

CONSTRUCTING A COVID 19 CONSPIRACY: A FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS
OF THE 2020 DOCUMENTARY “PLANDEMIC”

By

Gabrielle Garza

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Thesis Supervisor:

Rebekah Fox

Second Reader:

Bob Price

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	2
DESCRIPTION OF ARTIFACT	3
Productions	3
History of Plandemic	4
Plandemic film synopsis	5
Public reaction to Plandemic.....	9
METHOD: FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS	11
Background.....	11
Defining fantasy theme analysis	12
Steps for analysis.....	12
REPORT AND ANAYLYSIS.....	14
Threats to parental autonomy.....	14
Control of education	15
Hidden cures	17
CONCLUSION/CONTRIBUTION.....	19
REFERENCES	22
APPENDEX	27

Abstract

This research looks at the short film “Plandemic” and the persuasive devices used to create the film’s rhetorical vision. Plandemic was released in May of 2020 and garnered millions of views and both positive and negative feedback. The story of the film follows Dr. Judy Mikovits as she explains her life as a medical researcher and her perception of the unfolding pandemic. For analysis, fantasy theme rhetorical criticism was used to find the shared “fantasy” or idea of reality that is being created by the rhetoric used in the film. The fantasy themes present in the film, taken together, reveal the worldview created is that the choice of what to do with one’s child and their life is being threatened with propaganda from the government and actual lifesaving cures are being kept to make a profit off of American families. Having come at the time it did, Plandemic was able to easily capitalize off of peoples worry for the future and fear of the unknown. However, the potential consequences of this fantasy are that parents may begin to ignore medical mandates such as wearing mask and look to sources like Plandemic as legitimate sources of scientific fact.

Introduction

As the covid 19 pandemic continues to unfold, the American people have been bombarded with numerous message sources claiming to have the most trusted virus news. Because of the internet, it has never been easier to find information and misinformation on the topic. However, this influx of information has also brought about a whole new problem, a problem that some experts are dubbing the “Infodemic.” Contributing to the infodemic is the fact that some of these sources of information aren’t even humans. One study done by researchers at Carnegie Mellon University found that nearly half of the twitter accounts tweeting about Covid19 may be bots (Allyn, 2020). As the virus continues to spread, and schools begin to re-open, one group of people that are especially worried are parents (Harris, 2020). With varying information on the safety of in person schools and specifically whether or not masks are effective, many parents are actively researching the best course of action from sources that include friends, family, education officials and government advisors (Cava, 2020). One piece of media that contributed to the confusion around covid was the first clip from the 2020 documentary, “Plandemic.” The video was shared through Facebook and YouTube. For some it was shared out of curiosity and uncertainty, but others fully believe the information presented (Pinsker, 2020). Plandemic follows Dr. Judy Mikovits as she explains her history with government officials and medical research concerning infectious diseases. Mikovits creates a narrative that puts our public health programs in the role of the villain while Dr. Mikovits and the scientists who back her are cast in the role of heroes. The documentary was taken down from many social media platforms, but that did not stop supporters from voicing their opinion on the short documentary. Notably, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Kennedy Jr. was

featured on the Thomas Paine podcast where he shared his support for Judy as being a brilliant scientist whose career was destroyed by Tony Fauci (Kennedy, 2020). Unfortunately, RFK, Jr. is not alone. The information in the documentary has been discredited by scholars, scientists, and public health officials, yet the documentary was still able to attract believers, and convert new ones to the idea that Covid is a hoax. On the surface, the claims and proof offered in the documentary do not reach many basic standards of logic or argumentation, so why is it that it was so persuasive for so many people, even some with high education? (Winter, 2020) For this analysis, I want to answer the questions of What persuasive strategies were used to create a rhetorical community and What are the possible implications of this shared fantasy. Through the rhetorical criticism lens of fantasy theme analysis (Foss, 2017), we can see that the documentary creates a rhetorical vision, or a version of reality wherein the state threatens parental autonomy and tries to take away the right of parents to make decisions about their children's health. The threat, not from covid but the state, is presented as preventing life-saving cures and natural remedies from reaching parents as part of a larger effort to exert control over American lives.

