

Stigmatization, Fractured Self and Segmented Identity in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series

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Abstract

Stigma is the term used in a negative perspective, as it diminishes the processes of shame and pain derived from the individuals with human differences. It enables social alienation and exclusion. In the case that an individual, it he is flexible in his ability to cope with the fact of stigmatization, it is to be found that the individual is led to a fractured and segmented identity. Through stigma, decreased subject positions are also established. This denotes the degraded position of the individual. Stigma even regulates one's social and emotional relationships. Experience of marginalization is also an outcome of stigmatization. When an individual has a trait or identity that is publicly discredited, he is subjected to stigma.

Irvin Goffman defines stigma as a controlling mechanism; it is a means of maintaining social order; it reinforces social hierarchies through the act of shaming and stigmatizing individuals and groups. If stigma increases the social exclusion of individuals, it can lead to resistance from the stigmatized and create new forms of exclusion. In this context, Goffman's perspective of the normal/abnormal binary is significant. His discussion is centered on the negative societal consequences and the social disadvantages faced by the stigmatized in society.

The present study interrogates J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series, through the lens of Irving Goffman's theory of stigma. Harry is the eponymous hero, around whom the whole narrative is woven. The purpose of the study is to examine how the stigmatization of Harry develops in the Series. Goffman's premise of stigma is used to analyze the struggles of Harry with cultural negotiations.

Key Words: Irving Goffman's theory of stigma, normal/abnormal binary.

Introduction

When certain stereotypes become devalued, they pick up an attribute called 'Stigma'. In his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, (1963) Erving Goffman, sheds light on the concept of stigma, providing a detailed examination of the positions of the stigmatized. It is regarded as a classic work of sociology because of the fact that it highlights the experiences of the stigmatized. Erving Goffman is one of the most influential Canadian sociologists and social psychologists. He is widely known for his original research and theoretical contributions, which shape the understanding of social behaviour and self-presentation in our day-to-day interactions. Goffman debuted with his first significant publication, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, in the year 1959. In the book, he elaborates dramaturgy, comparing social exchanges to theatrical performances. According to him, every person tries to stage their performance in such a way that he gives the desired perception of himself to the audience. In the course of his writing, he has included his discussions on stigma, gender depiction in advertisements, and workings of institutions like prisons as well as mental hospitals. Goffman's method is based on ethnographic research which stipulates that investigation is done through observing and participation. He has gained an understanding of how social systems affect a person's behaviour.

Goffman elaborates the two major harmful outcomes of stigmatization; the social stigma leads to marginalization; at another level, the people with disability undergo the experience of exclusion. As per the matrix, people are categorized and positioned as the normal and the abnormal. While social stigma is faced by many sectors in a society, its impact is greater in the case of disabled individuals. Having strayed away from the socially accepted norms, the disabled people constitute a highly socially stigmatized group.

In Harry Potter Series, J.K. Rowling explores themes of stigmatization, prejudice, and systemic discrimination, though her fictional frameworks. Among the specified themes, stigmatization operates through rigid social hierarchies, blood status, marginalization of non-human or part-human beings. Throughout the Series, stigmatization occurs in specific forms. In the wizarding world, the characters are categorized in the name of blood purity. According to the standards set by the magical society, they are treated with embarrassment and pushed to

the margins in the wizarding world. Certain groups are systematically enslaved; they are conditioned by birth to enjoy their servitude; they are viewed as household property by the elite society. The half-giants face prejudice, character assassination, and legal exclusion. Professor Remus Lupin suffers from lycanthropy and undergoes medical stigma. His condition is viewed as chronic and dangerous illness and he is driven to social exile. The forced status as the werewolf on him pushes him to a life of secrecy. Coming to know that his plight is exposed to the society, he resigns his post as a respected professor; he is the specific character in the Series to struggle with deep internal shame.

Debangana Basu and Paromita Mukherjee in their research article (2023) view the picturing of disabled characters in Harry Potter Series as a social issue. They admit that Michael Foucault and Erving Goffman have initiated the disability studies in the West only in the present century. The disabled persons, who have been denied social justice and marginalized all these days, have started gaining individuality and identity. Rowling reserves the platform for the representation of the disabled people. The purpose of this research is to apply the theories of Foucault and Goffman to understand and analyze the treatment of the disabled in the magical world, and how they geared this treatment towards the real world parallel to the magical world in order to further enrich the understanding of their treatment.

