

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER DYNAMICS IN TWO OF KONRAD WOLF'S
FILMS: *SONNENSUCHER* AND *SOLO SUNNY***

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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August 2025

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to women who have experienced sexual harassment and inequality either
in the past or recently.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God be the glory for the successful completion of my master's degree.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Maria Stehle, for her time, unwavering support, encouraging words, guidance, and constructive feedback throughout the writing process. I also want to thank my committee members, Dr. Sarah Eldridge and Dr.

Stefanie Ohnesorg, for their input and support both on and outside the thesis—special thanks to Professor Daniel Magilow for his approach to helping me improve my writing skills.

I graciously acknowledge the contribution of all the German faculty to my study through their guidance, feedback, and efforts to improve me as a student and an instructor. I cannot help but thank Dr. Gallmeier for helping me familiarize myself with teaching methods in the USA.

Thank you to all my colleagues, friends, and family members who supported me in many ways. I want to thank Ajeboriogbon Titilope and Falaye Ireti for providing clues and ideas on how to excel as a graduate student.

To my son, Ademide Obalanlege, for being a sweet, calm, and happy baby.

Finally, I thank my husband, Ademuyiwa Obalanlege, for walking through this journey with me and supporting my dreams. I appreciate your support and strength throughout the program, especially your taking on childcare when our son came into the picture. I will always cherish you.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the themes of sexual harassment and objectification of women and asks the question of how the female protagonists in DEFA films struggle to find their identity in a field or society dominated by men. Two of the films directed by Konrad Wolf and produced by the state-owned film studio DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) in the early and late East German film periods. The films *Sonnensucher* (1958) and *Solo Sunny* (1980) portray women's experiences as they struggle to fit into society. The female main characters in these films try to stay relevant and successful despite all odds. These films also show more broadly how people perceived gender roles and the place of women in society at two moments in German history: the 1950s and the late 1980s. This study reveals how each film depicts how men of varying classes and positions of power use their power differently. Some abused their power, while some did not, even when they had the opportunity. It also examines Konrad Wolf's different perceptions of society during the early DEFA period and the changes in the late 80s. Many scholarly works have discussed various aspects of women's experience during the post-war era, ranging from gender roles to discrimination in the workplace, societal pressures, and economic precarity. This thesis builds on this research by focusing on depictions of abuse of women and the limitations they face in society and professional settings as portrayed in DEFA films.

Keywords: *Sexual Harassment, Objectification, DEFA, Women, Gender Dynamics, Konrad Wolf.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DEFA – Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft

GDR – German Democratic Republic

SED – Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (The Socialist Unity Party of Germany)

OTS – Over The Shoulder camera angle

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Art serves as a powerful tool that reflects history and society, just like a mirror reflects the human body. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, contemporary literary theorists, enhance scholars' understanding of the relationship between society and literature – a form of art, how it reflects social events, and offer criticism of specific thematic subjects. (Rivkin 712) Film is a form of art, and filmmakers use creative narratives, sounds, and other formal elements to entertain, educate, and convey interesting, politically, and socially relevant stories. Sebastian Heiduschke, in his book on East German Cinema, referred to this when he talked about DEFA and film history. In his words, "...East German cinema was born as a reaction to address the legacy of national socialism by way of making films conveying messages of peace, democracy, and antifascist ideals." (Heiduschke 9) Given that cinema reflects on the complexities of human conditions and experiences, this thesis explores the themes of sexual harassment, gender dynamics, and the objectification of women in East German cinema using two DEFA films. Within this context, the two DEFA films discussed function as tools for exploring these themes. They offer criticism of the social issues that existed in East German society. Exploring these themes aims to foster empathy and solidarity and to reassure victims that they are not alone or neglected in their struggles.

The issue of sexual harassment is a subject of discussion in various parts of society, mainly where hierarchies are evident, such as workplaces, schools, and some homes. Some feminists come up with definitions or descriptions for sexual harassment. Lin Farley, an American author and feminist, described sexual harassment "as unsolicited non-reciprocated

male behavior that asserts a woman's sex role over her function as a worker." (Farley 14) A professor of Sociology, Susan Halford, in her text on *Gender, Power, and Organisations*, writes that "radical and structural approaches both understand sexual harassment as something that (typically) men do to women as a way of exerting their superior power." (Halford 148) Both men and women can be victims of sexual harassment. However, this thesis focuses on women. Some men see women as objects of desire, which lures them to yearn for women and do not mind going to any length to satisfy their desires, even if it means doing so by force.

Some sexual abuse victims have suffered alone and in silence. Growing up and seeing women bottle up their experiences is quite disheartening. Some keep silent until their death, and they die without getting justice for themselves, which leads to the rampant spread of these unethical behaviors. Mary Meyer Coeli, an American author, states that some have been courageous enough to stand up for themselves. "Similarly, there is the female who is unable to cope and seeks, presumably, to rectify every injustice wrought by males. She will subjugate the male and denigrate his masculinity by putting him in his place." (Meyer 64) This explains that some victims fight for themselves in the face of harassment and set their prey right by rebuking sexual advances. However, how many females, in old and recent times, dare to speak up after their experience? Many victims become stigmatized, are affected psychologically, and lose their self-esteem and confidence. Some become depressed, anxious, and stressed both physically and emotionally. This is where literary texts and films become relevant as they enlighten and stir viewers' reactions to fight and litigate against future occurrences.

Aside from sexual harassment, this thesis aims to address other challenges women face in male-dominated fields, such as limitations and the inability to expand their careers. Before the formation of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1949, traditional or patriarchal beliefs

existed, which limited some women of the lower classes to cooks, wives, and mothers. Women were hardly included in the workforce. Also, Rivkin and Ryan perceived it as “women’s experiences under patriarchy, the long tradition of male rule in society, which silenced women’s voices, distorted lives, and treated their concerns as peripheral” (Rivkin 893). Gender dynamics is a critical issue that women face. Eventually, after the division of Germany into four occupational zones, and when the Soviet Union began to transform the political, economic, and social landscape in East Germany, one of their ideologies allowed for the inclusivity of women in politics and the workforce. As a result of this inclusivity, society placed high expectations on women to excel as professional people and in their roles as mothers without lagging in either role. Even though East German society permitted inclusivity and equality of men and women, it took time to take effect, as many East German women struggled to find their place in East Germany. This is due to the structural sexism in place. Although the socialist ideology promotes gender equality and women’s participation in the workforce and political life, the films show how some female characters face barriers and are relegated, which exemplifies some of the critical issues in East Germany.

This thesis addresses how female protagonists in DEFA films struggle to find their identity and place in a male-dominated field or society. Some other DEFA films with women as protagonists, such as *Der Dritte (Her Third)* and *Karla (Carla)*, reflect the place of women and their search for independence, growth, and success. Many scholarly works have also examined some aspects of DEFA on how film tells the stories of women’s challenges, such as gender dynamics, the role of women in the family, the concept of double burden, women filmmakers, and other aspects. This thesis aims to examine how women were depicted as objects of sexual desire in these DEFA films and how these treatments affected them. It analyzes two of Konrad

Wolf's films to examine how these films depict women's experiences in male-dominated fields in East Germany. This thesis identifies how much the female characters in the films tried to survive despite the many challenges they faced in their fields, the advances and sexual demands from men for positions, protection, companionships, or jobs, and how some succumbed to these demands to have a life, be relevant, or survive. All of these are seen in the way the films portray them.

1.2. DEFA HISTORY

East German Cinema existed between 1946 and 1992. After World War II, Germany was divided into four occupation zones. The Soviet Military took over the eastern zone and controlled all its affairs, including the cinema. DEFA, Deutsch Film-Aktiengesellschaft, was the state institution and official film studio of East Germany. The Soviet Military used the creation of DEFA as one of their strategies to restore democracy in Germany and to remove traces of fascist and militaristic ideology¹. They intended to use films to shape the public's opinion of the socialist ideology and educate the people, especially the young, on what true democracy meant. DEFA became a political tool that produced films aligned with the instructions of the then-ruling party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). "In the Soviet Zone, German productions returned to cinemas rather quickly in the form of newsreels, assisted and approved by the leadership of the soviet colonel..." (Heiduschke 10)

DEFA film scholar Seán Allan recorded, "During the forty-five years of its existence, DEFA, the state-owned film company of the GDR, produced about 750 films." (Allan 1) Film production became strategic and political. A film and media studies professor, Margaret Fröhlich,

¹ DEFA shares the same goal with the *Bitterfelder Weg* initiative of 1959, which aims to bridge the gaps between the intellectual elites and the working class. These two initiatives were deeply rooted in the GDR's socialist ideology, both *Bitterfelder Weg* and DEFA were central to GDR's attempt to make East Germany a socialist state.

added that “to make a film in the GDR, whether fiction or documentary, was a highly political issue. It inevitably meant that the filmmaker had to have the ability to navigate the fine line between addressing controversial issues and tempering the view to a level acceptable to the regime’s cultural functionaries.” (Fröhlich 45) This means the producers or film writers had to be diplomatic to produce films, as DEFA films have been used as the lens through which societal issues are made known to the public. Directors had to employ metaphors and allegories to address political and social issues to avoid the ban on their films.

