, if there are any.

Figure 7 – *Colors of the World at the End of the Story*

By the climax and end of the story, the high saturation colors at the beginning will become desaturated. This symbolizes the transition of how Detective Erenio views himself and the San Saul Police Department: from high regard to disgust.

Logline

This section details the log line of the creative output, allowing the readers a peak into the story. The following log line is the culmination of four previous drafts written alongside the story's development.

Detective Erenio joined the San Saul Police Department hoping to serve justice. His righteousness is challenged when colleagues pressure him to participate in corruption. His need to belong blinded him, convincing them that their repulsiveness was just a means toward righteous ends. His beliefs are challenged one last time when his career drowned in evil finally catches up to him.

Storyline

This section is a synopsis of the creative output's story.

Detective Erenio is a cop who has earned the respect and admiration of his peers. After a promotion party, the San Saul Police Department (SSPD) chief assigns him a new partner, Detective Labao, a hero loved by San Saul. A man he hated but did not know why. They are given an assignment. On their way to the chief's office to accept this assignment, they ignore the glaring evidence of police brutality and corruption within their building.

Erenio and Labao is tasked to track down a serial killer, whose victims are low-income individuals that were once connected to the San Saul City Gang—a gang Erenio was credited for taking down years ago.

The assignment takes them to San Saul's slums, where they ID the bodies left by the serial killer. During their ID, they are shot at by a child. Erenio tries talking with the child, revealing his name to be Jericho. Labao took it as an opportunity to fire back, killing Jericho. Erenio was furious, but Labao explains it was self-defense. An ID reveals Jericho to be the son of the San Saul Gang's leader, whom Erenio shot years ago.

That night, Erenio is restless. He tried washing Jericho's blood from his badge, but it would not wash off. He gets a call from Labao, saying he has an informant in the slums. He leaves immediately. The informant gave them an address nearby. They will find the serial killer there. But it had been a trap. A mob of witnesses, one of them holding the body of Jericho, attacks them.

After a lengthy shootout, Erenio sneaks out of the house, leaving Labao. He travels to the address where he finds a woman alone in a dark house: The serial killer.

The woman began crying at the sight of him. Erenio understands now. She killed all those people to draw HIM out specifically. The two of them talk, and it is revealed that the reason Erenio was able to disband the San Saul Gang was because he planted and fabricated evidence, putting evil men behind bars at the expense of the innocent-one of them being the daughter of the serial killer, who was given the death sentence. Erenio had tried, for years, to set his life straight and travel a path of justice, but evil past finally caught. His worst sin: he ran from it.

Erenio was ready to face his past. But Labao had arrived, covered in blood. Labao told him he was going to clean San Saul, and he demanded Erenio stepped aside, but Erenio did not. He now realized why he hated Labao: he reminded him of his younger self- a man who committed evil for praise and admiration. The situation escalated, and the partners drew guns. Labao is killed.

The serial killer covers for him, covering the murder weapon with her fingerprints. She does not want to kill Erenio, rather she wants Erenio to suffer this guilt for the rest of his life. Erenio calls for backup and arrests the serial killer. The next day, Erenio faces his reckoning. He gives his gun and badge to his chief, resigns, and asks to be arrested. When the chief refuses, Erenio says he will turn himself in to Manila Police. The chief is vehemently against this, afraid the San Saul Police Department's corruption would be exposed. He points a gun at Erenio. Not knowing he had Labao's gun, Erenio drew and a gunfight broke out.

Character Design

Figure 3: *Antagonist, Detective Labao (Left), Protagonist, Detective Erenio (Right)*

Figure 3 above shows the bust of my main characters, Detective Labao and Detective Erenio. In alignment with the setting of the story, their costume design is based on the Philippine National Police uniform, with Detective Erenio wearing the uniform of a captain as depicted by the two diamonds on his shoulder, and Detective Labao wearing the uniform of a Lieutenant as depicted by the single diamond on his shoulder.

The characters use several symbols that connect them further to the theme, and to me, the author. Their names, Erenio and Labao, are the family names of my grandfather and grandmother respectively. Detective Erenio wears a stained badge, symbolizing his corrupt past which he disguises with righteousness. Detective Labao boasts pink eyes to symbolize his status as the antagonist, following a color design used extensively by Disney where purples depict the color of evil.