Theoretical Framework

Ervin Goffman describes stigma as “attribute that is deeply discrediting”. (Goffman, 1963, p 3) The stigmatized trait can be determined according to people’s skin tones, size of the body, disability, difference in physical conditions, or mental health disease. Stigma being a common phenomenon in society on a large scale is regarded as a reason why disabled people and able-bodied individuals find it challenging to share the same social circles. Hence, disabled people often experience stigma when they are among able-bodied individuals. They often feel embarrassed and segregated in society. Moreover, the disabled experience a feeling that they are due to some reasons overlooked by the majority. The stigma has a negative impact on disabled people as it provides them with a feeling that they are somehow disadvantaged. The other considerations associated with the topic are structural factors, effects at the level of population, and collective reactions. Stigmatization causes social inequality at both micro and macro levels. The difference of causes and effects of stigmatization must be understood to be a different phenomenon for every social group. In accordance with Goffman’s claim, owing to certain situations and under certain conditions, nearly everyone feels the pain of being stigmatized.

The general causes of societal stigmatization are grouped on the basis of tribe, physical deformities, and blemishes of character. The term ‘stigmatization of tribe’ is used for the discrimination of a person on the basis of his/her race, ethnicity, and religion. Physical deformities, leprosy, blindness and deafness, if stigmatized, also entail shame and separation. Certain character flaws, like mental illness, addiction, and homosexuality, also lead to stigmatization, as they are discredited by the society. On the whole, the society sets certain standards to measure the physical deformities and mental illness, and as a result, directs disgrace and seclusion on the affected individuals.

The present study does an analysis of stigmatization, the fractured self, and segmented identity in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series and reveals how deeply Rowling has depicted the psychological trauma, social exclusion and identity crisis of Harry, in particular. By adopting magical metaphors, the novelist represents the sociological and psychological phenomena in the real world. In the wizarding world of Harry Potter Series, stigmatization operates on both institutional and interpersonal levels. The biases based on race, illness, and class, existing in the magical society is mirrored through the conflicts and pain of the characters. The early life of Harry with the Dursleys highlights the stigmatization of difference. Harry experiences a terrible time of childhood with the Dursleys. He is punished for his emotional and magical outbursts; they force him to hide his true nature to fit into a strictly conformist, mundane world.

Harry embodies a fractured self because he is the bearer of a piece of Voldemort’s soul, in the form of a scar on his physical body. This deformity pressurizes the compromise between his identity and its external presence. Harry’s varied experiences such as shared thoughts with the other characters and frequent flashes of anger make him question his own core goodness at times. He explores himself to find out whether he is a good person with bad things or vice-versa. The stigma of Harry shapes the young Harry into a flawed angry man. Anyway, he constantly balances his internal identity with his public, highly commercialized identity. The stigmatization forces Harry to create isolation to himself to escape the pressure of his public segment.

Significance of Study

While discussing the practice of conceptualizing stigma, Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan define stigma as the co-occurrence of four processes. (Bruce, 2001, 363-385) The human society is conscious of and it is liable to label human differences. Once locating the differences, the society stereotypes them to the utmost. Individuals, who have the human differences are labeled and separated from the rest of the society. Discrimination is exercised toward the labeled individuals, and they are driven to a lower social status. In the course of these linked processes, law and institutional practices also play a major role in stigmatizing individuals with human differences. This crude fact is to be viewed from the sociological as well as humanitarian point of view. The affected individuals exclude themselves from social networks and even from their neighborhoods.

In J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter Series, the lightning-bolt scar on the forehead of Harry represents his physical and psychological link to Lord Voldemort. It serves as the badge of Harry's trauma. Rowling has woven the whole narrative of the Series around the deformity of the eponymous hero. During the death of his parents, the accidental piece of Voldemort's soul gets latched on to Harry, the infant. Thus, by bearing the wound and scar, Harry becomes an unintentional Horcrux. The physical pain of Harry is interlinked with his intense emotions. The scar is mute and inactive at normal occasions; it reacts when Harry experiences like enragement or enthusiasm; it gets aggravated when Harry senses the presence of Voldemort in close proximity; the pain and burning sensations act as an early-warning system. Harry realizes in the later part of the Series, that the scar, which is shaped like a lightning bolt is a physical manifestation of the self-sacrificing love Lily Potter, his mother.

