

Difference, Power, and Discrimination in Film and  
Media: Student Essays



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*STUDENTS AT LINN-BENTON  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE*



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## *Welcome to **Difference, Power, and Discrimination** in Film and Media: Student Essays*

The authors are students in English 223: DPD in Film course at Linn-Benton Community College in Albany, Oregon taught by Dr. Stephen Rust. Students at LBCC and Oregon State University choose from a wide range of courses to meet the [Difference, Power, and Discrimination](#) graduation requirement. Dr. Rust copyedited and formatted the project and images for publication and wrote the introduction. The goal of our project is to help our readers, particularly high school and college students interested in movies and television, develop a better understanding of the ways that narrative media like movies and television represent issues of difference, power, and discrimination in American culture, both today and in the past. Students who took Dr. Rust's course studied representations of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability in American film while learning to:

- a) Explain how difference is socially constructed;
- b) Use historical and contemporary examples to describe how perceived differences, combined with unequal distribution of power across economic, social, and political institutions, result in discrimination; and
- c) Analyze ways in which the interactions of social categories, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and age, are related to difference, power, and discrimination in the United States

This project was supported by a Linn-Benton Community College Faculty Innovator Grant and compiled in collaboration with Open Oregon, the LBCC library, the LBCC Writing Center, the LBCC English Department, and the OSU/LBCC Difference, Power, and Discrimination teaching community.

**Content Warning:** DPD content, by its nature, can be culturally, politically, and personally challenging for many readers and media viewers. Many authors have chosen to analyze R-rated movies or TV-MA television shows but have agreed to write for a PG-13 reading audience and avoid the use of potentially triggering images.

## Background and Purpose: Editor's Statement

This project began as an exploration of open pedagogy in the course ENG 223: Difference, Power, and Discrimination. My goal has been to develop inclusive, research-led course activities to welcome students into the field of cinema and media studies and model the values of the DPD program. This project invites students to share their voice on the issues facing our country by publishing their final essays in an open-source publication intended primarily for young adults and teenagers to build a generational conversation about the role cinema and media play in representing the lives and perspectives of all Americans. The authors hope you will read and share their work with students to inspire frank and open-eyed conversation about issues of race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality in American – and how those issues are represented and misrepresented by film and television.

The chapters are organized chronologically, which reflects the historical approach taken by our course textbook *American on Film: Representing, Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, 2nd Edition (2011) by Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin. The chronological organization also demonstrates the results when students are invited to select any film or television show of their choice to write about for the project. Without constraints, students are generally



interested in analyzing the shows and films they encounter in their personal viewing. To eliminate textbook costs from the course, students accessed the textbook as a free eBook via their school library accounts or accessed a physical copy from the library reserve desks or bookstore. This project is published on Pressbooks under a Creative Commons license to encourage sharing and inspire more teachers to share their student's voices with the work and contribute meaningful academic scholarship to the college community.

LBCC Faculty Innovator grant funds supported the time I needed to develop the essay guidelines, learn Pressbooks, format and edit the work for publication, and work with librarians Richenda Hawkins and Micheala Willi Hooper to develop a Library Research Page for the Project and Creative Commons tutorial and handout (see below). I also participated in professional development training, a DPD faculty cohort, and Faculty Innovator Workshops and reviewed several textbooks for the Open Textbook Library to become better acquainted with the field of open educational resources. The campus Writing Center tutors, thanks to the efforts of director Chessie Alberti, agreed to support required visits by each student to receive universal and sentence-level feedback on their writing before submitting final drafts. Liz Pearce, Family & Human Services instructor, provided additional mentorship inspiration, particularly through her OER textbook co-authored with her students, [\*Contemporary Families: An Equity Lens\*](#) (2020). Matt Usner created the course and continues to mentor me as he teaches his own sections and I am deeply grateful for his trust in my teaching and support for our students. I consider this project a success, particularly given the newness of this kind of open pedagogy and creative commons publishing, the rigor of the course, the sensitivity of the subject matter, and our move to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **The Value of Student Research**

After discussing the initial idea with students in Fall 2019, their enthusiastic support helped me realize the project could help them raise awareness about LBCC's remarkable Difference, Power, and Discrimination partnership with OSU and allow me to improve my teaching. Our goal has been to demonstrate our collective ability as students and teachers to meet the central outcome of the DPD program "to develop inclusive curricula that address institutionalized systems of power, privilege, and inequity in the United States" ([OSU DPD website](#)).

This project also seeks to address a problem in academic publishing, the privileging of rank and credentials that can diminish the value and impact of student writing. By providing students more power and voice in sharing their coursework online directly with the general public this project seeks to embolden student learning while also addresses the problem of the general public's lack of access to academic film scholarship (which is often restricted to university library databases). While my students do not have access to the same kinds of research materials available to Oregon State University students given the limitation of our library budget, I used all of my experience teaching full time at the University of Oregon to provide students a comprehensive curriculum suited to a 3 credit, 10-week, lower-division course.

Open Pedagogy (OP) places emphasis on making the published work of students and instructors more visible and available to the general public, whose access to academic-quality film and media criticism remains highly restricted by publishers and university libraries. Working with the partners mentioned above, I took the initial steps necessary for this project by redesigning the syllabus, changing the major essay assignment for the course, and making changes to the course schedule and materials. These changes in my teaching have been useful for student engagement but this project goes further, I think, to serve the aims of the DPD program. Using Pressbooks as a publication format will also address the issue of

the long-term viability of the project, we hope. I will update the project at least once per year with new essays as long as I am able to teach the course and hope new projects will emerge as well. Using a Pressbook format will also enable the book to be shared widely on OER websites like Open Oregon and possibly the University of Minnesota Open Library. Michaela Hooper designed materials to help students better understand what OP Creative Commons publication means so that students are well-informed about their rights and responsibilities as published authors and all authors have agreed to this publication model and license.

A big shout out to the student-publication [\*Culture & The Sitcom\*](#) produced for a course at Wake Forest University in 2017 by students in Communications Professor Mary M. Dalton's courses. Dr. Dalton generously shared supplemental materials such as a video panel discussion featuring the librarians that supported the project and other guidance. I am also encouraged to hear that professors Benshoff and Griffin are ready to publish the 3rd edition of *America on Film*.

### **Open Pedagogy and Student Success**

In addition to improving my own teaching practices and helping address the inequities in publication opportunities for student writers, I have developed good reason over the course of the project to feel strongly that open pedagogy supports student learning. During the first term that I taught the course in Winter 2019, Oriana Mulatero, Associate Dean of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, concluded in her course observation report: "Steve is a very caring teacher who is an expert in their field. Steve excels in having students learn more reflexively and having students be really engaged in their own learning." Since that first term, I have continued to develop tools for keeping my students more engaged in their own learning. Students have given me useful feedback about the curriculum, lesson plans, and assignments in the course. Students have pushed me to develop my inclusive pedagogy skills

and have been very supportive of my efforts to develop this open pedagogy project. My thanks especially to Diego Mendoza and Zach Foutch, who took the course Fall 2019 and became the first students to contribute.

The feedback from my students during class discussions and course evaluations is reflected in the quality of their final drafts. This anecdotal evidence resonates with current research on Open Pedagogy in research journals. A recent large-scale study by Hilton III, et al (2019), found that “Students found value in open pedagogy and believed that open pedagogy had greater overall educational value than traditional educational activities. When students were asked if they would prefer to take a course with open pedagogy or traditional pedagogy, a majority preferred open pedagogy.” These findings are corroborated by a recent case study on the potential learning benefits of OP in healthcare management education by Bonica, et al (2018). Further, according to a research survey of 136 university film studies students by Georgiadou and Kolaxizis’ (2019): “Findings suggest that film students want to use OERs in their studies but many of them are not aware that these resources exist .... Therefore, university teachers should assist students to develop familiarity with OERs of high quality and educational value as a useful aid to their studies.” These studies support my classroom experience that students are more engaged in their learning when they feel that the results of that learning are valued and visible, both of which have been enabled by this project. The pride and sense of responsibility that students who publish get to feel is something I have always valued and think may LBCC film students will value as well. I would not be pursuing this project without the initial enthusiasm that my students have shown.

As new Parts/Units of this book are added each year as the course develops, this introduction will reflect any changes to the textbook (which is expected to be updated shortly to a 3rd edition) or essay guidelines. Suggestions for textbooks and other reading, research,

and teaching materials are always welcome. Please visit my open-access course [Introduction to Film: A Creative Commons Course](#) for more ideas about using open educational resources in your own teaching and learning.

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All images and text used, quoted, or referenced in the preparation of course lectures, assignments, and other materials are acknowledged under Fair Use, following the Center for Media and Social Impact [Code of Best Practices for Fair Use in Media Education](#) and “[The Society for Cinema and Media Studies Statment of Best Practices for Fair Use in Teaching for Film and Media Educators](#).” All images used in the chapters are 1/24 second screen captures created with a Microsoft Windows snipping tool or Macintosh Command+Shift+4 snipping tool and are used for educational purposes only to enhance the impact of the student’s arguments and evidence in their writing.

## Land Acknowledgement

Linn-Benton Community College in Albany, Oregon, is located within the traditional homelands of the Kalapuya people. Following the Willamette Valley Treaty of 1855, Kalapuya people were forcibly removed to reservations in Western Oregon by the United States military. Today, living Kalapuya descendants are a part of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Community of Oregon ([grandronde.org](http://grandronde.org)) and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians ([ctsi.nsn.us](http://ctsi.nsn.us)) and continue to make important contributions to their communities, Oregon, and the world.

PART I

# 2019-2020 STUDENT ESSAYS





# I. True Grit (1969)

Hollywood's Unique Western: *True Grit* (1969)

By Sabrina Desha

Henry Hathaway's movie *True Grit* (1969), tells a story about teenage girl Mattie Ross's strong will to find her father's murderer, Tom Chaney, and bring him to death for her father's justice. To help with this mission she hires Marshall "Rooster" Cogburn to help her seek her revenge and by default Texas Ranger, La Beouf, joins in on the manhunt as well. *True Grit* is significant and should be recognized not only for its incredible cinematography and cast but for its underlying meaning about a young girl struggling to find acceptance and respect within a male dominating society. Within the film young Mattie constantly fights for her word and to be taken seriously in the revenge for her father's death, it is not till later on that Rooster begins to show her the respect she deserves and becomes a father figure for Mattie. *True Grit* effectively represents issues of difference, power, and discrimination with many characters that are accurately represented through specific visual and audio techniques.

As a traditional John Wayne movie, *True Grit* is a classic western. The film was made during a time when westerns were very popular in Hollywood (Benshoff and Griffin 242). Lead male actor John Wayne's, "Rooster", is represented as a straight able-bodied white male who has "True Grit" and carries traditional male cowboy traits. Supporting male actor Glen Campbell, La Beouf, is also represented as a straight able-bodied white male with traditional cowboy traits. Interestingly lead actress Kim Darby, Mattie Ross, does not carry traditional western female traits, which is what makes this film so significant. Her character strays away from the traditional

housewife feminine western cowgirl, to an independent and strong-willed woman who would do something so manly as kill a man to avenge her father.

Encoded within the film difference is represented by the theme and main character. The theme of the movie is about a young girl seeking revenge for her father's death, which is unlike any western Hollywood has created. Though there are few westerns that have a strong female as the main character, for example, Kat Badou, *True Grit* is particularly special for having a teenage girl as the main character. Not only is the theme of this film incorporating a lot of difference, but the main character herself represents the difference. Mattie's character has significance for women in the film industry because she breaks all barriers. She not only avenges her father's death but makes deals and bargains with multiple men who try to cheat her, along with taking care of the men she is traveling with. There is no doubt that Mattie Ross made an impact on the film industry and was so significant that it is still talked about today.

The movie was rebirthed in 2010 with Hailee Steinfeld as our strong-willed lead Mattie Ross and carries her traits into the modern day. In the article, "Teen girls in film Showcase *True Grit*" that was published in the Los Angeles Times in 2011, the author elaborates on role shift in our young Mattie Ross. The author states, "She's the product of a film industry in which young women are infiltrating traditionally male genres like action films; female directors and producers are wielding increasing creative influence, and the culture is moving from a sexed-up, dumbed-down model of female adolescence to one marked by smarts, strength and scrap" (Keegan) .

Power could be the ultimate theme for this movie. In this film, the power or authority is centered around only white straight able-bodied men. Mattie however doesn't care. All difference and discrimination aside, Mattie's number one struggle throughout the

movie is for acceptance and power. Since she is not only a teenager but a woman Mattie is almost always overlooked in every scene with more than just Rooster. From finding out who killed her father, to selling her horses, Mattie is constantly being disrespected and struggling to be heard within a male dominating society. Rooster is the first character that starts to respect her within the film, but she is still struggling for power in the manhunt. The biggest representation of issues with power in the film is between La Boeuf and Mattie. Since Mattie had already hired Marshall, she did not want La Boeuf's help and he went behind her back to talk to the marshall himself. In my notes, I talk about the scene where he tries to recruit the marshall and how significant the dialogue is. Mattie is overlooking the entire interaction and struggles to be heard due to the power of the men.



John Wayne as “Rooster” Cogburn and Kim Darby as Mattie Ross in *True Grit* 1969

Discrimination is represented within this film directly with the

main character Mattie. She is constantly battling discrimination with everyone in the town and the men she works with. Since Mattie is a young woman she is overlooked, sexualized, and discriminated against by many men. When she goes to sell her horses the dealer tries to cheat her and Mattie stands up for herself having a great significance on the film. The most discrimination Mattie receives is from La Boeuf. When they first meet he sexualizes Mattie and talks about wanting to kiss her then later treats her like a little kid and spansks her for following them on their ride to find Mr. Chaney. Mattie's discrimination for being a teenager is great representation as much as her being a woman.



Supporting male actor Glen Campbell as La Boeuf in *True Grit*, 1969

Why did I choose this film? I chose the film *True Grit* to do my DPD essay on? because it was truly life-changing for me to watch. I love the movies. I love movies that make you laugh, escape reality, and ultimately impact you to be a better version of yourself. Growing up I always felt like “one of the boys” and I always thought that was wrong and I needed to be more feminine. As an adult, I care less about being “one of the boys”, but watching this movie as

an adult impacted me on a whole different level. I love this movie so much because it's badass, and teaches young women to stand up for what you believe in and not let men influence your decisions. Mattie Ross inspired me to be a strong independent woman, and I think this film is important for young women to watch.

Though it might be old, *True Grit* is a milestone movie in Hollywood. With its incredible cast and cinematography this film is one of my favorite movies. This movie is important for people to watch because it tells a wonderful story about a young girl struggling for her respect.



Kim Darby as Mattie Ross, the inspiring young woman of the movie, *True Grit*, 1969

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## 2. Grease (1978)

What's the deal with *Grease* (1978)?

By Seth Duffy

*Grease* is an exciting movie from the late 70's. It stars a young John Travolta. *Grease*, alongside *Saturday Night Fever*, catapulted him into fame. This movie is packed with problematic themes, but a large amount of them have to do with the extreme characters that the characters employ. The extent that every character is exaggerated may be due to the source material for the movie being a musical. Musicals tend to have characters that have easy to recognize qualities. Are these themes bad if, ultimately, it's the point of the media?

The costume choices the movie makes really stand out. It becomes immediately apparent what personality traits a character possesses when they appear on screen. Danny Zuko, our slick and cool tough guy, has slicked-back hair and is suited out in leather. Rizzo, by far the most promiscuous character in the entire show, is also dressed in all black and creates a stark contrast between her gaggle of pink-wearing underlings. Sandy, the virgin from Australia, is dressed in all white. All of these costume choices lead to easy to follow character traits.



### Medium shot of Rizzo and the Pink Ladies

The sheer amount of toxic masculinity in this film is staggering. Almost all the members of Danny's gang either sexually assault or harass someone throughout the movie. Kaneki is the most problematic in this matter. He grabs women's butts, looks up their skirts, and verbally harasses them. The main conflict of the movie has to do with Danny's true self conflicting with his masculine self. The entire plot of the movie could not have existed if Danny cared slightly less about his friends thinking he was a wuss.



### Wide shot of Kaneki groping an extra

There is constant judgment being leveled against the women in the movie through its use of dialogue. Sandy is bashed by Rizzo and the other women for her lack of sexual experience. Rizzo is judged by the women and men in the movie for her promiscuity. They highlight her problematic expression of her sexuality by Danny Zuko saying, "Sloppy seconds ain't my style". This line suggests that Rizzo is some kind of used goods due to her previous sexual experience. Another heavily judged character in the film is Jan. Throughout the entire movie she's made a joke because of her eating habits. A character even goes as far to say that he "doesn't think that she's all fat" and asks her to the prom. This wouldn't be that problematic if the character in question was actually fat. Instead, it's just a normal actress wearing baggy clothing.

### Medium shot of Jan not being fat

This movie also minimizes the problems of women in the movie. At one-point Sandy is frustrated with Danny over an incident at



prom. The incident is resolved by Danny giving her a ring he yanks off his finger in a comedic fashion. Afterward, she suddenly can't think of a single problem that she has with him. Later on, in the scene Danny has his advances towards Sandy denied by her and he exclaims "Sandy, what's the matter with you?". This cultivates a feeling like he deserves sexual gratification from her.

Though this movie presents a large number of troubling ideas, it's not as though it has no nuance. The hyper-masculinity that's portrayed in the movie is starkly contrasted to Danny Zuko's softer side. Even the ridiculous caricature of skirt-chasing man in Kaneki shares a heartfelt moment with Danny when they hug. This moment is played for laughs as they quickly separate. Rizzo's character also features some nuance when she falsely believes that she is pregnant. The movie highlights the harsh dialogue leveled against her due to her pregnancy.



Danny Zuko embracing Kaneki

The film gains some leeway due to the time period that it's emulating. If it didn't express these problematic themes when portraying the 1950's it would be doing a disservice to the film, but the movie doesn't really attempt to ridicule these behaviors. The movie also portrays all characters in the world as over the top caricatures of what they would have been in reality. The nerd character in the movie has huge glasses, a pocket protector, and is carrying around a large stack of books. When characters in the

film mock him for his glasses, he complains that he has astigmatism. Portraying the character in such unrealistic manners helps differentiate fiction from reality because it begins to lose its resemblance.

Sandy's transformation at the end of the movie highlights even more poor ideas from the film. It portrays a message that you need to change yourself to get your man. Not only does she transform herself, but the song is also centered around her needing a man. Some critics argue that Sandy's transformation is her becoming her true self. Susanna Carr, from her self-titled website, says, "...the transformation is not just for Danny. It's primarily for herself because she doesn't like how she's viewed"(1). This theory has some ground since Sandy says that she isn't feeling happy then goes and transforms herself, but the movie doesn't really give an indication that this is her true self. Before the final scene, Sandy is only shown as a prim and proper person. She actively dislikes the macho masculine side of Danny Zuko and just wants the loving caring guy that she met during the summer. She changes herself to fit in. Chris Peterson, from OnStage Blog, highlights the disparity in the amount both characters change saying, "To win over not only Danny but her friends as well, sandy completely transforms herself. In return, Danny joins the track team and earns a letterman sweater, which he immediately ditches once he sees the new Sandy, so to recap, Sandy succumbs to social pressures and Danny becomes a jock and reforms himself in Sandy's eyes by taking off a sweater"(2).

The film is enjoyable to watch due to its colorful setting and good music. However, the movie portrays many of its characters in disgusting ways. To further exacerbate this problem, the movie does almost nothing to show that its negative themes are negative at all. The movie doesn't become so exaggerated that it feels like it's satirizing itself which makes it hard to overlook the problems with it.

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### 3. Indiana Jones: The Last Crusade (1989)

Difference, Power, and Discrimination in *Indiana Jones: The Last Crusade* (1989)

By Tabassom Taghinejad

*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* has a lot of DPD issues all throughout it. The movie came out in 1989 but it was set in the late 1930's (McBride). At that time Nazis, were not a huge threat to the world yet, however, their ideologies and influence were growing more severe. Women's rights were a lot less common than what we have today. The Indiana Jones franchise is known for having good-looking able-bodied characters for their lead roles. They have had non-white or disabled characters; however, they are either the villain or do not play a large part in the movie's plot.

*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* is a movie about an archeologist and professor name Indiana Jones who goes by Indie for short. He sets out to rescue his father who has been kidnapped and find the Holy Grail on his way (Harper). He must pass through many obstacles to be able to first find his father and finally get his hands on the ultimate treasure. He starts the adventure with a fellow female doctor and, they discover where his father is. Once his father is found he discovers that the doctor was working with the Germans who had kidnapped his father in the first place. From there he has to escape with his father and go on a dangerous journey to find the holy grail.

In the Indiana Jones franchise, specifically *The Last Crusade*, white Americans are always viewed as the ideal group. The other groups always seem to have issues of some kind and need help from

Americans to resolve those issues. In the movie one of the biggest differences that separated the Americans from German s was knowledge. Even though the Germans were, after all, the historical and valuable artifacts, they were proudly burning books that did not agree with their Nazi values. This was a painful scene to watch for Indie and Dr. Schneider as they were both well-known scholars, and this was not of their nature.



[Alison Doody as Dr. Elsa Schneider.](#)

In every movie, Americans are overwhelmingly powerful compared to the enemies. The enemies are hapless Nazis or people of color in undeveloped countries who lack any kind of real resources to defend themselves. These characters are usually portrayed as helpless people who are unable to do anything themselves and rely on others to function. In the *Last Crusade*, the enemies were white Germans, but even then, Indiana Jones seemed to have more power, connections, and resources than the Germans. The women are usually powerless, but not voiceless.

The Indiana Jones franchise is full of discrimination, and *The Last Crusade* is no exception. Everyone who is not an American male is portrayed as inferior. Throughout the movie, the people in the

undeveloped countries are begging the Americans for food or money and are always dressed in ripped dirty clothes. The women are portrayed as powerless compared to men and ultimately depend on them. In the movie, Dr. Schneider had sex with both Indiana Jones and his father to get information, making her seem like she was desperate to get whatever she can. She had to depend looks rather than her knowledge to obtain what she wanted, even though she was a doctor in the movie who was very knowledgeable about her field.

Like all movies, the clothing, makeup, and other added appearances were used to convey a message, however, in the Last Crusade, it was mainly used to show who was good and who was bad. The Nazis always wore dark clothing with tight leather and weapon. The women are always well dressed with a full face of makeup no matter the situation. The poor people are always just short of being naked, wearing very little clothing that is very ripped and dirty. They themselves are always dirty as well, however it has a different tone than when Indiana Jones is dirt, which usually means he was being heroic.

I used to watch this movie a lot when I was a child, and I really enjoyed it. Even though I had watched the movie dozens of times, as a child, I never saw anything wrong with how the characters were portrayed. In fact, I thought that this movie was very realistic and that the way the characters acted was how the people they portrayed would have actually behaved. It was not until I watched the movie again recently that I discovered how many things were wrong with the movie. In my opinion, this movie would get a lot of backlash from people if it were released today. Even though the movie is just over 30 years old, a lot has changed in Hollywood when it comes to what is acceptable for the portrayal of people of color and women in movies.

*Indiana Jones: The Last Crusade*, was obviously made for simple entertainment. It was not the most politically correct movie, even

in its time. It struggles to properly address any sort of topics that have to do with race, power, difference, or discrimination. This movie was acceptable by the standards of its time, but something similar would not be considered acceptable today. The series had a chance to redeem itself in 2007 but the cast was still all white except the natives, had a mainly male cast and it played on a lot of stereotypes. They may have another chance to resolve these issues since a possible female-led Indiana Jones movie is on the table (Haring).

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## 4. Paris Is Burning (1990)

*Paris Is Burning* (1990): Oppression of Minorities

By Leonardo Morales

I was drawn to the film *Paris Is Burning* because it is about the ball culture of New York, which still remains present to this day in modern queer culture. This film serves as a time capsule for the discrimination the LGBT and black youth of New York had to deal with in the 1980s. Their race and orientation is shown to be the primary factors leading to their inability to rise through social classes. There has been a huge change in the dynamics of LGBTQIA+ representation since the time that this film was released, yet many of the dilemmas faced by queer youth in *Paris Is Burning* remain throughout the U.S. and other countries around the world. The film deals mainly with the concepts of ball culture but throughout the film, you can see how ball culture was a reflection of gay and black oppression in the U.S.

