

Expectation and family hierarchy: a semiotics analysis of colors in *Encanto* (2021)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to observe how colors depict expectations and pressures within a family. Encanto is an animated musical movie that describes hierarchy in a family which inevitably triggers a hierarchy of expectations and pressures from Abuela Alma, the oldest member of the Madrigal family. She treated her children and grandchildren as her own expectation and desire for the sake of the continuity of the family's descendants. This study belongs to a descriptive qualitative study where observing, recording, and analyzing the data are applied. Roland Barthes' theory about denotation and connotation will be used to analyze the meaning of the colors attached to each character of this movie. The various colors presented are magenta, baby blue, tiffany blue, lilac, white, yellow, faded green, scarlet, black, and bluish colors. Each color symbolizes characters, the hierarchy of expectations, and the kinds of pressure in this family. The colors and patterns of each individual's outfit, according to the explanation of the contrasts between the characters on each side, indicate the degree of Abuela's influence over them, as she is the person in charge of the family hierarchy. Abuela, aware of the community's dominance of magical power, tries to keep it in her family, resulting in a hierarchical disposition in her family based on her perspective of how their magical ability benefits others.

Keywords: color, Semiotics, Encanto, hierarchy

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Introduction

Family is the foundation of our lives. The values, mindset, and culture are taught through the family. The good or bad that our family value becomes what we accept as true, mainly when it comes from the older part of the family. As the younger generation, we have to follow and respect the rules since we are living under their roof, until we forget to respect ourselves.

Encanto (2021) is a movie produced by Walt Disney Animation, which took place in the hilly area of Colombia, namely Encanto (Anon n.d.). The city is described as a vibrant, breathtaking, radiant, and friendly location (Fitriane and Nugroho 2022). In the movie *Encanto*, the Madrigal family is portrayed as having a distinct magical ability, with each

member possessing their own unique set of skills, except for Mirabel Madrigal. Unlike her older sister, Isabela Madrigal, who received a lot of attention and pressure from Abuela Alma, the founder of magic and the matriarch of the Madrigal family, Mirabel appeared to be the only member without any magical abilities. This sets her apart from the rest of the family, making her feel isolated and unimportant. This contrast in abilities highlights the importance of individuality and self-worth, despite societal or familial expectations. Whereas Mirabel admires Abuela, she was dissatisfied with the manner Abuela treated her for not having a gift and frequently explicitly prohibited her from participating in their family activities. Moreover, Abuela was quick to tear out at

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Mirabel for causing misery within the family after learning the source of the gift dying and attempting to tell Abuela how to fix it. In line with this, this story will tell the story of how Mirabel uncovered her magical skill.

This movie is categorized as a musical and family movie. Bringing a movie with the background of family as the main setting, *Encanto* (2021) is suitable to watch with family members. The characters in this movie are depicted in colorful figures as can be seen from the clothes, dresses, accessories, the characters' skin tone, as well as the situation around them. In addition, color can convey information about a product's qualities (Won and Westland 2017). The use of colorful figures and detailed objects is not merely for the matter of beauty and art, but intrinsically it has meanings if people observe this deeper. According to Ahmad and Aftab (2015a), colors have an effect on mood. Since it helps to convey the basic creative mood and tone of the animation and helps to amplify the viewers' emotions, color is a crucial component of the visual language system used in film and television animation (Ren 2021). Because the visual representation is more untied and unlocked in movie or TV animation, as well as because the characters are visual, the color even has a greater purpose in the material than it does in regular movie or television works. Also according from Prasojowati, Natsir, and Ariani (2019), experts claim that the visual images are semiotic signs that have successfully conveyed messages to the audience and are clear enough for the addressee to understand. Everyone in this movie is using different color palettes, which helps to uncover personality and struggles of each character. According to Brunick and Cutting (2014), scientific findings find that colors influence how cognitive setting is used in art and animation. It is also supported by Kauppinen-Räsänen and Jauffret (2018), they stated that semiotics distinguishes itself by viewing communication as a process determined by the interrelationship between a message and its

Research Method

This study is typically a descriptive qualitative research using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. This study investigated the meaning of individuals or groups ascribing to

recipient. Because interpretation is determined by the interaction between the message and the recipient, the sender, or the company representing the marketing activity, loses relevance once the message is sent.