Many DEFA films have women as their protagonists, and film directors began to show women’s lives and experiences through their films, to give visual representations of things happening to women in society at the time. This became common since the socialist government encouraged the equality of men and women in the workforce and the society at large. Fröhlich states,

As a result of the turn away from historical subjects to topical themes, and those about everyday life, both fiction and documentary film began to focus on women...through a female protagonist perspective, they examine the societal structures of East German society as they were experienced in everyday life. (Fröhlich 45-46)

This thesis explores how sexual harassment, objectification of women, and gender dynamics are shown in two DEFA films by analyzing two films directed by Konrad Wolf: *Sonnensucher* (1958) and *Solo Sunny* (1980). Both feature young, single female lead characters who are orphans. They portray nonconformist characters and their struggles with a problem-ridden or unsatisfactory life. By featuring strong and independent women in films, DEFA presented a positive image that aligned with the state policy, which portrayed growth in the recognition and

inclusion of women in state affairs. Lischke-McMab, a German feminist and socialist writer, states that:

The films that were made at the Deutsch Film-AG (DEFA – German Film Corporation) during the seventies and eighties, and featuring women as heroines, very much reflect the *public consciousness* of the former GDR. These films, more often than not, reflected the place of women in society and their search for self-fulfillment and meaning of life in a society that had deemed them as equal. (Lischke-McMab 200)

As a state-owned institution, DEFA could not continue to uphold its legacy after reunification, so it became privatized. “In December 1992, production of DEFA films ended for good when the French real estate firm...bought the DEFA feature film studio...” (Heiduschke 31)

1.3. KONRAD WOLF

Konrad Wolf was an East German film director and a prominent figure at the DEFA studio. Larson Powell, a German and Film studies professor, in his book about the collection of Konrad Wolf’s works, said, “He is generally recognized as being...the most significant director in DEFA, especially known for his antifascist films, and his work often has qualities that suggest the subjective and personal stamp of auteur cinema.” (Powell 4) He contributed significantly to East German cinema and helped shape some of the cultural ideologies of the Soviet Union through films. Some of these ideologies are collectivism, state control of the economy, and the proletarian culture, which allows for the education of its citizens. He achieved this when he portrayed collectivism in *Solo Sunny* and how he depicted the Soviet Union, in *Sonnensucher*, as good people, who are after the peace of everyone in society.

Konrad Wolf was born in 1923 in Hechingen in Swabia, Germany. His background shaped his views and connections to the socialist ideology because he was exposed to those

ideals early on. In Powell's voice, Konrad Wolf began to appear in the antifascist films of the 1930s after he and his family left Germany for Moscow in 1933. He also joined the Red Army at 17, serving as an interpreter and a witness of the Liberation of Warsaw and the fall of Berlin. (Powell 3 - 4). Due to his exposure to antifascist cinema while growing up, this contributed to his ideologies and perception of this kind of film. He joined DEFA post-World War II and directed several films exploring relevant activities of East German and socialist values. He also portrays issues such as displacement, trauma, and the search for identity in his films based on the experiences he had growing up. He was also President of the GDR Academy of Arts in Berlin from 1965 until his death and was elected to the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) in 1981." (Powell 4).

Many of Wolf's films explore historical narratives and national identity, some of which refer to Germany's past. His 1958 film *Sonnensucher* reflects Wolf's commitment to profoundly empathetic storytelling and portrayal of the complex realities of East German society. This film portrays how his views reflected in his narrative. *Sonnensucher* tells the story of uranium miners in East Germany, their harsh working conditions, and their personal lives. He uses the film as a narrative to show how people balance their personal lives with their ambition. He later made the film *Solo Sunny* in 1980 to show the shift from the traditional portrayal of women to how they become included in society, which aligns with the socialist ideology of gender equality. Konrad Wolf stood out as an East German cinema filmmaker because of his ability to combine political themes with human experience.

1.4. MOTIVATION

Personal experience and the widespread apathy for the maltreatment, domestic abuse, and sexual harassment of women inspire this thesis. Women are considered weaker than men, but it is

incredible how much strength, courage, and resilience they exude in society and the fields they find themselves in. They try to make positive impacts and combine motherhood with careers without lagging, even when inconvenient. Women go out of their way to support their partners and colleagues and yearn for growth regardless of their present condition. Despite all this, they face so many challenges, such as limitations, being taken for granted, and the inability to thrive in male-dominated fields because they are women.

My interest was stirred up after seeing some DEFA films and how they portray the issues of gender dynamics and Women's experiences in a male-dominated society. Konrad Wolf's films *Sonnensucher* and *Solo Sunny* stood out for me because they portray the same themes of sexual harassment and women's objectification. Each film represents two distinct political and social periods in the GDR, and he used his creative storytelling to address important societal issues. I am writing this thesis to contribute to the scholarly works addressing the issue of sexual harassment and the cruel treatment of women in society, using the films mentioned above as case studies.

1.5. OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this thesis is to conduct a comparative analysis of the themes of sexual harassment and gender dynamics in *Sonnensucher* and *Solo Sunny*. This analysis seeks to explore gender dynamics in the socialist states of East Germany as depicted in these two films. It examines the differences between the depictions of these themes in each film. It also highlights the differences between how Konrad Wolf portrayed these issues in each film. *Sonnensucher* is the visual representation of East Germany in the fifties, and *Solo Sunny* represents East Germany in the eighties. *Solo Sunny* helps to see how these issues have either reduced or grown in the space between the films' release. This thesis examines how the female characters, particularly the protagonists, handle their experiences and how these experiences shape their way of life.

1.6. THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis takes the following structure: the first and introductory chapter introduces the work by providing background and definition of key terms. It also briefly discusses DEFA history, Konrad Wolf, and how his works reflect some of the socialist ideology. The second and third chapters present a brief introduction, synopsis of each film, and analysis of *Sonnensucher* and *Solo Sunny*, respectively. These chapters analyze how the films portray the themes of sexual harassment, gender dynamics, and objectification of women. They further offer character analyses, discuss how formal elements contribute to the messages, and the role friendships and contacts play in the female protagonists' lives. Chapter four conducts a comparative study of the two films, highlighting the similarities and differences in the protagonists' experiences, the situations that surround their experiences, and how they reacted to them. The last chapter summarizes the work, concludes the research, and recommends future research.

CHAPTER TWO

SONNENSUCHER

2.1. INTRODUCTION

In *Sonnensucher*, Wolf portrays real-time events in the East German society in the 1950s.

Figure 1 below is a scene (0:06:57 – 0:07:56) that shows the female protagonist, Lutz, expressing her anger at her past trauma of sexual harassment. In an extreme close-up shot, the camera focuses on Lutz's face as she expresses her anger and hatred towards men. She experienced different sexual assaults growing up, which will be discussed in detail in the analysis. These experiences led to her hatred for men, as seen in her expression in **Figure 1**. Emmi advises her "*Am besten suchst dir ein Provinceonkel zum Leben oder anderen verheiratet.*"²

The camera movement and the non-diegetic sound effect in the scene contribute to the emotions depicted and reflect her state of mind, anger. The dark background shown as she speaks



Figure 1. *Sonnensucher*, [Film]. Dir. Konrad Wolf, (1958).

² At best you should find a province uncle to live with or to get married to another.

aims to deepen the viewer's connection to her emotions. It brings the viewers closer to Luz's psychological state, heightening empathy.

2.2. SYNOPSIS

“Männer sind Schweine! Alle!... Komm! Rock hoch... Immer der Gleiche.”³

The protagonist, Lutz, makes the statement above in the film *Sonnensucher*. Lutz is a young and naïve woman who seeks a means of survival in the rubble society following the war and her parents' death. An establishing close shot shows how the poor orphan struggles to escape from a man's firm grip as he tries to rape her. This man is assumed to be her boss. As she finally escapes his assault, she runs to her room, gets her bag, and flees to Berlin. In Berlin, she arrives at Emmi's apartment, asking if she could stay with her, offering her money, and convincing her that she could work and not become a liability to her to escape men's harassment. Instead, Emmi advises her to find an uncle to live with or a man to get married to. This triggers Lutz and leads to the initial opening quote. She mentions that she has been abused since she was 14 and hates men. The same night, they go to a pub, and a fight breaks out. Following the fight at the pub, the Soviet authorities send the two women to Felsach to work in the Wismut mine as a punishment for their presence at the fight scene.

At Felsach, Lutz works in the mining field alongside other women and men of different ranks and calibers. There, she encounters other forms of assault. One of the miners, Günther, marries her without prior discussion with her. He forces her into his cart, drives her to a new apartment, and hands a marriage appointment slip to her without having any initial conversation with her, stating his intention to marry her and hear her opinion about it. Lutz neither disagrees nor agrees; she gives in, having no choice, to the arrangement, probably taking Emmi's advice of

³ “Men are pigs! All of them!... Come, Sweetie, just lift your skirt. Always the same!”

finding a man to live with. She endures the union for a while but leaves when she gets tired and uncomfortable with how Günther treats her. Afterward, she moves in with Franz Beier as both agree to marry one another, not for love but for companionship. During their relationship, Lutz finds out she is pregnant with Günther's child, but officer Beier tells her not to inform him⁴ about it, as he is willing to keep the baby as his child. Unfortunately, Beier dies in a fire accident that breaks out in the mine. Lutz gives birth to her child, stays with Emmi and Jupp König for a while, and leaves the mining field after two years to start a new life.