The film *Paris Is Burning* revolves around the life of various homosexual and transgender individuals who attend the ball of New York. Balls are essentially dance halls mixed with runway fashion aesthetics where people compete to see who can achieve the most “realness” and win a trophy. Realness refers to a contestant’s ability to emulate whatever category is being judged at the ball. There are categories like executive realness where people must strive to be the most realistic business professional that someone can be even though they are not. The reason these categories are made very obvious as they are rooted within classism. Pepper LaBeija, a black drag queen in the film states, “This is white America. Any other nationality that is not of the white set knows this and accepts this till the day they die. That is everybody’s dream and ambition as a minority – to live and look as well as a white person...That is why,



in the ballroom circuit, it is so obvious that if you have captured the great white way of living, or looking, or dressing, or speaking, you is a marvel.” In real life people who attended balls were often so poor they could barely afford food and housing. Many people in the film say their misfortune is due to them being gay and black which keeps them in poverty. The resounding sentiment is that ball culture allows the poor, ostracized youth to fantasize and become someone they could only hope to be as the real world was unfair. The film becomes much more serious in these moments where the subjects are explaining their turmoil in the society they exist in. Pepper Labeija is shown in a closeup shot lamenting the state of her social standing along with the rest of her family. The frame is still which breaks away from the handheld perspective the camera often has throughout the film. It creates a serious ambiance with all focus on Labeija and the struggles of marginalized youth



*Pepper Labeija in Paris is Burning*

One scene that exemplified the discrimination of gay youth was one of the last scenes showed in the movie which was the death of Venus Extravaganza who was a transgender woman. To preface this it is important to know how the drag scene worked in New York ball culture. People who won balls eventually formed their own groups

called “Houses” and were headed by the “House mother”. Houses are families comprised of people who often were rejected by their biological family. Angie Extravaganza was the house mother of the house of Extravaganza. She revealed towards the end of the film that Venus was found strangled under a bed in a hotel. She says that it was most likely by the hands of a disgruntled client as Venus would often escort for cash. What is shocking to hear is Angie’s resolution to this with her saying that it’s just life as a transgender woman in New York: you end up dead. These would be very harsh words to hear given that it seems that people believe and expect transgender women to come up either missing or dead. The film emphasizes these implications with a medium shot of Angie in a dark, moody atmosphere created by the light source shining across her face giving a contrast between her and the dimly lit room.



*Dorian Corey in Paris is Burning*

The concept that whiteness and heterosexuality is a power that gives people the right to better things is an idea that is recited by many of the people involved in this film. The idea that black, gay youth in New York are in poverty and can’t aim for much higher standards of living for themselves is said to be for two reasons. One was the label of homosexuality hovering over all of them while the other was simply being black. The 1980s were a tumultuous time for

gender expression and the world was overall much more oppressive back then than it is now. The oppression of gay black people in New York must have felt immense. Dorian Corey, a black drag queen in the film, goes so far as to say that ball culture is the only way that someone who is gay, and especially if they were black, to ever feel as accomplished or as empowered as a straight white person is.



Angie Extravaganza reveals the murder of Venus Extravaganza in *Paris Is Burning*

This is a point touched on by author bell hooks in her book “Black Looks” where she says that the drag being portrayed in this film “is totally personified by whiteness. What viewers witness is not black men longing to impersonate or even become like “real” black women but with an idealized fetishized vision of femininity that is white ”(147). Dorian Corey shows this by mentioning how no one was striving to look like the black actress Lena Home; they were striving to look like white actresses such as Marilyn Monroe. The overarching infiltration of whiteness leads to the oppression of minorities along with a prevailing internalized hatred of being a black homosexual.

The nature of this film as a documentary of ball culture lends itself well to showing the real discrimination people faced. Tragedies like Venus's murder plagued New York along with harassment of gay and black people at the hands of straight citizens. The aftermath of the film being released did lead to some critics believing that the film itself was discrimination towards the people in the movie. In a New York Times article by Jesse Green, he described how Paris Dupree, a drag queen in the film, planned on suing for 40 million dollars believing she was not paid her fair share of the movie's profit. The settlement was dropped once the attorney saw they all signed a contract that had already decided their pay. The director Jennie Livingston defended her decision stating that her film was a "work of nonfiction" that usually does not pay actors in the first place. Some critics took this as Jennie Livingston profiting off the discrimination of minority groups even though Jennie Livingston was reported to have had difficulties getting the movie funded at all. The book "America on Film" states that "Under white patriarchal capitalism, queer white men were still more readily able to obtain funding for projects than were women and people of color"(Benshoff and Griffin). This could be seen as another factor of discrimination the film faced in production.

bell hooks criticized Livingston's film for employing what she referred to as an "imperial overseeing position"(151). Furthermore, hooks states that " By shooting the film using a conventional approach to documentary and not making clear how her standpoint breaks with this tradition, Livingston assumes a privileged location of "innocence" She is represented both in interviews and reviews as the tender-hearted, mild-mannered, virtuous white woman daring to venture into a contemporary "heart of darkness" to bring back knowledge of the natives"(151). The film is controversial in this aspect as some people think it educates injustices faced by black, gay youth while others believe Livingston to be a selfish individual who was looking to make a profit off of others' suffering. I personally believe Livingston made this film to bring attention to the

discrimination of individuals and bring to light the blossoming gay culture of New York, especially since Livingston was a queer individual herself.

The reason I chose this film to analyze is because of how it has become a foundation for the LGBT culture we see today. TV shows such as Rupaul's Drag Race have taken ideas from ball culture and incorporated it into their show's premise. Much of the gay lingo used in *Paris is Burning* is now widespread such as "reading" or "shade" which people don't even realize originated from the New York drag scene in the 1980s. This film resonates with me as a piece of history portraying how LGBT culture has evolved from being something dark and underground to now being displayed in mainstream media. This film encapsulates a piece of history that may have gone completely unnoticed.

*Paris is Burning* is a critical piece of LGBT culture showing the injustices faced by gay and ethnic groups in New York. Many of the cast have died since the release of this film but their legacy is immortalized as this film has been included in the United States National Film Registry. The ball culture of the 1980s is no longer as grand as it once was but the impact it had can still be seen in many aspects of gay culture throughout the world. There are still many issues faced by the LGBT community that the film addresses as prejudice continues. The majority of transgender women who are attacked and killed are black. The transgender community still faces discrimination in their everyday lives from people who deem them sub-human. Though the prevalence of homophobia is still entrenched in our society it is important to remember how far along we have come since *Paris is Burning*. Ball culture was seen as a reflection of gay and black oppression. I believe the LGBT culture of today has grown into being more than just a reflection of oppression and now is taking a strong stand against it.

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## 5. But I'm a Cheerleader (1999)

Megan's Development in *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999)

By (student has chosen to remain anonymous)

For this essay, I chose the film *But I'm a Cheerleader*. This film tackles a lot of important topics, but it's also just entertaining to watch. It's about a girl named Megan who gets sent to conversion therapy, but she's convinced she doesn't need it because she thinks she's straight. This film deals with topics like homophobia and conversion therapy, but it's also filled with various characters that have distinct and interesting storylines. The story also involves a really beautiful romance that made my heart melt.

The reason I'm excited about this film is because of Megan's development throughout it. Starting off in a state of denial, she grows and learns to accept herself. It was extremely heartwarming as a queer woman to watch this film and see the main character grow in that way, as well as the romance that bloomed as a result. This film does a beautiful job of handling topics like homophobia, conversion therapy, and sexuality as a whole.

A significant portion of the cast of this film is LGBT+. They each have different lives and stories. The diversity within the cast made the film feel less like a token gay story because we get to see several. A specific scene that expresses this very well is one where the main cast goes to a gay club. They get driven there by two older gay men who take in LGBT+ kids and give them a place to stay. In this scene, you get to see various LGBT+ characters, including the main cast. It's shown how the characters interact and express themselves when

they're in a space where they're surrounded by people like them and free to be themselves.

The contrast between this scene and the characters' behavior in the conversion camp plays a big role in driving through the point of this film. The main character, Megan, is a firm believer in the program throughout the film, but in this scene, she starts to let loose and learns to accept herself a little bit more. A quote that has stuck with me since I first watched this film was when Graham, the main love interest said, "You are who you are, the trick is not getting caught." These characters are doing their best to survive the situation. Pure survival though, is exhausting and they needed an outlet. That's where the club scene comes in.

These kids have little to no power at the conversion camp. The adults around them have taken control over their daily lives, choices, and their whole identities. According to Yale's film analysis guide, "Camera angle is often used to suggest either vulnerability or power." (Mariano Prunes, Michael Raine, Mary Litch) There's a particular scene that exhibits this concept by using the same camera angle twice. The scene has Megan sitting in a chair facing the group and it's shot from a high angle. This is the scene in which Megan is properly introduced to the group and told that she has to admit to being a homosexual. The angle of these shots shows Megan in a position where she's completely at the mercy of the adults that run the conversion camp.





Point of view in *But I'm a Cheerleader*

This is a common theme throughout the film. All of the main kids, Megan especially, are at the mercy of the adults in their lives. They gain the courage to fight for their freedom throughout the film. According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, US National Library of Medicine, “Psychological control has traditionally been considered a negative form of control in that it affects the child emotionally, stifling their ability to establish emotional links with others, the development of their personal identity, and their autonomy.” (Barber BK) Some representation of this concept is the character Graham and her parents. Graham is very standoffish and sarcastic. She seems determined not to form connections. Near the middle of the film, we get introduced to her parents. They're controlling and refuse to let Graham back into their lives unless her “affliction is fixed.”

Discrimination is a common topic in this film. A large part of the plot centers around characters that are forced into conversion therapy, because their families hate the fact that their LGBT+ and want it “fixed.” Homophobia is a key topic in this film. The characters not only fight against the adults in their lives trying to repress their identities, but they also fight internalized homophobia.

This film only has a rating of 39% on Rotten Tomatoes.com. Audience member Matt P's remark is typical, "This movie had potential, but stereotypical characters and a flat storyline stifle its development." This film has a variety of characters all with different stories. Some of them do follow stereotypes, but there's more than just one type of gay person in this film. The main characters all have distinct and individual personalities. Of the main cast, there are about six LGBT+ characters. The film's storyline may fall flat according to some people, especially because of the attempts at satirical humor. The thing about the plot though, is that it follows a very real line of events that happen to a lot of LGBT+ people around the world. The romance and humor aside, this film brings to light what a lot of people suffer through.

I chose this film because I hold it near and dear to my heart. But *I'm a Cheerleader* was one of the first LGBT+ films that I watched after coming to terms with my sexuality. Now, this film isn't new, it came out in 1999, before I was even born. Despite its age, it's still relevant to this day. Kids are still being sent to conversion camps by people who claim to love them. As someone who grew up in a very conservative, Russian household, this was a very real fear for me. My family still doesn't know and I don't plan on telling them. Now, when I watched this film, I watched Megan go through the same steps that I went through. From internalized homophobia to acceptance, to pride, and finally to anger at all the people who dared try and change who she was. Watching Megan's story gave me hope and at the point in my life, that hope was what kept me from suffocating from my life. But *I'm a Cheerleader* is a story about conversion therapy, homophobia, and finding the power within yourself to accept who you are. The stories and characters show different sides and situations, making it ultimately more real and relevant to more people.

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## 6. How *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007)

How *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) Lacked Diversity and Found Ways to Misrepresented Minorities

By Angie Geno

When I first began watching *Gilmore Girls*, it was from recommendations from friends as well as the Netflix algorithm based on what I had watched recently. I really enjoyed the show as it was easy to watch and could relate to me in my own struggles and confusion on navigating college. *Gilmore Girls* was a hit from 2000-2007, a 7 season-spanning tv show centering single mother, Lorelai, who had a teenage pregnancy, and her academically brilliant daughter, Rory. TV (*The Book*) is among a number of sources that consider *Gilmore Girls* one of the “greatest American shows of all time” (Sepinwall et al). The show touches upon the struggles of single motherhood, financial strains, and is a high school/college coming of age story focusing on the beloved pair. However, as sweet as the pair is, there is a blatant disregard for characters of minorities and often, for humor, the show relies on the stereotypes of these groups. Glaringly, there are stereotypes of Asian, Hispanics, and African Americans presented in the show as well as stereotypes of the wealthy class. Through character dialogue and cinematography, the audience can understand the different jokes and implicit stereotypes the white protagonists have. The *Gilmore Girls* emphasizes the importance of identifying misrepresented minorities, as well as the power held over people due to wealth disparities.

*Gilmore Girls* has a predominantly white and able cast. In the show, there is one African American character who has actual

speaking lines, his name is Michel. There are also two Korean characters who have speaking lines- Lane Kim and her mother, Mrs.Kim. Many Hispanic characters who have dialogue have been maids for a wealthy white couple. It was a common gag to have them fired often for not meeting high expectations and there was a new maid in the following episode(s).

Season 2 Episode 8, highlighted overt stereotyping, introduced power struggles, and social class dynamics. In this episode, the owner of the Inn, Mia, condescending remarks that she can never understand Michel because of his thick accent. Michel is the French African American day manager, and is consistently mocked by the other characters. Lorelai then proceeds to tell the Inn Owner he was being disrespectful. The scene is shot where the perspective of Lorelai and her positive interaction with Mia and panning back to Michel who looks sad, but unsurprised, to be treated the way he was. This was of concern to me because by not supporting her friend and allowing him to be looked down on, she was able to maintain her power as a white woman who can speak without barriers to Mia and build on the fact those who speak with accents are less valued in all lines of work. All characters seen on screen are able-bodied, straight, and predominantly white, with the exceptions noted above.



*Gilmore Girls*, Season 2, Episode 8

Season 2 aired in around 2001. In this time around the world, Americans had growing concerns BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) were stealing jobs and made derogatory comments about their accents, clothing, or culture. The Journal of Organizational Behavior explains how in the early 2000's there was growing prejudice against minorities. They explain, "Our findings suggest that female evaluators were less likely to select Asian than White candidates into positions involving social skills and were less likely to promote Asian than White candidates into these types of positions. Furthermore, female evaluators' perception that Asians were less socially skilled than Whites mediated both of these decisions"(1). This is important in regards to *Gilmore Girls* because the show reflects the growing opinion of Americans in the early 2000's.

Power is something that is discussed in the show. A large aspect of the show is about how Lorelai is not able to be as financially independent as she would like to be. This leads to Lorelai and her estranged mother's relationship to gain closure once again for the

mutual reason of supporting Rory. Her mother likes to lord over and manipulate the protagonist pair and forces them to come to weekly Friday night dinners in exchange for financial assistance. The power of wealth and definitive difference in social class is excellently portrayed in the literary and cinematic design of the series. In the literary sense, the characters act in two different social aspects. Emily, the mother, is very posh. She has a private fashion designer and caters extravagant parties. She attends charities and elitist groups. Lorelai and Rory on the other hand, eat junk food on a daily basis, work non-corporate jobs, and make crude jokes. Rory is the bridge between an average lower-class person and being a part of the elitist class. The financial power struggle is between Rory's need for paying off education costs, and Lorelai's reluctance to rely on her parents. In the cinematic sense, the dialogue and formality of the scenes focusing on the characters is quite different. When in the elitist environment, the camera scenes are always long and dramatic, often spanning the luxurious background. When in non-elitist areas, the camera shots are quick and focus more on the actors than the background.

*Gilmore Girls* does a wonderful, unintended highlight on how accents on different groups of people. Rory's grandparents, Emily and Richard, a very wealthy white couple, speak french and have accents when speaking French. Michel, an African American French immigrant has a French accent when speaking English that is a detriment to his career, as mentioned above. In Season 3 Episode 9, Emily and Richard are even complimented on their wonderful French accents. I think it is important there is more discussion of how different attitudes to accents are considered sexy or good on one group of people (usually white) but considered a detriment to others (minorities).



*Gilmore Girls*, Season 2, Episode 8

As mentioned earlier, discrimination is something that is openly displayed on screen. The instance with Michel and Mia, the inn owner, is just a small example. *Gilmore Girls* relied heavily on discrimination and making jokes about it to carry the show forward. I don't believe the show intended to completely discriminate against so many minority groups, however, I do believe the producers of the show took great advantage of using stereotypes to propel the show and prevent it from becoming too serious. One example of stereotypes was the Asian best friend, Lane, didn't want to be forced to date another Christian, Korean boy who was going to be a doctor, whom her mother approved of, as well hated the fact her mother didn't like her love for all things punk and rock. Using these stereotypes, there was an episode where her cousin was getting married to a random bride from mainland Korea who didn't know a single word in English but was pretty and petite. This is an issue some Asian minorities face and is a real issue, but the TV series made light of the situation. It is also interesting that Rory, the white female protagonist is the academically brilliant one in the pair,



versus the very common smart Asian stereotype. In a world where prejudice against minorities was ramping up, *Gilmore Girls* took the initiative to create characters who held no positive stereotypes.

Some might argue *Gilmore Girls* means and does no harm, however, I believe that line of thinking can be dangerous for it leads to the ignorance of the deliberate actions made by producers and writers. In this show, every single rich character is white, many smart characters are white, and people who have additional barriers to communicating are minorities, deep controlling parents are from minority families. Why are so many negative attitudes given towards minority folks? Although they are loveable characters, why do they face extreme unnecessary problems because of their accent, religion, or cultural practices (positive or negative)?

I chose to do my report on *Gilmore Girls* because it is a show I'm currently watching and touches on a lot of important DPD issues. When I began watching this show, I had just finished all my high school credits and was in the middle of making a really difficult decision of where I should apply to for school. It was nice to watch a show where the protagonist was also making the same difficult decision as I was.

*Gilmore Girls* is a lovely coming of age story between a mother and her daughter. It is an unexpected shocker; it has so many instances of misrepresenting minorities and displaying disparaging amounts of discrimination to different minority groups. The *Gilmore Girls* brings up topics like social class, minorities and their stereotypes, and other communication barriers. It's important to talk about productions that have scenes on racism, discrimination, and minority stereotyping. By being able to identify issues in beloved shows, we can ensure future products will be an enriching experience that accurately portrays its cast, and don't exploit discrimination.

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## 7. The Matthew Shepard Story (2002)

Say His Name: *The Matthew Shepard Story* (2002)

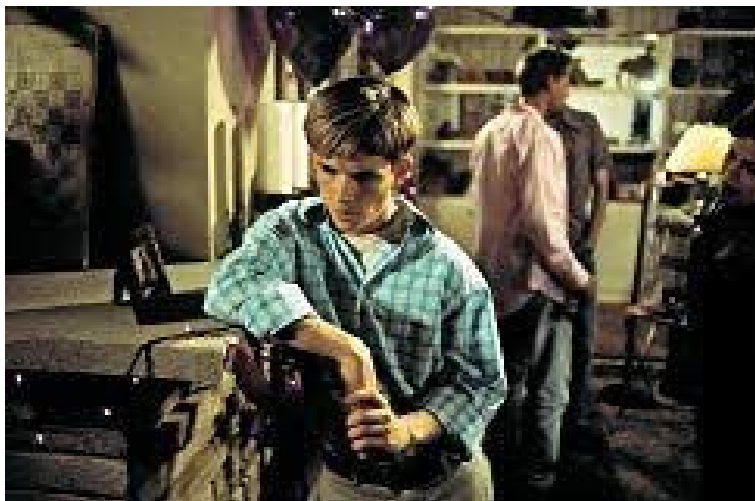
By Raiden Quiggle

*The Matthew Shepard Story* is a powerful and important story. The film was made because a gay man was tricked and murdered because of discrimination and power. The two murderers felt Matthew was different than them; he was murdered for being gay. I think as a society we try to not care or dismiss bad news that doesn't personally affect us but his story deserves to be heard. This is very relatable for today's students. The film even got big-name actors and actresses to play the family members and friends. This helped get his story heard by more viewers than the other film documentary the real friends of Matthew made, called *Matthew Shepard Is A Friend Of Mine*. The unfortunate part is that they used a heterosexual to play the character of Matthew, but that's typical.

Matthew provides most useful representation of difference in this film. Matthew was engulfed in a society that is very heteronormative and he tried his hardest to play that part but after years and years of struggling finally faced that he is different. He went to a university where he found an LGBT support group and finally started to accept himself instead of hating himself and wanting/trying to die. After all of his trials and tribulations, he was in a state of peace, and then, because of his sexuality, those two men baited him and got him to go in their truck with him and brutally murdered him for being gay(different). I agree with the point of view the film has; it is told from the parents perspective and portrays what they had to go through immediately following his murder. I do agree with some reviewers

that it would have been better to include Matthew's story before his death in more detail.

I found this to be a very touching and moving movie with wonderful performances by all, however, I felt it would have been much better without all the grainy and artistic camera shots, and that the movie would have been more effective if told from the beginning to the end rather than jumping forward, back, forward, and showing so many flashbacks. It was beautiful and brave to show the kiss between Matthew and his friend, but they could have explored that relationship a bit more so that we could feel a little more like we knew something of Matthew's life. Overall, I think it was a very sad and scary tale of what hate and discrimination and prejudice can do to everyone when they get out of control. I seriously hope everyone will learn from the tragic tale of Matthew Sheppard's life and this movie.



Screenshot from *The Matthew Shepard Story*

This film perpetuates that men have power and will use it on other men as a show of dominance or control likely due to some insecurities or trauma but nonetheless this film showed us that

Matthew while on a trip to Morocco was out alone at night and got gang raped by some locals. This was a show of power just because they could and he looked like an innocent weak white boy. I find myself in full agreement of the film's representation of power. The white man does in fact have the most power. But this film also dives into the power that Matthews' parents have to decide whether or not to give the men who murdered their son the death penalty or to let them get the plea deal. The most impacting scene was when they decided to give the boys mercy because that is what Matthew would have wanted. They could have had them sentenced for life with no parole but they used their power to help and that hardly ever happens.

This is a direct quote from Matthews' father:

"My son, Matthew, did not look like a winner. He was rather uncoordinated and wore braces from the age of 13 until the day he died. However, in his all-too-brief life, he proved that he was a winner. On October 6th, 1998, he tried to show the world he could win again. On October 12th, 1998, my firstborn son, and my hero lost. On October 12th, 1998, my firstborn son, and my hero died. 50 days before his 22nd birthday. I keep wondering the same thing that I did when I first saw him in the hospital. What would he have become? How could he have changed his piece of the world to make it better? Matt officially died in a hospital in Fort Collins, Colorado. He actually died on the outskirts of Laramie, tied to a fence. You, Mr. McKinney, with your friend Mr. Henderson, left him there, by himself. But he was not alone. There were his lifelong friends with him, friends that he had grown up with. You're probably wondering who these friends were. First, he had the beautiful night sky and the same stars and moon we used to see through a telescope. Then he had the daylight and the sun to shine on him. And through it all, he was breathing in the scent of the pine trees from the snowy range. He heard the wind, the ever-present Wyoming wind for the last time. He had one more friend with him. He had God. And I feel better, knowing he wasn't alone. Matt's beating, hospitalization, and

funeral focused worldwide attention on hate. Good is coming out of evil. People have said, 'Enough is enough.' I miss my son, but I am proud to be able to say that he was my son. Judy has been quoted as being against the death penalty. It has been stated that Matt was against the death penalty. Both of these statements are false. I, too, believe in the death penalty. I would like nothing better than to see you die, Mr. McKinney. However, this is the time to begin the healing process, to show mercy to someone who refused to show any mercy. Mr. McKinney, I am going to grant you life, as hard as it is to do so, because of Matthew. Every time you celebrate Christmas, a birthday, the 4th of July, remember that Matt isn't. Every time that you wake up in your prison cell, remember you had the opportunity and the ability to stop your actions that night. You robbed me of something very precious and I will never forgive you for that. Mr. McKinney, I give you life in the memory of someone who no longer lives. May you have a long life. And may you thank Matthew every day for it. “

Recent events have shown us that the issues and mentalities represented in the film are still perpetuated for example this seems like the place to talk about Tony McDade who was murdered by police officers after someone had been harassing him for being a black transgender man and he ended up out of self-defense stabbing the individual and when the police showed up they shot him multiple times in broad daylight and not one source of media covered it. I found it on Twitter. Tell me why those white boys after using guns to shoot multiple people get arrested without lethal force and get to go to jail and await trial and then be acquitted on mental health instability and this black transgender person got shot immediately. The news reports you will find use his deadname because that is how the media treats transgender people. That is racism. Homophobia mixed with racism makes police officers, and police officers kill people they are scared of. Gay people have it hard but black gay people have it harder. The media is polarized, politics are polarized, the united states are polarized, and if you are

not a white cisgender heterosexual man then the world is scary and threatening and the government is not here to protect you, they get to kill you and justify it with “gay panic defense” or “he resisted arrest” even when the whole world has video of you deliberately kneeling on a man’s neck for 9 minutes and three of those minutes the body was limp and unconscious and still you plead not guilty. The news shows what they think will interest their viewers while also pushing their agenda. They now have to be even more censored now that Trump changed our standards on media. The individual news sources are extremely biased and one will push republican ideals and one will push liberal ideas and both cherry-pick certain details to extenuate their point. You still will hardly see gay men or lesbians or trans women or trans men in the news or on the news because we aren’t mainstream enough or it might make viewers uncomfortable or whatever the excuse is and I am tired. I am tired of the president trying to eliminate any and all respect people had or have for minorities and encouraging people to inflict violence upon us because we aren’t the good white heterosexual Christian narrative pushing sheep. People need to start recording trans women and men getting beaten and murdered in the streets so that the internet can see what is happening to us also. The black community had to do the same thing in order for the world to take notice. We may end up with another Stonewall on our hands.