Semiotics analysis on movies has been discussed by other researchers. Utami, Setia, and Deliana (2021) discussed a movie poster, and they found two aspects attached to the poster, namely the verbal aspect and visual aspect. Some variables on the former are characters, title, and date of the movie. While the latter discussed the color, background, and shape of the poster. Their object of study and the aspect of the analysis makes it different from this research.

Sign and meaning in magazines are studied by Nopiyati (2019). The researcher inferred that the signs in the sentences were used to influence women to give more care to hair and apply hair care products to result in the appearance of models on the covers. Another study on sign and meaning from a semiotic point of view had animals as its focus (Agustina, Haris, and Trisnawati 2021). This study focused on the three animals that appeared in the *Zootopia* movie, namely mouse, rabbit, and fox by applying Saussure's theory of signified and signifier. The result revealed that the three animals depicted in the movie were different from what had been believed in real life. Meanwhile, this research focuses on the color semiotics which reflects expectation and family hierarchy.

The researcher aims to see how the characters in the *Encanto* (2021) movie were presented through the colors of their physical appearance, such as clothing, accessories, and so on, using the Barthes' denotation theory. The result of this study shows that the characters in this movie coincides with their family and characteristics. In addition, their colors, in some way, are underlining about the pressure and the dynamic at how their colors are coordinated.

social phenomena in our daily life (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Things can be said as a sign if they can be categorized as a signifier because it has important meaning (Sobur 2016).

According to Roland Barthes, semiology "aims to take in any system of signs regardless of their constituents and boundaries, such as images, gestures, musical sounds, and objects." As a system, these are significant. Semiology, according to Roland Barthes, is the branch of linguistics that deals with the major signifying units of discourse (Barthes 1968). With the help of his semiotic theory, Roland Barthes separates the process of reading signs and concentrates on how various societies and cultures interpret them. It produces two ways, denotation and connotation (Chandler 2007). The physical form of the sign as people perceive it using their senses is known as the signifier, and the signified, or meaning that is interpreted, is known as the signified, according to Barthes.

The physical appearance of *Encanto* (2021) characters is the primary data for this research. The technique of data collection is by watching, observing, and recording the scenes

of the movie, which are related to the purpose of this research. After obtaining the data needed, the signs and markers are going to be analyzed using Barthes' semiotic theory. The relationship between character-performed situations and the color-coordinated meaning is going to be analyzed and deconstructed using Barthes' approach of categorizing signs into denotation and connotation.

Several activities are conducted in analyzing the color-coordinated *Encanto* (2021) characters. Firstly, finding the signs consisted in the *Encanto* (2021) movie based on its physical appearance. Secondly, the meaning behind each color associated with the characters is revealed and analyzed from Barthes' theory. This further explores how the use of color in the movie is not simply arbitrary, but rather intentional and symbolic, which contributes to the characterization and overall story.

Results & Discussion

The color of the dress which each character wears in the movie reflects a certain meaning. Abuela as the central figure made the color for others to mark her expectation and a

family hierarchy in each of her members, as it is symbolized in the cool and warm tones in their dresses. The details of the color symbols are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Encanto* characters' analysis

No	Character	Physical Appearance	Denotation	Connotation	Myth
1	Abuela Alma	A magenta dress with mountain patterns below and a shawl	A long dress in the color of magenta covered with black shawl, which is patterned with a black mountain.	The color of magenta on the dress implies the power and energy that Abuela holds as the leader of the Madrigal family. According to Ahmad and Aftab (2015a) black means grief and death. Thus, the black pattern shows her grief toward the death of her husband Pedro	
2	Julieta Madrigal	Baby blue shirt, a tiffany blue skirt	A long-sleeved baby blue shirt, a tiffany blue long skirt, cooking apron	Light blue is a calming and peaceful color. tranquil, harmony and relaxation. It represents peaceful things such as "Clear Blue Ocean" and "Blue Sky". (Ahmad and Aftab 2015a)	
3	Isabela Madrigal	A lilac, frilled and layered dress decorated with flowers	A dress in lilac color	Purple is associated with royalty. It symbolizes power, nobility, luxury, and ambition. (Cerrato 2012)	Depicts the Colombia region as the diverse area where races of people such as the white and black live
4	Luisa Madrigal	White, short-sleeved shirt and a long indigo skirt with free weights at the bottom	White shirt with and a long indigo skirt	The color white symbolizes light, goodness, innocence, and purity. The color indigo connotes integrity and deep sincerity. (Cerrato 2012)	