2.3. ANALYSIS – SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The opening scene shows Lutz trying to escape from a man⁵ who attempts to rape her. She escapes his grip, washes her face, runs into the room, carries her bag and money, and flees to Berlin. In this scene, she is assaulted by the man and verbally abused by his wife. We can hear the man's wife complain to him, probably about his infidelity. This act can be interpreted as emotional abuse. He tries to cheat on her and does not feel guilty; instead, he tries to exert his power as a man to shut her up from complaining. On the one hand, he shuts his wife up to enact his masculinity; on the other hand, his wife could not complain and confront him about his infidelity because she is a woman, and they are in a patriarchal society that shuts women up and makes them embrace whatever is thrown at them.

Getting to Berlin, while trying to find Emmi's apartment, one man on the street looks at Lutz from her head to her buttocks. This can be termed as visual harassment. He stares at her as though curious to know who the young new lady is in the environment. Lutz eventually finds Emmi Jahnke's apartment, she knocks at her door, Emmi opens it, and invites her in, and they both catch up because they have not seen each other since the war ended. She asks Emmi if she

⁴ Günther Holleck

⁵ This man owns the Dorf (village) where Lutz works before she leaves for Berlin.

could live with her, but Emmi politely declines and advises her to find a man to live with. Lutz feels enraged, as though she cannot continue her life that way. Later in the film, we find out she is eighteen years old, which means she has experienced this abuse for four years and was underage when it started. This explains why she becomes enraged when Emmi advises her to find a city uncle or get married.

Emmi's advice also shows how women's lives are attached to men's for success or survival. It portrays women as being weak who need men for financial security and social status. On their way to Felsach, after the fight at the pub, Emmi utters a statement that reduces the woman's role to an object that entertains or uplifts the man after a long day of work. In her words, "*Besser als Knast. Viele Männer. In der ganzen Zeit unter der Erde im Dunkel. Dann brauchen sie Abend Sonne. Was meinst du, wir leuchten!*"⁶ This could also mean that Emmi has internalized this traditional gender role in society and has accepted that a woman's role is to be homely and welcoming, available to help the men feel relaxed after their daily jobs, which includes satisfying them sexually.

While dancing with Günther Holleck at the pub where Emmi took her, another man tries forcefully to get Lutz to dance with him. When she declines, he tears her dress, which leads to a fight between Günther and him, because Günther tries to protect her and have Lutz to himself. The police interfere, leading to Emmi and Lutz's deportation to Felsach as a punishment. The man feels he can walk up to any woman he wants to dance with, regardless of whether she is with another dance partner. He rough handles Lutz as though she is an object that could be grabbed as long as he needs her to do whatever he wants.

⁶ "Better than prison. Lots of men. They are underground in the dark all day. In the evening, they need some sun. And we are going to shine!"

The film also shows other women's experiences of harassment in the mining field. While clearing rubbles, one of them sees a male figure approaching them from afar. Immediately, she stands and begins to undress herself, but an older woman stops her and says, "*Du nicht, etwas neues,*"⁷ referring to Lutz. This scene shows the recurrent manner in which the men use the women to satisfy their sexual desires, and even the women have accepted it as a regular thing, which they do without hesitation. The older woman advises Lutz to get the man in a good mood so they can reach their quota. The woman tells her to undress, which she does, and the officer summons her to his office. At the office, officer Beier orders her to remove her clothes but realizes she is uninterested in the act and only gives in because she is obliged to. He brags to her about his position and how he can make her get whatever she wants if she accommodates his advances. "*Felsach gehört mir. 4000 Leute. Für millionen Ressourcen auf jeden Tag!*"⁸ Although he did not take advantage of her, he made her a radiometrist instead of working in the rubble field. He does this to prove a point to Lutz that he can make her life better in exchange for her satisfying his sexual needs. This shows that some men in positions of power would rather the feeling be mutual to earn respect instead of forcing the women to satisfy them or rape them. It also shows the issues of power, control, and gender dynamics in the GDR. The way different men choose to execute their power is different. Beier also falls into the category of men who exert their power to get what they want. His initial intention is to have sex with Lutz, but following their conversation, he observes that Lutz is not the same as other women.

In another experience at the house party Jupp organized, Günther roughly handles Lutz and tries to force her to dance with him, but she refuses. How he grabs her breasts shows

⁷ "Not you, something fresh (new) for him."

⁸ "Felsach is mine. 4000 people. Digging resources for millions each day. Even the Russians take heed as long as I maintain the pace." - sequence 0:23:45 – 0:23:50.

Günther's lack of respect for women's bodies. He believes he can handle Lutz however he likes, with the confidence that his actions will have no negative consequences. However, he realizes his mistake and apologizes in the following scene. Also, in the mining pit, some miners make jest of her following the conversation⁹ she has with officer Beier, and one of them spansks her buttocks¹⁰, but she does not react because she is used to that way of life. Wera¹¹ does not like the idea. She flares up, saying, "*Ohne Kultur!*"¹² Then she asks Lutz why she allows that. In her words, "...bei mir macht kein Mann so."¹³ In Lutz's defense for why she did not react, "*Wo sind die Männer anders? Wo?*"¹⁴ Her experiences have made her believe that all men are the same, and she is helpless and cannot change that fact. The other women in the rubble field also have this same mentality. They believe all men are the same. On the rubble field, when one of the women sees the approaching male figure, she exclaims, "*Er kommt!*"¹⁵ This refers to a particular man, *Herr Markscheider*, known for always coming to prey on them sexually. From afar, observing what is happening between Lutz and officer Beier, they discover that it is a different man. One of them calls other women's attention to see that it is another man, and someone responds, "*Und? Mann ist Mann... Der ein Mann! Ein Tier!*"¹⁶ This portrays how some victims of sexual harassment show distrust and develop a generalized opinion about every man. As a result of their past experiences, they develop hatred and a lack of respect for any man.

⁹ He asks if they can meet later that day, and one of the men jokes that she is now going out with the pit boss, as though she traded the position with being in a relationship with the boss.

¹⁰ In sequence 0:40:33 – 0:40:42, she begins working underground with Vera and encounters a different group of men.

¹¹ She is the radiometrist whom officer Bier connects Lutz with to be her work partner in the underground mine.

¹² "No culture!" which literally means they have no respect for Lutz.

¹³ "No man can treat me that way."

¹⁴ "Where are men different? Where?"

¹⁵ "He is coming!"

¹⁶ "So what? A man is a man... Him? A man? An animal."

Günther takes Lutz to an apartment without discussing it with her beforehand. He asserts that the apartment belongs to both of them and hands her a marriage appointment for them to get married, stating, "*Ich wollte eine Frau und eine Wohnung. Was ich wollte, habe ich immer noch gekriegt.*"¹⁷ He makes up his mind to marry Lutz without considering her opinion about it. He has to go ahead regardless, even if it means taking it by force. In her dissertation, Jennifer Good, now an associate professor of German Literature and film, refers to their entire relationship as "sweeping Lutz onto his motorbike into a relationship in which he dominates all their activities." (Good 147) His obsession with his trumpet also depicts his masculinity and authoritative attitude. He does not care about Lutz's opinion or choices. Instead, he imposes his choices on her when he angrily removes Lutz's frame with an image of a goat and replaces it with his trumpet. He also treats her as a whore when he tries to pay her to sleep with her, and this leads to Lutz's fleeing to Emmi. She identifies what she wants and does not envision having an enjoyable or free life with him.

Officer Beier talks Lutz into being with him because they are both lonely. Beier also fears that he is unloved, especially among the underground miners. He wants Lutz on his side, taking advantage of Lutz's naivety. In a bid to protect her from Günther's lack of emotional intelligence and genuine love, he tells her not to inform Günther about her carrying his child. Beier claims not to love Lutz, but he, in many ways, has her interest at heart and looks out for her. For instance, he brought her to a working environment to give her a proper life rather than waste away in the rubble field. He also gradually helps her to break out of her shell of sadness and inability to smile due to past trauma from sexual harassment.

¹⁷ "I want a wife and a home. And I always get what I want."

2.4. CHARACTER ANALYSES

Lutz is the central female character in this film. She is portrayed as a young, naïve lady whose life is full of challenges. She struggles to balance her life and work in a male-dominated and labor-intensive industry of the post-war era. Her character gives a voice to the women's experiences during that period and represents women's strength, determination, and resilience in a socialist society. At the film's beginning, she has difficulty relating with men due to her past encounters with them. Due to her age and level of exposure, she could not say no to men's advances and harassment. She accepts everything thrown at her because she only wants to survive and have a roof over her head. When asked why she does not object to how men treat her, she says all men are the same. Her experience made her conclude that every man has the same intention, and there is nothing she can do to change this other than to live with it. She also exemplifies loyalty when officer Beier talks her into standing by him and when she does not tell Günther about her pregnancy. Even though she admires officer Sergei, she keeps it to herself because she is not courageous enough to express her feelings to him.

Due to her past trauma, she has difficulty expressing joy or sadness. Good describes her as disillusioned, sullen, and uncommunicative, having forgotten to smile (Good 145). She opines that Lutz comes out of her shell due to her inclusion in the world of work, which is one of the socialist ideologies.