It is worth noting that most of the gay characters were played by non-gay actors and actresses and that is discrimination via the casting crew to not go hire actual LGBT members but instead wanted a Hollywood hit so they used big names to gather attention and a more broad audience. The perpetuation of the “flamboyantly gay” stereotype also was not helpful, not all gay men are feminine presenting so that was also discriminatory. To be able to look at a movie and say “hey that’s someone like me, look we made it! is something LGBT people hardly ever get to do. Even a film entirely based around a gay character could not properly represent the gay community. They perpetuated the “flaming gay” stereotype also by

having his gay friends being obnoxiously in your face flamboyant. Not all gays wear animal print and flail their hands all over the place. I do have to remember this was 2002 and the gay community was just emerging so I give them credit for trying their best at least.

I chose this story and film because Matthew's life mattered. Not enough of the country knows this story, this is important and happens all the time. The only reason Matthew got his story shared is because he is white. Unfortunately, trans black women get murdered almost every day but Hollywood doesn't make movies about those stories because it's controversial or they don't think it matters or they won't get enough ratings, or whatever the reason is. I still think it is important to hear about this story because like Derek Chauvin the garbage ex-cop who had sexually assaulted people numerous times and had multiple excessive force complaints and had murdered an unarmed Native American a few years ago and who most recently held his knee on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds until he was kneeling on his lifeless body and even then had to be pulled off to put the body on the gurney, these two white boys knew they had power and privilege and that the law is on their side so they feel more encouraged to get away with actual murder, even if they had known him since grade school. They trapped him and brutally beat the life out of him with the butt of a gun, set him on fire, and left him to die, he did not though, he went into a coma for about a week and an officer had to find his body tied to the fence post. His parents had to come to the decision to take him off life support because he was never going to make it out. The best part of this story is that his parents decided to personally allow the two boys who murdered their son to get out of life in prison just in Matthew's name and with hopes that they could teach them a lesson in humility and gratitude and to thank Matthew every day they live. This is the gay agenda, to be free to be yourself without fear of being murdered for existing, but we are not there, gay men get murdered less than black trans women but they do still



get raped and assaulted and fired from jobs and have cake makers refuse to bake their cakes for them.

This movie was made because stories like this need to be heard and it never would have made nationwide recognition had they not gotten this and a few other movies out and the Matthew Shepard Foundation wouldn't have gained any traction. This movie was monumental for me, I had seen the plaid shirt on the news with the smiling blonde-haired boy but I was a kid and the news never stuck to my memory, and within a couple of weeks even the news stopped airing it and he disappeared again. His mother going around the conferences is what made me available to see this movie and when I did I told everyone I knew about it and forced so many people to watch it because it is a powerful important story that reminded me that we still have a long way to go to reform white privileged boys brains to not hate differences. But even then they have a little less fear of dying for existing than black people fear every single day just walking down the street, or going to a grocery store and paying with cash and having the cashier assume they are drunk and using fake bills that get them murdered because of the implicit bias you had ingrained in your brain that black men are bad and thugs and drunks. Whether you consciously acknowledge that or not that is what white kids are brought up to think. Partly because of their families and extended families who have perpetuated the racism both internally and institutionally and industrially. These stories need to be shared and these names need to be said. Say his name.

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## 8. Finding Nemo (2003)

Hope Below the Surface: *Finding Nemo* (2003)

By Christian Pool

*Finding Nemo* is an animated film by Pixar Animation Studios and published by Walt Disney Studios in 2003. It is the story of a clownfish named Marlin, who goes on an underwater journey to find his missing son Nemo who has a bad fin that was injured when he was very young. Along his journey, Marlin encounters many obstacles usually in the form of different fish and with each encounter, Marlin learns something new and redefines the relationships that he has both with himself, his son, and his acquaintances that he meets along the way. I believe that when you take a deeper dive into the story and characters in *Finding Nemo*, you will find a rich and diverse world populated with a plethora of different characters. In my opinion, many of these characters represent different disabilities and personality profiles that we encounter in our real world. I believe that the way that these disabilities and defects are presented in a positive light has the ability to help all of us gain a better understanding of disabled individuals and can possibly even teach us a lesson on how to deal with these issues here in our real lives above water.

I will use different characters from the movie and an analysis of how they and their personal defects or disabilities are presented on the screen to support my belief that *Finding Nemo* goes beyond just being an animated children's flick. It addresses many social issues that disabled individuals face every day and presents those individuals in a positive light that highlights their power to overcome obstacles, despite facing social stereotypes and preconceived notions about their roles in society. I will use different characters that we meet along both Marlin and Nemo's journey

and an analysis of their relationships to support my points about the film's deeper implications. I will talk about different characters including Nemo and Gill, who both have similar physical disabilities in the form of a mutilated fin, Dory, Marlin's companion who struggles with short-term memory loss, and of course Marlin himself who undergoes a journey of both self and social enlightenment as he comes to terms with his own anxiety and his relationships with the other fish he meets along his journey.

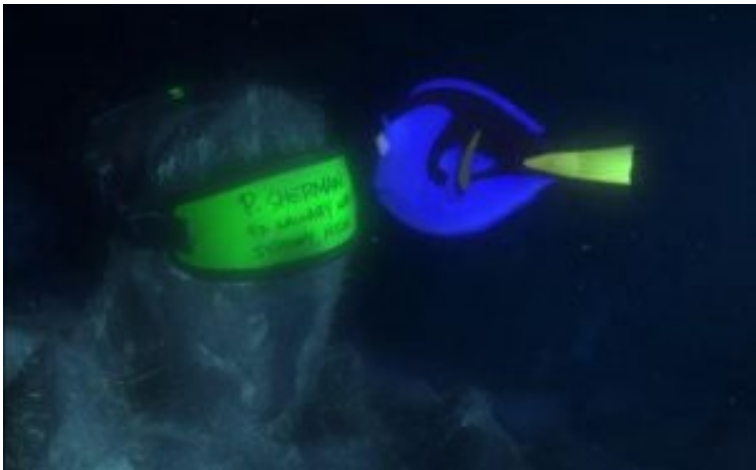


Screenshot of Marlin in *Finding Nemo*

In the story for *Finding Nemo*, Nemo gets separated from his father on a school trip and ends up trapped in a fish tank in a dentist's office quite a long way from his home and father. In the tank Nemo meets a very diverse group of fish from all different walks of life. However, one fish in particular relates to Nemo on a deeper level. Gill, a Moorish Idol fish voiced by Willem DaFoe, who also has an injured fin, teaches Nemo a lesson about his own value and about overcoming obstacles. The film presents Gill as dark and mysterious utilizing several camera and sound tricks to create an air of mystery about the fish, even the music and lighting is different the first few times we see Gill onscreen. Although Gill's motivations could be presented as self-serving, in his plan to escape the tank

and reunite Nemo with his father he teaches Nemo an important lesson about self-worth and helps Nemo shatter his own illusions about his value and abilities. He creates a plan to escape the tank that heavily relies on Nemo being able to overcome his perceptions about his disability, and he trains Nemo to be stronger and to realize that despite his disability he still has value. Nemo does eventually overcome the level of performance he sets for himself and helps the fish escape the tank.

I feel like Nemo and Gill's relationship is very important to the central theme of the film. It shows both fish overcoming adversity and their relationship with their disabilities to complete the plan and escape from the tank. Up to this point in his life, Nemo has not really been told what he is capable of. His father was a very anxious and careful type and usually just reminded Nemo of what he couldn't do. Gill sees Nemo's value and understands Nemo's struggle because of his similar affliction. Gill is presented in the film as the leader of the rag-tag gang of tank fish, and he uses his power and position to try to persuade Nemo to become more than he thinks he is and to become a valuable member both of the tank-gang and an asset to the escape plan.



## Screenshot of Dory in *Finding Nemo*

Dory, a Pacific Regal Blue Tang voiced by the recognizable Ellen DeGenerous, suffered from short-term memory loss since she was very young. Dory is easily one of the most recognizable and popular characters from the movie, and she did eventually become the central character in the sequel movie *Finding Dory*. Marlin comes across Dory very early in the film; right after he loses his son. When Dory finds out about Marlin's predicament, she immediately offers to help, and as she starts to lead Marlin to his son it immediately becomes clear that there is something wrong. Marlin soon learns about Dory's memory loss and before he manages to split up from Dory, they both get thrown into a string of events that drives the storyline forward and forces Marlin to get to know Dory better. Eventually, Marlin begins to recognize Dory's value. By the end of the story, he even comments that without her he never would have completed his journey and found Nemo. However, along the way, Marlin does struggle with maintaining his relationship with Dory. He takes advantage of her affliction. However, at different points in the story, he also relies on Dory, and despite his doubts about her abilities and experience, she plays a big part in Marlin achieving his goal of finding his son.

There are a couple of key moments in Dory and Marlin's relationship where Marlin is forced to confront his preconceived notions about Dory's value. He even takes advantage of Dory's affliction a few times in the story but when this ends up putting both Dory and himself in danger. After they survive the encounter with a little help from some sea turtles he vows never to do so again. Dory's story is one of tragedy and overcoming adversity. The film does tap into Dory's tragic past and the relationship with her parents that she cannot even remember, but mostly the film focuses on Dory's value and on Marlin's evolving relationship with Dory's disorder. Many times in the film, Marlin doubts Dory's ability to be an asset to his journey, but just as many times she overcomes

his prejudice and saves the day. Even though Marlin sees Dory as a burden at first she is the only fish that can read the address on the goggles he finds, so without her, he would not have known to go to Sydney to look for Nemo, and his journey could have ended right there. Later in the story when she helps Marlin catch a ride to Sydney inside a whale, he shows her some animosity and even aggression and resorts to demeaning her although his misgivings turn out to be wrong and Dory once again defies expectations and leads Marlin closer to his goal.

Through her relationship with Marlin, Dory learns that despite her memory loss she can still play an important part in Marlin's journey and eventually is the one who finds Nemo. Through his relationship with Dory, Marlin must face some of his own insecurities and his preconceived notions about Dory's value to his journey, as well as his expectations of what the disabled are capable of. In this realization, he also gains enlightenment about his relationship with his son and his relationship with himself, and his own anxiety. Although it is somewhat less highlighted in the film, I believe that Marlin also represents the struggle with anxiety and PTSD and how it can affect his relationship with himself and those close to him. Early in the film, Marlin experiences a tragic encounter that leaves its mark on him throughout the entire film. I found it very interesting how in the very first few minutes of the film Marlin is presented as adventurous and outgoing but after his tragic encounter Marlin's personality changes. It is only a brief look that we get about what Marlin was like before the tragic episode that changed his life and character. I like the way that the film's creators give us that glance, and throughout the entire film Marlin is constantly evolving himself through self-realization spurred on by his relationship with Dory and overcoming his preconceived notions about the other fish he meets along the way so that he can have a more positive relationship with the world around him and his own family and friends.



Screenshot of Nemo and friends in *Finding Nemo*

On the surface, *Finding Nemo* is a children's film about fish and adventure but if you take a deeper dive into the underwater adventure I believe that hidden in the animated world in which Marlin and Nemo exist in there is an incredible dynamic to the characters and their relationships that the filmmakers encoded into the story. I remember watching the movie in theatres when I was very young and impressionable. I do not believe at the time that I consciously realized the many lessons and profoundness of the characters, their ailments, relationships, and ability to overcome adversity. However, I do believe that the movie had an impact on me. As an adult, upon reanalyzing the movie I feel that you can see the way they present the discrimination of disabled individuals as a socially created concept. By both realizing their own potential and breaking the preconceived notions of others, the characters demonstrate the power that these stereotypes can have and the power that each individual has to break their own misconceptions.

I hope that in a sea of Hollywood movies that may not be as eye-opening and enlightening, *Finding Nemo* can stand out as a beacon for the good that films can do as proponents for equality and ending the misconceptions that we may have about disabled individuals



value, both socially and physically. I for one am glad that I had the opportunity to be exposed to positive influences both as an impressionable youth and in my adult life through film and media.

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## 9. Avatar: The Last Airbender (2005-2008)

Diversity, Power, and Discrimination in *Avatar: The Last Airbender*  
(2005-2008)

By Bryan D. Mastenbrook

*Avatar: The Last Airbender* is a traditionally animated television series that ran from 2005 to 2008. Being an animated show, some may assume that it is nothing more than children's amusement. However, the show is quick to dive into deep and mature topics, with episode 3 being where the main character Aang discovers that his people the airbenders were victims of genocide and that he is the last of them. What makes *Avatar: The Last Airbender* so memorable is its ability to tell adult stories with weighty topics like genocide in a context that even children can understand. By doing this, it brings together generations and teaches good values like respecting others and treating others kindly to the youngest among us. This show has been a major influence on my life, and without a doubt, I can say it has pushed me towards the good.

The world of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* features four countries. The Water Tribes are tribes at the north and south poles who are loosely based on the Inuit people. The Earth Kingdom is a large and diverse nation reminiscent of ancient China that is highly decentralized. The Fire nation is based on Imperial Japan, and they have been at war with the other nations for a century. The Air Nomads were a Tibetan like people eliminated save one, by the Fire Nation at the start of the war. None of these countries are based on western nations, and this gives the show its very Asiatic world. Each nation is named after one of the four elements classically thought to be the building blocks of the world, and certain members of

each nation have the ability to manipulate or bend their element. The exception is the reincarnating Avatar who can bend all four elements. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is in many ways based on World War II. The nations based on Japan and China are in a bitter war, and the fascist instigator of war is responsible for genocide.

The fantasy setting of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* allows difference to be seen in a unique way, benders vs non-benders. Having quasimagical powers make benders inherently more valuable to each nation. The main cast of heroes features a bender of each element, and Sokka a nonbender. As each bender improved their ability, Sokka became comparatively less useful in combat, and for a show set during a war, this becomes a big issue. Sokka feels emasculated and powerless, and so he seeks to become more powerful in the episode *Sokka's Master*. While traveling disguised they happen upon a village that is home to the master swordsman Piandao. Sokka is accepted and trained by Piandao but becomes ashamed of misrepresenting himself. When he reveals that he is from the Water Tribe Piandao duels Sokka and shows him and the audience how much he has learned and grown. Piandao reveals that he knew who Sokka was from the beginning and that the ways of the sword belong to no nation. Despite being from different nations there exists solidarity among nonbenders in the *Avatar* world. The events of this episode remind me of the introduction to the section in class in which it says "Seemingly in response to this implied criticism (less economically successful men are somehow inadequate), many economically struggling groups in the United States place a heavy importance on strength and ability" (Benshoff, Harry). While the text is in this case dealing with ability to earn money what it says about emasculation can also apply to men who feel they lack the ability to defend themselves.



Screenshot of Sokka and Piandao

Opposite of Sokka is Azula, as she is gifted too much power and abuses it. She is a princess of the Fire Nation, and a gifted firebender with her signature blue flames. She is introduced later in the series and acts as a foil to her older and less talented brother Zuko who has been one of the main antagonists. Both have the goal of capturing the Avatar, and this fuels their sibling rivalry. Azula uses power and intimidation to get whatever she wants, and this destroys her in the end. In the episode The Boiling Rock, Part 2 Azula is prevented from ending the life of her brother by her ally and his love interest Mai who says that she loves Zuko more than she fears Azula. This begins a cascade of paranoia which causes Azula to push everyone away, and her instability is what allows her to be defeated in combat at the show's finale. Azula could not control her self and she abused her station. Honored and revered Chinese philosopher

Loa Tzu once said "Mastering others is strength. Mastering yourself is true power". Azula lacked self-control, and in the end, she was nothing more than a bully.



Screenshot of Azula at the end of the series as she succumbs to her paranoia and begins to hallucinate.

While Azula relentlessly peruses the avatar and his friends, her older brother Zuko experiences severe discrimination as he travels the kingdom his nation is at war with. The episode Zuko Alone focuses entirely on Zuko the exiled Fire Nation prince who just has a subplot in most episodes. In it, he visits an impoverished Earth Kingdom village and befriends a young boy named Lee. The town is plagued by abusive Earth Kingdom soldiers, and Zuko is forced to use his firebending to save Lee and his family. Despite saving the family and helping the town Zuko

is rejected and forced to leave when the fact that he is of the fire nation is reviled. This parallels post World War II discrimination against Germans and Japanese. Japan in particular has poor relations with its neighbors due to what happened 70 years ago, and Japanese-Americans whose ancestors were interned can now face discrimination when traveling to East Asia. “Japanese-Americans met waves of hostility as they tried to resume their former lives.

Many found that their properties had been seized for nonpayment of taxes or otherwise appropriated” (Frail. To know that your ancestors faced all of that and then be discriminated against for things you or they never did is horrendous.



### Screenshot of Zuko and Lee

In addition to the powerful messaging in Screenshot from Avatar: The Last Airbender it also stands out for its eastern influences. The most obvious eastern influences are ascetic, as the town and villages look like something out of ancient China or feudal Japan. While it may seem superficial showing children different architecture is a way of exposing them to the wider world. Avatar: The Last Airbender also features eastern storytelling. Zuko is the character who is originally an antagonist but later joins the heroes. This is a classic eastern archetype seen in many myths and fables. Perhaps the most meticulously planned eastern influence is how each fighting style used by benders is based on different martial arts. For example, earthbending is based on the dramatic and powerful Hung Gar style, but waterbending is influenced by the very structural T'ai chi. All of these combine with influences from anime into a very eastern series, so much so that *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is often referred to as the grandfather of American anime and American media inspired by Japanese anime.

I chose *Avatar: The Last Airbender* because it stuck with me all these years. There were plenty of shows I watched religiously as a child, and most of them I can't remember hardly at all. They lacked substance and heart, so they didn't stick with me. One of the major aspects of childhood is the transition into adulthood, and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is able to tell stories about adult issues in a way children can digest and understand. Stories that taught me about ableism, not to be a bully, and that someone shouldn't be shamed for their parent's actions. Putting a war story on Nickelodeon was a brilliant and wonderful idea.

We often say that you are what you eat, and while this is true for the physical body, we are more than just that. What we surround ourselves with and engage with in many ways influences who we are intellectually. In other words, you are what you watch. Having a show that can teach children the harsh realities of life, but also the value of tolerance and hope is an amazing benefit to our society. That is what makes *Avatar: The Last Airbender* so memorable for me because no other show at the time even considered doing this. Very few shows can say that people are still obsessing over them after this long, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* can. It will forever be near and dear to my generation for not talking down to us.

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# 10. Avatar: The Last Airbender (2005-2008) - Essay

## 2

Restoring Honor to the Avatar: an Appreciation of Representation in  
*Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2005-2008)

By Haley Daarstad

*Avatar: The Last Airbender* is an animated children's show that has totaled three seasons and a sequel series, and defined a whole generation of animation for children. Produced by the studio Nickelodeon and running between the years 2005 to 2008, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* won a total of five awards for its soundtrack, humor, themes, art direction, characters, and cultural references. These awards include a Primetime Emmy Award, Kids Choice Award, Annie Awards, a Genesis Award, and a Peabody Award (Wikipedia). To this day, critics and audiences still consider it one of the best-animated television shows of all time. The show was a masterpiece with representation of Asian culture, strong female characters, and people with disabilities. Through the devastations of war, the story of *Avatar: The Last Airbender* provided representation in ways still felt in 2020 with its addition to Netflix. Built upon the themes of love, duty, redemption, and honor, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* revolutionized what children's television could be, and few shows have been able to capture what it was able to do.

The series takes place in a fictional world with four nations that are defined by the four elements: The Water tribes, The Earth Kingdom, The Fire Nation, and The Air Nomads. In this world, certain people hold the ability to control the elements and are called "benders". One person holds the ability to control all four, the Avatar.

There can only be one Avatar and are the connection between the real world and the spirit world “reincarnated” into a cycle between the nations. The cycle follows the seasons of which the first avatar learned to master the elements: fire, air, water, and earth. A hundred years before the series begins, the leader of the Fire Nation, Fire Lord Sozin, begins a war to conquer the three other nations and rebuild the world in the vision of the Fire Nation. However, during the beginning of the war, the avatar at the time, Roku, disappears. After his disappearance, the Fire Nations hoping to break the Avatar cycle, committee genocide against the air nomads. A 100 years later, Katara, a Southern Water Tribe waterbender, and her older brother, Sokka, discover Aang the new avatar dormant within an iceberg at the South pole with his air Bison, Appa. From there the three of them begin their journey to help Aang master all four elements, stop the fire lord and bring peace, while being tracked down by the exiled son of the current fire lord, Zuko, to return his honor and reclaim the throne. Avatar: The Last Airbender was a children’s animation show that dealt with deep and traumatizing themes, like genocide, but the most lasting impact is its representation of Asian cultures, people with disabilities, and feminist ideals.



Screenshot of Aang, the Avatar

### **Book 1: Asian American Representation**

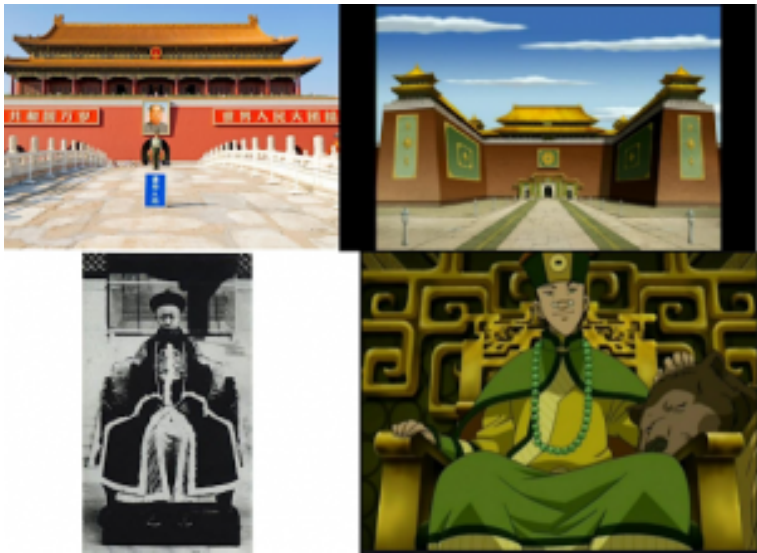
The genre of Animation has been a central tool in redefining Asian

images in film and television in terms of representation (Keramitas, 50). *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is based in a fictional world influenced by Asian cultures and the creators put the work in to make sure it was done correctly. What made the series so compelling was the care taken to develop the characters and the world around them. The series is considered to be a series that will be solidified in Asian American history for its blending of the Eastern and Western cultures. The author of the comic series of *Avatar*, Gene Luen Yang, stated that the creators must have done their research because it is rare to have a show so nuanced and well-constructed represent Asian culture as well as it did (Costa). Representation on television matters because it affects what is known as cultural citizenship, according to Lori Kido Lopez. Cultural Citizenship is the feeling of how much a group belongs to the common understanding of 'American' and if their own cultural identities and practices are respected by those within this larger society (DuCros). Within contemporary film and Television, Asian American actors tend to only be cast within supporting or stereotypical roles with a pressure to conform to American ideals.

A current pressing issue is the use of white voice actors playing non-white characters. It is important to note that the series creators of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, Michael Dante DiMartino, and Bryan Konietzko, are white and that 14 out of the 17 voice actors were white as well, even though the show was based upon Asian cultures and characters (Costa). *Avatar: The Last Airbender* was not perfect, as seen by issues such as above, however, to make sure that the show didn't disrespect any Asian culture and treated everything in a sensitive matter they hired Edwin Zane who was the then VP of the Media Action Network for Asian Americans to consult on the show (Watson). DiMartino and Konietzko, the creators, did their research on the world, clothing, food, architecture, and customs to successfully achieve what *Avatar: The Last Airbender* did.