Description of the Artifact: "Plandemic"

Film Production

Mikki Willis is a filmmaker and father out of Ojai, California. Willis created a number of films/videos (Shelbourne, 2020) but before Plandemic, he was most noted for a video he posted to his families YouTube channel, "Elevate Family" (Shelbourne, 2020). The video had Willis speaking on the issue of gendered toys and how fathers like himself, should encourage boys to like what they please. His desire to create uplifting media for

families and a first-hand experience with the death of a brother to AIDS led to Willis starting a small production company with his wife Nadia Salamanca. The production studio named “Elevate” specializes in films and videos that have an “uplifting New Age” message. According to the Elevate’s website, the company's goal is to use media to create real and lasting change in the world (Elevate, 2020). The studio uses a variety of media types to meet this goal, including movies, documentaries, music videos, and more (Elevate team, 2020).

History of Plandemic

“Plandemic” was not originally planned to become a film at all. Willis had originally reached out to Dr. Judy Mikovits in order to get her professional opinion on the matter of Covid19. Willis and Mikovits had met previously, and Willis said that he found her intelligent and a hero in the fight against HIV/AIDS. A year later in the midst of the pandemic, Willis felt that the pandemic had become too politicized and was being used to take away people’s civil liberties and autonomy and wanted to seek out a scientific voice that was not in the mainstream (Allen, 2020). After briefly speaking to Mikovits, Willis asked her to sit down for a full interview, and thus Plandemic was born. According to Willis, the production itself cost less than \$2,000; he directed and edited most of the movie himself with his only aid being from a camera operator and researcher who was tasked with finding footage to back Mikovits’s claims. In an effort to underscore his goal of spreading the film far and wide, Willis said he did not and would not charge audiences to view the film (Widger, 2020). He added that he created the film to be shared over social media in order to share the information with a variety of people. Although he has since come under fire for the film, he has not denounced the film and has instead met

with a number of doctors and lawyers to help strengthen the documentary's case and provide proof for Mikovits claims.

Plandemic film synopsis

When I started this project in June of 2020, Willis hinted at a possible continuation but did not release the second part of the documentary until August 18, 2020 (Atienza, 2020). My analysis focuses on the first installment of the full documentary not just because it was made available to general audiences (before it was taken down on most sites), but also because it was released early in the unfolding of the pandemic. Although other messages have been created to influence audience members, including those messages aimed at individuals who consider the pandemic to be a hoax, however this film allows us to examine how the pandemic-as-hoax worldview emerged at the time.

Central to the film is Dr. Judy Mikovits, who is a medical researcher and scientist who has been working in the field of viral infections since receiving her B.S. in Chemistry from the University of Virginia in 1980 (Froelich, 2020). She spent the next 22 years working for the National cancer institute. After leaving the institute, she took some time off to work in California before attending George Washington University in 1991, where she received her PHD in Biochemistry (Mikovits, 2017). She would later go on to be the research director at the Whittemore Peterson Institute at the University of Nevada from 2006 to 2011 (Mikovits, 2017). In 2009, Mikovits co-wrote a paper that linked chronic fatigue syndrome to a retrovirus that originally came from mice (Froelich, 2020). However, the findings of the study could not be replicated by other studies and the discovery was linked to contaminated lab samples and scientific malpractice. Consequently, the paper was retracted by the prestigious research journal "Science" in

December of 2011 (Alberts, 2011). In November of that same year, a month before her paper was officially retracted, Mikovits was arrested and held on charges that she took intellectual property from her current employers the Whittemore Peterson Institute (Cohen, 2012). Mikovits was held in jail for five days before being released, and the charges were later dropped in 2012 (Froelich, 2020). It was at this point that Mikovits began to co-author books with Kent Heckenlively (Mikovits, 2017). Their first book, entitled “Plague: One Scientist’s Intrepid Search for the Truth about Human Retroviruses and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS), Autism, and Other Diseases” was released in 2017. Mikovits has since made many controversial claims about vaccines, chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), and now Covid19 (Lourgos, 2020).

In brief, the documentary argues that big pharma can’t be trusted due to their threats to individual freedoms, control of education, and omission of vital medicine. This is supported by clips from news channels, webcam videos of doctors, and other clips that are used to create a sense of legitimacy. Other clips, such as those of starving children in Africa and children receiving vaccines are emotional appeals mostly built on fear and uncertainty.