The female figure, Lutz, is constructed as an individual woman who develops socially from a raw, damaged, barely-human being to a self-conscious woman, representing the transformation that can occur through work. Her character weaves the society's difficult conditions into her personal history to reveal the thorny barriers to creating a unified national identity in the GDR. (Good 155)

Socialism advocates for the inclusion of women in the workforce. “This active participation in the national economy has also had a tremendous impact on the women themselves – on their lifestyles, their aspirations, and last but not least, on their self-confidence.” (Bahr 126) Towards the film's end, she finds peace with officer Beier, smiles at him, and tells him to take care of himself. She finds happiness, smiles, and makes the first move to kiss Sergej in the last scene, with much confidence and enthusiasm, unlike the former Lutz, who hides at the sight of Sergej.

Officer Beier, also referred to as *Obersteiger*,¹⁸ exemplifies the Soviet government. He is empathetic to Lutz. Although he claims not to love her, he helps her come out of her lonely life. He discovers Lutz’s inability to smile at their first meeting and says, “*Lächle!*”¹⁹ There, he finds out that she is different and not a “whore” as others. He becomes more interested in her and asks about her background. He discusses this with Sergej, “*Sie kann nicht lächeln. Sehr allein...Sagen Sie das Ihre Wera.*”²⁰ He connects her with Wera to work in underground mining. When he meets her again at the underground field, he repeats, “*Lächle!... Kannst noch nicht.*”²¹ He is seen as a dictator, and many miners do not like him; they also protest that he should be removed. This is one of his reasons for talking Lutz into being on his side; he fears being alone.

Emmi Jahnke’s character represents an experienced adult woman. Due to the society she finds herself in, she decides to find happiness and make the best out of life by living freely and doing what she must to survive. On the one hand, she is described as “a depraved creature” who is morally corrupt and leads a wayward lifestyle. When Lutz visits her at her apartment, the older woman, whom Lutz asks if Emmi lives there, looks at Lutz with disdain, as if to mean she must be someone like her. On the other hand, she is portrayed as a loyal, hospitable, and strong

¹⁸ Pit Boss

¹⁹ “Smile!”

²⁰ “She cannot laugh. Very lonely... Tell your Vera about it.”

²¹ “Smile! Still can’t do it.

woman. She helps Jupp König to escape from the Nazis and also takes Lutz in after the death of her parents during the war.

Günther Holleck is a young man working in the mining field alongside other men. He embodies a male figure who believes he can achieve anything he desires. He is portrayed as rude, uncouth, and prone to dominating a woman.

Officer Sergej Melnikow represents the Soviet government and is depicted as a reputable person. “The male figure, Sergej, a cultured, reasonable, and German-speaking engineer and leader, is of great importance for Konrad Wolf...” (Good 148) Wolf portrayed Sergej as a good Soviet officer to reinforce socialist ideals and to appease the censors ensuring the film would not be banned. The Soviet Union is depicted thus to promote that they have good intentions for their socialist allies and to encourage a sense of friendship between the GDR and the Soviets. Sergej was portrayed as a calm and empathetic officer, especially towards Lutz. Even though he is grieving the loss of his wife, who died during the war, he is seen as responsible and tries to show care to everyone around him. He stays by Beier when the fire breaks out in the mining pit and is not revengeful to him for not saving his wife. He does not take advantage of Lutz’s naivety, though he sees that she is drawn towards him; rather, he walks away.

Wera is a minor character in this film, Wera represents a firm woman who can stand up for herself in the face of harassment. She is the radiometrist with whom Lutz works in the underground mining. She is worth discussing as she portrays a non-conformist attribute. She set her boundaries and, despite working amongst men, did not allow any of them to take advantage of her while she worked. She also stands up for Lutz when one of the miners slaps her buttocks. Some women like Wera do not give room for disrespect regardless of the society and situation in

which they find themselves. Working with Lutz significantly impacted Lutz's life as she influenced her to speak up and fight for herself.

Jupp König embodies the voice of socialism. "He is a confirmed socialist..." He advocates for socialism among the miners and educates them on the significance of the Soviet Union. When the miners blamed Beier for the increase in men's accidents and how Sergej and Fedossyev ²²did not have their interests at heart, he stood to fight for them and show them why the Soviet Union government was helpful to their socialist state and how they had brought a lot of good to benefit their society.

Die Soviet Union bau' den Kommunismus auf. Die Soviet Union hilf' der ganzen Welt im Kampf für den Frieden, Klar! Die Soviet Macht' verhinderten dritten Welt Krieg, Stimmt! Die sowjetischen Genossen helfen uns beim Aufbauen Socialismus. Wir und Sie. Alle. Die Arbeiter Machten. ²³(*Sonnensucher*)

After preaching about the Soviet Union to the workers, they were satisfied and returned to work without complaints. With Jupp, there is a sense of collectivism, one of socialism's core ideologies. He is always surrounded by a group of people—drinking, playing, cheering, partying, and spreading the good news of socialism. He believes in people's inherent goodness and recognizes Emmi's positive aspects, even when others do not. Weirauch discourages him from getting her out of jail or having an affair with her, saying, "*Jupp, du als alte Genosse und so eine... ich als junge Marxist sollte dich nicht gelehrt...Sie ist ein Fleck auf deiner Weste.*"²⁴ He reacts angrily to that statement and slaps Weirauch because he loves Emmi and sees her worth

²² Sergej and Fedossyev are the Soviet Union representatives who see to the affairs of the mining pit. Fedossyev is displayed as a figure-head in the film who all he does his complain about the work of the miners.

²³ "The Soviet Union is building communism. It is helping the whole world in their struggle for peace. Soviet power prevents World War III. The Soviet comrades help us establish socialism. Us and them. Everyone. The workers' power..." (sequence 0:45:22 – 0:47:53)

²⁴ "Jupp, an old comrade like you with a woman like her. As a young Marxist, I shouldn't tell you what to do. She is a stain on your vest."

when others do not. He confesses his feelings to Sergei, "*Ich liebe das Mädchen und ich hole sie raus.*"²⁵ His character in this context reflects a respectable man who fights for his love regardless of what others think of Emmi and pushes for her release. He is also portrayed as a good leader. After the fire outbreak in the mining pit, he goes down to the pit to rescue the men.

2.5. FRIENDSHIPS AND FEMALE CONTACTS

This section explores the relationship among the female characters, showing the role of solidarity and support that women share in the face of these societal challenges. This film highlights how Lutz's female friendships and contacts influence her perception of men, contribute to her experiences, and help her find her voice. In sequence 0:04:07 – 0:04:40, after Lutz escapes the rape attempt, she flees to Berlin to find solace with her female counterpart, Emmi. Lutz's always returning to Emmi shows a sense of camaraderie and support, which she gets from her whenever she needs it. Another instance, as seen in sequence 1:01:13 – 1:01:29, after Günther gets back home drunk and tries to sleep with her for money, treating her as a prostitute, "thus at the moment when Lutz's relation to Günther fails, she flees to Emmi again" (Powell 70) she goes back to Emmi as an escape from the sexual assaults she faced with Günther.

The film also portrays Lutz's relationship with Wera in the mining field as another woman who speaks with Lutz and encourages her to speak up for herself and not allow any man to treat her as an object. As seen in sequence 0:40:39 – 0:41:15, Wera uses herself as an example that no man dares treat her as Lutz has just been treated. This gives Lutz another knowledge that, rather than keeping silent and accepting the way the men treat her, she can speak up for herself and stop the harassment. She evolved towards the film's end as she turned down Günther's request for them to come back together.

²⁵ I love the woman, and I will bring her out.

Sonnensucher highlights the roles of female solidarity and support, particularly through the relationship between Emmi and Lutz. It also explores women's emancipation in the GDR, as women get the support they need from family and the contacts they make in their workforce or by sharing experiences with other women.

2.6. STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Formal elements are crucial in conveying the film narrative, setting the mood, adding effects to the narrative structure, and unfolding events that impact the viewers and influence how they perceive and understand the storyline. Konrad Wolf uses many formal elements to reflect the film's thematic and historical concerns.

Text, Typography, and Voice-Over

The film uses an intertitle as a brief background to the story, helping the viewers understand what the film is about and what led to the situation unfolding in the film. It uses it to inform the audience about its cast, crew, and producer. It also uses voice-over at the beginning and the end of the film, which serves as an opening and closing remark, giving a brief history of the republic and the Wismut society before the first scene is shown. It also gives a closing remark, retelling Sergej's farewell statement to Lutz, as the camera pans up to give an overview shot of the environment.

The use of sounds

The film uses diegetic and non-diegetic sounds to add significant effects and set the tone. In the establishing sequences, non-diegetic trumpets and military-like sounds set the atmosphere for the viewers and give a heads-up about the story. At the film's beginning, the narrator²⁶ explains the country's situation a year after Germany was divided into two independent nations,

²⁶ Assumed to be Jupp König.

East and West Germany. In the background, people sing, clap, and jubilate as they celebrate their republic's one year of existence. When Emmi advises Lutz to get a country uncle or a man to marry, the sound used reflects the anger and trauma Lutz has experienced with men. In addition to her voice, the non-diegetic sound emphasizes her anger toward men, as her conversation with Emmi triggers it. Powell refers to this as "...a musical outburst underlining her traumatic alienation from sexuality." (Powell 70) Whenever the character Lutz is shown alone or with Günther, the sound of the trumpet is used to portray solemnity, sadness, or introspection.

It also uses diegetic mining-related sounds, such as machinery noise, footsteps, honking trains and elevators, and loud noises from miners to depict their daily activities. These sounds contribute to the film's realism.