*Avatar: The Last Airbender's* nuanced blend of Eastern Asian

cultures into the show, is seen through its visual and literary design, such as the design of the four nations. The Northern and Southern water tribes are similar to that of the Inuit-Yupik culture scene in the design of clothing and food and have some aspects of Chinese culture within their architecture (Avatar Wiki). The Earth Kingdom's architecture is also very similar to that found within the Ming and Qing dynasties of China, within the buildings such as Ba Sing Se looking like that of the Forbidden City in China. Even the king of the earth kingdom wore clothing similar to that of the last Chinese Emperor in the Qing Dynasty (Avatar Wiki).



### Collage of images demonstrating real-world references for The Earth Kingdom

The Air Nomads are heavily based upon Tibet and Hindu culture, which is seen through the design of clothing and spiritual culture (Avatar Wiki). The Fire Nation holds a lot of similarities to that of Japan, seen through its emphasis of family honor and shame as well as the symbolism of the sun: firebenders obtain their bending from the sun, and the idea of honor (Avatar [Avatar Wiki]). The whole world of Avatar: The Last Airbender is the blend of Asian cultures

to create this fictional world that allows audiences to construct a diegetic world which is an apparition of East Asian culture. In the end, *Avatar: The Last Airbender* was a show that created a world all on its own, but also was a show built to show cultural appreciation to that of Asian culture.

### **Book 2: The Power of Toph**

*Avatar* didn't just provide a representation of Asian American culture, but a representation of those who have (dis)abilities and illustrated the power of people who have disabilities. Within prime time television in 2018-2019 only 2.1 percent of characters have a disability even though according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 and 4 adults have a disability (Ruiz-Grossman). People with disabilities, especially visible disabilities are shown in a positive and powerful light, such as Toph. Toph Beifong has been blind since birth and was born within a wealthy family. She is also an earthbender, who learned earthbending from the first earthbenders, badgermoles (who are blind), and uses her ability of earth bending to see with her feet. Toph is one of the toughest, most powerful, and strongest characters on the show, however, she was constantly treated differently because of being blind by her parents. She was thought that she was fragile and had to be dependent on others because of this disability. Although, as she began to learn earthbending, she learned more about herself and she began to realize that she was strong and could be independent.

Toph is a dynamic character, who goes from her parents' views of fragile to a powerful earthbending master. While she is blind she doesn't let her blindness define her or let her be treated as weaker. The word disability, with 'dis' attached to 'ability' creates an "immediate hierarchy constructed by this line of thinking – some people are 'above normal' while others are 'below,' terms that tend to suggest class standing" (Benshoff and Griffin). For Toph, she doesn't let people believe that people are above her just because she is blind. She fights and is strong. The flashbacks of Toph and her

learning to earthbend with the badger moles to her entering into underground earthbending tournaments illustrates her strength and her lack of fragility that has been placed upon her by her parents. She entered under the name the Blind Bandit and was a champion multiple times of those tournaments. Toph became the first earthbender to discover the subset of earthbending, metalbending, as well. The show didn't write Toph as an innocent and fragile character, they wrote her as a strong independent female character who didn't let her blindness define her.

### **Book 3: Strong Female Warriors against Discrimination**

Along with its Asian influence and depiction of people who have disabilities, *Avatar: The Last Airbender's* female cast was full of strong independent warriors who fought to show their ability as fighters and leaders in the war. This is important because around 90% of women in the world believe that having a strong female role model within the film and/or television is important in a study done by the J. Walter Thompson's Female Tribes project (Female Characters in Film). Media images affect people's perceptions, of the people, survey in that study 61% stated that a female role model within the film and/or television had an influence on their life, and another 58% said that it helped them become more assertive and ambitious (Female Characters in Film). *Avatar: The Last Airbender* provided a variety of strong female characters, from past Avatars to a band of non-bending female warriors that protect a whole island. Within the main protagonists, there are two main female characters, Toph and Katara. Katara is considered the last water bender of the southern water tribe, so she had no mentor to teach her. It's her goal to travel with Aang to the Northern Water Tribe to learn water bending. However, when they get there she is met with scrutiny and sexism by the water benders of the Northern Tribe, females are only taught healing not to fight. After trying to secretly learn through Aang and the master waterbender finding out and refusing to teach Aang further, she decides to challenge him in a fight after refusing to apologize for her actions. Katara standing up and fighting against

the elder male in this episode goes against the patriarchal ideals seen in early film and television and illustrates a strong female character speaking up against an oppressive tradition.

Early film and television tended to illustrate women as submission and beautiful people, that are not warriors and needed men to protect them. By showing the scene of Katara standing up to the elder challenging these traditional roles, symbolized this strong female character that fights for her rights. The camera shot of Katara standing there in front of the Northern Water Tribe Leaders, stating that if she wins, the master has to teach her waterbending. While she doesn't win in the end, he still agrees to teach her after realizing how the costumes of the Northern Water Tribe have been detrimental. Katara's strength and tenacity to challenge the status quo resulted in her being able to become a master waterbender, and later in the series learning the second subset of water bending besides healing, bloodbending. The series depicts her as a strong female character that fights for respect and her spot as a leader. Female characters on the show continually have to fight and prove their worth as warriors in the war. However, each fight results in another person changing in their views of females within that world. The depiction of female characters who never stop fighting for their rights is needed in a world that has shown to make sexist and misogynistic comments about women. *Avatar: The Last Airbender* showed strong female characters fighting against discrimination within their world, which studies have shown shaped people's perspectives and provided strong female role models for children.

### **Revolutionizing Children's Television**

The world of *Avatar* captivated audiences and continues to captivate audiences today as it tells the story of a young boy trying to save the world. The creators of *Avatar* developed a show that respectfully appreciated east Asian cultures by blending eastern Asian influences into the fictional world. Its blend of Asian cultures was substantial because it became a show known for its Asian

American representation. Furthermore, it showed people with disabilities as people who are strong, independent, and capable people. The strong female cast who also fought against discrimination throughout the series spoke up and fought for their ability and leadership. The representation of these things is essential, and providing them for children is significant. Representation on television is vital because it impacts how much people feel connected within the larger culture, their perception so people, and provides them with role models to look up to. As a children's television show, this has a significant impact because it shows children that are young that they are represented and are powerful, strong, and capable no matter what stands in their path. DiMartino and Nonietzko's work on *Avatar: The Last Airbender* provided them with five awards and continues to influence new generations, and few shows have been able to replicate the vision, themes, and characters that this show provided.

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## II. Pride and Prejudice (2005)

Gender and Class in *Pride and Prejudice* (2005)

By Autumn Jernigan

With the French Revolution, Napoleon's rise to power, and the dethroning and beheading of Marie Antoinette, the period in which Jane Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), was ripe with the history that impacted the themes of the novel. During this time, in the early 18th century, women were treated much differently than today and had lived by unequal expectations. The 2005 film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, uses several different visual and audio techniques to shed light on how women and families of lower socioeconomic status of the early 19th century lived and were treated.

One aspect of *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) that must be considered is that all the characters are white and are completely able-bodied. The main focus of difference in this film is that of sex and socioeconomic wealth. There is an obvious advantage to the characters of power and wealth, these characters all tend to be male. Mr. Darcy is seen in his larger-than-life estate. The use of props and scenery in Mr. Darcy's marble statue room is a grand show of his worth. His reputation is also immense as he seems to be the non-stop talk of the town; everyone admires him, wants to be him, or wants to be with him. There is clear discrimination throughout the film for those lower on the socio-economic ladder. There is an expectation of how people should behave, different morals to live, and breathe by.



Groombridge Place served as the filming location of the Bennet family house for *Pride & Prejudice* (2005)

Those expectations are set by those of higher wealth and heritage and are expected to be followed by others. When characters of lower-economic wealth acted out against these “social norms,” they and their families would become a laughing stock. One example of this is when Lydia, a younger Bennet sister, had run off with Mr. Wickham. It is looked down upon for younger sisters to leave the house before the elder sisters are married. Mrs. Bennet is seen sobbing her eyes out in bed, great use of set design. Her dialog in this scene shows her disappointment in her daughter for potentially destroying her family’s reputation. It is therefore encoded with the repercussions of those who do not live within the rules and expectations of the higher class members of society. There are even more expectations for women to live by, for women in this time did not have as many rights as they do now.

Elizabeth Bennett is the main protagonist in *Pride and Prejudice*

(2005); her family consists of her mother (Mrs. Bennet) and father (Mr. Bennet) and five sisters (Jane, Lydia, Kitty, and Mary). Women were not able to receive any inheritance from a family if a father were to die or abandon them, because of this, the Bennet family inheritance was promised to their cousin, Mr. Collins. This difference between male and “female characters is social powerlessness under difficult and unequal conditions. We could see it through the patriarchy that always and explicitly serves men” (Mufa, 2016). This gender discrimination is an underlying theme throughout the movie. It is coded in the dialog and relationships (interactions) between the lower and higher economic class people.



Jacqueline Durran designed the Bennet sisters' costumes

This unfair system keeps women powerless and unable to receive an inheritance to be able to care for themselves. In this kind of system, parents push their daughters to marry into rich families, and oftentimes there are arranged marriages. In one scene, Mr. Darcy saves the Bennet family name. He does so by paying Mr. Wickham, a cheating gold digger, to marry Lydia Bennet, after she had run away with him. It was looked down upon for a family to allow their youngest daughter out of the house before the eldest

was married. Women were especially looked down upon for having sexual relations with men, outside of marriage.

With men having a financial advantage, it is easy to see why they are portrayed as having more wealth and power than women. As it turns out, Jane Austen was in poor financial standing as she wrote the book in fact, she “her mother, and her sister Cassandra, was dependent for their living on three sources: a small income of Mrs. Austin’s, a small legacy of Cassandra’s, and the 250 pounds provided annually by the four Austen Brothers,” (Newton, Judith, 1978). In *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), the Bingley and Darcy estates are constantly being drooled over, and are subjects of admiration. There are several scenes in the film where Mrs. Bennet and others gossip incessantly over the worth of the estates, as well as the annual incomes of Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley seem to have control over the people of the lower class. They can bend the wills and minds to achieve their best interests. For instance, Jane Bennet was falling hard for Mr. Bingley, and vice versa. Mr. Darcy wanted to save his friend’s reputation and knew that if he married into a dysfunctional and lower class family like the Bennet’s, other people would mock and think less of him. With power comes the responsibility of upholding the image of one in power, hence “pride.”

Elizabeth has a friend named Charlotte. There is a dialog between Mr. Bingley and Mrs. Bennet, in which Mrs. Bennet is talking badly of Charlotte, and having sympathy for her because of her lack of “handsomeness.” Later on in the film, Charlotte winds up marrying the boring, unattractive Mr. Collins (Bennet’s cousin). Elizabeth was horrified that her friend would settle for such a man, but Charlotte insisted that this was her only chance at a stable and happy life. It seems that one “center of activity in *Pride and Prejudice* is the operation of the marriage market, where a woman’s beauty is a precious commodity, bait for marriage trap, and her body is capital to be exploited. The male’s sexual susceptibility offers the females

a point of attack” (Smith, Leroy, 1983). The Bennet’s knew that Jane, the eldest daughter would be married quickly, and were holding out for the wealthiest suitor. In the movie, Mr. Collins was first attracted to Jane, as was Mr. Darcy in the novel. This further proves that a woman’s attractiveness could hinder or destroy her in the early 19th century.

Visual techniques are used throughout the film to perpetuate discrimination against women, especially ones seen as “less handsome.” One scene particularly stands out to me. It was at the ball that Bennet’s, Mr. Darcy, and Mr. Bingley had attended and was where they all first met each other. After Elizabeth meets Mr. Darcy, she is seen in a dark room, gossiping with her friend Charlotte. Mr. Darcy comes into the shot, and starts speaking of Elizabeth’s unattractiveness, he even says that she was not pretty enough to interest a man such as himself. He did not know that Elizabeth was listening in on the conversation. This scene is a great insight into what men with pride, wealth, and power, say about women behind their backs. He was extremely rude, and discriminatory against the person who later turns out to be the love of his life.

With the use of dialect, we were able to hear Mr. Darcy’s true opinion of Elizabeth. We know that it was his opinion at this time because he didn’t think anyone was listening in on his conversation. By the use of prop and character placement, the scene was able to accurately convey how men talk about women “lesser” than them. The scene also took place at a ball in a very wealthy family’s house. High expectations were being held, and the Bennet’s don’t live by those standards. Perhaps Mr. Darcy was only saying those nasty things about Elizabeth because it was expected of him.

As a woman, I feel as though it is important to shed some light on hardships women have overcome and are still overcoming. *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) is the perfect representation of the hardships of women in the early 19th century. The patriarchal system keeps

women in less power and unable to be genuinely free to make our own decisions. By keeping women as the house caregivers, they never have the opportunity to create a name for themselves. I feel that this is why society today is changing so rapidly.

Women are no longer looked at as breeding machines, we are more than capable and wanting more than that, of dreams and aspirations. Women are more than just sex objects here to please and entertain that of the opposite sex. Elizabeth Bennet is an intelligent, well-spoken, independent young woman, and getting to see her perspective and attitude on life and marriage is refreshing to the world around her. She was an outlier, but because of that viewers get to see a different side to the system and to how women are represented.

*Pride and Prejudice* (2005) is chock-full of gossip, awkward tensions, displays of power, discrimination against the unwealthy and unattractive, and women's struggle to be individual. Mr. Darcy puts aside his pride, and Elizabeth puts aside her prejudice in this love story where two people from opposite worlds come together and find love. It is a beautiful display of how women were treated as objects to be traded for promised generational wealth and safety. Women weren't pushed to be themselves and to make their own decisions, unlike today. I recommend this film because it shows us how far we've come in women's rights, but it also reminds us never to give up fighting for our individuality.

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## 12. The Boondocks (2005-2009)

Raising a Ruckus: *The Boondocks* (2005-2009)

By Diego Mendez

In Season 2, Episode 10 of *The Boondocks*, we begin by seeing three of the main characters sitting around the table playing cards in a basement. In the early 2000s, there was a call for a boycott of the wine Crystal by the rapper Jay-Z because the owner said “he didn’t want no big nigga lips drinking my fine wine,” according to the character Uncle Ruckus. Uncle Ruckus in response to the statement that there should be a boycott of a product by the black community, went on a politically incorrect rant. I personally found everything Uncle Ruckus spoke about rather interesting because he mentions the white man no longer having anything nice for themselves because the Black community has taken it over. Along those same lines, all of the subjects mentioned: Polo, Timberland, Mercedes, and Versace, could be arguably better off because of the black community. All of these companies fall in line with the same model Polo by Ralph Lauren followed when they became popular in the NY streetwear scene, which was to take the profit and free publicity but never directly market to the Black community or admit its impact. This causes an entire generation to live having to choose between living under the labels applied to their culture or being outcast and labeled revolutionaries.



Screenshot from *The Boondocks* Season 2 Episode 10 “Home Alone”

My focus is surrounding the side story following Riley and Huey. Following a long string of failed babysitters, we are introduced to Uncle Ruckus a self-hating African American, who claims to have been chosen to babysit because of his extensive knowledge of wild animals, of which a black person is the most savage of them all. Despite all of his wild statements, however, he becomes a failed babysitter and leaves the boys alone to their own devices. What follows is a commentary on how white society sometimes sees young black males. We see the boys face the typical argument against handouts, where they were given a set amount of money by the Man (Granddad) and then Riley who is coded to be a “thug” spends all the money that Huey, being the intellectual black revolutionary with his red star patches, was using to feed them. I decoded this to be a reference to the African American community trying to better itself as others have, comparing this to a struggle faced by Barack Obama who was called a “Food Stamp President” (Parasocial Politics 154). This highlights that regardless of the societal level a member of the African American society reaches, the welfare, handout loving image persists.



Screenshot from The Boondocks Season 2 Episode 10 “Home Alone”

We begin to see how much Uncle Ruckus is coded to be a slave master, by using cattle prods and electric dog collars as tools to use on children, but as I have stated before, he sees black people as animals and savages that need to be controlled. This draws a parallel between the treatment of slaves in the past but modernizes the tool used to dehumanize them, no longer is it whips and chains, but cattle prods and dog collars. All throughout this scene, we hear a dopey tuba as the main accent of the scene, which tells me the creators of the series were aware of the outdated mentality and chose to add some humor to it. We see Ruckus eating a sandwich and making free use of the freeman house, a set of actions that had previously gotten the only successful source of discipline, in the form of a white supernanny, fired. This distinctly shows that there is a disparity between the consequences of the same actions simply due to race. There is also a brief focus afterward on the boys gearing up for a gun battle, a coming together of the revolutionary mentality and the gangster mentality to overthrow what could be decoded as the white culture or, more generally, a common enemy. While briefly working together they achieved their goal of eliminating all their babysitters. I see this as an early call to action, getting rid

of superficial differences in the African American community and acknowledging that sometimes the enemy is not external in the form of White culture, but it can be internal in the form of outdated and divisive ideologies perpetuated by the African American population itself.

Power dynamics can be seen all throughout the episode from all the nannies that came in: a teenager who failed and a positive “Big Brothers Big Sisters” style positive black man who also failed. The only person who succeeded in bringing order to the freeman household was an authoritarian white woman, which can be easily be seen as a representation of the idea that black people were better off under the strict guidelines of the white man. Power being taken by force shows up when Uncle Ruckus cries to be saved from the black hooligans who are attacking him, a distinct shift in the power dynamic considering he was earlier threatening to use cattle prods and shock collars to tame the boys. The two young boys resorting to gun violence due to limited positive social associations, which we see as a theme all throughout the episode reminds me of the perpetual concept of the White victim and African American aggressor. Messineo described the situation well when he wrote that “men of color are faced with achieving masculinity [in media representations] through their corporal selves as physical threats (i.e., as an athlete or gang member) as opposed to their intellectual contributions ... To be viewed as assertive and aggressive is valued in the culture but comes at the expense of other highly valued qualities ...” (Messineo, 2008, p. 755).

While it might seem that the entire show is nothing but a joke, the creator, Aaron McGruder took it very seriously and is quoted saying that “For three seasons I personally navigated this show through the minefields of controversy. It was not perfect. And it definitely was not quick. But it was always done with a keen sense of duty, history, culture, and love.”(Ezell 112). After the third season there was a drive from the network to put out more episodes that were not

in line with what the creator wanted, and it led to him being absent from the production and the oversight of the creation of the season. While the first 3 seasons of the boondocks are far from subtle in their use of racism, season 4 went off the rails, throwing the N-word around in places that before it would not have been used. Reminding me of the argument over the use of profanity that it should be used less, but used with conviction when it is time to use it. Season 4 did not follow that mentality and as a fan of the show, it made me cringe because something so good was ruined by the Hollywood machine.

An issue with all this could be that it is being so blatant with its use of racism and barely coded themes that it is detrimental to the black community, as it is making a joke of something that has been systemic and incredibly oppressive. Some episodes have been banned or heavily censored on Adult Swim and BET, which leads me to believe the show has touched a nerve among the African American media demographic as well as the white networks like Turner Media, which owns Cartoon Network and Adult Swim. The African American community sometimes wants to put stereotypes behind them, but the characters of Huey and Riley, who embody the black revolutionary and the black gangster mentality, were helping to keep those stereotypes alive. The gun battle between them in this episode is the culmination of the expected actions of the self-destructive young African American male. The intellectual and gangster African American male can both rationalize their action through the duality of an African American males existence: Huey as trying to apply order and discipline by any means necessary to break free of oppression, and Riley as the fiercely independent and sometimes ignorant aggressor who lives by and is consumed by the stereotypes of minority aggression.



Screenshot from *The Boondocks* Season 2 Episode 10 “Home Alone”

The Boondocks is an awesome (not season 4) series with episodes like the hunger strike and home alone. It reminds me of a similar struggle in the community that I grew up in. I used to wear polo and all the standard white brands only to not fit in there and be mocked for white washing by my “community”. Like Uncle Ruckus says, white women have been taken over by the black men. While I’m not black I have seen that first hand, interracial dating was frowned upon from my end and even more so from the perspective of the parents of the women I was dating back then, who were excited to meet me until they realized that I was not a member of a rich white family. Growing up around fairly wealthy White people showed me how money and status can radicalize one subtly, and just like Huey and Riley, one can end up rationalizing their actions out of fear that a minority could rise up and take over what they have built. Tying in with the fact that all of the issues presented in this episode are typical of low-income family situations but yet they are happening in a rich white environment breaks the illusion that the problem stems purely from their innate mentality. It instead indicates that their environment forces that mentality upon them in order to survive, with some not being as lucky as others.

In conclusion, this episode tackles a lot of issues around being a young African American male, we see that you can take them out of the hood but you can't take the hood out of them, as seen by their rampant gun violence among the upper class of Woodcrest. The oppressive depiction of the African American community's willingness to take handouts and then mismanage their funds and remain poor. These only briefly touch upon the struggles with Discrimination, Power, and the fundamental Differences between White and African American societies. Despite all these obstacles we now see the African American culture blooming and flourishing on its own, and becoming a keystone in the mainstream culture. With that being said, we can not forget that culture as a whole has fetishized many aspects of African American culture, willfully ignoring all their troubles and tribulations. Hopefully, as we see more shows and films tackling these issues, unity can be attained in the future.

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# 13. The Curious Case Benjamin Button (2008)

*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) and the Issue of Ageism  
By Evin Holstad

*Benjamin Button* is a film I have heard of since it first came out and the premise has always perplexed me. One film critic summarizes the plot as such “Where others are born unformed and unwrinkled, Benjamin comes into the world a decrepit old man; where others wither, he dies in a pink and creaseless state of infancy” (Shwarzbaum, 1). This is the story of Benjamin Button played by Brad Pitt who suffers from a fictional disease that affects his development. When first hearing about this film, it assumed it would be an outrageous comedy, something out of an Adam Sandler film or something. However in reality it is a beautiful story that comments on the issue of age and ableism and how we should be accepting of people at any age while incorporating a love story at the same time and was truly one of the most unique films I’ve ever seen.

The film takes place over many different time periods of Benjamin’s life. It begins with his love interest Daisy as an old woman in a hospital bed as Hurricane Katrina is getting ready to fall on New Orleans. She is with her daughter who reads Benjamin’s journal to her mother. As she reads his journal we are taken back in time to when Benjamin was born in 1918 in New Orleans. We are then taken back in time on a journey with him through various times in his life all the way until he is in his 80’s.





Screenshot from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

Benjamin, with his disorder, has many trials and tribulations as he grows up, maturing as he normally would inwardly, but outwardly appears to be getting younger. Because of the discrepancies between his mental age and his physical age, he is discriminated against at times which is represented in the film through various metaphors, and visual techniques. The main visual techniques used are achieved through CGI that make Brad Pitt appear older, or younger at different stages in his life, and make the people in his life age normally. There is also a metaphor at the beginning of the film where a clockmaker installs a clock in a train station but the clock goes backward, representing Benjamin aging backward.

One of the other main themes in this movie is death. Benjamin, growing up in a nursing home saw countless people come and go in his life. From his many mentors to his adoptive mother, friends, family, most everyone he interacted with in his life, he saw die, however, it never seemed to affect him emotionally. Even at one of the happiest moments of his life, when he finally didn't need crutches anymore to walk, was immediately met by the death of the preacher helping him. He began to realize that it was easier to live life independently and not to rely on anyone else or have anyone else rely on him.

Most of the characters are representative of the historical period covered by the plot, with many of them being straight white males which was indicative of power at the time. There are some African American characters but for the most part, they are represented as maids or cooks which reinforces the common representative of the time. However, one of the main characters, Queenie, is an African American woman and was Benjamin's mother figure and she very sympathetic character. She took Benjamin in when he was abandoned by his father, and loved him regardless of his disfigurement. Benjamin was also reliant on a wheelchair and crutches for the first few years of his life.

Benjamin is obviously suffering from some kind of fictional disease that affects his development in some way and because of this, he is often discriminated against. He faces discrimination from the minute he is born when his father first sees him and immediately thinks to drown him in a river. However, he is interrupted and then decides to abandon him at the nursing home. The editing technique of "flashbacks and flashforwards" is the most common one seen in this film as the film is constantly switching between Daisy as an old woman in 2003 and Benjamin in the 1900s. In these flashbacks, there are many scenes where he is discriminated against or treated differently because of his age. "In the Curious Case of Benjamin Button, it is apparent that wellbeing is defined by fitting in: physically, mentally, and socially according to one's age. I'd say this is a pretty universal in our current society, despite one's age, sex, or gender. Having a "group" to belong to fulfills our innate need to connect (and be happy) with those around us and I'd say this is a greater challenge in early development years (toddler-childhood) and for the elderly, as they fall into the age outliers of society." (Unknown, 1). This quote sums up much of the issues that Benjamin has to deal with in his life, regarding not fitting into any group at any stage of his life because he looks different, and facing discrimination because of it. He is often told he can't do

things because of his old withered appearance when in reality he is fully able.