The video starts with Willis giving a brief introduction to the audience on Mikovits and her work. He opens with the lines,

“Dr. Judy Mikovits has been called one of the most accomplished scientists of her generation. Her 1991 doctoral thesis revolutionized the treatment of HIV/AIDS. At the height of her career Dr. Mikovits published a blockbuster article in the journal ‘Science.’ The controversial article sent shockwaves through the scientific community, as it revealed that the common use of animal and human fetal tissues were unleashing

devastating plagues of chronic diseases. For exposing their deadly secrets, the minions of Big Pharma waged war on Dr. Mikovits destroying her good name, career, and personal life” (Willis, N.P).

Aside from the introduction, the rest of the video is conducted in an interview style with Willis as the interviewer and Mikovits the interviewee in order to get Mikovits opinions on the story firsthand. The first part of the discussion covered Mikovits arrest in 2011 for stealing confidential information and data from the Whittemore Peterson Institute (Cohen & Enserink, 2020), which she states was a conspiracy against her (Mikovits, 2020). She claims (2020) that she wasn’t charged with anything but was held in jail after being dragged from her home, having refused to let the police in without a warrant. She goes on to claim (2020) that the intellectual property she was accused of stealing was actually “planted” in her home and that the heads of our government health agencies conspired against her. Mikovits take the abstract accusation of “government conspiracy” and gives it a human face by turning her attention to a singular individual, Dr. Tony Fauci, specifically. She states that Dr. Fauci held up her publication on HIV and thereby killed millions of people during the AIDS epidemic (Mikovits, 2020). Mikovits (2020) argued that the way science is funded produces bad research, especially patents that “destroyed science.” Mikovits claims that government funded researchers would put out anything in order to receive more funds and that certain physicians would not question what they are told even if it means administering the wrong treatment plan for the same purpose of getting more money. Beyond accusing researchers of manipulating the scientific process for profit, she also accuses them of being either incompetent or malevolent. She claimed that Covid19 was not naturally occurring and therefore,

manipulated in a lab. She states (2020), “It's very clear this virus was manipulated...this family of viruses was manipulated and studied in a laboratory where the animals were taken into the laboratory, and this is what was released whether deliberate or not” (Mikovits, 2020). Regardless of whether it was deliberate, Mikovits (2020) implies that the virus is relatively harmless to which Willis (2020) points out that the death tolls of Covid19 are still high. These numbers go against some theories that it is a harmless virus but Mikovits (2020) concludes that this is due to how the CDC is handling covid diagnosis. To back this up, clips of doctors speaking on the subject are added in. The overall thought is that death numbers are being skewed due to government regulations on what constitutes a Covid19 death. However, Mikovits recognizes that the virus is still deadly for some and that medications must be created to stop it. Although recognizing this, Mikovits thinks that the people creating the vaccine are not the right people for the job and have higher stakes in it being received. Mikovits claims that certain medications are not released on the market because people like Bill Gates, who she claims owns medical patents in the covid vaccine, would not be able to make money off of it. This includes a medication that would help autistic children, Suramin (Mikovits, 2020). Mikovits moves from accusing public health officials and others of profiting from medication at the expense of human life to further discrediting these professionals by saying that their strategies for dealing with Covid are also dangerous including wearing masks and closing of public spaces (Mikovits, 2020). More clips of doctors are added in, with one clip having a couple of doctors discussing the use or uselessness of masks. One doctor (2020) goes on to say, “This doesn't make any sense. We wear masks in an acute setting to protect us. We're not wearing masks right now. Why is that? Because we

understand microbiology. We understand immunology and we want strong immune systems.” The video finishes off with Mikovits and Willis going over their thoughts on how the education system is pushing propaganda about science that is leading to polarization among the American people. Mikovits (2020) makes the claim that the governments propaganda is the underlying problem as it has created a severe climate of polarization and causing people to fight one another.