Viewed according to the Stigma theory of Ervin Goffman, the scar of Harry can be described as an attribute that is deeply discrediting. It is a burden on his identity in the public. The wizarding world brands him as the boy who lived; Harry is not identified by his individuality; he is recognized as by the scar and its related matters, which outshine his true essence. The scar strips away Harry's privacy. It subjects him to unwanted fame, hero-worship and skepticism. By the presence of the scar on his physical body, Harry becomes vulnerable and experiences utmost internal conflict; it causes severe psychological distress. The alienating pain drives him to emotional outburst as it happens in Order of the Phoenix. As the narrative proceeds towards the destruction of Voldemort, the pain out of the scar vanishes; what remains is just a normal visible scar, signaling peace.

Stigmatization in Rowling's Harry Potter Series:

Some of the characters in Rowling's Harry Potter Series are stigmatized. The effects of stigma are highly detrimental to the affected individuals. Rowling's work of fiction portrays suffering of different characters at the micro level. It pictures the pain, created by various social structures of the wizarding world. The case of Lupin helps one understand the pain and social interaction that the affected individuals have to experience. There is a need to analyse different social groups in Harry Potter Series and their social standards of discrimination. The Purebloods or the group with magical power stigmatize all other non-magical groups such as Mudblood, Halfblood and Squibs.

The discrimination, stigma and prejudice in a society of a certain community occur due to ignorance, apathy and intolerance. Rowling pictures the division between the wizarding world and the Muggle world at the basic level. There is always an emphasis on blood status. In The Prisoner of Azkaban, Aunt Marge says that everything comes down to blood; she has been insisting this in the previous days. She is sure bad blood will be out. The pure-bloods represent the aristocratic society of the wizarding world. The half-bloods are next in the striking order. Snape, Voldemort and Harry, the abandoned children are half-bloods. The Muggle-born witches and wizards are at the lowest level of the social hierarchy. Draco Malfoy, filled with evil thoughts, refers to the Muggle-borns as mud-bloods in a derogatory way. But, to the contrary of Draco's statement that Hermione is the cleverest wizard of her age. (Prisoner 253) Rowling's greatness lies in keeping up the tone throughout the fiction that the blood status is meaningless. Other social gradations include magical non-humans like elves and goblins, magical creatures, squibs, non-magical people born to magical parents and many more. The Ministry of Magic under the reign of Voldemort displays discrimination and prejudice.

Harry and his Physical Scar

Growing up with the Dursleys, his scar is the only thing that Harry likes about his own appearance. But once he meets Hagrid, Harry's relationship with his scar begins to change. Not only does he find out that it is a mark made by Dark magic and by his parents' murderer, but he also realises that it is a mark that makes him recognisable. Time

and time again through *The Philosopher's Stone*, it is Harry's scar that identifies him as an orphan or even a victim of Lord Voldemort. Harry's scar also changes from dormant to active throughout *The Philosopher's Stone*. Whilst he is growing up, it is merely part of his appearance; soon after his arrival at Hogwarts, it starts causing him physical pain. With his entry into the wizarding world, it is almost as though the scar comes alive, and with its awakening comes a searing pain in Harry's forehead that will follow him for many years to come.

In his second year, Harry's scar is the physical sign that brings him fame and attention. It has become a part of the tale of Harry Potter that he could not even remember. Adding to the mystery surrounding him, he really wants it to be revealed. Once Tom Riddle's diary is destroyed, Harry's relationship with his scar shifts again, particularly towards Voldemort. Dumbledore tells Harry that Voldemort has transferred some of his own powers to Harry the night he gives him that scar. Harry learns that the scar is not just linked to his past; it is linked to his present and to Voldemort, who has determined to return. In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry becomes increasingly irritated with his scar. Running away from the Dursleys after he has blown up Aunt Marge, Harry is barely able to conceal his identity from Stan Shunpike on the Knight Bus. He is then exposed and Stan is able to see the mark clearly. Harry's tendency changes and he wants to absolutely avoid the scar. He is not in the mood to have a lot of people staring avidly at the scar on his forehead.