Benjamin spent his years growing up in a nursing home with other old people whose ages match their appearances. However, Benjamin was a 10-year-old boy appearing to be an 80-year-old man. Because of this, he does not fit in with the older people even though he looks like them. He has too much energy and wants to play too much while the older people just want to relax. At the same time, people who are his age also discriminate against him because he looks like an old man. They often call him “boy” in a very negative way which further alienated him from the group. In this way, he never is able to fit into any group at this age and finds companionship in only a few people. One of whom being Daisy. They meet when Benjamin is 12, and Daisy is 6. They begin to become friendly but this is quickly shut down when someone sees them together and tells Benjamin that “he oughta be ashamed of himself” for being an old man playing with a young girl. However, in Benjamin’s mind, he is simply a young kid playing with another young girl. But because of his appearance, this is seen as inappropriate.

One quote from a movie review sums up the issues with Benjamin’s life quite well “Jokes about old people are accepted within our society and older people even laugh at their own deteriorated appearance. There is an ambivalence regarding aging that permeates every level of our society. However, since Benjamin was humbled early by the vicissitudes of aging he did not experience the arrogance that comes with youth.” (Rothaupt, Flom, 1). Benjamin was met with ambivalence from the moment he was born, as his father abandoned him as soon as he saw him. He was treated differently for being old, and never really got to experience the innocence and freedom of being a child.



Screenshot from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

One element of DPD that was never really discussed in this film is racism. The film was set mainly in the mid-1900's when racism was rampant and very common in America. Benjamin's mother figure Queenie is an African American woman however her race, and how that may have impacted Benjamin's life, are never mentioned. "Missing from the film was the racism present during the time period. Had Ben been a real person, his particularly curious life would have no doubt been further complicated by having an adoptive mother who African American. However, race is never really acknowledged in this film, which instead emphasized the role of a dedicated mother." (Rothaupt, Flom, 2). While race isn't the main topic in the film, or even mentioned at all, I think it is somewhat dismissive and privileged of the filmmakers to completely ignore an issue that would have no doubt been relevant at this time and could have made a powerful impact in this film.

When looking for a film to analyze for this piece, I immediately knew I wanted to do Benjamin Button. I had watched it only a few days prior so it was still very fresh in my mind, and the story had stuck with me for days after watching it. Also bear in mind the movie is almost three hours long so I split it up and watched it over a

three-day time period. I had heard of this movie for years and it was always intriguing to me and I wondered how they could have made a baby look like an old man, and how they could have made such an outrageous premise into a serious movie. But I believe it was executed very well, and despite what I had heard about the movie prior to watching it, that it was boring or too long, it kept me enthralled the entire time even with breaking it up into three parts. I think it is a great piece that discussed the issue of aging and how it can be viewed negatively when that shouldn't be the case at all.

Now if the idea of an old-man baby or a baby old-man is intriguing to you at all, then Benjamin Button might be the perfect movie for you. But be prepared to go through a rollercoaster of emotions and come out at the end feeling a little better about aging, and not seeing it as such a negative thing. It happens to all of us and we should rather focus on what we do and achieve during our lives than focus on the things we cannot do during our old age.

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# 14. Glee (2009-2015)

## *Glee* (2009-2015) and the Problems of Discrimination

By Elizabeth Spriggs

*Glee* was my favorite television show back in 2009 when it first aired. Rewatching it about 8 years later, I noticed some problems with how they portrayed and handled some characters. *Glee* was created by Ryan Murphy and it touches on different subjects as these kids go through their years of high school. It touches on the struggles of discrimination, religion, disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community. This show has a lack of understanding with its representation of difference and discrimination. Even though the show does well talking on these subjects, the way they portray and solve them isn't always all that well done.

*Glee* is based around a small group of students considered the outcasts of the school. Everyone in the show from main to side characters are all able-bodied. That's where we hit one of the first disabled characters; we run into Artie. Artie is in a wheelchair from a spinal cord injury leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. This gives him a disadvantage as he can't perform physically unlike the others in their dance numbers. He is portrayed in an overcoming narrative way, wherein the end he may have just been set up for failure because of his limitation.

In season 1 episode 9 they come across the problem of being unable to get to regionals because the school didn't offer a handicap bus. Mr. Schuester, the glee instructor, explains how they can't go to sectionals unless all of them can make it as a team. This left the other members claiming it was unfair to them at first. In each cut, you can see how each character feels by the juxtaposition of wide-angle to medium close-up shots. You can see disappointment as the

main emotion amongst his peers, and Artie, you can tell, feels like a burden.



Screenshot from *Glee*

Schuester then brings up an idea to hold a bake sale to raise the proper funds for the bus. The group retaliates by trash-talking bake sales as they aren't "boujee" enough. Mercedes brings up a point that Artie can just get a ride from his mom. Schuester tells them that they were being insensitive towards a team member, this is when Quinn Fabray steps in saying "Artie understands, don't you Artie?" During this interaction, we are given a wide-angle shot of Quinn and Artie as she waits for him to agree. Later Mr. Schuester tells the kids that they will be holding the bake sale to be able to afford the bus to get Artie to regionals with them. There is a catch though, each member is told to spend three hours a day in a wheelchair while at school. This, in his hopes, will open their eyes to see how difficult it is for Artie on a daily basis. This is a great way the show has shown a positive look on an issue. It shows that just because someone has a limitation doesn't mean it holds them back on what they truly love as each member gets a short look into Artie's life.

Another problem that seems to occur in this episode is when Mr.Schuester brings out the setlist for regionals. Handing out the list the only African-American student in the group, Mercedes, asks why Rachel, the American, gets to sing lead in all of the songs. Mercedes's face is shown in a wide shot along with 3 of her fellow glee members as she asks why she couldn't sing lead on some of the songs. The shot then moves to a half body shot of Mr.Schuester as he looks away uneasily answering her question without once looking up.

During this moment in the episode, the camera switches between Rachel the lead, Kurt the gay best friend, Mr.Schuester, and Mercedes. It starts with a closeup of Rachel who seems to be looking over at Mercedes and then up at Mr.Schuester with an almost blank expression. When Kurt's shot comes in he shares a quick side glance to Rachel before smiling almost sadly at Mercedes as Mr.Schuester says he is unable to change the setlist to accommodate her "chocolate spice" but instead tells her she can have a lead in the future. The next scene cut is Mercedes as she laughs it off with the rest of her classmates.

*Glee* is one of those shows that takes real-life problems and turns them into a sort of comedic take. It mainly seems to star white characters with only a few select cast members of minority races. In an article written by Alyssa Rosenberg titled '*Glee* is an Immoral Television Show and It's Time to Stop Watching It' says "It's become a show that's not just sloppy but exploitative and manipulative of serious societal issues and human experiences" (Rosenberg). When Rosenberg brings this up in her article it makes me think about the two scenes I explained earlier, the screenwriter does well bringing up serious societal and human issues but plays it out in the wrong ways.





Screenshot from *Glee*

Later on in season 2 episode 5 titled “Grilled Cheesus” ‘ Ryan Murphy brings in the issues of religion. In the episode Finn Hudson, the male lead singer and football player, notices the resemblance of Jesus in his grilled cheese. Finn goes to school telling everyone that they should dedicate the week of songs to Jesus. The first issue we come across is that they are in a public school in which everyone has different views when it comes to religion. In an article written by Nate Hennigan called *Glee and Separation of Church and State* he says “When the students who are religious all make comments about their own personal religions and faiths, there is generally a mutual respect for everyone. However, when it comes to Kurt’s confession that he does not believe in God, the other students don’t show him the same respect” (Hennagin).

Before this episode, Kurt goes through a troubling time with his dad who had a near death experience. What also isn’t brought up much is that Kurt’s mother isn’t in the picture as she seemed to have passed on from mysterious causes when he was eight. These have caused Kurt to be an atheist as he has seen no reason to believe in a God. The other characters questioned his choice of belief and treated him with disrespect. Each member of *Glee* questions Kurt

about why he thinks God isn't real and is expected to explain himself further because everyone else in the room believed in one religion or another. This touches on the topic of how minority religious groups were treated.



Screenshot from *Glee*

*Glee* is a wonderful musical show that draws the attention of many viewers and has so many strong points throughout its storyline. The way Ryan Murphy chose to touch and portray some serious world problems was just comedic and disrespectful. There is so much within the show that treats a minority group like they're just tokens. Portrayed like pawns in a chess game where their problems weren't all that important. It's interesting to watch how Hollywood seems to show these characters to appeal to younger audiences, but Murphy could have done a way better job at addressing DPD issues.

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# 15. Django Unchained (2012)

*Django Unchained* (2012): A Twist on Slavery Films

By Zachary Velasco

*Django Unchained*, a film about a freed slave who works alongside a bounty hunter to capture evil slave owners, is a blunt portrayal of difference, power, and discrimination in the mid-1800s. Directed by Quentin Tarantino, it has many elements that are indicative of a Tarantino film, especially the extreme, over-the-top violence, and many elements were inspired by classic spaghetti westerns. However, Tarantino set out to make this film unlike any other slavery film that had been made. Many slavery films of the past were problematic, and the slave would often take the high road in the end in favor of the white people. But Tarantino did not want Django to be like that so he took a very different approach and created a film that discussed the difference in power of slaves and white men in the 1850s.

Jamie Foxx plays a slave named Django who was bought by a man named Dr. Shultz (Christoph Waltz), who is actually a bounty hunter in need of Django's help to identify his next target. They work out a deal and Django agrees to help him in exchange for his freedom and compensation. The two of them then go out and collect many bounties, and ultimately find themselves at the Candieland Plantation where Django's wife is being held as a slave.



Screenshot from *Django Unchained*

The differences presented in *Django Unchained* are clear. The difference that has caused so much pain and hurt over the years, the difference in skin color. This was in a time where white men had all the power and black people were often helpless against them and were kept as slaves. This is a terrible scar in America's past that keeps getting reopened to this day, and the effects of slavery are still felt. The differences between the white people and the slaves during this film were seen through their clothing while the white people wore fancy elegant outfits at all times, the slaves must wear worn down, ratty clothing because that is all that is provided to them by the slave owners. They are also much less intelligent because they have not had the opportunity to go to school or learn much, and in this way the slaveowners keep them obedient and try to prevent them from developing the intellectual ability to know how to escape or fight back. It is only when Django is freed by Dr. Shultz that he is able to choose his own clothes. When he does so he seems shocked that the doctor would let him pick out his own clothes as this is something he's never been able to do before. Something that we

take for granted every day meant so much to Django, and just by getting a new outfit, he was seen with much more respect.



Screenshot from *Django Unchained*

Power is perhaps the most important element in this film. Back then, and still to this day, white men hold much of the power. In this way, they are able to manipulate things to their benefit. This is seen obviously in *Django* as the film centers around a black, former slave, and his adventures as he enters plantations and engages with many white characters and slave owners. In one scene the racial injustices are seen explicitly. The Plantation owner, Mr. Candie has a dangerous and evil response to his power and uses it in inhumane ways. In this particular scene, he has two of his slaves fight each other to the death purely for his own entertainment. This is a catalyst for Django and makes him even more determined to find his wife in this plantation. “The film is a manifestation of power and resistance between racist White Americans and the oppression of African Americans. The film reflects on the conservative superior classes that exercise their power to mistreat those that are viewed as second class citizens.” (Rwafa, 1). This is still something that is seen even to this day. To take a look at the differences in power in the United States is especially relevant right now regarding the

abuse of power by many policemen against black people in the country.

It is also important to note that even though Django did benefit somewhat from this difference in power. Mr. Shultz is a white man and it is greatly because of him that Django is even able to be a free man and enter into the plantation. This can be seen as white saviorism where black people only succeed in a movie because of the help of another white hero. Yes, this is problematic in films but during this time period when black people were mostly powerless they did have to rely on the kindness of white saviors to help them at times. However, Tarantino was wary of this and tried to make Django the hero as much as possible rather than giving all the credit to Dr. Shultz “He’s the one who paid for Django’s freedom, trained him to be a killer, and helped him locate where his wife Broomhilda was sold to. The entire story revolves around Schultz’s influence on Django’s life. It’s no coincidence that Django becomes the real hero of the story after Schultz dies. With him gone, the audience can finally see what should’ve been depicted all along – that Django is the film’s hero.” (James, 1). Dr. Shultz has an influence even over the other white characters. Although he is German and English is his second language, he still speaks it so eloquently that the people in America have trouble understanding his vocabulary at times. He speaks with such intelligence and authority that he is able to manipulate other white characters to fit his agenda.

Discrimination doesn’t even begin to describe what occurred during the time that this film was set. Black people were discriminated against in the harshest way. They were seen as less than human, comparative to animals, and were oppressed in the most evil ways possible for hundreds of years. The injustices could never be described in just one movie, but they are seen often in this film. Django obviously faces discriminatory language from almost everyone he meets, but what was shocking to me was that he faced discrimination even from other slaves. They had racist ideologies

so far ingrained in their heads by their owners, that they would be discriminatory of their own kind. The other slaves were all shocked when they first saw Django on a horse because they had never seen a black person on a horse before.

The movie was faced with some sharp criticism, and the morality and justification for Tarantino making this film was brought into question by Spike Lee and other vocal critics. People wondered whether he should be the one to make such a movie, and he was also criticized for his over-use of the n-word. “Tarantino, of course, has long argued that his dialogue simply reflects reality. (The Gangsta Rapper Defense.) It is one thing to reflect a tragedy, however, and another to revel in it. And that tick goes way beyond the rhetoric in this movie.” (Melber, 2). While, yes the use of the word is historically accurate for the time, I do feel that Tarantino may have used this as an excuse to use it excessively. While they might have used it this much in the past, it is a little jarring to hear it being used so much in a movie made in recent years. It was also called into question whether or not it was Tarantino’s place to make such a movie. However, he justifies himself as wanting to create a Western that dealt with racism when so many in the past had ignored that aspect. “I was always amazed so many Western films could get away with not dealing with slavery at all. Hollywood didn’t want to deal with it because it was too ugly and too messy. But how can you ignore such a huge part of American history when telling a story in that time period? It made no sense.”, he is quoted as saying. (Samuels, 1). This was his way at changing the narrative of Westerns that ignored slavery which is very dismissive of the time. He also knew he wanted to make the black characters the main characters rather than the white saviors mentioned earlier. Tarantino even criticized other films such as *Roots* that depict slavery in an unrealistic manner. In the end of *Roots*, one of the characters is given the opportunity to beat his former slave owner but does not in an attempt to be the bigger man. Tarantino then criticizes that and claims his intentions for creating Django: “Bulls-t, no way he



becomes the bigger man at that moment,” says Tarantino. “The powers that be during the ’70s didn’t want to send the message of revenge to African-Americans. They didn’t want to give black people any ideas. But anyone knows that would never happen in that situation. And in *Django Unchained* we make that clear.”



Screenshot from *Django Unchained*

I think this movie, while extremely violent and graphic, and with some historical discrepancies does a great job at showing the injustices that black people faced during the years of slavery and how someone may react to those injustices. It is important to create movies that don't ignore this aspect as that is reflecting on the privilege that we have today where we don't have to worry about the effects of slavery even though people deal with the repercussions every day. It should still be talked about and not swept under the rug like Hollywood tried to do for years. This film does not rely solely on white saviors or expect the former slave to act like the bigger person when given the chance. It shows the real emotions and anger that someone living through slavery would have no doubt felt, and

I think white people should educate themselves more on this topic especially with the climate we are living in today.

In conclusion, this film took many aspects of old spaghetti westerns, and Quentin Tarantino took his own creative liberties to create a film that discussed racism and slavery in the 1850s. They did not shy away from being controversial or overly dramatic, as that was indicative of the times. Things were very bleak for slaves and free black people back then as we can see from movies like *Django Unchained*, and while the action was definitely dramatized the lesson we can learn from this film are still relevant to this day.

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# 16. 13th (2016)

## Cinematic Technique in 13th (2016)

By Esmeralda Hernandez

The thirteenth amendment was ratified in 1865 to eradicate voluntary and involuntary slavery except when used for punishment when convicted of a crime in the United States. With the incarcerated population increasing at daringly high rates since the amendment was founded, the documentary *13th* puts a spotlight on the amendment and the loophole that has been placed by stereotypes, racism, and system corruption. This movie also demonstrates mise-en-scene techniques to enhance and help the audience better understand the setting and nature of the film. This movie is a representation of how race, discrimination, and power have molded the justice system while media and modern society have formed an unhealthy relationship with its views on freedom.

With freedom at the front of most political and social disagreements, it raises questions of trust between the people of America and its relationship with the justice system. As incarceration rates, police brutality, violence, and political protest increase, chaos will also increase in the imbalance of power. For example, this can relate to the world now, the Minneapolis protests and raids have sparked controversial views after a police officer killed George Floyd after handcuffing and kneeling on Floyd's neck eventually causing him to suffocate. Those within Floyd's community and in other parts of America have seen extreme force used within the justice system, this is shown by representation of race, discrimination, and the power that the differences between us hold.

*13th* highlights a portion of those who have experienced,

witnessed, or have been impacted by the prejudice society has constructed. They also address the unforeseen consequences and those who use the loophole for power, greed, and control. The amendment was created so that slavery would only be acceptable in the form of punishment. In order to explain and present their perspective, the film brings in a vast amount of credible people, such as Cory Booker, mayor of New Jersey, Angela Davis, famous activist, and others in business, politics, and the law creating trust within the audience.

13th also uses cinematography techniques such as lighting and angles within the film. For example, the interviewers are the storytellers and when they are being filmed they angle the camera so that the person telling their perspective to a 'mystery' person off to the distance. This is a technique that is utilized throughout the film and during every interview. This allows the audience to feel as if they are being let in on a secret or important message. The main angle they use is a medium close-up shot, "A framing in which the scale of the object shown is fairly large; a human figure seen from the chest up would fill most of the screen" (Prunes 3), which leaves little room for other influences other than that person, a common angle used.

Discrimination is apparent and explicitly shown throughout the film when they show certain techniques such as editing and montage. When an interviewee is explaining an interesting and what may or may not be a plausible story, they edit in scenes to back up their testimony. For example, they edit or montage an array of videos with voice overs to also keep the viewer's attention. This entire movie is addressing race and discrimination to advocate and educate those who are uninformed of the prejudice we accumulate. As explained in the film white patriarchal views dominate western culture discriminating against those of color. According to the textbook, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, "The United States was founded on and still

adheres to the dominant ideology of white patriarchal capitalism” (Benshoff and Griffin 44). That being said, this is a belief system that has been constructed by society enabling the use of discrimination and power.

In the film, they represent individual and historical evidence throughout time, beginning through slavery and ending in the present day. When doing so they use editing techniques to better help the viewer understand the ways race and power have shaped the society in which we remain today. For example, when showing montages of news articles and films from the early '90s, they are careful to pay attention to the color. This gives the audience the feeling of being dragged through time with authenticity and reveals some shocking moments in our nation's history. Some of the clips are black and white and then entering the 20th and 21st-century color and pixel qualities enhance. Examples of the clips from other films that were shown included minstrel show, blackface impersonations, and representations of stereotypes. These montages of older black and white clips were shown to help explain the power films had over the depiction of another race.

Another important mise-en-scene element used is sound throughout the film, during interviews or personal points of view, they keep a low constant note or tone to create an ominous feeling and enhance the importance of the topic through deep sounds and low lighting. Literary design elements are shown, for instance, when they have the transition slides to introduce another section of the story they play a song with lyrics displayed on the screen often having the song relate to prejudice or race. This allows the audience to think about the information that was expressed as well as the willingness to wait and keep the attention focused on what will happen next.

In conclusion, *13th* serves to effectively address the amendment that has created a creative way to lawfully uphold slavery within

the justice system. The film also showcases the correlation between the increasing population in prisons and specifically within the minorities. The amendment states that slavery is unlawful except when used for punishment for a crime. For the minorities, this should have meant freedom but the change in the system may have been too drastic for the already formed generational habits and beliefs. The reason this film was picked is that the main topic is based on race, discrimination, and power and can be relatable to some of today's issues. The film displays literary, cinematography, and sound design to enhance the viewer's experience as well as a lens through those affected directly or indirectly by prejudice.

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# 17. Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments (2016-2019)

The Impacts of a Passionate Fandom on *Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments* (2016-2019)

By Bethany Leach

*Shadowhunters: The Mortal Instruments* (*Shadowhunters*) is a television show created and produced by Ed Dector that aired on Freeform in 2016-2019. The show is loosely based on Cassandra Clare's book series *The Mortal Instruments*. *Shadowhunters* is a Sci-Fi drama centered around Clary, who finds out on her 18th birthday that she is a shadowhunter, which is a secret hidden race that protects humans from demons, and other supernatural beings. The show is known for having many diverse characters, and there is something for everyone. There are straight, lesbian, bisexual, gay, biracial characters and couples in the show. The way *Shadowhunters* is unique is that the fandom who watched the show were able to influence storylines and the way writers and producers thought of the show. *Shadowhunters* fandom has fought hard for the things they believed in and they were able to achieve some of their dreams.

For some background information about the show, *Shadowhunters* was been nominated for various awards at the Teen and People's Choice Awards. Several Categories *Shadowhunters* has been nominated for or won include best Sci-fi show, best tv show, best actor, best actress, best villain, and best relationship/couple. One of the more prominent awards *Shadowhunters* won would be the "Outstanding Drama Show" at the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Media Awards. GLAAD is an American

non-governmental media monitoring organization founded by LGBT people in media. The cast and crew took a lot of pride in having a gay couple on the small screen. Many of the cast members embraced the LGBT community and supported the decision to have characters with those sexualities. The cast and producers of the show wanted the queer community to feel loved and accepted by representing them in the show accurately. Main cast member Katherine McNamara, who plays Clary Fairchild, has always embraced “Malec” (Which is the ship name for Magnus and Alec) and the *Shadowhunters*’ fandom. Katherine McNamara who was the main actress on *Shadowhunters* said in an acceptance speech for her best actress award at the people’s choice award. “*Shadowhunters* is a story of unlikely heroes who form an alliance in divided worlds,” McNamara continued. “It has been a real privilege to watch you, the fandom, do the same, to create a community of love and acceptance in our divided world. Our characters might be your heroes, but you angels are undoubtedly mine.”

While there are several different relationships on the show, I am focusing on the characters of Alec Lightwood and Magnus Bane played by Mathew Daddario and Harry Shum Jr. Alec is a character who has struggled with being gay and was in the closet for a long time, not being brave enough to come out and accept himself. In the show, he meets another character, Magnus Bane. Magnus is a man who is bi but takes an interest in Alec. Magnus recognizes that Alec is gay and tries to convince him to be with him and to come out as gay. The characters end up together after facing various adversities and struggles which prevent them from being together. While being together they face many problems, which try and tear them apart, but they overcome the obstacles, judgment, and discrimination.

At Alec’s wedding in season 1 episode 12 titled “Malec”, Alec is under extreme pressure from his parents to be a responsible leader by following all the normal standards, while continuing his family legacy and living up to the Lightwood name. Because of this Alec



ends up having an arranged marriage to a woman named Lydia. On Alec's wedding day at the altar, Magnus crashes the wedding. While the crowd is watching Alec's every move, he decides to come out to the world as gay, and leaves Lydia at the altar, to kiss Magnus in front of everyone. This causes many emotions and reactions to come out. Some of Alec's siblings and friends are happy and proud of their friend, while other people like Alec's parents and mentors are shocked, appalled, and furious. This scene caused a chain reaction and allowed many people of the LGBT community to come out and be vocal with their sexuality because they saw their favorite characters be brave enough to be themselves.



[Screenshot from Shadowhunters](#)

When it comes to the technical aspect of this scene, there were several things I noticed. The editing of the shots was very fast-paced. The whole scene took less than thirty seconds. The editing of the scene was shot that way to show the significance, drama, and climax of the scene. The editing helped signify the audience to know that this was a big moment for Alec, as well as the LGBT community's representation in television.