Public reaction to Plandemic

After the film's release to the internet on May 4th, 2020, the video garnered over eight million views across major platforms Facebook and YouTube in just under a week of the release (Perman, 2020). Although the video has since been taken down from these platforms, copies are still being shared on alternate websites like Reddit or posted to other platforms under altered names (Hatmaker, 2020). The number of views was surprising to Willis, who had never thought that the video would get so much attention. In an interview with the Los Angeles times, Willis had this to say, “We knew the branding was conspiratorial and shocking. Unfortunately, in this age, you kind of have to be that to get people’s attention. But that it would go viral to this degree, I don’t think anyone could project” (Perman, 2020). After the initial first wave of views, many people, including medical professionals, politicians, and regular citizens, took to the internet to share their thoughts on the documentary. On one end of the spectrum, there are plenty of those that were very quick to dismiss the documentary as conspiracy and propaganda. Mikovits made several claims in the video, and medical professionals were quick to react and dismiss her claims. Her claim on vaccines was not well received by many in the medical community, with one professional, Bertram Jacobs who is a professor of

virology at Arizona State University, said, "We first started using vaccines in the West about 200 years ago, and they have saved millions of lives" (Papas, 2020). Other professionals such as Benjamin TenOever, a microbiologist at the Mount Sinai Icahn School of Medicine, called her claims "ridiculous" and that some of our greatest success stories come from RNA vaccines (Papas, 2020). Mikovits also received a lot of criticism from the medical community for her claim that mask can make you sicker. Marsha Wills-Karp, the chair of environmental health and engineering at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said that Mikovits does not understand anything about immunology if she thinks that you can get sick from breathing in the virus already present in your own body (Papas, 2020).

Although there were many scientists and doctors who were quick to dismiss Mikovits, there were a few that agreed with her and her view on science. Dr. Luc Montagnier, the 2008 Nobel Laureate for physiology or medicine from France, argued that coronavirus was created in a lab in an interview on a French TV channel (Bast, 2020). Montagnier, who received the Nobel prize for his research and isolation of HIV in the 1980s, connected the novel Coronavirus to having elements of the HIV-1 retrovirus (Bast, 2020). Mikovits had worked with Montagnier in HIV research in the past according to her interview for Plandemic. Montagnier also wrote a comment that was featured on the cover of Mikovits 2020 book release "Plague of Corruption." His comment stated, "This rampant corruption, which hides from the public scientific truths which might go against these corporate economic interests." (Montagnier, 2020). Another Doctor, Dr. Rashid Buttar of the Center for Advanced Medicine and Clinical Research,

said in an interview on the pandemic that, “People need to wake up and realize that there is a massive criminal component to this” (Rashid, 2020).

Outside of the science community itself, the video has received mixed emotions from the general public. One professor of literature at New York University, Debra Winters, recently wrote an article about acquaintances who had recently started to share articles and videos such as Plandemic on Facebook (Winters, 2020). She wrote that when she ran into her neighbor, a retired doctor, she was surprised to hear her thoughts on covid. Her neighbor shared the belief that Covid19 had been created and added that Tony Fauci and Bill Gates “Should be arrested” (Winter, 2020). Winters herself found the video to be full of falsities and did not give it a second thought until several other friends began to share the video. Winters is not the only person who has been met with friends and family members sharing these video, and whole articles on how to talk to people about the video and its falsities have been shared on the internet (Haelle, 2020).

Method: Fantasy theme analysis

Background

Although there are multiple rhetorical criticism methods that allow researchers to uncover the worldview of rhetors (metaphor criticism, ideological criticism, etc.), fantasy theme analysis was developed to understand how the shared worldview of groups emerge. The idea of the fantasy theme analysis was first developed by Ernest G. Bormann while conducting research on group communication in 1972 (Foss, 2017). Bormann had been studying Robert Bales research on group communication, specifically the process of how groups come to share a common way of seeing the world. This group fantasizing or “dramatization” takes place when members of a group create a shared

narrative with characters that played out dramatic situations in settings that are removed from the space and time of the current moment or the “here and now” (Bormann, 1972). From Bale’s observation, Bormann created a theory and a method of analysis, those being symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis (Foss, 2017). Symbolic convergence theory is built on two major assumptions. The first assumption is that the way we communicate shapes our reality (Foss, 2017). The second assumption is that our reality can be shaped and formed to fit the shared reality of a community of people, or in other words, groups of people can come to understand a shared view of the world; their symbolic worlds converge. (Foss, 2017). Bormann writes “If several or many people develop portions of their private symbolic worlds that overlap as a result of symbolic convergence, they share a common consciousness and have the basis for communicating with one another to create community, to discuss their common experiences, and to achieve mutual understanding” (Foss, 2017). From here, Bormann created fantasy theme analysis.