The use of camera angles and movements

The shot between Lutz's conversation with officer Beier and the close-up shot of Günther shows a correlation between the present and the future. Beier asks Lutz, "Don't you have a man anywhere?" The camera immediately shows a correlation between the present and the future. Beier asks Lutz. The camera immediately shows Günther in a close-up shot to give the impression that he will eventually be the man in her life.

It is clear from this film that during the ruined Germany, some people lost their morals and took advantage of young naïve girls and single women to satisfy their sexual desires.

For German women in 1945 – certainly, in Berlin and to its east – these rapes were experienced as a collective event in a situation of general crisis... "Rapes had," many noted, "become routine"; the story of sexual violence was told as part of the narrative of survival in ruined Germany. (Hagemann 33)

This film serves to call the viewers' attention to the growing issues of sexual violence in East Germany. It highlights the contradiction between the state's ideology and the women's experiences in society and their workplaces.

CHAPTER THREE

SOLO SUNNY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Solo Sunny tells the story of a single woman in Berlin who is struggling, with only moderate success, even more moderate talent, to establish herself as a popular singer. (Powell 192) **Figure 2** below shows the female protagonist, Sunny, sitting at her dressing table in a medium close-up shot, trying to think about her life and how far she needs to go in her career. In sequence 9:52 – 11:20, the camera shows her in a mirror, which translates to a moment of introspection and self-examination. With its dripped wax, the candle in the background symbolizes the passage of time in her career, as she tries to become relevant and famous, but all efforts have proven abortive. Subsequently, the camera pans up slowly to show Sunny in a black and white portrait, which Thomas Austin, in his analysis, explains as Sunny's doppelgänger, “judging her and asking if she will be able to secure her identity as Sunny.



Figure 2. *Solo Sunny*, [FILM]. Dir. Konrad Wolf, (1980).

3.2. SYNOPSIS

*“Wenn du mich schlägst, bringst du mich besser um”*²⁷ says the protagonist of this film, Solo Sunny. Having faced different forms of sexual harassment and abuse, she stands up for herself to fight her predator. Ingrid Sommer, often called Sunny—also her stage name—is a young, vibrant, and goal-oriented woman who strives to succeed in her music career, find love, and live a happy life. She sings pop music with the band The Tornadoes. She is also a single, fashion-freak, and free-spirited woman. Sunny has trouble with her neighbors because of her lifestyle. One of them, Frau Pfeiffer, complains about how dirty her apartment is and reports that she is a nuisance to the neighbors. She plays loud music, entertains different men, and has a pigeon nest. As an artist, Sunny sings the same song often and seeks to update her lyrics. She has a man, Harry – a taxi driver, who is interested in her, but she is not interested in him and tries everything to avoid him. She asks him to write music lyrics for her, but he tells her it is not his expertise.

The East German DEFA film opens with the band's stage performance. The host, Bohne, introduces her and the other band members to the audience. In her band, Norbert hits on her often, trying to have sex with her. In one of the scenes, he asks if he could sleep with her for that night; Sunny objects and walks out on him. As soon as Sunny turns him down and walks out, Norbert turns to another woman in the bar who, unknown to him, is with another man at the bar. This man hits him in the face, leaving him with bleeding lips and making him unable to play the saxophone for the band. The band got a replacement, Ralph – a self-acclaimed philosopher and saxophonist. Sunny falls in love with Ralph, visits his house, and spends the night. On her request, Ralph writes her new lyrics, *“Das Salz der Tränen.”*²⁸ Sunny is so comfortable with

²⁷ “If you hit me, you’d better kill me.”

²⁸ “The salt of tears.”

him already as she imagines giving him a child until he cheats on her and leaves her heartbroken. After Sunny catches him with another woman, she stops visiting him. In return, Ralph visits her to discuss what happened. In his defense for cheating on Sunny, he states that their relationship is not defined, and he is unsure what they share. She revisits him, intending to kill him, but she sleeps off, leaving Ralph to wonder if he could have been dead if she had not slept off.

Following her abrupt exit from the stage and her fight with a band member, the band replaces her with a new singer. When the Tornados end her contract, she gets a solo gig, where she sings her usual lyrics by Regine Dobberschütz. After the performance, she expected the audience to cheer her up, but only a few did. Harry cheers her on and speaks encouraging words to her, but she does not consider the compliment genuine. When the show ends, she drinks alcohol in the bar and leaves with Harry. He thinks she will go to his house, but she refuses to stop by Harry's. Instead, she goes further to Christine's. Harry gets angry about how much Sunny has turned him down. At Christine's, she takes a few sleeping pills, which leads her to be rushed to the hospital and diagnosed with attempted suicide because alcohol and sleeping pills do not go together. After her recovery, she asked Christine if she could resume her job at the factory where she had initially worked before joining the band. She meets a therapist with whom she discusses her definition of success. Sunny replies that she has never felt successful. However, success for her is when she tells people what she thinks of them. She also wants to know if someone wants her, which includes her audience. She calls Harry for them to meet up, and he promises to take care of her; he earns enough to cater for both of them. He takes her out on a stage performance date, which reminds her of her ambition to be a stage performer. She rejects Harry for the umpteenth time. In Christine's room, she makes her listen to the song Ralph wrote for her and

breaks down in tears. Sunny only wants to be a successful singer. Her friend encourages her not to give up on her career, so Sunny joins another musical band.

3.3. ANALYSIS

Solo Sunny tells the story of a young, upcoming pop musician who refuses to conform to the pressure and expectations of society. This film, as Heiduschke puts it, "...hits a nerve with audiences, who, like Sunny, were looking to break out of their daily routines and assert their personal space in a society that favored conformity over individual freedom." (Heiduschke 117) One of the socialist state ideologies is collectivism over individualism. This ideology conflicts with Sunny's aspiration of becoming a popular solo singer, which makes her strive to be successful and acceptable to her audience. However, all she encounters makes her feel like a failure. Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel, German film historians and professors, described *Solo Sunny* thus: "It concerns the representation of female subjectivity not across sexual liberation...but through the mediation of the public sphere of show-business, signaled via the stage, microphones, and amplifiers, self-exhibition and spectacle." (Elsaesser 21) This means that besides the sexual freedom Sunny has in the film, it also shows how women are portrayed publicly and how they express themselves.

Solo Sunny also visually represents some of the challenges women faced in East German Society as they attempt to succeed personally and professionally. This analysis explores how the film portrays the two key areas the thesis focuses on: sexual harassment and gender dynamics. It asks how the female characters are portrayed in the film. How does the film reflect the societal ideology? How are gender dynamics depicted in the film, and how does it affect the female character? How does the central character, Sunny, develop, evolve, manage, and overcome the setbacks and challenges she experiences in the film?

3.3.1. SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND OBJECTIFICATION

The protagonist, Sunny, struggles to pursue happiness, career fulfillment, and love. She works in a male-dominated field, a music band, and in a bid to stand out in her music career, her male colleagues throw many shades at her. She faces sexual and verbal harassment from them. Sunny is portrayed as a woman who knows what she wants and goes for it, but the society she finds herself in makes her efforts futile. As stated in the Bartleby article,

While Sonny's passionate pursuit of a career as a singer is central to the plot of the film, it is evident that she is not being treated equally to her male counterparts within that field. The male members of the band Sunny perform with "The Tornadoes" incessantly verbally and even sexually harass her. The first time a member of the band makes an unwanted advance towards Sunny, he is not blamed for making her uncomfortable, rather, Sunny is seen as at fault for not appeasing his sexual desires. (Bartleby 47)

This is evident in sequence 14:31-14:54 when Norbert, the band's saxophonist, asks Sunny if they could have sex. In his words, "*Ich glaube, heute Abend ist es soweit...Zum Vögeln*"²⁹ First, he approaches her as if Sunny, as a singer, also functions as a sex worker to satisfy his sexual urge, and the way he puts the statement makes it look like he can get whatever he wants. When Sunny asks him why she should give in to his request, he replies, "*Weil ich richtig abgehen kann.*"³⁰

Following the conversation, Sunny turns him down and walks out on him, and he immediately turns to another woman in the bar. He says the same statement and tries to kiss her. This act shows his lack of respect for his female colleagues. Whether Sunny or someone else, all

²⁹ "I think tonight's the night...For screwing"

³⁰ "...because I can really get down"

he wants is a woman to lie with because he is a man and can get whatever he wants. Unknown to Norbert, Monica's partner comes behind him and asks that they see outside. He follows the man and tells Monica he will return shortly. Unfortunately for him, the man punches him, rendering him useless in the group as he cannot play for a while. This scene depicts how some men make it a norm for women to give in to their advances. Norbert is also seen with this new lady who replaces Sunny. He hugs and kisses her without the lady's objection. This depicts that some women have come to terms with this way of life, which enables men to do more.

In another scene, Norbert again tries to persuade Sunny to be in a relationship with him. He tries to rape Sunny, "...thinking that with the lifestyle and extroverted personality, she would sleep with anyone". (Heiduschke 116) He roughly handles and slaps her when she bites his shoulder in self-defense. Sunny hits him with the heel of her shoe and says, "*Wenn du mich schlägst, bringst du mich besser um*"³¹ to show that she is unwilling to conform to the pressure she gets from the man. Even though she sleeps with random men, she shows that she has a set boundary, has control over her life, and can choose whoever she wants to have sex with.