Figure 4: *Pre-production Sample Scenes*

Figure 4 demonstrates the scenes I made to depict the synthesis of the art
direction, color progression, and story for my thesis output. My scenes are washed with a
heavily-neon color palette as the genre of the story I'm making falls under neon-noir, and
a neon color palette is often used at night to color an otherwise lifeless city nightscape.
The style is simple, and the lighting technique used is cell shading. The setting of the
thesis project is San Saul—a fictional city based on Pasay City. Hence, the scene is
heavily inspired by the streets and interior of Pasay City.

Production

The production stage involves four phases: storyboard, lineart, animation, and coloring.

The storyboard phase determines the flow of the story panel-by-panel, essentially acting as a blueprint for the foundation: the lineart. During the storyboard phase, I will be drawing the foreground and midground separate from the background. The characters, props, and floor layout will be drawn in Photoshop. On the other hand, I will be constructing the background scenes and environments in 3D using the Blender Software. The storyboard's panels will be arranged vertically according to the format of a Webtoon. This separation is done to ensure consistency with the scenes and environments, as turning the scenes and environment into 3D assets allow me to flip them according to the perspective/point-of-view requirement.

The lineart acts as a foundation for the thesis project, solidifying the final, uncolored look of the entire output. The lineart will follow the construction of the storyboard. The lineart of the characters, props, and floor layout will be drawn in Photoshop, while the lineart for the scenes and environments will be made in the Blender Software.

The animation phase begins once the lineart is completed. Only select scenes will be animated, inspired by Horang's (2011) animated webtoon, Bong-Cheong Dong Ghost. The animation for the the characters, props, and floor layout will be drawn in Photoshop, while the animation for the scenes and environments will be done in Blender.

Finally, the coloring phase involves adding a base color to the entire output according to the color script. The characters, props, and floor layout will be colored in photoshop, while the scenes and environments will be colored in Blender.

Post-Production

The post-production will finish up the thesis project through the delivery of four key deliverables: rendering of the output, creating a cover page, composition of soundtrack, and preparation for exhibition.

The rendering of the output adds lighting, shadows, depth, and emotion to the entire output. The rendering of the characters, props, and floor layout will be done in photoshop. Separately, the rendering for the scenes and environments will be done in Blender.

While rendering, I will also be in the process of creating a cover page for the exhibition. The cover page will be sketched, lined, colored, and rendered entirely in photoshop.

Because the output is an animated webtoon, a soundtrack will be appropriate to add further impact to the reading experience. The soundtrack will be outsourced to a composer.

Finally, once the output is complete, the output will be prepared for exhibition. Because webtoons are a digital form of graphic novels, the output will be exhibited digitally. The output will be viewed via a touchscreen vertical monitor. Additionally, I

would like to print standees of my characters for my set design. The output will be exhibited in Asia Pacific College.

Review of Related Literature

This chapter provides an overview of literature, articles, studies, discussions, and papers relevant to the thesis project.

Webtoon Market Statistics

According to Princy (2022), a webtoon is a form of digital comic designed to be read on a smartphone, typically top-to-bottom. They originated from South Korea and have become one of the country's biggest exports (Jobst, 2023). According to an industry forecast conducted by Naga, Neha, and Vitika (2022, July), Asia-Pacific, the region of Asia in which the Philippines belong to, is the biggest consumer of webtoon in the world, with a CAGR rating of 36.5%, forecasted within the years, 2021-2030.

The creative output's medium will be a digital graphic novel—specifically, a webtoon. It will be designed to be read on a smartphone and scrolled, instead of the western left-to-right, page-to-page. Because of this, a webtoon's panel is vertical instead of horizontal, and often longer than the screen itself.

Need for Belongingness

The need for belongingness is documented in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, where it is considered the third greatest human motivation, being a pre-requisite to achieving esteem and self-actualization. It is a psychological need achieved through the development of intimate relationships with a person or group of people. Although it is a pre-requisite, Maslow states in his 1987 study that achieving needs higher up the hierarchy does not require belongingness to be fulfilled; rather, one may simply find it difficult to attain higher needs if belongingness is not present.