Defining fantasy theme analysis

Fantasy theme analysis can be defined as the analyzing of “fantasies” shared by a group of people (Foss, 2017). In fantasy theme analysis, the fantasy itself may not be “fantastical” or in other words may not fit what we typically view as fantasy. Rather than analyzing an artifact for elements of magic, a fantasy in this sense is the shared reality of a group of people (Foss, 2020). For example, a shared reality among a political party may be that the opposing party is made up of evil villains. This shared fantasy leads to members of the group participating in certain actions that further support this idea (Foss, 2017). These fantasies, when shared through an artifact, can be used to shape the realities

of the audience members (Bormann, 1972). By analyzing the fantasy themes in an artifact, the critic can find answers to questions concerning the strategies used to persuade the audience, the functions a rhetorical vision serves, and the potential implications of certain rhetorical visions (Foss, 2017).

Steps for analysis

The procedures for completing a fantasy theme analysis starts with selecting an artifact to analyze. Plandemic has all the key elements for a successful portrayal of a fantasy, including visual aids (McIlwraith R.D and Schallow J.R, 1983) and claims that seem too convincing to refute (Pennycook, 2019). Since people share fantasies in order to make sense of what is happening around them, many people tend to seek out media that already goes along with a certain world view they hold. Once the artifact is selected, an analysis is completed of the artifact's themes. The first step is going through and coding for settings, characters, and actions within the work (Bormann, 1972). The codes can be looked to for possible patterns that lead to the overarching themes of the artifact. Then, the themes can be analyzed to find the rhetorical vision or fantasy being created by this artifact.

The most salient characters to emerge from the analysis were : Mikovits, Doctors, Tony Fauci, Big pharma, parents, the American public/taxpayers, and Bill Gates (see Appendix). However, other characters emerged that were worth noting, especially how Mikovits positioned COVID-19, HIV, Ebola, and viruses in general as characters responsible for taking certain actions. For example, she discussed how Ebola had to be “taught” how to infect human cells without killing them in the lab, as if Ebola were a student. The salient setting themes were actual locations, American hospitals,

government labs, and foreign countries (primarily Italy and China) and the setting themes included backdrops such as the pandemic itself and the American public education system. The salient action themes were terrorizing, hiding, lying, losing of rights, and control. Taken together, these common themes lead to rhetorical vision of a dangerous world wherein professionals (researchers, scientists, public health officials, etc.) lie to the American public, and are driven by profit at the expense of humanity, while marginalized or silenced parents must sit by and watch their children.

Report and analysis

Threats to parental autonomy

A salient theme in the documentary is the loss of free speech/free choice. As Willis (2020) put it, “There is no dissenting voices allowed anymore in this free country which is something I never thought I would live to see.” Taking an even closer look, the language surrounding this claim is narrowed down to a threat to parental autonomy.

Parental autonomy is defined as, “parents have(ing) the fundamental right to raise his or her child and to make all decisions concerning that child free from governmental intervention” (US Legal, N.D). The codes that encompass this theme are the characters: Doctors, Bill Gates, and Tony Fauci. The action is mask mandates and other covid related regulations, and the setting occurs in American hospitals and private practices.

Let’s first discuss the language that the doctors use to talk about the mask. One clip of an unnamed doctor (2020) from the film had the following to say about mask:

“I don't think everybody needs to wear the masks and gloves because it reduces your bacterial flora. It doesn't allow you to interact with society and your bacterial flora and your viruses your friends, that protect you from other diseases end up going away

and now you're more likely to get opportunistic infections. Infections that are hoping you don't have your good bugs fighting for you, if that makes sense.”

By using medical lingo and a mixture of metaphors the doctor makes the argument that wearing mask and gloves will only hinder your immune system and that by doing so, you are putting your overall health at risk. The underlying question being posed to parents is then; Don't you want your child to have a strong immune system? The argument for a strong immune system has proven very popular among some parents, particularly those members of a new movement in Utah called the “Moms against masks coalition.” The coalition that was started on Facebook by mother Madeline Kazantzis (Karalis, 2020), uses information like the doctor presents as evidence in the fight against medical mandates. By using this information as leverage, they are reinforcing the idea that mask are not even necessary and therefore do not need to be mandated.