Another case of sexual involvement with band members is seen with Hubert and one of the female singers, Monica. She spends the night in Hubert's room and leaves hurriedly to Sunny's room when they both realize that his wife and son are around. Following this scene is another male colleague massaging her neck as she looks at Hubert spending time with his family. It seems the men see nothing wrong with playing around with different women because they are work colleagues. With the expressions on Monica's face and the remark she makes when she enters Sunny's room, one can tell that she is not happy about it and only does it to have a significant standing in the band.

³¹ "If you hit me, you'd better kill me"

The film also shows how she was verbally abused. First, Norbert makes a negative remark about her voice after she turns him down. “*Was ich dir so immer sage, du singst wie ein Schwein.*”³² Another member of the group looks at Sunny and says, “*Du siehst aus wie eine Nutte.*”³³ Though she does not react to these comments, they gradually accumulate and affect her belief in herself.

3.3.2. GENDER DYNAMICS

Solo Sunny portrays how the tension between collectivism and individualism affects Sunny. The state emphasizes collective goals over individual desires or fulfillment. The film shows how Sunny struggles to improve herself individually in a society that embraces collective success. She often seeks validation from the audience to help her know she is a good singer, but she does not get the response or feedback she wants from them. This factor becomes more difficult for her as a woman in a male-dominated group. Susanne Kranz, in her article, stated that even though the East German movement gave policies on women’s rights and inclusion in society, women were not truly free or equal to their male counterparts.

The primary concern is that women in the GDR, as well as the entire society, had achieved a certain kind of equality and emancipation which can only be seen within the specific context of socialism. But overall, society and women were not much emancipated, and ironically, women especially lacked feminist consciousness. (Kranz 69)

In her text on domestic experience, Donna Harsch, a political and social historian, stated that:

“The SED was proud of its destruction of legal patriarchy. Women’s equality remained, nonetheless, peripheral to the utopian vision, for women’s rights did not promote class equality

³² “I always thought you sing like a pig.”

³³ “You look like a whore.”

or a collective mentality, much less raise productivity,” (Harsch 63). Even though Sunny, as a woman, has the right to sing with a band dominated by men, she is not treated equally to the other male members of the group.

Sunny also gets treated unequally following Norbert’s beating. In a group where the male did the wrong thing, the female gets blamed for the man’s misbehavior. Sunny is blamed for Norbert’s advances to another woman because if she had not turned him down, he would not have looked at another woman, leading to his beating. Heiduschke says, “However, instead of supporting Sunny, after the attack, the band members replace her with a younger, and supposedly less-resistant, singer” (Heiduschke 116). Society claims equal rights and inclusion, but rather than support the female and rebuke the male for the sexual advance towards her, she gets blamed for not giving in to his sexual request.

3.4. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Ingrid Sommer, whose stage name is Sunny, is the main character in the film. She is portrayed as a bold and outspoken woman. She works with a group of music bands but “secretly dreams of her breakthrough as a pop singer, able to make her living by singing solo.” (Heiduschke 115) The East German cinema blog describes her as “... a free spirit, who is not afraid to call it like she sees it, and who sleeps with whomever she wants.” She mentions this in her introduction to the new music band at the film's end: “*Ich bin direct, schlafe mit wem ich will, die Tornadoes haben mich fallen gelassen. Ich bin Sunny.*”³⁴

“This quote evokes one of the initial scenes when Sunny, still in her robe after getting up, opens the blinds in her bedroom and addresses a young man in her bed with the words:

“It’s without breakfast.” When he protests about being kicked out, she replies, “It’s

³⁴ “I’m blunt, sleep with whomever I want. The Tornadoes dropped me. I’m Sunny”.

without discussion, as well,” providing evidence of her independence and her ability to take charge. (Heiduschke 116)

She prefers to live alone and stay in charge of her life, so she turns down Harry’s proposal despite his promise to care for her even if she does not work. She is also depicted as someone who takes charge of her life in the first scene; the scene portrays Sunny as stern and austere. She can bring any man to her house and make them leave as soon as their business with one another is over without giving room for any chit-chat. Her family is not referenced in the film, but she tells Harry she is an orphan. She is also portrayed as someone who loves to be in love but prefers to be with someone she loves rather than any random man, making Ralph cheating on her a painful encounter. She confesses, “*Ich bin verliebt*,”³⁵ to her colleague, Monica, as she watches Ralph’s stage performance. She strives to be a successful pop musician, seeks motivation from the audience’s response, and gets discouraged when she does not receive the positive reaction she expects from them. Despite her many setbacks, she did not give up on her career. Rather than conform to society’s expectations, she changes her group and allows herself to start afresh.

Harry, a taxi driver who is also interested in Sunny, portrays a mature and persistent character. Despite that, Sunny does not return his affection; he supports her, believes in her, encourages her when she feels she is not making headway in her music career, and offers to take care of her even if she does not want to work. Harry, unlike Sunny, is reserved, calm, and supportive. However, he gets angry at Sunny because she has turned him down several times after chasing her for over a year and a half. Even though he would be a safe and devoted husband, Sunny did not want him or this life.

³⁵ “I’m in love

Ralph is a philosopher and a saxophonist. He is portrayed as a widely-read individual. His apartment is decorated with books, and he tries to read for five minutes to prove his being a philosopher. He also works as a typist for newspapers. He fills in for Norbert on a one-time occasion when he cannot play the sax due to his wounded lips. He writes Sunny a song. He sometimes spends time at the graveyard as the philosopher that he is, giving him the serenity to reflect on the themes of life and death. He understands himself as a bohemian and free spirit.

Norbert is the band's saxophonist. He is portrayed as one who seeks sexual pleasure from his female counterparts in the band. This is seen in his many attempts with Sunny, the lady who has another date at the club, where he gets hit by the man. He has his eyes on Sunny and the new female band member who replaces Sunny. He is very audacious and thinks he can get whatever he wants.

Hubert is a flat character. He is first seen sharing the same bed with Monica and running after her to give her some of the belongings she left behind, so his wife does not find them. His character represents an unfaithful husband who, despite having a beautiful family, is still involved in extramarital affairs with his work colleague. He is also seen when he discusses the new girl with Sunny and the end of Sunny's work with the band.

Christine is Sunny's friend. She is portrayed as a supportive and loyal friend to Sunny. She is like Sunny's haven whenever she needs to keep her head or avoid Harry. After the attempted suicide, Christine was interrogated as the only family member she had left. When she breaks down and feels like a failure, Christine encourages her not to give up on her music career and promises to sew clothes for her if needed.

3.5. FRIENDSHIPS AND FEMALE CONTACTS

The film portrays the essence of friendship and contact, and how it serves as a source of strength and support for women as they try to navigate the complexities and challenges they face. Sunny's most prominent friendship in this film is with her close friend, Christine. As seen in sequence 36:09 – 37:30, Sunny visits Christine to help her set up her new apartment. The film shows that Sunny gives Christine money to support her as she settles into her new apartment. While scrubbing the floor, the two women speak about their job, and then Sunny asks her about Manfred, supposedly Christine's ex. Here, Christine talks about the relationship, her age, and that she is no longer young enough to play around with any man. These women give one another a listening ear as they both express what they are going through in life.

Another scene of these women giving support to one another is after Sunny's dismissal from the band, betrayal by Ralph, and her attempted suicide. In sequence 1:33:18 – 1:36:25, Sunny expresses her disappointment and begins to cry that she has failed. Christine empathizes with Sunny and encourages her. Christine states "*Du hast wirklich eine Gabe. Du kannst singen. Du darfst deinen Mut nicht verlieren*³⁶." Sunny complains that she needs to change her look. Christine breaks down in tears, too, as if she feels what Sunny was going through. She tries to encourage her not to give up and offers to make dresses for Sunny when she gives the excuse that she does not have clothes to wear. After much encouragement and persuasion, she joins a new music band.

Examining this from a contrastive perspective, the woman who replaces Sunny in the Tornadoes band illustrates the absence of deep and supportive bonds among the female characters in the film. It shows women's struggles, especially in a competitive setting, and the

³⁶ You really have a gift. You can sing. You can't lose your courage.

lack of solidarity or empathy. Women's solidarity and empathy are pivotal in helping women navigate difficult times. Christine's words of encouragement help Sunny to pick up her life together and not give up on her career.

3.6. STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

The film opens with a long establishing shot of the stage showing the instrumentalists. Then follows a blackout, and the audience claps, depicting either a stage performance or a cinema. The spotlight moves left and right as though searching for the speaker and eventually focuses on the character Bohne, the program moderator, who welcomes the audience to the show. The camera pans left and right as he introduces the performing artists to the audience, helping the viewers know each artist's name.

The film uses high-side lighting in sequence 3:52 – 3:56 when Sunny sings solo. It initially shows her back view before the camera focuses on her face in a medium-long shot and zooms in gradually until a close-up shot focuses on her as she sings her song. This camera focuses on Sunny and is used to introduce her to the audience officially. The song lyrics she sings as the camera zooms in, "...*look at my face...*," make a coincidence as the audience tries to understand the character.