Cohen (2022) and Allen Et. Al. (2023) describes humanity as a feeble race far removed from the safety of tall trees with no teeth, claws, beaks, poisons, venom, or strength to defend themselves. On their own, humans would not have the capacity to survive in the wild. But humans evolved to be social creatures, and thanks to their innate ability to work together and coordinate themselves in large groups, humanity survived and thrived. And although modern humans do not face the same dangers as their ancestors once did, the drive to be social continues to influence us to this day.

The core of this thesis and creative output revolves around the human need for belongingness. Because it is the third greatest human motivation, it is highly sought after. And although Similarity-attraction theory states that groups are formed by similar people, this would later be observed to be inconstant because of conformity.

Similarity-Attraction Theory

The Similarity-Attraction Theory is a theory introduced by Donn-Byrne (1969), who turned the phrase "birds of a feather flock together" lab-testable. His 1969 study based on the Similarity Hypothesis concludes that those of similar attitudes, behaviors, backgrounds, beliefs, and appearances are naturally more attracted to each other, while those with dissimilar attitudes, behaviors, backgrounds, beliefs, and appearances are more likely to be averse to one another.

The similarity-attraction theory is the science behind the formation of friend groups, life partners, and other social circles (Ko, Et. Al., 2023). And although it states that groups are formed by similar people, it is not always the case, as Cohen (2022) observes.

Conformity to Achieve Belongingness

Cohen's (2022) Party-Over-Policy Effect was written up after observing a group of Republicans and Democrats conforming their views based on the views of their political party, regardless of if these views are averse to the ideals these Republicans and Democrats originally believed in. This violates the Similarity-Attraction Theory, which states that similarity must be present for two parties to form a group. Cohen states that group thinking is a powerful thing, and it can lead to manipulation, and the death of individuality.

This brings Cohen to the frontier of this field, saying that there is not enough research on conformity towards repulsive attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. He states that groups are a powerful influence on an individual, and if a group affects an individual's line of thinking, then there is a great chance that individual conforms, regardless of if it violates his/her own set of beliefs.

Neo-Noir

To understand Neo-noir, one must first understand noir.

Figure 5: *Noir Genre*

Noir is a genre of film that is deeply rooted alongside crime films, sprouting in the mid-20th century. It is characterized by its dim lighting, skewed angles known as the "Dutch Angle," and typically led by anti-heroes such as morally gray male leads, or femme fatales (MasterClass, 2021a). These characteristics of the genre result in a bleak yet familiar post-modern world full of lurking dangers that we can never truly feel safe in.

Figure 6: *Neo Noir Genre*

Neo-Noir, on the other hand, is a renaissance of noir that sought to improve the genre. According to Masterclass (2021b), the noir genre was a film genre that could not reach its full potential due to the Hays Code, guidelines active during 1934 to 1968 which prohibits profanity, sexual scenes, hyper-realistic violence, and rape (Lewis, 2021). Neo-Noir, however, is not held back by this code, which allows it to deliver darker themes, and more appropriate scenes for a crime-centric genre. Furthermore, it makes use of the latest visual film techniques, and implements newer storytelling elements such as futuristic, and science fiction, which gave birth to the sub-genre known as tech-noir. Additional sub-genres of neo-noir include superhero-noirs—noirs that feature superhuman protagonists taking on crime organizations led by superhuman antagonists; and neo-noir, which uses highly saturated neon color palettes that ironically paints the crime-ridden cities the genre is usually set in (Masterclass 2021b).

Violating Color Psychology

Masterclass (2021c) defines subversion of expectation as a literary technique utilizing a sudden shift in the direction of a story away from what the audience anticipated, typically leaving the audience surprised. This shift must occur within the bounds of what is logical for the story and the arc the audience is following with an aim to enhance the narrative.

The thesis project will make use of subversion of expectation, but not only within its narrative, but it's color direction as well. Benson (2000) explores the philosophy of Greek Color Psychology, one of the first observations of a phenomenon in which we associate certain colors with certain concepts, such as the concept of good and evil.