In *The Goblet of Fire*, the pain in Harry's scar causes him real anxiety for the first time. In his first year at Hogwarts, he puts his scar hurting down to being a warning and courage to face Lord Voldemort. But his scar starts hurting whilst he is in Privet Drive, with no Voldemort in sight. It is something new and more threatening. Harry's relationship with his scar shifts again. At first, he tries to keep the pain and hurt to himself. He does not want to worry Ron, Hermione, even Dumbledore. The pain alienates him; he isolates himself with it; he is unable to keep his friends in the dark for long even though he prefers to. The pain, coupled by his dreams, linked to Voldemort, starts to mean that more than ever the scar is becoming a living link to Lord Voldemort. When he is finally confronted with He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named in the graveyard, the pain in Harry's scar is excruciating and unbearable.

This idea of his scar as a weakness is something that is solidified in *Order of the Phoenix*. Whilst Harry has previously viewed his scar as something to be proud of, it is now causing him not only physical pain, but emotional trauma too. Throughout his fifth year at Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic uses it as a way to discredit and mock him. Whilst in previous years, pain in Harry's scar has been something unusual, in *Order of the Phoenix*, the prickling sensation in his forehead becomes commonplace; it is a constant reminder that Lord Voldemort has returned, contrary to the lies the Ministry is disseminating. In short, Harry's relationship with his scar, with the varying levels of pain comes with visions and dreams. It takes over his whole life. At the end of *Order of the Phoenix*, Harry finds out more about his scar and what Dumbledore has been keeping from him about it for years. This changes his relationship with the mark of Dark magic even further. Dumbledore reveals the particular words of the prophecy that are relevant to the scar.

In *Half-Blood Prince* Harry realizes that his scar is not just meant for the past; it marks him as the one who must kill Lord Voldemort. The scar is not just a battle-wound anymore; it is a target. Harry experiences a poignant moment at Bill and Fleur's wedding, narrated at the beginning of *Deathly Hallows*. Harry harks back to time spent with Ginny at the end of *Half-Blood Prince*. Watching the ceremony, he equates having a normal life, without a scar. His relationship with his scar at this point is not one he has prized. He wishes that he does not have it. The scar is now intrinsically linked to finding the Horcruxes, destroying Voldemort and walking along the path that Dumbledore has set for him. In *Deathly Hallows*, Harry's relationship with his scar becomes slightly more positive and a useful warning. He gains control over it. At King's Cross, meeting Dumbledore again, Harry's scar has actually disappeared.

Harry's Physical Stigma

Kristina Zirdum in her dissertation (2019) analyzes contemporary social issues which have been portrayed subtly by Rowling in Harry Potter Series. The primary theme discussed in the fiction is social discrimination. Some of the sub-themes discussed include racism as well as the theme of slavery. The dissertation addresses some issues such as discrimination based on the stereotypes which are related to the houses of Hogwarts, the treatment of house elves and goblins, the werewolves and the gender discrimination. The researcher asserts that the social issues and the gender stereotypes of the wizarding world are similar to the real world.

The scar on Harry Potter's forehead, as the stigma suggests and bears the psychological and emotional consequences. This scar abides on Harry's forehead from the night Riddle attacked him and his parents. Till date, Harry suffers from the psychological subconscious memory of the barbaric event. The pain of loss on Harry's part is still ongoing. Harry comes across the fabled mirror of Erised, tucked away in an unfamiliar room. The word 'Erised' in backwards spelling is 'desire' and therefore refers to it. The mirror shows the spectator's innermost desires, regardless of what they truly need. The scar on his face, visible in the mirror, is an emotional scar, and this features Harry's suffering in an apparent way. He is pulled to a state of trance by it. He attempts to hide it beneath his thick bangs. But the physical scar is too big to be hidden. Dumbledore describes the scar in a different way, saying Tom Riddle has left a little of himself in Harry. By doing so, Tom Riddle has traumatized Harry psychologically.