5	Mirabel Madrigal	A white blouse with colorful butterfly stitching and black frills at the neck and sleeves, with a long teal skirt	A blouse that is white in color and full of embroidered pattern, and a green skirt	White connotes light, goodness, innocence, and purity (Cerrato 2012). The understated elegance of teal promotes a calm, reflective mood. (Braam 2022)	together. However, the prominent figure of the Madrigals gives the outlook of how social class builds the community based on the power they have. In order to protect the family generation and carry the prestige that a family has out, the pressure and the previous generation method of raising children remain.
6	Pepa Madrigal	A yellow dress	A dress that is totally yellow in color	Yellow stands for her personality that is passionate and emotional (Ahmad and Aftab 2015b). Moreover, it also stands for her ability to control the weather based on her feeling	
7	Bruno Madrigal	A faded green hooded poncho	A long poncho that has faded green color and a beanie	In Psychology, faded green color connotes his pure of love for the Madrigal family, and his personality who like peacefulness	
8	Dolores Madrigal	A yellow-warm cloth and scarlet skirt	A cloth that is yellow and bright in color combined with a skirt that is bold red in color	Her warm tones of clothing represents unconsciousness and impatience	
9	Antonio Madrigal	A clothing that consists of warm and bluish colors	A cloth and trouser that consist the color of yellow, orange, red, purple, and green	The existence of each color of the characters show Antonio's personality that want to please everybody	

Expectation

An expectation is an emotional anticipation or belief that something will happen in the future. It is a potential form of faux reality that we hope will manifest in our lives. Expectations can come from people, things, or anything else that exists outside of our integral self. Expectations are formed as a result of inherited characteristics, cognitive skills, attitude formation, social conditioning, cultural norms, and one's mindset and life experiences (Balasubramanian 2022). The expectation that circles within Madrigal's family is not just a one-time issue.



Figure 1. Color wheels based on Abuela's expectation

In this movie, Abuela is depicted as a grandmother who led the Madrigal generation. Her dress was magenta showing her character that is passionate and full of power and energy.

The foundation of Abuela's expectations of her family was her commitment to preserve her sense of family pride. Since she led the Madrigal family, she had the power to control the town. This made Abuela anxious to have any bad publicity about them because everyone looked up to them. Those who do not live up to Abuela's standards suffer because of this thought. She makes them feel as though they do not belong if they are not capable in her view. Their color from the closest and farthest to the tone of Abuela can be used to explain their expectation and hierarchy pressure positions that they received from Abuela.

Cool Tones

Being in cold tones, which are near to Abuela's color tones, Julieta's family experienced the most pressure from Abuela's expectations. The closest blue tones family member was Isabela Madrigal with her dress in a lilac dress that was really close to Abuela's dress color. Isabela achieved the demands of being the ideal child mainly to the elegance of her blossoming flower gifts. Next, it goes to Luisa Madrigal wearing an indigo skirt to represent her integrity. This is evident from the fact that Luisa has consistently complied with her grandmother's requests, allowing her to prove her dependability and ability to live up to her standards.

Julieta's marriage caused her to feel less pressure from Alma because Abuela was annoyed by her decision to marry the "clumsy" Agustin Madrigal and continued to have her doubts about it. Mirabel was the youngest daughter and sister on Julieta's side of the family because she was the only Madrigal by birth who lacked a magical skill. Mirabel always sought Abuela's approval before a miracle or magic for herself, therefore the butterfly on her shoulder was the same color as Abuela's clothing, even though Mirabel did not live up to Abuela's expectations for being a nice granddaughter.

Bruno, who had the capacity to see the future, was the one who was most distanced from Abuela's respectively due to his long poncho's fading green hue. Alma despised Bruno for leaving the family since he chose to remain concealed from the family within Casita's own walls when he did peek into the future. Because Abuela and the rest of the family were prone to assuming the worst of him, he did that. He advanced the farthest by failing to impress Abuela.