In sequence 9:52 – 10:22, the camera in a medium shot captures Sunny's music player as she sits before a mirror. It then pans upward, showing Sunny's face in a medium shot as she stares at herself in the mirror. This moment shows Sunny in a reflexive mood. Thomas Austin refers to this moment as a cue to character interiority. In his words:

Moreover, the first of several mirror scenes reworks the convention of looking in a mirror as a cue to character interiority, along with the cliché of a performer fashioning herself in front of the glass, to suggest the fragility of Ingrid's self-presentation as Sunny. Seated

silent and expressionless, looking at her reflection in a dressing-table mirror,

Ingrid/Sunny plays a tape of an instrumental track. (Austin 279)

This scene shows how fragile Sunny is as she reflects on her music career, accompanied by the instrumental track of the song she performed on stage in the previous scene. Sitting silently without expression suggests that a lot is going through her mind. The camera then pans slowly left to black-and-white pictures of her on the wall. Austin interprets this as Sunny looking at her as if asking if she can make it in the music career. “Furthermore, one inference to be derived from Sunny’s inscrutable photograph is that the doppelgänger is judging her, asking if she is able to secure her identity as Sunny, to really ‘make it,’ both as a coherent individual and as a star.” It also depicts Sunny monitoring or judging herself.

Solo Sunny portrays women’s desire for growth, success, and recognition as against the usual patriarchal tradition.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The issues of sexual harassment and gender dynamics, as portrayed in both films, are designed to provoke viewers' reactions. The two films focus on female protagonists primarily to emphasize to the audience the effect of these issues, particularly concerning the female protagonist who experiences verbal, visual, and sexual harassment, as well as objectification. By analyzing selected scenes from each film, this chapter explores the similarities and differences between them. It examines how each protagonist responds to the abuse and how they develop at the end of the film.

4.1. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN *SONNENSUCHER* AND *SOLO SUNNY*

The protagonists faced the same oppression and subjugation in the GDR society. However, their responses to their experiences and strategies for overcoming them were different. Lutz and Sunny are both orphans who try to survive life without a guardian. Each of them, having a different personality, aims for the same things in life. That is, having identity, agency, and voice in their respective field. Lutz is depicted as a calm, naïve, and lonely individual who has been abused because she is perceived not to have any family to fight for her, and she does not have the courage to stand up for herself. Sunny, also an orphan, is seen as a fighter. She is portrayed as a stubborn personality who will give anything to get what she wants but will not give in to any form of disrespect or abuse.

Sonnensucher opens with a voice-over, telling the situation of the state after the republic, as the camera pans left to a dark scene before the characters are shown, and we see a man trying to rape a young girl. She eventually breaks loose from his grip and runs to her room to get her

bag; then, she flees to Berlin. **Figures 3** and **4** below are attempted rape scenes in *Sonnensucher* and *Solo Sunny*, respectively. Konrad Wolf used medium closed-up shots in the rape scenes to focus closely on the victims' faces. This highlights the characters' emotions of fear, pain, distress, and helplessness.

Figure 3 shows Lutz under the firm grip of a farm owner, who is also Lutz's boss, as he tries to rape her. The scene depicts Lutz's helplessness as she is emotionally and physically oppressed and just needs to escape from him. **Figure 4** shows Sunny after Norbert slaps her for not obliging to his advances. While each of the characters was in the same sexually violent situation, their reactions differed. Lutz, as soon as she escapes from the man, goes to her room and leaves for Berlin. Sunny, on the other hand, stands her ground. She first bites Norbert's shoulder, then hits him with her shoes. This shows the different reactions of women to oppression and sexual violence. While some women will speak up or fight for themselves, others will flee or keep silent about their experience. The same is happening today, some of the victims stand up for themselves by either fighting their predators or speaking to other women or organizations that fight for women's rights. Lutz flees the scene because she knows no one to report to, and to avoid future occurrences, she flees to Emmi in Berlin.

In *Sonnensucher*, following Lutz's escape from the man, he calls her a "*Beast!*" because she turned him down. In *Solo Sunny*, Norbert slaps Sunny because she refuses to let him have sex with her. These two scenes show how men cannot deal with rejection. Rather than letting go, they become violent and say vulgar words to the women. Prior to Norbert's anger, he tries to praise Sunny. He talks about how beautiful and attractive she is, but as soon as Sunny rejects him, he resorts to slapping her and also says she sings like a pig. It seems like a double-faced



Figure 3. *Sonnensucher*, [FILM]. Dir. Konrad Wolf, (1958).



Figure 4. *Solo Sunny*, [FILM]. Dir. Konrad Wolf, (1980).

attitude. In a minute, women are good. They are good when they give in to their advances, but become a beast or pig when they reject them.

When the men are shown in the act of rape, they are seen as dominating – above or on top of the women. This can be said of their patriarchal attribute or male domineering nature of trying to be coercive in some areas, as a boss, a father, and a husband. This is evident in the succeeding scene after Lutz escapes from the man when he shuts his wife up for protesting that he cheated on her. It can also be seen from the perspective of extra-marital affairs. Despite having a wife, the farm owner is not satisfied with his wife. A similar case is depicted in *Solo Sunny* between Hubert and Monica. Hubert has a beautiful home – a beautiful wife and a son – yet he has an affair with one of his band members. This portrays the men's lack of satisfaction with their wives and the urge to look for other women to prey on. In *Sonnensucher*, the man feels no remorse and is not secretive; instead, he insults his wife for interfering and shuts her up. In *Solo Sunny*, Hubert, though a cheat, is portrayed as a loving father and husband.

Another form of harassment is shown in **Figure 5** below. This scene uses three people's hip-level shots to show how the man slaps Lutz's butt. Following Lutz's conversation with officer Beier for both of them to meet after her shift, one of the men slaps her butt and regards her as a "private property," while other men laugh at her. Referring to Lutz as a property reduces her to an object that anybody can own.

The same can be seen in *Solo Sunny*, as portrayed in **Figure 6** below. This is an over-the-shoulder shot (OTS) of Sunny with the focus on the mirror reflection of her and the male character behind her. The man behind Sunny looks at her and says she looks like a whore. Some of the male band members do not like Sunny's guts. Her ability to object to what she does not want rather than giving in to the men's rough handling. Before the man refers to Sunny as a

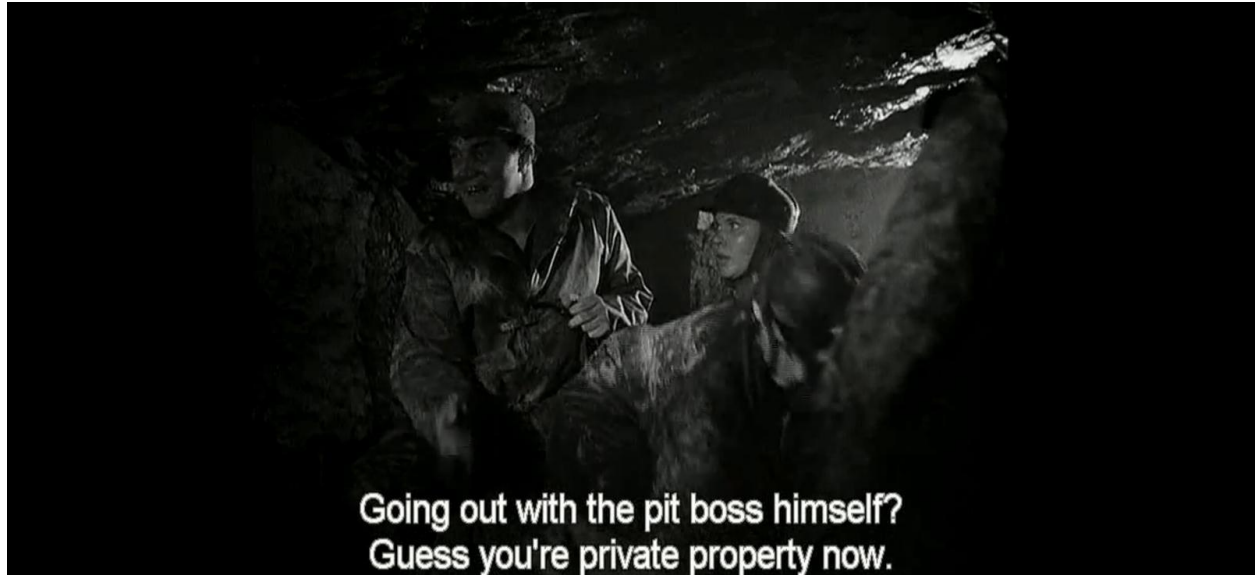


Figure 5. *Sonnensucher*, [FILM]. Dir. Konrad Wolf, (1958).



Figure 6. *Solo Sunny*, [FILM]. Dir. Konrad Wolf, (1980).

whore, another band member, comes to call her for the stage performance, but Sunny is not ready. She tells the person she will join them shortly. The man's statement in that scene can be from a place of dislike for Sunny.

Following the two remarks, Lutz did not respond; instead, she walked away. Sunny, however, retorted that the man should leave and not provoke her. Oftentimes, Lutz chooses to walk away in situations like this, while Sunny, even when she leaves the scene, will either fight back or express her thoughts to show she is not afraid to speak up or stand up for herself.

As the films end, the women are shown to have evolved compared to how they were at the beginning of the film. For Lutz, as seen in **Figure 7** below, two years after officer Beier's death, Günther comes to speak with her to see if they could come together since Lutz has his son with her.

Before Günther could complete his sentence, Lutz objected. "*Lass Günther, es ist mein Kind und von Franz.*"³⁷ She has found her voice and knows exactly what she wants. She does



Figure 7. *Sonnensucher*, [FILM]. Dir. Konrad Wolf, (1958).