Harry's scar is has much significance as it denoted his past and a chance for him to identify himself with his parentage. Harry could feel the physical pain, when he undergoes emotional pain. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, when Tom Riddle possesses Harry, the painful subconscious memory and the trauma of losing his beloved parents is prompted in Harry. The scar starts yielding acute pain to Harry once the thought of the past occurs in him. Till his life with the Dursleys, Harry has never undergone any physical or mental pain, caused by the scar. In fact, Rowling describes as, "The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance." (Philosopher's 92)

The meeting with Hagrid changes the attitude of Harry toward his scar. Eventually, he finds out that the mark has been done with the help of Dark magic by the murderer of his parents. Above all, it is the mark that points him out to the society as an orphan or a victim of Lord Voldemort. Once, Harry attains this realization, the scar starts changing from its dormant stage to active stage. As a young boy, Harry believed that scar is a part of his physical appearance. But, after his arrival at Hogwarts, the scar triggers physical pain to Harry. After his exposure to the wizarding world, the scar has come to life. The persisting pain in his forehead is a symbolic representation of Harry's emotional conflict.

Lockhart and Malfoy give a different perspective to Harry's scar. According to them, it is a physical sign, bringing fame and attention to Harry. But, Harry ardently wants to unravel the mystery behind his scar solved and get relieved from that identity. Dumbledore's encouraging words give a positive view to Harry's physical deformity. He views it not as a scar but as a sign or a symbol, to be viewed by others. It carries the noble message of love. The loved ones of Harry are no more. But their protection is with Harry forever. In *The Philosopher's Stone*, Dumbledore is sure Voldemort could never touch Harry for this reason. When a person is marked for something good, touching him will create anxiety.

In *Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry becomes increasingly irritated with his scar. Harry runs away from the Dursleys because he is in struggle with Aunt Marge. During his far off journey, he attempts to hide his identity denoted by the scar. But he fails in his attempt. Snap, one of the passengers stars at the scar and accepts the sight of it with hesitancy. But, Harry loses his interest in conversing with him, as the talk is centred on the scar. Harry dislikes a lot of people staring avidly at the scar on his forehead.

In *Goblet of Fire*, Harry is presented as a pitiable character, experiencing pain and anxiety by the presence of the scar on his forehead. In the bygone days, Harry had been with the resolution to confront Lord Voldemort and find solution to his conflict. When he is in Privet Drive, the absence of Voldemort terrifies him of the permanency of the scar with him. It is a threatening matter to Harry. Harry tries his best to hide his anxiety and conflict, arising out of his physical stigma, from Ron, Hermione, even Dumbledore at the beginning of their relationship. His good intention is not to worry them by the sight of the scar. He isolates himself. He is upset that the scar is becoming a living link to Lord Voldemort.

In *The Order of the Phoenix*, the notion that his scar is vulnerability is cemented. During his childhood days, Harry was proud his scar, considering it as a sign of his courage. As he grows up, he comprehends the new dimensions of the scar. It generates emotional trauma in addition to physical agony in him. In his fifth year at Hogwarts, Harry faces an act of shame. The Ministry of Magic finds pleasure in making fun of him for they consider his scar a disgrace. Even the newspaper, *The Daily Prophet* gives a detailed description of Harry's scar. The article says futuristically that the presence of the scar will make Harry a subject of worship. After growing up, Harry is accustomed to the prickling sensation in his forehead. The sensation is a continual reminder that Lord Voldemort has returned. But the Ministry of Magic has been disseminating misleading information about the dark wizard. The pain and anxiety, created by the scar is at varying levels, depending on the situation in Harry's life. The entire life of the protagonist is possessed by nothing but visions, dreams, Voldemort's emotions and mockery of the Ministry of Magic. That was the reason Harry gets enraged, when Hermione urges him to tell Dumbledore about

the hurting scar. , it turns out to be an outburst of anger. Harry gives a haughty reply: "'Yeah,' said Harry, before he could stop himself, 'that's the only bit of me Dumbledore cares about, isn't it, my scar?'" (Order 111) Harry no more considers himself to be a boy with the scar. He is sure the scar defines him. At the climax of *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry finds out more about his scar and the secrecy maintained by Dumbledore all these years. His perspective of the mark as a result of Dark magic changes further. Dumbledore speaks out the words of the Prophecy that are relevant to the scar. Voldemort, the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal; but, the power of Harry will never be known to the Dark Lord.