Warm Tones

The granddaughter with the warm-toned coloring most resembling Abuela is Dolores. Although Dolores's thoughts about her grandmother were unknown, it appeared that she and Abuela got along because the two were frequently pictured together in the movie. Alma depended on Dolores to hear anything for her and other people's needs, even though her hearing was not as useful to the community as Isabela's or Luisa's was.

The last child of Pepa and Felix, Antonio, was never assigned by Abuela any responsibilities, when she was seen getting him ready for the gift ceremony. When Alma turned to face him, Antonio smiled, showing how worried he was about disappointing his grandmother. Initially, Antonio was not grinning and seemed anxious. He was very close to Mirabel and was aware of how much it hurt her when she was denied the gift.

Camilo Madrigal, being the middle child of Pepa and Félix Madrigal with shapeshift gifts, dressed in white long-sleeved shirt with a yellow ruana with darker yellow streaks. He occurred in the middle right wheel from Abuela's color because his gift was not very useful to the community. He appeared to

be one of the members of the family with the fewest responsibilities imposed on him by Alma, possibly implying their interactions were similar to those she had with Mirabel, even if to a smaller extent.

The family member who is the furthest apart from Abuela in warm tones is their mother, Pepa. She had the ability to influence the weather by manipulating her emotions. She was prone to mood swings, quickly switching from being pleased to angry or vice versa. Her emotions occasionally had more control over her than she did over them, causing stormy weather.

Similar to her mother Alma, Pepa has a desire for perfection, but not to an excessive degree. Pepa worked to maintain emotional self-control in order to present the ideal image to her society. She wanted the gift-giving ceremony for her younger son Antonio to be flawless, but her mother's strict control over her and her siblings was to blame for everything. Pepa was also frequently criticized by Alma for having a cloud or for being unable to regulate her emotions, and she received little assistance from her when she needed it. On the other side, if Alma lost control of her anger, Pepa might get angry with her and react to her. Although she respected Alma as the family matriarch, Pepa was not afraid to contradict or yell at her when she became overly stressed. Hence, that is the plausible reason why she is the farthest warm tones in the family.

In conclusion, Abuela Alma's expectations for her grandchildren in Encanto are reflected in their color coordination. Isabela and Luisa, with primarily lilac and indigo outfits, have the most pressure placed on them, while Mirabel in teal and Dolores in yellow have relatively low expectations. Julieta and Antonio, in soft blue and orange, fall in between. Bruno's outfit is green, which may suggest that he has a significant role to play in the family's magic. However, his aloof and distant personality may indicate that he feels detached from the family's expectations and responsibilities. Lastly, Camilo's outfit is primarily yellow with some orange accents, which may indicate that he has a sunny and optimistic personality. The use of color adds depth to the characters and their relationships with Abuela Alma.

Family Hierarchy Pressure

In terms of choosing a spouse while taking into consideration the requirements of the entire family, the concept of parental hierarchy is particularly unique (Wang 2019). The family hierarchy in the *Encanto* (2021) movie is ranked by the family members' ability. Thus, Felix and Agustin are not included into the family hierarchy because they do not possess any magical power, even though they are already married with the members of the Madrigal family. The magical ability that each member has certain benefits to the community. In addition, it also shows the prestige that Madrigal has, at least in Abuela's mind. The more power benefits the society, the more the person has an important position in the family.

The First Generation

The *Encanto* (2021) movie was begun by Abuela, who was migrating after fleeing a war. Sadly, she also lost her house and her husband. After being left by her loved ones, she felt compelled to use Casita, a candle with special magical abilities, to further defend her family. Due to her war-related post-traumatic stress disorder, her intense desire to protect the family unwittingly became a burden for Abuela. Even if their mentality needed to be set aside, the family had to sacrifice everything for the good of the entire community. Abuela creates the family hierarchy as a result of generational trauma.

Julieta, Pepa, and Bruno are the triplet children whom Abuela gave birth to. Both Pepa and Julieta were wed to ordinary people, Agustin and Felix, respectively. The yellow embroidery on Abuela's dress indicated that she slightly preferred Pepa's side because she thought Mirabel was undermining Julieta's family. Bruno experienced much pressure from her mother rather than his brothers because he was the only first generation member who had not married to anyone else. Bruno was denoted as a man who wore green poncho with his light skin tone. Bruno was identical with his green costume. In psychological meaning, green connotes calm and peaceful. His ability to perceive the future is demonstrated by the hourglass prints on his hooded green poncho. But, the community did not accept it because his ability to see into the future had shown how horrible things would be for people. Bruno

made the decision to leave the city because the people around him did not experience peacefulness as a result of his presence.