³⁷ Never mind, Günther, it's my child and Franz's.

not want to return to an abusive relationship. Shown in a medium shot, she stands up for herself and speaks to Günther's face, telling him what she wants. Günther, seeing that Lutz is not the same person, also did not argue with her. The old Lutz would have given in and agreed to his proposal, believing that was the only way for her to survive, and Günther would have held her forcefully without asking for her consent, as he did previously, but he was rather sober and asked if they could be together. She chooses her peace and happiness over returning to a man who will only impose his desires on her. Lutz leaves the mine, happy and ready to be independent.

On the other hand, Sunny did not relent in being audacious and outspoken. Still, in search of success and growth, she picked up her life after the Tornadoes left her. **Figure 8** shows how she had grown and showed up in the new band. In her introduction to the new team she joins, she outrightly tells them the kind of person she is, setting the stage for her new life.

In addition to their choices, Lutz, being a single mother, decides that she needs no man in her life, and all she wants is to focus on her child and herself. She had difficulty connecting with people previously due to her experiences, but the presence of her son makes her alive and gives



Figure 8. *Solo Sunny*, [FILM]. Dir. Konrad Wolf, (1980).

her the reason to develop herself, build her agency, and create the connection she needs to survive. On the other hand, Sunny chooses herself, her freedom, and her career. She goes back to Harry after her failed suicide, thinking that is what she needs to survive, but it is difficult for her to be with him. Therefore, she leaves him, choosing herself and her autonomy. This explains that women have choices to make. Either option is fine as long as there is happiness and fulfillment. Being a mother and focusing on a profession is good; also, being single and pursuing a profession is great. Women should have the freedom to decide what makes them happy.

The production period for each film is also significant as it illustrates the differences and developments that have occurred over time. Lutz's response to sexual harassment in 1958 differs from Sunny's response in 1980. Lutz's reaction to the abuses demonstrates the limited power that women possess. She had no voice because women at that time were not allowed to speak up. On the other hand, Sunny shows women's development and emancipation. Even though sexual harassment persists, women now have the power and voice to say no and fight against it. The change was possible due to some factors, such as the emancipation of women and the introduction of women into the workforce. The relationships women formed in the workplace contribute significantly to their growth and ability to speak out for themselves. Women's ability to confide in other women and find solidarity and support is another factor that brings about change, inclusivity, and women's ability to find their voice.

The film's protagonists model how women resist sexual violence and how they take agency and power over their lives. They highlight how they choose to live their lives following any experiences and encounters they have had in the past. This is the hope: rather than giving in to abuse, these films motivate women to say no to sexual harassment, which can help reduce how frequently the matter arises.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1. RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Several scholarly works have been published on women and DEFA films, ranging from the inclusivity of women in the workforce to the concept of double burden.³⁸ This thesis contributes to academic discourse and delves into the underlying causes of sexual harassment and oppressive gender dynamics, the implications on victims, and how the characters evolved or managed their circumstances. As the research progressed, a few areas surfaced as suggested for future studies. The recommendations are as follows:

This research focused on DEFA films, highlighting how some DEFA films portray the themes of sexual harassment and gender dynamics in the GDR. It used two selected films from Konrad Wolf's works produced at two different periods and examined how he depicted the effects on the female characters and how they evolved. It is recommended that a comparative study be conducted to explore:

- i. How other East German films or German films overall, produced by different directors, depicted the themes of sexual harassment and gender dynamics, for instance, *Eine flexibel Frau*.
- ii. The differences in how East German cinema addresses these themes compared to Western films in recent times.
- iii. How various feminists and gender theories apply to these films. It could also include intersectional analysis to see how race, class, and other identities intersect with gender in the films.

³⁸ Some of these scholarly works are Jennifer Creech's text, "*Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*," Andrea Rinke's "Models or Misfits? The Role of Screen Heroines in GDR Cinema," Eva Kolinsky's "Reinventing Gender: Women in Eastern Germany since Unification," to mention a lot but few.

These would yield more discussions, highlight cultural differences, and show how each film directors portray gender issues.

5.2. CONCLUSION

If there has been one trait most markedly characteristic of Women's cinema, I would say that it has been *the project to work with and against narrative*... The importance of narrative cinema as a mode of working through the relation of female subjectivity, identity, and desire cannot be understated. (de Luretis 25)

The two films were carefully selected to highlight the issues during the mid and late DEFA period, illustrating how women discovered their voices and advocated for themselves. Konrad Wolf uses his films to highlight some of the socio-political issues in East Germany during the period in which the films were produced. Exploring the themes of sexual harassment, objectification of women, and gender dynamics as portrayed in the analyzed films offers insights into the East German socialist state and how its ideologies affect or impact gender-related matters. Konrad Wolf's use of female protagonists in both films is significant because it offers his audience a glimpse into some of the women's experiences in East Germany. He also uses these films to highlight the working conditions in the mining pit, as portrayed in *Sonnensucher*, and the striving for recognition of the female singer in a male-dominated industry, as seen in *Solo Sunny*.

These films also call on viewers and scholars to criticize or react to these themes, observe how they are relevant to today's society, and how changes can be made to mitigate against further occurrences. Sexual harassment and gender dynamics have been issues faced by people in different cultures and geographical areas. Despite the many efforts to fight against them, most of them have proven futile, and these acts persist due to the perceived patriarchal tradition that has

given men more power and voice than women. Even in East Germany, the socialist ideology supports including women in the workforce, yet some women struggle to occupy higher positions in some industries, unlike their male counterparts. These struggles include exchanging their bodies for positions, higher pay, and relevance in their industry. Society not only makes it difficult for women to excel in their careers but also places a burden on them to be sure they excel professionally and at their various homes, as wives and mothers. Since women have been included in the workforce, they have been exposed to a “double burden.” The transformations and inclusivity made society expect them to meet two sets of responsibilities simultaneously, making it more difficult for women as they strive to excel in their mother and wife roles and stand out or remain relevant in their careers. Some contemporary German films like *Eine flexible Frau*³⁹ continue to show these gender dynamics and how the female protagonist struggles to excel in a male-dominated field.

Filmmakers take the initiative to highlight events in their society, raising criticism through films, showcasing morals, and stirring people’s emotions to protest for change. This was one of the reasons filmmaking became a tool for awareness, especially after World War II, as it reflects society and exposes the government and its intentions to its citizens. Some DEFA films were banned, particularly when the government perceived that the film did not align with their ideologies or revealed their questionable actions or intentions. Consequently, to avoid bans, some screenwriters adopted a more diplomatic approach in their scripts, conveying their messages through symbols, signs, and sarcasm to lighten the tension and make it more subtle.

These films use female protagonists to evoke the literary scholars’ reactions to these themes and to empathize with women who have faced the same issues. The female characters in

³⁹ The Drifters

these two films represent different categories of women—Lutz and Emmi in *Sonnensucher* and Sunny in *Solo Sunny*. Some victims do what they do just for survival. They have accepted that their voices, no matter what they do, cannot be heard because of the patriarchal tradition that gives more voice to men than women and makes sure women are submissive. Lutz, in *Sonnensucher*, has initially accepted that all men are the same because of the society she finds herself in and the number of encounters she has with them; so instead of fighting for herself, she keeps silent, which frustrates her emotions and makes her sad and sullen. However, towards the end of the film, she finds her voice through the help and support of other women in the films, like Wera and Emmi. This highlights the significance of solidarity, empathy, and support from other women, knowing that one is not alone in the circumstance.

On the other hand, some women like Sunny in *Solo Sunny* struggle for self-identity even when society tries to frustrate their efforts, given the tension between individual desires and societal expectations. These efforts continue even though some victims, in recent times, have had severe psychological, emotional, and physical effects from their experiences. They become mentally disoriented, unable to function well amongst their peers, and wallow in self-pity. This is evident in today's world. Some victims become dejected and feel like that is the end of the world. They become unable to do things they enjoy or find it difficult to concentrate on their life. Lutz exemplifies this when she has difficulty smiling. Some victims do not have a reason to live after their experiences. Some have suicidal thoughts, as seen in *Solo Sunny* when Sunny almost lost her life due to the setbacks she keeps facing in her career.

In conclusion, this thesis aims to encourage victims to speak out. Hélène Cixous, a French feminist and literary critic, advised women to speak out and not hold back. She stated that

while it has been normal for women not to speak up, now is the time to do so and fight for themselves.

Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground, and language slipping away – that’s how daring a feat, how great a transgression it is for women to speak – even just open her mouth – in public... Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. (Cixous 944)

Another professor of gender and women studies, Chandra Mohanty, advises women to protest collectively, referencing a Filipina Worker, Irma. “Because the only way to get a little measure of power over your own life is to do it collectively, with the support of other people who share your needs.” (Mohanty 976) Women should speak to other women who are also victims, work together as a team to fight against sexual harassment and objectification and promote gender equality. Another factor that can help victims survive this traumatic state of their experiences is the ability to find groups of other women who can relate to their stories and give them the moral support needed to overcome the phase. One of the solidarity and support bodies that women need is groups like the #MeToo movement of 2006. Although this word was coined in 2006, it gained international recognition in 2017. This movement brings about visibility for victims of sexual harassment. It is a social movement created to mitigate against sexual abuse, sexual harassment and rape. Their core purpose is to empower women to speak out and share their experiences while they fight together, as it is believed that there is strength in numbers. It encourages victims to speak out and share their experiences with other women who have similar encounters, to show that they are not alone. There can be other movements or smaller groups like this, too, that will give public awareness and help find justice for the victims.

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VITA

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