When dealing with cinematography, Alec was walking up to

Magnus, and the camera follows Alec as he walks to Magnus. When it comes to the kiss, the camera slowly zooms onto them kissing, the shot zooms in from a medium-long shot into a close. Followed are the rest of the shots of everybody's reactions taken from a medium close up, while the parents shot is taken from a medium-long shot. The camera work brought the scene to life. For the Mise-En-Scene, the costumes were styled for a wedding. Actors were wearing dresses, tuxedos, a wedding dress. The location in the scene was set in a church, which was decorated with white flowers. The lighting in the scene was natural lighting coming from the stained glass windows. All these factors created an epic scene, which fans appreciated. Although many of the fans did not care for how the show was filmed or edited, but rather they cared for the relationships, plot lines, and character development

The sound in this scene has a few words of dialogue at the beginning of the scene. In the background of the whole scene is a high-pitched song with a fast beat and drums to signify the importance of the decision and action taken place. The producers had contacted an artist named Ruelle, to write and record songs for each couple on the show. These songs would play in the background of important steps in the couple's relationships and were written specifically for that scene or episode. The song that played in the background of this scene was called War of Hearts. The song symbolized the struggles of falling in loving someone that you're not supposed to love. Since these songs were written personally for the show, these songs became people's anthems and were very important to the fans and what the songs represented.

*Shadowhunters* has a huge fan base. When the show aired many people connected with the characters and couples. The actors Mathew Daddario and Harry Shum Jr. who played Alec and Magnus have represented the LGBT community in a strong way. The actors were dedicated to their roles while taking on the responsibility of accurately portraying the gay couple. The fan base is so huge

and passionate about the show that they heavily influenced the writer's decisions of the show. There was an incident where the main straight couple had finally got together, and the characters had a love scene. When the LGBT community discovered that the love scene that the gay characters had was shorter, and was not accurately represented, the fans were furious. They demanded that they get a true accurately represented love scene between the gay characters. Because the LGBT community was so vocal with the injustice of the scenes, the writers went back to the drawing table and wrote an accurately representative love scene between the two male characters. Once the fans saw the love scene between Alec and Magnus, they were happy and satisfied, knowing the writers and actors listened to what they wanted.

This show was so loved and supported by its fans. In 2019, the show was canceled unexpectedly after shooting the third season. The fans were furious and hurt. These characters meant so much to them, just to let them go without any closure. Almost as soon as the announcement was made, the fans went to Twitter and other various social media platforms to which they started trending #saveshadowhunters. The fans were not going to stop until they got some resolve. The fans started a petition to save Shadowhunters, to this day there are 197,000 plus signatures. Fans also paid for billboards in Times Square, Los Angeles, Toronto Canada, Seoul South Korea. They put ads on busses in London. The most extreme act the fandom did was fly a plane over Netflix headquarters with a banner attached (Lovely).

The fandom managed to raise \$25,000 for The Trevor Project (which is an organization that provides crisis and suicide prevention to LGBT Youth) in the name of Shadowhunters. The Freeform Network had noted the accomplishments the fandom made to try and save the show by matching the amount the fandom raised and donating it to the charity (Lovely). Although the show was not saved, the network did decide to give the show two last episodes to tie

everything up and give the show a good ending. The writers wanted to make everyone pleased with the ending. Since the gay couple on the show was so developed as a couple, the writers and producers decided to give the LGBT community a wedding between the gay couple. This gave a lot of people peace of mind because they did not have to wonder what happened after a cliffhanger. The characters' storylines and relationships were wrapped up so nicely it did the justice that the fans wanted to happen.

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# 18. Blindspotting (2018)

*Blindspotting* (2018) and Seeing Both Sides of the Picture

By Graham King

“How come every time you come around you monsters got me feeling like a monster in my own town?” Collin, played by Daveed Diggs, screams at a white police officer while pointing a gun at him and fighting back tears. This single line by Collin is a perfect encapsulation of everything *Blindspotting* is about. From gentrification to police violence, *Blindspotting* tackles many hard subjects in a way that is able to capture the audience’s attention from start to finish. Directed by Carlos López Estrada and co-written by the co-stars Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal, this team creates a comedic drama that depicts how difference, power, and discrimination affect the way people live their lives every day. Estrada said in an interview with No Film School that “the whole movie is about perspective and about angles and different people’s understanding of the same events” and *Blindspotting* explores these perspectives in a very well done and entertaining way.

Having grown up together in Oakland, California, Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal wanted to make a movie that felt true to Oakland and highlighted certain conditions that they had experienced in their time living there. In an interview with Colorlines, Diggs stated “We decided it should be about the Bay Area and Oakland specifically because we’d never seen it done in the way that we always imagined it to be, and that it should star us. Right about that time, [Oscar Grant](#) was killed at Fruitvale BART Station. In telling an Oakland story, that was a part of the story we were telling.” The police shooting of an unarmed black man is one of the narrative elements in *Blindspotting*, clearly drawing parallels to Oscar Grant’s murder. Diggs and Casal were able to use this event as motivation to

complete this multi-year project and setting the movie in Oakland added a new personal level to the experience.



Screenshot from *Blindspotting*

Unlike discrimination and power, which are both easily definable, difference is more complex and has different meanings in different situations. In order to understand difference in the context of this movie, it is necessary to break down the title of the film and what it actually means. As described in the scene between Collin and his ex-girlfriend Val, blindspotting is when a situation or an image can be interpreted in two different ways, but you can only see one of the interpretations. A real-life example could be the boys from the Central Park Five case. While some people may see a group of teenagers joking around in the park, others may see a group of thugs harassing and assaulting people throughout the park. In regard to this movie, while people who know Collin know he is a nice and harmless person, outsiders may assume he is dangerous and violent simply based on his appearance. These different views are all shaped based on everyone's prior experiences in life and it will affect how they view any given situation. However, even if somebody points out the other side of the picture to you, it doesn't remove the blindspot. Someone can't go against what their brain instinctually tells them unless they spend the time to retrain their

brain to see the other picture. Estrada also uses editing to highlight differences between characters in the film. During a phone call between Collin and Val, rather than having cuts back and forth whenever one person is talking, Estrada decided he would rather use a split-screen to keep both characters on screen the entire time. This split-screen does a great job of showing that these characters have differing views about their life and what living in Oakland means to them. While Collin is content with staying in Oakland and working as a mover, Val wants to get an education and move on with her life. Additionally, the split-screen ties back into what the entire movie is about and continues to reinforce that everyone has different perspectives on the same situations.

Blindspotting also tackles the issues of power in a more straightforward way. The most prominent issue of power is the relationship between the police officer and the black man who was murdered. The police officer was clearly in power in that situation and killed an unarmed man who was not a threat to anyone around him. Although the cop says that he did not mean to kill him at the end of the movie, there is no guarantee that he wouldn't do it again due to his blindspot. Another issue of power is how people who become convicted felons have that title hung over their heads for the rest of their life. An example from the movie is when the landlord says "You are a convicted felon, Mr. Hoskins. You are now that until proven otherwise. Prove otherwise at all times." This is something that is applicable to felons in the real world as well. As the documentary 13th described, once you are incarcerated once, you have so many of your rights taken away and there is a figurative scarlet letter placed on you that everybody you met for the rest of your life will judge you on. More specifically, felons lose their right to vote, their right to bear arms, their right to travel abroad, and lastly, it is not illegal for employers to refuse to hire a felon. Being incarcerated once puts you in a powerless position for the rest of your life and allows for other people to trample all over you because they know there is nothing you can do about it.



Screenshot from *Blindspotting*

The last topic that *Blindspotting* talks about is discrimination. Other than the obvious discrimination that the police officer displays when he shot the unarmed black man, there are other more subtle moments that discuss discrimination. For example, during one of the scenes Collins's ex-girlfriend, Val, tells Collin that he should consider changing up his look and cutting his hair because he looks like a criminal. This moment highlights how people will often place blame on the person they assumed did it based on race and appearance. People will often associate certain looks with crime and bad behavior such as being black or dressing differently than how white people dress. In addition to this, Collin was concerned about his relationship with Miles the entire movie because he was scared Miles was going to get him in trouble even though he wasn't doing anything. For example, after Miles beats up a man outside of a party while holding a gun, Collin confronts him and says "And then what? Then they gonna call the fucking cops and they gonna shoot my black ass and not you!" This is a concern that a lot of black people can relate to. Similar to the Central Park Five, even if the black person was not responsible for the violent actions, the



blame will often be placed on them because people love jumping to conclusions.

One counter-argument that people may bring up is that black people are not being treated unfairly by law enforcement or by other people in general. In opposition to this belief, one statistic that I find disturbing is the disproportionate amount of black people that are incarcerated compared to other races. For example, according to the NAACP, “One out of every three Black boys born today can expect to be sentenced to prison, compared 1 out 6 Latino boys; one out of 17 white boys.” In addition to this, after viewing other films or TV shows such as *Just Mercy*, *Fruitvale Station*, and *When They See Us*, all of which are based on true events, I find it very obvious that black people are still being discriminated against and treated unfairly in America based on the high level of discrimination depicted in these various forms of media.

I choose *Blindspotting* among other movies is because it is geographically relevant to me. Because I live in a town in East Bay, San Francisco I find stories that relate to Oakland and the overall Bay Area to be very interesting and enlightening. Other movies that have attracted me based on their location were *The Last Black Man in San Francisco* and *Fruitvale Station*. All of these movies are important to me because I take pride in the place that I live and I believe that it is necessary to learn about the lives of other people that live in the same area as you. Having lived in a more affluent area of the East Bay, I am often sheltered from the atrocities that are taking place around me. Rather than remain ignorant to these atrocities, it is my duty to educate myself better on the place that I call home.

In the end, *Blindspotting* highlights many different issues that people of color are still facing every day. From gentrification to making assumptions based on someone’s skin tone and appearance, this movie uses the dynamic between Collin and Miles to show that

it is time to let go of these preconceived notions that everyone is so eager to make. It is time to see both sides of the picture, educate yourself on what is going on around you, and get rid of that blindspot that is haunting you every day.

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# 19. How The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (2018- )

How *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018- ) Demonstrates Difference, Power, and Discrimination

By Natalie Godwin

After 22 years of silence, Sabrina the teenage witch from Archie Comics is back—and she stands for more than high school love triangles and petty drama. Since the 1996 television series *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* aired, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018) has rebirthed Sabrina, the main character, as a coming-of-age heroine with a social agenda that goes deeper than the boys that she's dating. Topics such as gender, feminism, sexuality, and the effects of the patriarchy are all hot topics included in the show, alongside the normal boil-and-bubble of Sabrina's witch life. Not only does Sabrina fight demons and ghosts, but also for the rights of herself and others, all while standing as a symbol of light and equality.

*The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* goes beyond the average supernatural drama by intentionally touching on prominent social issues, making it a prime example of how modern television shows are beginning to explore topics of social importance like difference, power, and discrimination (DPD) in their storylines. Sabrina's coming-of-age story demonstrates the struggle of being an independent young woman in a patriarchal system of witches. Forced to choose between the life of a witch and the life of a mortal, she must also consider her willingness to follow the Church of Night's belief system stemming from an ages-old patriarchal system

led by Satan himself. The television show is more than cheap entertainment and actually depicts realistic social issues through displays of Sabrina's character and the plot of her story.

From the beginning, Sabrina intertwines a large pool of people to create a story rich with multi-ethnic characters of varying sexual identities, backgrounds, social statuses, and lives. Although the main character is a white female who is able-bodied and straight, the show makes a point to normalize people who do not fit that description without interrupting the season's plot. In seasons one and two, plenty of different sexual identities considered "outliers" in present society were introduced to viewers in normal light; including polyamory, bisexuality, pansexuality, heterosexuality, and others. Sexuality was not the only inclusive aspect of the show's cast, as each of the characters are equally diverse and have different ethnic backgrounds that help to diversify the story. The only topic the show has not touched on so far are people of able versus disabled bodies. However, with the inclusivity of gender, sexuality, and race, the show does not simply ignore the discrimination that people of these identities faced. Much of the plotline is centered around the points made in the original Archie Comics, yes, but the show also goes out of its way to create sub-conflicts around the freedom of choice. An example of this was when Sabrina founded the Women's Intersectional Cultural and Creative Association (WICCA) in spite of their school principal after he banned students from reading multiple free-thinking books. Sabrina recognized such oppression of free will and acted against it for the benefit of all of her fellow students. In conclusion, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is a fresh take on the problems of modern-day society when it comes to issues involving DPD and the oppression of free will.



Screenshot from *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*

In DPD studies, the word “difference” refers to the gap in social opportunity between separate groups of people. In *Sabrina*, the difference has the same connotations. In fact, much of the show’s conflict centralizes around differences – differences in rights, differences in positions of power, even differences in authority. The entirety of Season One is about Sabrina’s choice between the Church of Night and the humans in her life – basically, choosing between her family or her friends. Although it is her birthright to follow the ideology of the witch, she heavily disagrees with signing her soul (and independence) away to the Devil. By doing so, she would be at the mercy of those in higher positions of power than her with little to no say in the matter. As she puts it, “I have reservations about saving myself for the Dark Lord. Why does he get to decide what I do or don’t do with my body?” (David). She hates the idea of losing her right to live freely. Plus, the witch’s society mirrors the same “one nation under one God” mentality that today’s American society does. Although both the human world and the witch world appeal to her for separate reasons, they each possess their own issues in terms of the word difference. Humans are naturally abundant in issues when concerning difference because society has a preconditioned system that separates people into boxes and

then pits them against each other. Witches, however, exist in a highly organized caste system that pushes the weak down to the bottom and lifts the powerful high, producing a vast difference in positions of power. The show depicts this by creating two societies that Sabrina exists in simultaneously, making a paradox for Sabrina: whichever side she chooses will have extreme differences, but she must choose one. Anyone looking to overcome said difference must use their willfulness to forge a path of their own, where the concept of “difference” is less acceptable and more of an issue in need of being resolved.

The topic of power in Sabrina is often the main drive behind the show’s conflicts and resolutions. Power is defined as “the possession of control, authority, or power over others” and it is clearly highlighted as a recurring issue in the television show. Each time conflict rises, it can be directly traced back to the people in positions of power who abuse their rights as leaders. The most prominent example of this in the first season would be the leader of the witches. The coven is ruled by a white, male priest of supreme and unquestionable power named Faustus Blackwood. Blackwood represents everything wrong with the Church of Night: he is corrupt, evil, and generally incredibly sexist. As Fandom quotes, Blackwood “took over the throne as the embodiment of Satan’s will on earth, restoring some practices fallen into disuse or considered barbaric.” He enforces ideas in the Church that subdue powerful women and push the males, or warlocks, to the top, like a patriarchal system that unevenly disperses power amongst the witch community. This directly mirrors what frequently happens in American society to females in positions of power. There have also been discussions of racial inequality in the show. Although I, a white female, did not have an issue regarding race while watching the show, many critics pointed out the show’s use of turning one of the women of color in the show into “the angry Black woman who attacks the misunderstood, small, blonde, white girl” (Crumpton). Some of the viewers believed that this was a serious offense in terms

of power that the show overlooked. However, the show attempts to maintain a diverse perspective that includes all issues concerning power and how said issues impact the story and its characters and did not intentionally mean to create a gap in positions of power between the two characters.



Screenshot from *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*

In terms of discrimination, Sabrina is a strong advocate for everything that stands against it. There are not many instances of overtly demonstrated discrimination in the series, but complicated subjects like gender and sexuality often bring up points of homophobia and sexism in the series's storyline. The strongest case of this would be when one gender-nonconforming character, Theo, was being bullied by the school jocks. Instead of standing for Theo's rights as a student, the principal then suggested that Theo switch schools to avoid being bullied for their identity. This is obviously an unacceptable response to any student being bullied, much less a gender-nonconforming one, and the show made a point to display the authoritative figure in this situation as a CIS white male with little to no support of the LGBTQ+ community. The directors of *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* made sure to get through to

the audience that discrimination, in any form, is unacceptable and should not be tolerated in modern society. Sabrina herself represents a force against injustice: as SyFy Wire wrote, “She’s positioned herself against men in power from the beginning. She suspects [them] before there’s anything to suspect. She refuses to fall prey to [their] power play, actively rebelling against [their] belief that “the old ways are best.” The old ways are best for those they benefited. Most of the time, those beneficiaries were men” (Toomer). As Wire stated, equal rights for the beneficiaries of injustice is not the same as equal rights for all, and that is what Sabrina stands for. In general, that is what all people should stand for, whether it be in a Netflix show or in real life.

Despite the show’s best intentions to represent all groups of people and their struggles, many critics disagree with the show’s intentions. One of the main counterarguments I researched was how *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* failed in representing its characters of color, like Prudence Night – the main black female character in the series. In an article published by Teen Vogue Magazine, author Taylor Crumpton described the situation between Sabrina and Prudence as if, “the show’s primary positioning of Prudence as an antagonist plays into a centuries-old myth developed by colonizers to dehumanize Black people for their traditional African spiritual beliefs and practices.” The author supported this claim by identifying a scene in “The Harrowing”, where Sabrina defends herself by holding the three antagonistic witches (Prudence and her sisters Dorcus and Agatha) in the air by their throats through a spell she had cast. The author describes that as “an image of a lynched Black woman in 2018.” Although this is a serious concern that someone sensitive to the topic of lynching may have been offended by such imagery, I do not believe that the show’s intention was to promote such hateful messages. One of the three witches in this scene was African-American, albeit she was the leader of the three. Plus, Sabrina did not attack them, she simply defended herself from them. *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina’s*



purpose is not to entice harmful, awful concepts into the world of witchcraft, but instead to deliver lighthearted comedy with a secondary theme of inclusive, intersectional feminism that is easily applicable to present society as well.

Personally, I chose this television show to write my essay on because I think it is something that all kinds of people find relatable, relieving, and entertaining. It's also one of the few shows featuring a feminist agenda that does not base its entire plot around it. Instead, it presents an average coming-of-age story with a darker appeal; integrating both the entertainment of supernatural fiction and the feminist side behind witch culture. After watching every season of *Sabrina*, I am excited for the next release of episodes and the concepts of social justice that I am sure will also be included within them.

*The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* delves deeper into the complicated topics of modern-day social justice issues than other science fiction shows have by far. By tackling these topics head-on, *Sabrina* is crowned as both an icon of feminism and equality. With her reboot from the 1996 release *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Sabrina's* newfound agenda has left a noticeable impact on not only the Netflix community but the community of supernatural fiction fans as a whole. The production of this show should be recognized for its fully forward attempt at creating a "safe space" for people of all backgrounds, even if some critics believed it missed some markers to make it the perfect self-aware TV show. Overall, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* successfully integrates the topics of difference, power, and discrimination into its plot and displays how *Sabrina's* shining feminism and equality can be a model for the rest of us to follow in modern society.

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## 20. Pose (2018- )

Intersections of Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality in Pose (2018- )

By João M. Bauer

The FX/Netflix Original Pose came to mind as an interesting study of how multiple social challenges may overlap, or intersect, amplifying the difficulties endured for people of all walks of life. Initiating itself as a window into New York ballroom culture in the 90s, Pose is a remarkable display of who we are as a living, breathing community of human beings – materialistic, sexual, prideful, often at the whim of the ebb and flow of culture, and almost always subject to our senses. During the 1990s, New York nightlife was segregated and stratified which highlights the relevance of this show as it relates to Difference, Power, and Discrimination studies. Throughout seasons one and two of Pose, the story continues to develop and show the darkness surrounding gay and trans communities as they struggle to gain acceptance and influence culture enough to be seen as fellow humans who deserve equitable treatment and respect. The diverse group of people who created Pose, many who are of color and of the LGBTQ community, encode their life experiences and challenges into a compelling story that opens up our hearts and minds to sympathize and act on these struggles. I never thought I would be writing an academic essay on the topic of sexuality, but the struggle felt by the colored LGBTQ person is something more people need to be aware of.

The cast and crew of Pose has set new standards as all five main trans actors are actually playing trans characters and the rest of the crew is well represented. A Hollywood Reporter article informs “Pose features the largest cast of transgender actors in series regular roles as well as the largest recurring LGBTQ cast ever for a scripted TV series” (Goldberg 3). The drag ballroom scene of the

late '80s and early '90s couldn't be better depicted by any other, as unique perspectives are brought into the acting process. Casting in this manner has worked well for this show, as it flourishes and develops into an immersive experience for the viewer. It is not easy being a woman in America (or many parts of the world), and it is certainly not easy being Latino, Black, Gay, or Trans but this show highlights why it is that Black Lives Matter as a movement, and as a motto from which to build equity and justice from. Through various film techniques, the message of Black being the lowest of the low is heard, specifically LGBTQ and Black. The Trans community feels like part of the untouchable caste of our society which is a heartbreaking notion to ponder. Not only is it awful to consider their suffering, but it is sometimes unbearable to watch how the AIDS patients are treated, and the parallels of the struggle for hegemony, political pressure, and public opinion which resonates with the pandemic event we are experiencing today. Difference, Power, Discrimination, and the intersection of race and sexuality have a disproportionately negative effect on LGBTQ communities, especially those who are of color and HIV-positive. Pose does a revolutionary work in portraying the injustices and makes effective use of cinematography and mise-en-scene to frame their story.

In order to study how Pose reveals the struggles of this community through film, it is important to remember "A growing body of research has documented that...(LGBTQ) young people experience worse outcomes in mental and physical health and education as compared to their heterosexual peers..." (Snapp 1). The same academic article which supports these findings reports some 59% to 84% of LGBTQ Youth experience verbal abuse at school. "Pose" reveals a bit of what it may be like out in the real world outside of the confines of a school – the bullying gets much worse in the adult world and takes its roots in our earliest years. Everything about Lulu is different than what we see about the men which stare at her. Lulu is introduced as a woman marginalized due to the intersection of race, gender, class, and LGBTQ identity.



Lulu, stared at as she walks in the all-white NYC gay bar in Pose S1E2 – “Access”

It is worth noting how the facial expressions (cinematography) are meant to cement this as the establishing shot for the scene, but it is rear-projected so we can take in the difference between Lulu and the surrounding men; some of which look incredulous, others appear as if someone brought in a foul odor. There is almost a vignette-type effect and the lighting is low-key but with a strike of color reflecting on Lulu, highlighting who she is and how she manages to remain strong among the unfriendly company. I can imagine the holistic effect of White patriarchy and homo/transphobia as a horrible experience, but “Pose” depicts strong persons with agency who are battle-hardened by years of verbal and sometimes physical abuse – none dares to apologize for being who they are. This is, in my personal opinion, fundamentally American, and it is part of what strengthens us as a country. We learn how to live together equitably, regardless of diverse backgrounds, and this process elevates us as an ethical productive society.

Pose depicts the White male as being in a position of power and holding some type of social status about that of the two women, Blanca and Lulu, who sit at his bar. There are no editing choices that

appear relevant; however, cinematography again works in synergy with mise-en-scene to send the message well. The White male bartender is elevated in power status above both women, rendering their reasons to be present there irrelevant as he requests them to leave. Insulted with disparaging remarks about it being “drag night” at the bar and hearing the hurtful “you’re dressed as women” type comment is no deterrent for Blanca, who stands up for herself and requests to speak to a manager. She believes her recent ballroom win and rises within her own community has earned her a seat at the table where she is at liberty to patronize whatever bar she wants, especially a gay one.



Blanca (left) and Lulu (right) being asked to leave by bartender in Pose S1E2 – “Access”

The film history textbook *America on Film* demonstrates that “visual culture in America often ‘expects’ women to be objectified for the pleasure of a male gaze” (Benshoff and Griffin 386), which was unfortunately experienced by these two women even after being told they’re not women. More appalling is the fact a gay man is trying to tell Blanca and Lulu who are women, what it supposedly means to be one. Notice the low-key lighting in the mise-en-scene choice and the angle/level of framing. The sound effect of the male bartender’s voice seems to boom over the bar’s music and chatter,

and the point of view between the two women shows how this man projects his power onto them. Feminism at its core is a fight for all peoples, as it seeks to empower the cornerstones of all of our lives – our motherly figures. Our roots, our origins, akin to the Earth herself as Mothers are willing to give away every part of their body and soul for the benefit and desires of their children. This is the moment Blanca begins to grow as a Mother and decides to stand up for who she is, declaring herself a “woman” and noting how disrespectful the man was, despite being in the same community. Blanca asserts giving birth does not guarantee or maintain itself as a requirement for motherhood by acting with grit. She rises shortly after the screenshot in Figure 2 and so does the camera with her. I associate the rises and fall in camera as points of view of power in *Pose*, and how the text seeks to describe exchanges between persons. Women are rising but continue the fight for equal recognition as the White patriarchal capitalist hegemony leverages its power by constantly attempting to provide an accepted version of womanhood – distorted by base heterosexual White male desires and their accepted norms for sexual intercourse.

