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Ambivalent Modernity: Scientists in Film and the Public Eye

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Abstract
Scientists are widely regarded as high status individuals, who are smarter than the vast majority of the population. Science holds a very high status as a discipline, both within and outside of academe. This notwithstanding, popular stereotypes of scientists are often highly negative, with the image of the socially inept or even mad scientist being commonplace. This apparent contradiction is worth exploring. Additionally, we see the label scientific being used to justify pseudoscience and other results that are flatly contradicted by the bulk of scientific research (e.g., links between vaccines and autism). This is not due, as some argue, only or even primarily to a lack of understanding of science. Ultimately, there are two "sciences": science defined by the scientific methodology of the scientists, and the broader cultural use of science as a truth-teller without real use of scientific methodology. This dichotomy is wrapped up in both the nature of modernity and the idea of post-modernity. This research uses a content analysis of film to examine the nature of stereotypical portrayals of

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scientists, and a factor analysis of NSF survey data to investigate the complex attitudes towards science and scientists.

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