In *The Half-Blood Prince*, the attitudinal change happens in Harry. He realizes that the scar is not just a reminder of his past. Instead, it marks him as the one who must kill Lord Voldemort. The words that neither can live while the other survives reverberate in his mind. He comes to the conclusion that it is not just a battle-wound anymore. It is his target. As the fiction progresses, Harry undergoes many experiences, which teach him a different lesson about his own scar. He no more feels he is stigmatized. He considers it as his lifetime goal to be achieved. In *The Deathly Hallows*, while watching the wedding ceremony of Bill and Fleur, Harry imagines the other way how life would have been without the physical stigma. He equates having a normal life, with one without a scar. In *The Deathly Hallows*, we see Harry imagining his life without the scar. He may lead the life of a normal person in the shining part of his life. Harry has been prizing his scar for a long time as a memory of his lost parents. Now he attains the wisdom that it is his opponent's life source. He wants it to diminish at once. The scar is now intrinsically linked to his further attempts in finding the Horcruxes, destroying Voldemort and walking the path Dumbledore has set for him.

In *The Order of the Phoenix*, Harry is plagued by the thought of Voldemort. He becomes matured enough and in *The Deathly Hallows*, the same thought of Voldemort becomes a source of strength and knowledge for him. He depends on his insights to assist in his own hunt for the Horcruxes and Hallows. His relationship with his scar becomes slightly more positive and useful. While burying Dobby, Harry talks to himself about burying the pain attached to his stigma also deep into the ground. He soliloquies that he has to dig deep into the hard and cold earth and bury his pain and grief into it.

Harry's sole wish, all these years has been the disappearance of his scar. It gets fulfilled when he meets Dumbledore at King's Cross. By the change of attitude and attainment of maturity, Harry wants it to reappear on his forehead so that he can enter the battle with Voldemort again. Nineteen years later, Harry's connection with his scar remains present, though more subdued now; the scar is dormant, resembling the thin lightning bolt that young Harry Potter once appreciated about his looks. However, in adult Harry Potter, its quietness also indicates a conclusion to his challenges and struggles in the wizarding world. In fact, the scar has not pained Harry for nineteen years.

Conclusion

Jodie. S. Brown in her chapter in the book titled *Fear within Melting Boundaries* (2020) finds an application of Irving Goffman's theory of stigma to Harry Potter Series and analyses the condition of the protagonist through the lens of disability. Brown has undertaken the prosthesis of David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder on disability as a narrative trope. Harry, the young man is in an untiring attempt to identify his belonging to the cultural community. Harry is branded as an eccentric and undesirable boy. He is caught up in the midst of two homes, his parental home and his adoptive home. The perplexity arises whether he belongs to the Hogwarts group of witches or the non-magical group of the Dursleys. Harry is liable to social stigmatization Brown analyses the struggles that Harry meets with the cultural negotiations in both the homes.

Reading Rowling's Harry Potter Series is an enchanting experience to readers of any age. Rowling has created a powerful combination of magical content with fast-paced narrative and complex moral elements. The novel is not simply to be classified under Fantasy or Children's Literature because it constructs an insightful exploration of societal elements and human behaviours and wrestling between good and evil forces. In the expansive wizarding universe of Harry Potter, themes of societal alienation and dehumanization arise as potent motifs. They strike a deep chord with the readers. The readers are drawn to the psychological aspects of alienation and estrangement that permeate the story of Harry, in particular. While discussing the visual pleasures narrative cinema, Laura Mulvey comments that such themes matter more rather than just the outward displays of otherness. (Mulvey, 1975, p 16)

To throw light on the negative outcomes of stereotypes and stigmatization, the present study has attempted to uncover the complex web of human experience, desire, and subjectivity that constitutes Rowling's masterpiece by

taking on Irving Goffman's theory of stigma for interpreting the text. The individuals' complexities in negotiating the maze-like passageways of selfhood while under the crushing weight of cultural standards are explicit. The mechanisms of dehumanization and social alienation at work inside the wizarding world are reflections of the complexity and paradoxes of our present world.

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