Another parent who is very angry about the Covid19 regulations is an unnamed doctor featured in the film. The doctor (2020) had this to say in response to Covid19 treatments and mandates. “I'm here to defend my family's freedoms, my patient's rights to choose what to do with their life.” The doctor in question raises the issue of one's bodily freedom which is a topic of concern for some families in regard to their children and medical mandates. A movement that was created for this is the “My child. My choice” movement (Kennedy, 2020). This movement's main enemy is that of the mandated vaccine. The movement's slogan was coined by the Children's Health Defense led by Robert Kennedy Jr, who as mentioned before, is an avid supporter of Mikovits and her work (2020). The codes mentioned above identify the overall theme of threats to parental autonomy.

Control of Education

One of the lasting messages given at the end of the documentary is that our education system is being controlled and gatekept to only allow for a certain type of science to be taught, a science that according to Mikovits (2020) is not entirely correct. The codes that support this are the characters of Tony Fauci and Mikovits. The setting is the American education system and the action is that of being taught the mainstream narrative (Mikovits, 2020). Mikovits gives some very controversial claims about Dr. Fauci and his position as a national health advisor and accuses him of spouting “propaganda” (Mikovits, 2020). Mikovits (2020) states, “It's beyond comprehension how a society can be so fooled, that the types of propaganda continue to where they're just driving us to hate each other. Hopefully this is the wake-up call of all America.” One parent that agrees with Mikovits is mother Michelle Malkin. Malkin took to the internet to share her thoughts on Fauci and his caution against closing schools. Malkin (2020) wrote, “The truth is that Fauci is misleading American families and educators through arrogant acts of both omission and commission.” Malkin believes that the threat of anxiety caused by distress over the virus is much more harmful than the virus itself. She shames Fauci as a “fearmongerer” and even goes on the quote Mikovits later in her article as also having called Fauci out for his fear inducing messages.

Mikovits goes on to talk about how the government now controls and manipulates the science we learn in our schools (Mikovits, 2020): “We had no idea that that the data that we were being told was true, was not true. We've been taught now, in our in our schools a very different science. You don't get funded if you don't speak the party line.” It is true that the federal, but more importantly, the state government have a say in public

education curriculum (Findlaws team, N.D). However, there is no viable evidence as to whether or not the science taught in our schools is wrong. Instead, most of these claims about science are backed by opinions on the matter, and most notably the fights between evolution and creationism (Hovind, N.D). Although Mikovits accuses the educational system of being manipulated by special interests and manipulating the public, Mikovits does not call for a complete restructuring of the system, just a chance for state governments to weigh-in on matters of public education curriculum design. This is an example of how Mikovits invites members of the rhetorical community to envision a massive enemy that controls every aspect of the citizenry. State Boards of Education actually do determine curricular standards for public schools, not the federal government, but the claim that the federal government does this adds to the enormity of the enemy and the enemy's reach.

Hidden cures

The last theme is that institutions are purposely hiding cures to diseases. The characters that supported this theme were Mikovits, Bill Gates, Tony Fauci, doctors, and the minions of big pharma. The settings were America in the 80's, Africa during the same period, and America today. Lastly, the action codes were hiding, censoring, holding up cures, pushing patents, and pushing the wrong medication.

Mikovits's claims that her work in HIV research was held up by Fauci, which led to the virus being spread around (Mikovits, 2020). This spread of the virus led to Africa "losing a generation" due to HIV/AIDS as well as the loss of hundreds of Americans during the 80's (Mikovits, 2020). To further push this argument, the documentary uses

footage of African children, most of which look hungry and sick and shots of people visiting loved ones in American hospitals. Evoking images of sick or dying children can be expected to trigger emotions in parents (Krisch, 2020).