Bruno is more into the pale color. In line with the meaning of green colors, pale colors also stand for peacefulness and purity. Bruno had a pure heart toward her mother, Abuela. Bruno was not upset with her mother at all, despite the fact that she ultimately excommunicated him for bringing the family terrible luck. It even proved his purity of love to his mother. He suffered alone and left the family to make Abuela happy, even when he was not. He was doing this merely for his lovely mother, her love toward Abuela was pure and genuine.

The Second Generation

The hierarchy and pressure of the second generation are greater than the first generation because this generation does not have yet their spouse, unlike the first generation. Thus, this generation is enduring greater pressure and higher position in the family hierarchy as they will continue the family descent and is pleased to keep the family tradition.

1. Warm Tones

Unlike the cool tones, warm tones are related to a stronger psychological condition. Thus, the family who has the warm tones tend to be more emotional, passionate, and emotionally charged, like Pepa. As a result, their three children have brighter, outgoing personalities that go well with warmer, more vibrant colors. They are Dolores, Camilo, and Antonio who all endured the pressure as the second generation and possessed the family hierarchy as well in the lower side than the bluish skin tone. Dolores must also abide by Abuela's instructions for her future, therefore she was heavily influenced by what Abuela desires, as her red was much closer to Abuela's magenta color. Abuela was revealed by a tiny pink design on her skirt. Even if there was not much pink, it demonstrates that Abuela also acknowledged her power, which is advantageous for the Madrigal family.

Warm colors are also known to represent unconsciousness and impatience, as can be observed on Dolores, Pepa's first child. She possessed the miraculous ability to have

super-hearing ears. Dolores's warm coloring accurately captured her personality. She could not keep secrets. When she had heard the secret unconsciously, she would promptly and automatically reveal it to others. Her gown featured a long red skirt and wore red lipstick, a red choker necklace with a gold gem, and matching heart-shaped earrings.

The younger brother of Dolores was Camilo, and he was dressed in a white button-down shirt with long sleeves rolled up to his wrists and a yellow striped ruana with various chameleon motifs on it, symbolizing Camilo's shapeshifting ability. Camilo also wore black high-waisted pants and white-patterned black sandals. In addition to the chameleon symbol, Camilo's attire also demonstrated how much both of his parents adored him. Because his attire was meant to depict his chameleon tendencies, there were no strong red accents anywhere on it. Antonio resembled his father's style more in terms of appearance. Camilo was more yellow with orange (red/Abuela) stripes; he was closer to his mother.

Lastly, it was Antonio who did not get much pressure and was in the upper ranks like his other siblings. Besides he was still a kid who just got his magical ability, Antonio's color that was far from Abuela's magenta indicates the little intervention and attention that Abuela gives to him. Antonio kept being busy by their own world and not being disturbed by Abuela. He also tried to win over all the adults in his life, which made him an even mixed orange.

2. *Cool Tones*

The family members who had cool tones were inherited by Julieta and Agustin. They were Isabela, Luisa, and Mirabel. Isabela who was identical in her light purple dress, Luisa who stood out by her deep purple skirt, and Mirabel with her greenish and embroidered dress. Julieta's family was in cool tones because they are the ones who are most stressed by Abuela's expectations.

As the one who always lives up to Abuela's expectations, Isabela occupied the upper position in the family hierarchy as her closeness to Abuela. As shown in her dress that was pink at first, then violet, but the combination of both colors still resulted to be the closest to Abuela magenta color, implying that is Abuela (with Abuela's red theme) and Abuela's expectation towards her. This

demonstrated Isabela's desire for perfection for Abuela, as did the fact that Isabela had a young Abuela-like appearance. As Isabela has the highest position to Abuela, Abuela's pressure toward her became higher. She was regarded as the perfect golden child, indicating that Isabela must always be perfect and endure the greatest pressure from Abuela compared to her two sisters. In exchange, she did not have the ability to choose or feel safe within her blue-colored family. She was torn between being a normal Julieta's child and being Abuela's golden child. Moreover, Isabela's dress color was so muted as she was not able to speak up for herself, making herself hide her own feelings and true identity.