Historically, women of all types have not fared well when they stand up, few in number, to power structures seeking to keep them “in their place”. The same is safely said for Latinos, Blacks, Gays, and especially Transsexuals. Blanca and Lulu are of color, they are women, they are trans, and there are issues of class that also intersect in their case as they’re considered the lowest caste of the LGBTQ community during this period, marginalized by others in their own struggle. *Pose* reminds me of the recent artistic depictions of the late George Floyd, with the text “I Can’t Breathe” as the caption. How could ones such as Blanca and Lulu “breathe” and thrive despite all the injustices? The screenshot below is perhaps the most powerful of this selection.



Lulu and Blanca framed next to trash, as if taken out like it by the manager, towering above them, in Pose S1E2 – “Access”

Blanca and Lulu are discriminated against due to their color and sexuality and literally taken out of the bar as if trash – notice the big bag next to them and its size compared to the two women. This is a long shot in cinematography terms, but it provides an interesting eyeline match and point of view contrast between the women, the manager, and where they stand in New York society. The women are told the gay men inside don't want anyone of color there, as New York City nightlife is segregated, and they don't want “drag queens” either. The trash bag is a powerful symbol as it relates to this discrimination. Discrimination works by defining someone (usually a messy subject) into a neat and orderly form one can then utilize or dispose of. It's an interesting artistic choice to put the bag there but perhaps it may have been a common feeling by women and the LGBTQ, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities – that they were treated as if society's trash and discriminated against to be judged as good or bad by men the powerful arbiters and exclusive enjoyers of patriarchal societies. The class textbook *America on Film* reminds us how “Living with patriarchal cultures, women have traditionally been less empowered and accorded fewer rights and opportunities than man, thus discussions on gender often center on



the ways women have been discriminated against in the media...” (Benshoff 302). The manager of the gay bar is empowered by default to exclude Blanca and Lulu from some joys of womanhood, belittling their identity by purportedly segregating according to color, which is socially acceptable at the time and enough of a virtue signal to attempt a distraction from the deep disrespect extended to the duo – being disposed of as if trash, said to be “dressed up like women”.

As of late, there has been enthusiasm for the representation of Black voices in our communities and many of us are engaged and ready to listen to their experiences and celebrate their contributions. There are many examples of opposition to this message, claiming it to be racist as it doesn't say All Lives Matter. It is unknown to many in our country of the struggle of the black community and truly how lowly they've had to live and place themselves in our society in order to be accepted. In short, it is important to educate on how if we make Black lives count across the board, we win a major victory for our society and the development of human culture. It is a slogan which I can claim to understand to some degree but it's only a tiny perspective of great moving pieces, most of which comes from the lives of phenomenal people of color who have felt the unequal weight of government power, discrimination, and how by just being seemingly different has historically called for a rejection of basic rights. “Pose” in the scenes studied within this essay, proves to be a visual point of inspection into American culture in the late 80's and early 90's – much of which remains felt today.

The gay bar scene we have studied in this essay is depicted as a simple outing to a bar where two women go out to commemorate a winning night. Multiple layers of oppression and disagreeable ideologies are present from the beginning and shown throughout “Pose” as in Figure 1. Masterful cinematography and mise-en-scene choices, which are clearly Black and LGBTQ, corresponding to the main characters the audience experiences.

Figure 2 shows the intersection of gender, sexuality, and race as the women are diminished, obscured, and made as if to possess a lower point of view than the White male bartender. Throughout this analysis, I've assumed he is a gay man, as this is a gay bar, but I don't believe it a necessary assumption. Though it is an interesting academic study in intersectionality to consider if the bartender is gay – for if he is, his position as a white gay man still towers far above that of two women of color who are LGBTQ and this episode depicts exactly what the manager treats them like; garbage needing to go outside.

The FX series *Pose* is recommended by me due to the effort, quality, and depth of content. The costumes are fantastic, the music is sensational and takes you back to a different time. The sets seem to be well designed and the musical aspects fit right into the story. It is a relevant series to today's fight for justice and equal recognition for Black lives, and if one watches both seasons, there are dark glimpses of similarities between how those with HIV/AIDS were treated in the beginning of the disease, as to the way Covid-19 patients and survivors are being treated today. It is an unfolding series of events but those who have suffered from the virus are likely to suffer some form of discrimination or social challenge for years to come. The difference with the HIV/AIDS spread was how its proportion of LGBTQ victims were large and it seemed an exclusive disease or curse which is shown in *Pose* through a couple of dark episodes in Season 2.

Cinematography and Mise-en-scene are what *Pose* excels at, delivering clues and interesting artistic content to digest and mull over as you watch the show. The creators leverage their film strengths to communicate to us the challenges faced by colored LGBTQ communities, and their resolve is infallible. We will grow as a people if we embrace each other's differences and continue taking our small steps toward acceptance. Allowing more open definitions

of love within mainstream culture may allow our traditions to flourish into mechanisms that benefit and don't hinder Us.

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## 2I. 6 Underground (2019)

Masculinity, Action, and Comedy in *6 Underground* (2019)

By Kelly Faith Faulkner

*6 Underground* (2019) is an action-comedy featuring several Hollywood celebrities. A basic introduction to the plot is that a billionaire fakes his death and recruits several others to do the same. These anonymous individuals, known only by their recruitment order, form the Ghost crew of vigilantes that assassinate the evil elite. Michael Bay, director of *Pearl Harbor* and *Transformers*, and the investors of the film, created it to be the perfect modern-era masculine movie, equivalent to the Hollywood Westerns of the 1930s.

One, the billionaire, is the leader of the Ghosts. Played by the Hollywood celebrity Ryan Reynolds, One's character is the stereotypical white, male hero and upholds the dominating image of the classic Hollywood protagonist. He is perceived as mysterious and highly educated. One indicator of this is when he references avoiding the "Apollo Daphne," statue while they drive cars through a museum destroying everything else. Later in the film, he has a heated discussion about Shakespeare and the meaning of his work with the antagonist. One seems egocentric and daring in this moment as he intellectually challenges the dictator. Drucilla Cornell analyzes Clint Eastwood's directing style and film choice in her book, *Clint Eastwood and Issues of American Masculinity* (2009). More specifically she studies the male depiction in movie genres with a primarily white male demographic. The author addresses the "man's man" character that dominates genres such as westerns, spy thrillers, boxing, and war movies. These film genres focus on themes of violence, revenge, and justice. Certain genres emphasize specific themes or stereotypes that will appeal more to a male audience.

Cornell explains that “fantasies associated with white masculinity and the easy privilege that comes with” are often at the core of films directed for and by white males. That fantasy is at the core of *6 Underground*; in all of the film’s high action scenes, the Ghost crew shoot endless bullets from the latest firearms, crash and demolish expensive luxury cars, drive through buildings, and have access to private helicopters and boats. These scenes are representative of both excessive violence and privilege of wealthy white males.

*6 Underground* consists of a nearly all-white cast with the exception, Manuel Garcia-Rulfo who plays Three, and Corey Hawkins who plays Seven, and was directed and written by white men. In *Men in Color*, Josep M. Armengol writes about racial representation of men in film. The book explains how masculinity and race are represented through film forms. Composite stereotypes are built into each of the lead males’ roles in *6 Underground*, these character stereotypes are layered, meaning that Hollywood composes a character by encoding dominant racial, gender, and sexuality ideologies. Reynolds’ role of One, is highly educated, wealthy, and shows dominance over the Three, Seven, and Four. In the role of Three, Garcia-Rulfo portrays several aspects of the composite Latino character described by Armengol. Three develops a romantic relationship with Two symbolic of the “Latin lover” stereotype developed in early Hollywood narratives (Benshoff and Griffin). In the Ghosts’ Hong Kong mission, he adds comic relief to the scene by accidentally getting high on the laughing gas meant for the enemies. Three is also significantly more emotional than the other men, he could not cut ties with his mother and fight it hand to hand combat more than the other male character.

Seven, on the other hand, is an African American Ghost member; in this role, Hawkins characterizes multiple Hollywood discriminatory references. Seven is introduced in a war scene explaining his PTSD and sense of failure. The African American male war veteran is a composite that the film industry has often

used. His PTSD is a scary yet justified mental illness. In patriarchy, expressing difference from others can be portrayed as weakness. One offers Seven a chance to prove that his failure does not define him, perpetuating the ideology of white patriarchy within the film. Throughout the film he is depicted as the sidekick, second only to One, that brings the group closer together and highlights the mysteriousness of One's character, ultimately building up the emotional connection between the viewer and One. These specific models, put in place by Michael Bay and his writers in *6 Underground*, depict radicalized male characters which highlight the issues of discrimination, power, and difference in Hollywood.



[Screenshot from 6 Underground](#)

Male Roles compared to female roles, within the context of the film. The article, “‘Wham! Bam! Thank You Ma’am!’: The New Public/Private Female Action Hero” by C.L Stasia, compares the difference in film form and encoding between the gender of the main characters. Male roles are meant to evoke strength, protection, and dominance while females play a subordinate role or love interest, often objectified, their beauty is equated to their success. In *6 Underground*, the female team members are outnumbered but are considered equally valuable to the secondary protagonists such as Three and Four. Both have successful careers,

Two is a former CIA operative, and Five is a doctor. Similar to the male roles they are seen shooting guns, surviving violence, but to encode Hollywood expectations of femininity, the women wear tight-fitting dresses and use their sexuality to their advantage. Two, played by Melanie Laurent, uses her good looks to blend in or get by unnoticed on missions, for example when coming face to face with the enemy on his yacht, she pretends to be drunk. Unsurprisingly, both end up as love interests of the male characters, Two and Three become a couple, and Four and Five are seen alone together in one of the concluding scenes.

Exploring the *mise en scene* used for women in *6 Underground*, women are typically presented in male films as hypersexualized characters that support the male characters. C.L Stasia explains that There is a growing trend of women in action or hero roles. While Hollywood places women in more dynamic scenes and less traditional roles, there is an increased emphasis on over sexualizing the characters through film forms. One example, right at the beginning of the film, is Five, in the middle of a high-speed chase, she is removing a bullet from Two, a heroic feat, but then the camera speed slows and blood squirts all over her face. Five, played by Adria Arjona, is also used as bait at the start of the Vegas mission; the scene centers around her entry into the enemy's building. Gas masks are fetishized multiple times throughout the film, this is a form often used in Hollywood style to increase the excitement of the viewer. *Mise en scene* for men in hero roles is drastically different. Stella Bruzzi, author of *Men's Cinema*, determined specific forms used to convey masculinity. Lighting, editing, and visual design forms are used differently depending on the character and underlying message of the scene. Bruzzi explains that by moving the camera in accordance to the actor's movements an "intense and oppressive unity" between the character and the viewer. (pg 36-37) In the film, the camera angle and speed usually follow the male characters, with few expectations such as Five being used to gain

access to the building. The author focuses on the mise-en-scene of masculinity.

In 6 *Underground*, film form is used to decode an emotional connection to One, as Seven tries to get him to open up about his past and disconnect from emotions. The camera is panned out and at mid-range, then slowly moves in on One as he begins his inspirational speech about “changing the world” mattering more than their individual lives. An empowering song begins to play in the streets of Turgistan which cues explosions, sound is another major component of the mise en scene in this film. There is a noticeable Repetition in Action scenes: slow build up song in the beginning, explosions or violent ambush, followed by a car chase or massive gunfire, and then a slow-motion moment within a highly dynamic scene. Heavy bass music, like rap or dubstep, is used during the finale of the action scene. These micro scenes were either significantly gory or provided comedic relief. For example, the first action scene at the beginning of the movie includes a slow-motion clip of the car drifting out of control and nearly missing a baby and a close up of a dangling eyeball used to unlock a smartphone. Editing form is obvious and intentional, that repetition makes the rapidly evolving story easier to decode. Fast, intense scenes cut directly to slow-motion clips, and the final acts of the action are always followed by softer lower music. When Six gets left behind and murdered, the scene immediately changes to them on a boat setting Six’s body out to sea. Editing and literary design pull the viewer straight from action, to sad scene, and then directly back to the action by introducing Seven in a war scene explaining his back story.

These form techniques are decoded by the viewer and promote consumerism and acceptance of American cultures’ dominant ideologies. Forbes is a well-known magazine; their Editor’s Pick for this film was, “Review: Michael Bay And Ryan Reynolds’ ‘6



Underground' Is Another Lousy Netflix Blockbuster," by Scott Mendelson. Mendelson holds the position that the film perpetuates stereotypes and follows a classic Hollywood narrative. Distributed by Netflix, and produced by Skydance Media and Bay Film, the budget for *6 Underground* was a whopping \$150 million dollars, in true Hollywood fashion (IMBd.com). Author for TheVerge.com, Julia Alexander, wrote in "6 Underground is Netflix's Next Questionable Attempt to Build a Blockbuster Movie Franchise" that the main difference between old Hollywood and new Hollywood is their ability to successfully encode, or teach society. Hollywood executives maintain their oligopoly through the objectification of women and discrimination against minorities. The issues of difference that Hollywood perpetuates about race and gender are heavily used in *6 Underground*. Classic Hollywood form is alive and thriving; although the distribution has evolved to streaming and memberships with unlimited views, Hollywood still profits from promoting patriarchal values, regardless of the platform.

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## 22. Black And Blue (2019)

*Black And Blue* (2019): An Issue with Race and the Police

By Kacey Dickman

Growing up in a middle-class white home, I never had to look over my shoulder in worry of police brutality. In fact, the phrase “police brutality” was not in my vocabulary until adulthood. For this final assignment, I chose the 2019 thriller *Black And Blue* directed by Deon Taylor. This film is very fitting in light of recent tragic events. I hope I can do justice in my words to what has recently happened as I break down this thought-provoking film. The storyline and themes of this film were very methodically planted throughout the film, designed to open one’s eyes to current issues, such as racism and corrupt police, that our nation is facing.

*Black And Blue* is set in New Orleans in 2019 when Alicia West (Naomi Harris) returns to her hometown after her deployment in the US Military. She grew up in the lower socio-economic class neighborhoods part of New Orleans. Alicia grew up surrounded by gangs and drug dealing. To better herself, she made a life in the military which gave her a sense of duty. So as she returns home, she joins the New Orleans Police Department. As a young African-American woman, she faces racial issues inside and outside of her job. The brief summary of the film features Alicia West taking on an extra shift with a senior officer. They take a drug-related call to the rougher parts of town. She is told to stay put in the police car, but when she hears shots fired, she investigates. As she finds her temporary partner in a group with Narcotic Officers who had just executed young drug dealers, they see her. One Narc shoots at her and she escapes. They realize she has a body camera on, and pursue her in order to destroy the evidence of their crimes. The narcotic officers who shot the young drug dealers and Alicia tell the local

gang leader that she was the one that killed his dealers. This sets up a hunt for her with the local gang and the police station.



Screenshot from *Black and Blue*

Back to scenes that deal with race and social class, the start of the film begins with Alicia running in a higher income neighborhood and is pulled over by two middle-aged white cops. They immediately got aggressive with her when she was being compliant and tried to tell them that it was her neighborhood she was running in. She even tells them that she is “blue” referencing herself as being a police officer. Until they find her wallet and badge, they release her and apologize. This unnecessary use of force happens all the time with officers and those in the black community. According to Clarence Edwards, “Police officers from each of the aforementioned groups sometimes bring negative attitudes and or stereotypes to these communities that can adversely affect their decisions and the fairness of their enforcement actions” (Edwards). After realization, they tried to play off that it wasn’t about race and they were looking for someone “matching her description.” They obviously targeted her because she was a black woman running in a high-income neighborhood. This was an act of direct stereotyping her with racism and classism.

As described previously, the two male officers used their badge to force a person into submission. That person was Alicia West, a fellow police officer. It wasn't until they saw her ID and realized she was one of them that they stopped harassing her. Even though before seeing her identification, she tried to tell the male officers of her affiliation, they kept handling her with unnecessary aggression. This abuse of power is used every day in real life on African-American civilians, but not all of them are as fortunate as Alicia was in *Black And Blue*.

This film has so many subtle hints and metaphors with the use of eyes. I believe this theme of cinematography was used to get to the viewers. One scene cuts to the span of the city, specifically on an abandoned building, graffitied with "Open Your Eyes" along the base of the building. This was such a subtle yet loud smack in the face to the viewers watching this film early on. Other instances with eyes towards the end of the film. As Alicia fights for her life against the narc officer who put a bounty on her head with the gangs, the film cuts to many different graffiti paintings of eyes on the inner courtyard of where the fight was taking place. I believe this is a way for the movie to speak to the viewers that a silent witness helps no one. If no one says anything, the corrupt get away with their abuse of power.

The attention to detail from the writers and director with the issues of racism and classism are very in-depth. With the subtle use of eyes, to the beginning of the film with Alicia's instance with the white officers. The writers made sure to include as many aspects of the social issues that African-Americans face with corrupt police officers. As previously discussed, direct racism is described by the white officers' abuse of power when pulling Alicia over from her run. More indirect incidents just barely hint at racism and exclusion towards Alicia West. One scene shows the locker room with all the official placards with the officers' names on the lockers, but Alicia

has one made out of white tape and a black marker. Yes, she is new to the department, but they knew they hired her and it would not be hard to have an official one made for her. Her status as a rookie is why she is sent on a double shift, and ultimately leading up to the whole storyline of her witnessing an illegal execution and so forth.

There is one huge unconventional issue with race that this movie addresses, civilian African-Americans views on African-American police officers. Alicia West grew up in the “ghetto” as described in the film. She used to be a part of the police fearing group. Due to her leaving her past behind, joining the military, and ultimately joining the Police Force, she is seen as a “traitor” to her old “friends.” This complicates how a person of color in law enforcement may interact with people of their own race. According to Carbado and Richardson, “The central question we ask is: What are the dynamics that might shape how African American police officers police other African Americans? Asked another way, what do existing theories about race and race relations, and historical and empirical studies on race and policing, suggest about how African Americans will police our own?” (Carbado & Richardson) Early in the film Alicia and her partner stop at a convenience store to get snacks, Alicia sees a young boy playing with his skateboard. When she tries to strike a conversation with him, he gets defensive about the ownership of the skateboard, and his mother quickly scolds him for talking to an officer. Alicia tries to de-escalate the situation, but the mom wants to part in any conversation with an officer. Alicia starts to recognize the woman as an old best friend, but the woman coldly rejects her by saying she doesn’t know her. A hidden meaning was implied with her statement, that she doesn’t know Alicia as “cop Alicia.” Even though Alicia West grew up with her and would obviously recognize an old friend, because she is now a cop, she is no longer considered a friend.

In the movie, Alicia tries to make a point that one is not “black or blue” that you can be both... hence the name Black And Blue. As A.

O. Scott describes in the NYtimes, “the neglect and corruption that followed – are still evident, and the alienation of poor, black citizens is painful and profound. Alicia wants to believe something else is possible, that common ground exists, that people don’t have to be classified as ‘allies or enemies.’” (Scott, A.) The long bloody history of police officers and the African-American community has alienated African-American police officers from their fellow brothers and sisters at home and vice versa. I feel like this film is trying to humanize each end. The casting of this film also helped bring these issues to life. Naomi Harris’s performance is brilliant. This movie goes past just being an entertaining thriller. But subtly deals with racial issues within and without the police community. I think this film can unify those who stand on both points of view of police brutality.



Screenshot of footage of the theatrical premier of *Black and Blue*

I have personally seen this movie a few times. Mostly for entertainment purposes, but also got the message from the film each time. When I watched the movie with my roommates, my one roommate was actually the one to point out all the subtle innuendos with the eyes. That point of view really hit me hard in understanding the entire point of the film. The audience itself needs to wake up

to the issues of race and the police. This film would definitely not work or resonate deep with the audience if it was performed by a white actress. There was no white-washing nor was there any downplaying on the social issues that are wrong with America right now.

In all honesty, I almost picked the movie *Blackkkklansman*, but *Black And Blue* deals more directly with today's issues within the police force. The movie is up to date with more current issues at hand, especially now more than ever. I picked this movie out of all the others because it isn't super alt-left or alt-right. It can't really offend anyone, and it portrays real issues so accurately and blatantly. There is no way of defending either end of corruption in the police community or in the low-income African-American community. Drug dealing and gang life are wrong, but so is corruption and disregard for life in the police force. When Milo, a character in *Black And Blue*, questions why Alicia doesn't just cave in and surrender, she goes to tell him that, "A person is a person, and a murder is a murder. It doesn't matter who you are." Which is so true. This moment humanizes both the badge and the black community. This film is also entertaining, so it doesn't cause a person to feel like a message is being preached to them. Much like in chapter 3 of *America On Film* discusses Classical Hollywood Narrative Form.

I may not know the struggle that the African-American community faces with the Police community, but I can try to understand and listen. Especially with current events happening right now, the black community needs unity from all walks of life right now. I hope that this film can be seen by others, and help them understand the social issue at hand in America. Issues with race, social class, sexuality, gender, etc... The more we as the people try to understand each other, the better our country will become.

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## 23. Knives Out (2019)

*Knives Out* (2019): A Whodunit for the Modern Era

By Kiersten Johnston

Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie get a modern, comical flair in *Knives Out*, a film which never takes itself too seriously, but always keeps you guessing. Set in a Victorian gothic-style mansion filled with murder mystery props and statues and paintings that seem to watch your every move. Suspenseful orchestra music and dim-lit rooms set the tone for the mysterious plot of the film. However, within the first ten minutes, we learn that this movie isn't your classic whodunit, it is actually a very clever, entertaining film that (not so) subtly critiques certain ideologies and class structures embedded in American culture. One of the main social issues shown throughout the film is the current political administration's attitudes toward immigrants, more specifically the treatment of Hispanic people in this country. Also, the film touches on class division and the perception of power by the 1%. As an article by Andrew Chow at Time magazine said, "By its end, *Knives Out* has unexpectedly revealed itself to be a razor-sharp parable of a prevailing attitude towards illegal immigrants in America—and one of the most incisive socio-political films released this year." (Chow) The director, Rian Johnson highlights these social issues through quick-witted dialogue and brilliant literary design, but also with accusatory camera angles and smart cinematography.



Screenshot of Thrombey Mansion in *Knives Out*.

*Knives Out* begins with the death of famed mystery writer and the patriarch of the Thrombey family, Harlan Thrombey who is played by Christopher Plummer. His death is ruled a suicide by the two investigators on the scene, but a private detective by the name of Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) who was hired by an anonymous source shows up to investigate any foul play or motive for murder. We are introduced to Harlan's family which is played by a star-studded cast including Jamie Lee Curtis, Michael Shannon, Chris Evans, and Don Johnson. Through a series of interviews, we learn that Harlan's family all have secrets of their own and are all reliant on his fortune despite their claims of being "self-made" without his help. As the story unfolds any one of Harlan's family members could have committed the crime, but our attention is taken away from the Thrombey's and aimed toward Harlan's innocent, loving caretaker Marta Cabrera (Ana De Armas). Marta winds up being the unlikely star of the show as the film spins an intricate web of murder, intrigue, greed, and power. I would be doing a disservice to the film by giving away any more information about the storyline, but let's just say things aren't as they appear in this case. To quote

the eccentric investigator Benoit Blanc, “It’s a weird case from the start. A case with a hole in the center. A doughnut.”

One way that director Rian Johnson brought attention to anti-immigration and discrimination toward Latinx people was by making Marta the lead role and by not subjecting her to typical Latina stereotypes. Author Andrew Chow at Time magazine explains just how actress Ana De Armas felt about her role as Marta in this interview, “I received a logline that said, ‘Caretaker, Latina, pretty,’ and then one scene of the script—and that really didn’t speak to me.” The article goes on to explain that, “Once she read the whole script, she was blown away. ‘It was a dream. These characters don’t exist,’ she said. ‘Especially in this type of setup: a wealthy family played by all of these big movie stars, and then you have a Latina—the last thing you would imagine is that the movie is about her.’” (Chow) As we can see, Johnson did a great job of casting someone who could truly understand the discrimination facing a Latina character working for a wealthy, white family. Another way that Johnson gave power to Marta’s character was by letting Ana De Armas have some fun with an ongoing joke throughout the film. The way she did this was by having each member of the family say a different South American country that they thought Marta was from (Chow). They all sound so sure of themselves when saying answers like “She’s from Uruguay” or Brazil, Ecuador, etc. This ongoing joke shows just how ignorant people can sound when assuming someone’s nationality instead of just asking.



Screenshot from *Knives Out*.