According to a survey conducted by Månsson (2017), blue is greatly associated to be the color of "good." On the other hand, gold, in addition to Månsson finding it to also be associated with "good," many cultures use gold as a symbol for prosperity, power, and law (Umar & Rasul, 2017). The association of color with the concept of good and evil is still strong today, and has weaved its way into film, television, fiction, game design, etc. As a testament to the strength and prevalence of this psychological phenomenon, the Game of the Year 2023 winner, Elden Ring (Reilley, 2023), shortly after its release, was criticized for giving its villains a gold-centric color palette. This will be further explored below.

With these backgrounds in mind, the thesis project will be using blue and gold as the color for the protagonist, antagonist, and the group they surround themselves with. This is in line with how the protagonist sees himself and the people he surrounds himself with: servants of justice. In reality, they are a corrupt group who wields and abuses power to serve their own twisted ideals. This violates the association pre-existing association the readers may have with the colors blue and gold, aiding the delivery of the thesis project's message.

REVIEW OF RELATED WORKS

The proceeding section is a collection of similar works reviewed for the benefit of the creative output.

Elden Ring

Figure 7: *Elden Ring's Golden Order*

Elden Ring is the latest entry into Fromsoftware's "Souls-like" action-role playing game genre written by director, Hidetaka Miyazaki, and accompanying world-building by

American book writer, George R. R. Martin (Saltzman, 2022). Despite winning the Game of the Year 2023 (Reilley, 2023), the video game took a lot of criticism from game designers and fans, claiming the art design of Elden Ring is misleading (The Act Man, 2022). This is thanks to the design of the villains of the game, The Golden Order, who are depicted with gold. The main villains are gods and demigods that rule The Lands Between (the fictional setting of the game), and often use "holy magic" against the player. The domain of the gods, known as the Erdtree, is a gigantic tree in the center of the world illuminating the world with gold. These criticisms come from Elden Ring breaking the mold and violating unwritten rules of art such as color theory.

The creative output explores a subversive way of storytelling, where the symbols often worn by righteous people are given to morally gray and/or repulsive characters. Elden Ring became an inspiration because of its use of unconventional art direction, which the creative output wishes to capitalize on.

Love Death + Robots: Pop Squad

Figure 8: *Love Death + Robots: Pop Squad*

Love Death + Robots is a Netflix series that consist of standalone episodes revolving around a multitude of themes such as comedy, horror, science fiction, and fantasy (Prudom, 2019). The particular episode the creative output took inspiration from is Pop Squad, the third episode of part II, directed by Frank Balson & Jennifer Yuh Nelson (IMBD, 2021). It is a tech noir story of a future where everyone is immortal, resources are limited, and unregistered offsprings are illegal. Detective Briggs, a population control officer, faces a moral dilemma when he is tasked to eliminate unregistered offsprings.

Although par for the course of Love Death + Robots, this episode is dark, and revolves around real life issues such as uncontrolled birth, infinite demand and limited resources,

and police brutality. Love Death + Robots: Pop Squad is the first inspiration for the creative output and has taken elements from the episode and has made it its own. Additionally, the creative output benefits from a breakdown of Detective Briggs' character and the moral dilemma he faces.

The Wolf Among Us

Figure 9: *The Wolf Among Us*

The Wolf Among Us is a choose-your-own-adventure video game made by Telltale Games. It takes us to 1986 Fabletown—an enclave of refugees from folklore and myths (such as Beaty & the Beast, Snow White, and the Headless Horseman) located in Manhattan—where we follow a sheriff named Bigby Wolf, or the Big Bad Wolf (Mejia, 2013). As it is based on a comic book series called Fable, whose events happened 20 years prior to the events of the comic (Clark, 2014).

The Wolf Among Us exhibits the neon-noir genre, evident from the high-saturation pinks and purples. The story revolves around a series of murders happening in Fabletown—the setting of the story inspired by a New York Chinatown—and it is Sheriff Bigby's job to investigate these murders, find the serial killer, and bring him to justice. But Bigby is a man with a dark past, and although he tries to set himself straight, the darkness within him resurfaces when he pushed to the brink. The story of The Wolf Among Us is a great inspiration for the creative output, as Bigby shares several similarities with We of Crimson Feather's main character: being an anti-hero; is trying to be righteous but are morally-gray; and works for their respective universe's police force.