Isabela wanted to always please Abuela and the family; thus, she stayed silent. Being untruthful toward herself was not easy. Thus, when she finally realized her true character by having a fight with Mirabel, her true character was revealed. Her dress became dark blue after her transformation throughout Mirabel's attempt to help Isabela embrace her true self. Apparently, Isabela tended to follow her mother's side of the family color tone. The dress denoted a blue color with a pattern of rainbow splashes on its surface, showing that Isabela starts to fully find and accept her true character. Not being fake just to please people around her. Then, the pressure on Abuela started to disappear as her dress turned to a bluish color.

Luisa's skirt was a strong purple color, similar to Abuela's. This indicates that she is more influenced and attached to Abuela than her mother Isabela. Although Luisa and Abuela did not interact much in the movie, it was clear that Luisa would do whatever her grandmother asked of her. Abuela's pressure on Luisa was heightened because Julieta, as her parent, had no influence over her. Luisa's tone was more reddish-purple than bluish, which was much closer to her family's. Luisa told Alma as soon as she became aware that her gift was fading. Alma was very dependent on Luisa's physical strength and often expected her to do the heavy lifting. Despite the fact that Luisa was shown to follow her grandmother's instructions without question, Alma unintentionally exposed Luisa to a lot of pressure and insecurities at a young age. The purple of her skirt indicates that Abuela's pressure on her is even stronger than Isabela's, who physically interacts with her all the time.

Mirabel tended to be bluish in color because she was more strongly influenced by her mother than Abuela. Being the only grandchild who did not have any special ability like others make Mirabel have less contribution and position in the Madrigal family. Her greenish-blue dress was actually a sign, foreshadowing her future relationship with Bruno. Bruno and Mirabel ended up being left behind since the matriarch, Abuela, did not see that they are useful to the family, even making them to be excluded more.

Mirabel wore green/blues, red/yellows, and even green in her clothing because she was influenced by her entire family. It can be interpreted that Mirabel has something for everyone. She wore an outfit that had a similar floral layout to Isabela's because she looked up to her so much. Mirabel always sought Abuela's approval over a miracle or magic for herself, therefore the butterfly on her shoulder was the same color as Abuela's dress.

Everyone's outfit seemed professionally tailored, while Mirabel's was self-made which can be interpreted that since everyone in the Madrigal family are naturally and born-with-it with the gifts, Maribel suffered from her for not being the gifted so she tried to discover her own miracle. It can be interpreted they had all found their place in the family, but she was still looking for hers. She

Conclusion

According to the explanation above, this paper has shown the hierarchy of each character using Barthes' semiotic theory. The researchers found that the highest hierarchy is represented by magenta since it describes Abuela as the person in charge, meanwhile, the lowest position is represented by green owned by Bruno. It is found that due to their dependency on the surrounding community, those who hold dominant powers that have a significant impact, which is the Madrigals, as a result, are the ones who stand at the top of the

maintained her parents' cool colors, but the more greenish tint made her stand out. Mirabel was the only one wearing each color and Mirabel had the most colorful outfit compared to others.

In conclusion, Abuela Alma's family hierarchy pressure for the family puts the second generation in a higher position than the first generation. The Madrigal family's hierarchy and the pressure placed on each character by Abuela Alma is conveyed through their color coordination. Isabela and Luisa, with primarily purple outfits, feel the most pressure to meet Abuela Alma's expectations and protect the family. Julieta, who is a mother of three, is dressed in soft blue, which may suggest that, while she is a significant member of the family, her primary responsibility is to her own children, rather than to the family as a whole. Mirabel, in teal, and Dolores, in yellow, have relatively low expectations placed on them due to their circumstances. Bruno, in green, and Camilo, in yellow with orange accents, fall somewhere in between, with their roles and responsibilities reflecting their outfits. The use of color adds depth to the characters and their relationships with Abuela Alma, showcasing the complex dynamics of the family hierarchy and the varying degrees of pressure placed on each member.

hierarchy, causing the existence of a hierarchical attitude in the Madrigal world. Barthes' theory of connotation and denotation has completely elaborated the researchers' idea in conducting this topic.

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