Mikovits (2020) also makes the claim that, “Back in autism, with our discovery, there was an old antiviral drug hundred-year-old drug called sermon on the W.H.O list of essential medicine. It literally gave kids with autism a voice, a life...they took it away from everybody you couldn't get it to save your life right now.” For some parents, the threat of autism is enough to not vaccinate their children and so hearing that there was a drug that could have helped autistic children is especially triggering (Lubrano, 2019). The use of this example has the potential to be very persuasive as it is a subject that many feel strongly about, whether pro-vaccine or anti (Broniatowski, 2020). Mentions of vaccines are also used in a persuasive way, with Mikovits (2020) saying that there are currently no RNA vaccines that work and that worldwide mandates for vaccines would only work to make money for Big Pharma. The “minions” of big pharma that Mikovits also mention are a driving force in the use of vaccinations. The minions, although irrelevant enough to not be named, are also powerful enough to push the pro-vaccine movement forward. A follow up post that Willis (2020) posted on his Facebook wrote the following about Bill Gates and his minions, “This one will surely upset a few, but when it comes to those who bring repeated harm, even unintentionally, to innocent children, I don't censor.” With this statement, Willis sums up what parents who are anti-vaccine think about any medication that could potentially harm their child

Medication and vaccination is discussed again in the context of doctors stating their ideas and thoughts on medical practices during Covid19. One of the topics was on

the use of Hydroxychloroquine for Covid19. Hydroxychloroquine has been banned from use for Covid19 (Bellefonds, 2020) but some of the doctors in the documentary were opposed to this decision. One doctor stated that, “We know that Hydroxychloroquine and zinc are working great for patients but then Fauci comes out and says well there's no double-blind placebo study which by the way Dr. Fauci, is there going to be a double-blind placebo study of your vaccine...?” The documentary also includes a clip from a news report (Richardson, 2020) that shares that there has been a poll among doctors in some 30 countries, and these doctors agree that Hydroxychloroquine is the most effective drug to treat the virus (Covid19). Using these clips together reinforces the idea that these essential medications are being kept from the people by individuals like Tony Fauci. In essence, Mikovits accuses Fauci of both being a bad scientist because he is controlled by Big Pharma, but also being a bad scientist for holding to the toughest scientific rigor for releasing vaccines.

Conclusion/contribution

The timing of the Plandemic film was perfect for a conspiracy to take root. With some states having still been in lockdown at the release of the film in May (2020), the film gave an answer to those looking for something or someone to blame for the loss of jobs, lives, and other resources (Shepards, 2020). Having come at such a time of unrest, the film was able to capitalize off of peoples fear and while doing so, also led to the sharing of information in Plandemic as real scientific fact (Gorski, 2020). The film invites the rhetorical community to see the virus as less serious than other threats or in other cases completely fake. This has led to people ignoring mandated precautions as

well as warnings issued by medical professionals, which potentially puts individuals and their children at risk of infection.

Since 2019, there has been a significant rise in members of anti-vaccination groups on social media with prominent anti-Vaxxer Taylor Winterstein receiving 1500 new followers in April alone after posting on her Instagram about vaccine scheme behind Covid19 (Wilson, 2020). This engagement with anti-vaccination groups comes from anti-medicine and anti-science rhetoric like Plandemic (Collins & Zadrozny, 2020). Other groups like the anti-masks group out of Utah have also seen a rise during the Pandemic as parents voice concern and frustration over mandates for their children (O'brian, 2020).

The mandates are set up against the rights of freedom of speech and choice. These rights are framed as being more important to the overall health of the public. This leads to a distorted view on that of personal rights and its intersection with scientifically backed mandates. Parents who fully support movements like the “my child, my choice” movement are given the excuse they need to ignore medical mandates and do what they think is best for their child. The censorship of the film itself has also fueled the claim to a loss of freedom, as the censorship is seen as institutions hiding the truth and not that the film may be harmful (Zorn, 2020).

Plandemic therefore, is a piece of media that has become the driving piece of literature for some pandemic conspiracy theorist and the accessibility of the film despite attempted censorship can lead to the creation of shared fantasies worldwide.

The influence that Plandemic has had should be noted. As the Covid19 pandemic unfolded, this film was able to convince a group of people that the whole thing wasn't as serious as it was being made out to be. Future researchers and public health officials alike

should note that media such as this are worth examining as they emerge during hard and confusing times. By analyzing influential documentaries such as this one, there is the possibility to see how it will affect audience members and their actions over time which can in turn affect the whole of our nations.

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Appendix

Codes from the analysis

Characters: Dr. Judy Mikovits, Bill Gates Tony Fauci, Doctors, Minions of big pharma

Settings: America in the 80's, Africa during the same period, America today, American education system, American hospitals, Private practices

Actions: hiding, censoring, holding up cures, pushing patents, pushing the wrong medication, taught mainstream narrative, mask mandates and other covid related regulations