It exhibits an art style typically used for comics, despite being a video game. Additionally, the world gritty, contrasted by neon illuminating the night, signifying the dangers that lurk in the dark. Because the chosen medium is a webtoon, the creative output will utilize a similar art direction The Wolf Among Us uses.

Works of Horang's Nightmare

Figure 10. *Ad Promoting Horang's Nightmare*

Horang's Nightmare is a Korean Webtoon artist that specializes in producing horror comics. What sets their works apart from most are their blending of animation, 3d spaces, and interactivity in their comics, delivering scares that would normally be unachievable for static comics. Horang's Nightmare is a pioneer for animated webtoons, their first viral work being The Ghost of Bongcheon-Dong back in 2011. The animation of the webtoon is triggered by the scrolling of the reader, allowing storytelling techniques unique only to the webtoon format. In The Ghost of Bongcheon-Dong Remastered, for example, the camera initially faces the character's face. But as the reader scrolls down, the camera revolves around the protagonist's head to reveal the ghost in front of her. Later, the webtoon scrolls by itself through several turnaround frames, making the ghost's head quickly face the camera as her neck contorts to a full 180 degrees.

The techniques used by Horang's Nightmare are a great inspiration for the thesis project. The thesis project will utilize animation, 3d spaces, and interactivity in its creation. This allows the story to be told more dynamically.

Breaking Bad & Telltale's The Walking Dead

Figure 11. *Breaking Bad (Top) & Telltale's The Walking Dead (Bottom)*

Breaking Bad and the Walking dead are two stories that are not typically grouped together. While Breaking Bad is about the story of Walter White's, a meek father who accomplished little in his life, dive into the world of crime, Telltale's The Walking Dead is the story of Lee, and later Clementine, as they traverse a world infested with zombies. While these two stories seem to have little in common with one another, they have several things in common: an ever-present sense of danger, violence, and disease.

These three aspects are depicted on screen by a sickly wash of yellow.

In Breaking Bad, this filter of yellow is only present in Mexico. Mexico, in Breaking Bad, is a dangerous place, run by The Cartel. The Cartel is violent, volatile, and the audience is always left on edge when they are on screen, as they can never tell if someone is about to get rewarded or get killed. The sickness is more of a sickness of mind—an addition to drugs, power, and violence.

On the other hand, Telltale's The Walking Dead is a world full of walking, diseased undead that can spread their incurable pestilence through a bite. It's a world where no one is truly safe, and violence—whether it's against zombies or other humans—is a common occurrence.

The thesis project will implement this wash of unsaturated yellow when coloring the City of San Saul, as it is reflects how Detective Erenio sees the city: the underbelly of Manila rid with crime, disease, and violence.

Synthesis

Although there are plenty of scientific documentation about similarity-attraction being the driving force in the formation of groups, and in fulfilling belongingness, there is not enough research behind repulsive conformity as a means of forming groups and

fulfilling belongingness. But Cohen (2022) states that it is a possibility, considering the influence of groups are a powerful factor in deciding the decisions of individuals.

We of Crimson Feathers' central theme is repulsive conformity—a phenomenon in which humans adopts repulsive attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs to achieve belongingness in a group or person with similar repulsive attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. The neo-noir genre is appropriate for the story I want to tell. Apart from the neon palette the thesis project will use to paint its crime-ridden nightscape, I will also use the colors blue and gold for the main characters to further subvert pre-existing associations with color. The story will take inspiration from several creative works: the first being Love, Death, + Robots, Pop Squad, with its main character, the anti-hero, Detective Briggs who I shaped the creative output's main character, Detective Erenio was shaped around. When it comes to the use of symbolism, the creative output looks at Elden Ring. The creative output seeks to mimic its usage of symbolism with commonly associated meanings (such as giving the main bad guys a golden aesthetic, gold being a symbol of righteousness and good, and allowing them to use "holy" magic) and portraying them in a polar opposite light. Inspired by Horang's Nightmare, the thesis project will adapt the technique's used by their works to enhance storytelling through the means of animation, 3d space, and interactivity. Finally, in terms of art direction, the creative output would like to adapt a similar art style and color direction as the neon-noir video game, The Wolf Among Us.

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