Difference is quickly established amongst the family of recently deceased Harlan Thrombey. One of his grandsons is labeled a “Nazi Alt-Right Troll” while his granddaughter is an outspoken liberal. This family is dysfunctional and full of self-entitled snobs. No matter what side of the political spectrum they’re on, one thing that seems to tie them together is money. One way that the director sheds light on difference in the film is by sharp-tongued dialogue scenes that have the camera quick-cut between the different actors. For example, when we are first introduced to Harlan’s eldest grandson, Ransom, who is a spoiled trust fund bachelor played by Chris Evans, he instantly disrupts the mood of the scene. The camera quickly cuts from Ransom telling a member of his family to “eat shit” then shows their surprised, insulted faces. This transition allows us to see just how different Ransom is from the rest of the family. He is unafraid to confront them in person, rather than gossiping behind their backs. But, despite their differences, the family is usually seen grouped together in the many parlor-like rooms of the mansion. This is done via long shot scales that ensure all members of the family are in view of the camera and in focus. However, throughout these scenes, Ransom can be seen sulking in a corner of the room shrouded in shadows and visibly cut-off from the rest of the family.

Power is just as important as wealth in this family. Each member of the Thrombey family vies to be the center of attention and the most successful. They do this by establishing authority over those beneath them and by backstabbing and pointing blame on everyone else. Every character is guilty of flaunting and abusing their positions of power, but none do it as well as Ransom. He acts just how you'd imagine a wealthy playboy who has never worked a day in his life would. He calls the staff at Harlan's mansion "The Help" and demands that they call him by his real name, which is Hugh. Cinematographer Steve Yedlin draws attention to the power differences between social classes by framing characters into the scene based on importance (IMDB). In many scenes we can see the powerful, outspoken members of the family in front, usually voicing their opinions about some political, familial differences. While in the back of the frame, stand "the help". It isn't until later in the movie that Marta becomes the protagonist of the film and we see more close-ups of her and following shots that reinforce this shift in power.

Discrimination is a central idea in *Knives Out*. As mentioned before, even though the Thrombeys consider Marta to be part of the family they still don't know what country she is from. This quote from Linda Holmes at NPR dives a little deeper into this dynamic, "Marta is 'the help' to many of the Thrombeys, and the family treats her with a sharply observed combination of affection, condescension and dismissal, provided she stays in what they consider her place." (Holmes) The film does a great job of drawing attention to current events and political attitudes in the real world. This is showcased perfectly in a scene where the family is debating the anti-immigration policies of Donald Trump, they don't directly say his name, but they make unmistakable references about him. During the debate, one of Harlan's daughter-in-law says, "We are losing our culture. Every day thousands of Mexicans come into our country." When she receives criticism for this comment she states, "Don't make this a race thing. I would say the same thing

if they were European immigrants.” Some members of the family go on to say that it is inhumane what is happening to children at the border, while other members blame the parents and say that immigration is okay if it is done legally. Meanwhile, Marta’s mother is an illegal immigrant. This fact will later be used to blackmail her by the self-proclaimed liberal granddaughter. Clearly, literary design is a tool used throughout the film to make social commentary about current social problems such as race, immigration, and inhumane conditions at border control facilities.



Screenshot of Thrombey family in *Knives Out*.

Even though *Knives Out* is a work of fiction, the attitudes displayed by some of its characters are very real. In a literary journal about the psychology behind immigration attitudes for Denison University, Nida Bikmen writes, “Often, supporters of restrictions refer to their own family history of immigration but stress that their ancestors came to the United States legally unlike some current immigrants.” (Bikmen) This tactic is used to make it seem like the person is for immigration when really they don’t understand just how complicated the process of obtaining citizenship is. It is interesting to see how both sides of the spectrum use similar arguments to support their claims. An example of this can be seen here: “In the United States, the phrase “nation of immigrants” is used to both promote and restrict immigration. Those who use the phrase to promote immigration point to the similarities between

current and previous generations of immigrants, whereas those who use it to restrict immigration emphasize the differences between the two generations.” (Bikmen) This contradictory dynamic represents much of the feuding that we see within the Thrombey family.

*Knives Out* immerses you into a modern-age Clue-like world while still maintaining its vintage film feel. Details like camera angling, lighting, and framing all work together to portray the different power dynamics within the Thrombey family. While the literary design and cinematography, help tell the story of a Latina woman’s rise from a secondary character to the protagonist. Director Rian Johnson seamlessly worked complex themes and social commentary into a classic murder mystery film. Throughout the film, you may think that you know how it will end or who committed the crime, but you would be wrong. *Knives Out* forces you to go along for the ride and take a closer look not at just the characters and their motives, but at society itself. To Benoit Blanc, “This is a twisted web, and we are not finished untangling it, not yet.”

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## 24. Knives Out (2019) - Essay 2

### Differences in Class and Race in *Knives Out* (2019)

By Cole Keady

When I first saw Rian Johnson's modern-day Whodunnit film *Knives Out*, I knew that it was something unique. It's been a long time since we've seen an original Murder-Mystery film, and given the current age of sequels, reboots, and adaptations of novels, seeing that *Knives Out* was an original screenplay got me really excited. The world of Murder-Mysteries has been pretty stagnant over the last half-century. Apart from the brilliant works of Agatha Christie and subsequent movie adaptations, the Murder-Mystery genre has been demoted to the world of detective shows and one-off, half-baked television specials. Being an avid fan of the Murder-Mystery genre, I was excited for this movie from the moment I saw the trailer.

*Knives Out* stands as the beginning of a new era in cinema, proving to movie studios that we want more well-written Murder-Mystery films. Surprisingly, this isn't the first time we've seen the murder mystery genre be forgotten. Back in the early 20th century, many writers spoke out about the bland, overused tropes that made mystery novels famous and condemned them from being original writing. As B. Murphy wrote, "although the question of whether mystery and detective novels could achieve the same level of craftsmanship and literary significance as the 'serious' novel was long ago laid to rest, mystery writers themselves kept digging it up again" (Murphy, 9). This historical event illustrates that history tends to repeat itself, and indeed has done so with the release of *Knives Out*. However, the so-called hiatus from the genre has not been without its growth and evolution. Not only does the movie have engaging characters and a well-written plotline, it has well-incorporated, real-world issues of class and race discrimination.

The visual imagery and literary design help aid the film's messages in a well-written way and does so in a nuanced, natural manner.

The story of *Knives Out* takes place in modern-day Massachusetts in 2019, so the themes that it addresses are ones that audiences can relate to, and gives us character viewpoints that we can relate to in one way or another. The first set of characters we meet are the Thrombeys, who are your typical wealthy, white American family. Although not all of them are perfectly able, as seen by Walt, who walks with a cane, each of them strongly embody the privileged upper-class. They all dress in clean, high fashion clothing, all have expensive smartphones and drive shiny new cars. However, all of them have earned their success thanks in part to the patriarchal head of the family, Harlan Thrombey; his daughter Linda built her real estate business "from the ground up" with a million-dollar loan from Harlan, his son Walt runs Harlan's book publishing company, and Joni, Harlan's daughter-in-law gets an "Allowance" as well as tuition money to put her daughter, Meg, through College.



Screenshot of Marta being interviewed by Blanc and the Detectives in *Knives Out* (2019).

This biggest contrast of power is if we compare the Thrombeys to Harlan's nurse, Marta. Although we learn that Marta is an immigrant from somewhere in South America, we never actually learn where

specifically. Each of the Thrombeys claim that she is from either Paraguay or Uruguay, and even Ransom calls her Harlan's "Brazilian Nurse". This recurring "joke" illustrates that none of the Thrombeys have actually bothered to remember where she is from, or even ask her at all. This situation also arises during the detective questioning process, and indeed does what so many films from the early to mid 20th century did, which was to introduce women and/or people of color and who they are from a white person's perspective. Not only do we hear who she is from the Thrombeys first, but she is also interviewed by the detectives last. Although understandable, since she isn't a family member, she saw Harlan every day, perhaps knew Harlan better than anyone, and she was one of the last people to see him alive. In spite of that, none of them suggested that Marta should be interviewed first because they cared too much about being interviewed themselves.



Screenshot of the Thrombeys looking at Meg (offscreen) in *Knives Out* (2019).

This theme of power in this film boils down to the core elements of ego and self-absorbed behavior from the Thrombey family. All of them are well off in their own regards, but none of them stack up to Harlan, who truly built his career from the ground up. As Alissa Wilkinson from Vox wrote in her review, "its members are worthy

of ridicule, not because they're wealthy but because they refuse to admit their wealth comes from anything but their own merit". We see this during the detectives questioning the Thrombeys, not only because they avoid addressing it, but much of what they say is not the truth. For example, while the famed sleuth Benoit Blanc is questioning each of the Thrombeys, we cut away to show what actually happened; Harlan had found out Richard was cheating on Linda, Joni had been pocketing Meg's tuition money for herself, and Harlan had fired Walt from the publishing company.

However, when each of them is asked about what had happened, they lie and claim otherwise, in order to avoid the question. Even though their lies aren't directly pertinent to the case, and the detectives later admit that none of those is a strong enough motive to kill Harlan, each of them lied to protect their image and reputation. Contrasted to Marta, who at this point in the film is the least powerful, but also has the most to hide. Not only was she the last to see Harlan alive, for all she knows she killed Harlan and is now hiding that to protect her mom, who is undocumented and could be deported if Marta was found guilty. The fact that Marta's police questioning is pushed to the end not only shows the imbalance of power between the Thrombeys and Marta but also shows that, as Marta says to Blanc, "You're not much of a detective".

Another example of a character exercising their power is by Linda's son Ransom in the final act. Once Blanc has pieced it all together as to how Harlan was killed, Ransom appears to be the guilty party. Once Ransom has been accused, he turns on Marta and threatens her with lawyers, and how little jail time he'll receive for attempting to kill Harlan and the other housekeeper Fran. This part in the film perfectly illustrates the way that our society works and has worked for a long time; regardless of how much evidence is stacked against you, and as long as you have enough money and influence over the accuser, you have a higher chance of only receiving a "slap on the wrist" for your crimes. Not only is

dominance being shown, but Ransom is also a white man talking down to Marta, who is a South American woman and is threatening her with his power. Even though at this point in the movie, Marta has inherited all of Harlan's assets and is immensely more powerful than Ransom, he knows full well, and even says that he'll barely get any jail time for his "alleged crimes".



Screenshot of Daniel Craig as Blanc analyzing the carpet for clues in *Knives Out* (2019).

The concept of discrimination in *Knives Out* is purposely obvious. Because the movie calls back so often to Agatha Christie film adaptations of the twentieth century, many of which featured a predominantly white cast, with only people of color pushed to side characters or extras. We see in many of Christie's novels the tropes that are represented in *Knives Out*, such as *Three Act Tragedy*, *Black Coffee*, and *The Adventure of the Italian Nobleman*. This is another brilliant way that *Knives Out* modernizes the Murder-Mystery genre. As Brian Tallerico similarly stated in his review, "Ultimately, as in the films and books that inspired this one, it's all about the whodunit, which is revealed in such unexpected ways that just when you think you have it all figured out, you realize something doesn't add up." For the first half of the movie, you believe that Marta has

killed Harlan, whether intentional or not. Where the film subverts our expectations is that Harlan doesn't die by the vengeful hands of Marta, but rather her own innocent mistake and a hasty cover-up by Harlan so Marta's mother isn't deported. Because as Meg mentioned earlier, "He's a truly selfless man", Harlan knows that if Marta were found to be the cause of his death, that due to the Slayer Rule, Marta wouldn't inherit the fortune and his family would take it instead. Fast forward to the end of the movie, once the true suspect has been caught and Marta knows that she's inheriting Harlan's estate, we see her drinking out of Harlan's "My House, My Rules, My Coffee!" mug, her hands leaving only "My house" visible, staring over the balcony of the family mansion looking down on the Thrombeys. This final scene is perhaps the best in the entire film, not only because it's such a subtle way to show Marta literally standing tall over the easily hateable Thrombeys, but also because the discrimination roles are flipped here. The once rich, white family is left defeated and penniless by Harlan and Marta, the once lower-class immigrant is standing on the balcony of their former family home, more powerful than them all.

When I first saw *Knives Out* in theaters, I was invested in the story almost immediately. I grew up watching the basic, recycled plots of Scooby-Doo, so I don't have a very high bar for what entertains me with a mystery plotline. However, it has quickly become one of my favorites because of its production value and fantastic literary imagery. Over the last decade, lots of mystery films or TV show episodes have prioritized concepts of difference, power, or discrimination, rather than the characters, plot, or literary imagery, resulting in a bogged down half-baked plotline and this movie proves you can do both.

One example of prioritizing identity issues over viewer engagement are the recent two seasons of the BBC show Doctor Who. For over 60 years, Doctor Who has been a staple in the Sci-Fi genre, pioneering new villain ideas and bringing us engaging

and creative stories. However, with the recent change of the series' showrunner, the show has begun to include such issues where it hadn't before. Granted, this is by no means unwarranted. The show has included real-world issues for decades and has done it quite successfully. However, given the show's predominantly white-male Doctor/white-female companion archetype for most of its history, it's understandable to see how the show would want to diversify its character base and attempt to give stories that also could relate to our modern-day issues. Unfortunately in its efforts, the show's episodes have become dull and propagandistic, and are full of weak villains and shallow, unrelatable characters. However, seeing that the writers and showrunner are actively thinking about these issues and want to bring them to Doctor Who is encouraging. However, if we look at the way that *Knives Out* has been able to incorporate elements of discrimination and power into the characters and the plotline, there has to be a level of nuance brought to its execution, and better incorporation of those concepts.

*Knives Out* marks the dawn of a new era for Murder-Mysteries. Not only did the film reintroduce or renew our love for the genre, but it did so at a time where many movies and TV shows were unable to achieve the same level of cultural and historical insight. As Brian Tallerico stated in his [rogerebert.com](https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/knives-out-2019) review, "it's not just a wildly fun mystery to unravel but a scathing bit of social commentary about where America is in 2019". The relevant concepts of race and class, paired with how it changes those concepts in new ways is what makes the film so uniquely insightful. Seeing the movie and the story that it tells is what I believe made it so successful. As a result of its success, Rian Johnson has been reported to be writing a sequel within the same shared cinematic universe with Daniel Craig returning as Benoit Blanc. If that is true, and if this film is any indication of how insightful the sequel will be, we are in for an exciting cinematic universe. I absolutely would recommend this film to anyone who loves Whodunnits, and especially to anyone who loves engaging, progressive films.



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## 25. Joker (2019)

How Class Divide Leads to Violent Anarchy in *Joker* (2019)

By Zach Foutch

Joker looks on as Murray and his studio audience watch his failed stand-up routine. He becomes visibly more agitated. Tonight, he had planned to kill himself, hoping that his death would make more “cents” than his life; however, watching his boyhood hero, Murray Franklin laugh at his failure, Joker decides on a different path. Everything in the past week has led to this moment, Joker has been beaten down and cast out from society. Now, his eyes are open to how truly awful people have become. His final joke will be the catalyst that causes the lower class of Gotham to rally around the clown and overthrow the elites and oppressors that have kept them down with myths of opportunity. He turns to Murray, “How about another Joke, Murray? What do you get when you cross a mentally ill loner with a society that abandons him and treats him like trash? I’ll tell you what you get! You get what you fucking deserve!” BANG! Murray dies and the man who was nobody, who lost his identity. Feeling abandoned by society because of his difference, he becomes a somebody.

The man who would become somebody does not start out as Joker. Rather, Arthur Fleck lives a seemingly normal life. He works as a clown for hire. He has a small and run-down apartment, but he can at least provide for himself and his mother. On the surface, Fleck works to carve out his own place in society. However, when examining his character some dark truths begin to emerge. Fleck is lonely, mentally ill, medicated, and as he explains to his therapist, “All I have are negative thoughts.” It’s no surprise then, to learn that Fleck frequently escapes his dreary life with vivid fantasies of love and support from those around him. Indeed, these stories are so

encoded with realism, the viewer is left to decode the message as reality vs. fantasy.

Furthermore, his life as a clown is not a happy one. A group of students steal his sign and when he gives chase, they beat him harshly and leave him curled up in the alley, as people walk by, barely sparing a glance at him. Early on in the film, the director, Todd Phillips makes it abundantly clear that, Arthur has been shunned by society. He is different and the people of Gotham want nothing to do with him, because of that difference. Consequently, Arthur and his peers within the lower social class, face constant discrimination from the powerful elites who believe themselves inherently better than the lower echelon of society. Although Arthur is a member of the lower class, the director depicts his peers constantly shunning him because of Arthur's quirks. Arthur is different, he has an uncontrollable laugh disorder, that causes him to break out laughing at inappropriate moments. His disorder makes those around him uncomfortable and keeps him in a perpetual state of loneliness.



Screengrab from *Joker*, Arthur laughs uncontrollably on the bus, making those around him uncomfortable.

The parallels between our society and that of Arthur's are extraordinary. We cast out those we deem different for fear of opening ourselves up to discrimination for associating with the undesirables of society. Arthur is very clearly meant to represent an undesirable. He is poor, mentally ill, medicated, uneducated, and unaccepted. The point of Arthur's constant beat downs lays the groundwork for his eventual turn into Gotham's prince of crime. Though he is discriminated against, his difference is a much bigger focus of the movie. Arthur's laughing disorder causes him to laugh loudly and uncontrollably at inappropriate times. It's a major stigma to be mentally ill, mental illness is by and large, not understood by society. In fact, one of Arthur's jokes makes a powerful statement about the difference those with mental illness feel. Arthur believes, "The worst part of having a mental illness is people expect you to behave as if you don't."



Screengrab from *Joker*, Joker prepares for his big moment in the spotlight.

Much like ours, Arthur's society expects everyone to conform to

societal norms. However, the problem for Gotham and us is those norms do not allow for people that are desperately searching for help to receive that help. Too often, like Joker, the despondent forgotten people of society lash out violently at those in power, whom they feel have wronged them. For Arthur and Gotham, it's lashing out at Thomas Wayne, the wealthy politician when he calls the people of Gotham clowns. In response to the violent murder of three employees, Wayne goes on tv calling the murderer and people like him clowns. He makes no effort to disguise the fact that the people of Gotham are beneath him. Wayne announces a candidacy for mayor and arrogantly informs Gotham that they have to follow him and that only he can lead Gotham out of economic ruin. His arrogance is predictably met with resistance from Gothamites and, as Charles Gerain states in his Joker movie review, "Gotham is torn apart by classism and societal woes as billionaire patriarch Thomas Wayne campaigns for Mayor, representing the 1% and the free-reign of the rich."

By this point in the movie, Arthur has lost his job. His therapist informs him the city is cutting funding for social services and that Arthur will no longer have access to his meds. Quite literally, Arthur has no power, until, by a stroke of luck, Arthur finds a letter written by his mother, Penny, to Thomas Wayne. The letter claims that Thomas is Arthur's father and suddenly, the power dynamic shifts. In this moment, it is possible that Arthur is part of the elite 1% and for a moment, Arthur allows himself to believe that salvation is at hand. Only for those beliefs to be crushed when Wayne rejects him. According to Thomas Wayne, Arthur's mother is delusional. She invented the affair between her and Wayne as an excuse to cope with her reality. In actuality, Arthur was adopted by Penny and, as we find out, Arthur was beaten quite severely at a young age by Penny's boyfriend. However, while the explicit story plays out on screen for the viewer, a deeper examination throws the narrative into disarray. A common theme from Phillips is that nothing is

explicitly stated. It is implied and up to the viewer to make their own determination of the events in Arthur's life.

Looking back at the Thomas Wayne is Arthur's father storyline, while the narrative explicitly states that Arthur is a nobody, there are subtle clues that Thomas Wayne used his power and money to fabricate the entire event. It is not a stretch to believe that Wayne used his enormous fortune to forge an adoption form and had Arthur's mother committed to hide his affair from his wife, Martha. Regardless of what the viewer wishes to believe, the story is driven by Arthur's understanding.

We have finally arrived at the catalyst for Arthur. He is a mentally ill loner, he has lost his job, his access to medication is gone and, as it turns out, his name isn't even Arthur Fleck. Society has constantly pushed him away, choosing to discriminate against a person they perceive to be different from them. However, Arthur has a dark secret. Unbeknownst to Gotham, Arthur is the clown who murdered Wayne's three employees. The underclass of Gotham has taken up that symbol in protest against Wayne and the elites that seek to control their lives. Now that he is nobody, Arthur is free to be whoever he wants and what he has always wanted above all else is to be accepted and loved by society. Arthur dons the iconic makeup of the clown and gives himself a new identity, Joker. Joker will become the symbol of Gotham's protest, not as the head of the movement but because it's fun, and all he wants is to have fun. Albeit, Joker's concept of fun is twisted and dark.

Inevitably, there are those in our society that fail to understand the story Todd Phillips wants to tell. They view this movie through their narrow perspective that says everything Joker accomplished was due to his whiteness. They confirm their bias when refusing to contemplate and understand what this movie actually is. For example, Lawrence Ware of The New York Times writes, "what struck me most is what the film wants to say-about mental illness

or class divisions in American society is not as interesting as what it accidentally says about whiteness. For it is essentially a depiction of what happens when white supremacy is left unchecked. It shows the delusions that many white men have about their place in society and the brutality that can result when that place is denied. The fact that the Joker is a white man is central to the film's plot. A black man in Gotham City in 1981 suffering from the same mysterious mental illness as Fleck would be homeless and invisible. He wouldn't be turned into a public figure who could incite an entire city to rise up against the wealthy. Black men dealing with Fleck's conditions are often cast aside by society, ending up on the streets or in jail." Lawrence Ware utterly fails to comprehend what the *Joker* narrative is intended to be and instead, turns the movie into a racial issue. Ware believes Joker is an example of white supremacy and that the difference, power, and discrimination present in this film are products of race. He ignores the obvious implications of classism and the story of how society reacts when oppressed by elites that look down upon them. The lower echelons of society are meant to be followers, subservient to our leaders, the elites, the 1%. Whether intentional or not, Todd Phillips has painted a vivid picture of what is happening to our own society. Our own society is struggling with an imbalance of power and wealth. In fact, the extremely wealthy, continue to become richer, while the rest of us struggle to meet the demands of day to day life.

Joker tells the story of what happens when a society is pushed to the brink. The lower class is choking under economic pressures and inability to care for themselves because the jobs they rely on are disappearing. Their problems are capitalized when the wealthiest man in Gotham calls them clowns and instructs them to follow him, as he is their salvation. Like Gotham, our society has experienced rapid economic growth that disproportionately benefits the upper class. According to Reuters, our society is struggling with the fact that the wealthiest fifth of Americans hold 88% of the country's wealth, while the number of people receiving food stamps has gone

up to 39 million, a 40% increase from 2008. *Joker* personifies our society, showing us what happens when a person pushed to the brink can become.

While *Joker* lashes out and seeks to become a bully for fun, he unintentionally becomes a rallying point for the disillusioned lower class of society that is fed up with the status quo. That his outbursts become violent is simply a by-product of his desire to be heard by society. Now that he understands how truly awful society is, *Joker* gleefully goes on a rampage bullying those who have bullied him. He seeks retribution and will stop at nothing to avenge himself. If people die, so be it.

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# 26. The Rising of The Shield Hero (2019- )

Difference, Power, and Discrimination in *The Rising of The Shield Hero* (2019- )

By Harry Ford IV

*The Rising of The Shield Hero* is a Japanese Animation based on a light novel series written by Aneko Yusagi. The genre of *Shield Hero* is Isekai or “different world” in English. The reason I chose *Shield Hero* for a study of DPD in film is the controversy that came in response to the release of the first episode of the anime on January 9th, 2019. The first episode plays an important part in developing the main character and despite the initial negative response, the series has 4.5 stars on Crunchyroll with 1202 5-star ratings by viewers. The literary design of *Shield Hero* incorporates many issues of DPD and has many progressive elements in a genre that can often become an escapist power fantasy. The fantasy medieval setting is also a great place to take notice of DPD because the medieval period of time in our own history was a place where many of the ideals we are trying to escape from were very prominent. *Shield Hero* uses many cliché character personalities but strays from the norm of the invincible Hero, and instead shows the negatives to these personalities. I will show how *Shield Hero* tries to progress the isekai genre while still using the classic formula to retain its audience, by being aware of the DPD problems that are a part of most isekai anime.

The story begins as the main character Naofumi Iwatani introduces himself to us as a young college student living with his parents. After reading a strange book in the library he awakens suddenly in another world, and at first, it seems as if everything is

going well. Naofumi and three others were summoned to this other world to fight as Heroes with legendary weapons against hordes of monsters that appear in waves at set time intervals called “The waves of Cataclysm”. The four Heroes are each equipped with a unique legendary weapon (a sword, a spear, a bow, and a shield) and must kill monsters in order to empower their weapons for the coming waves. We see from early on that Naofumi the Shield Hero is treated differently from the other Heroes because his weapon is considered to be inferior. Because he is considered inferior, Naofumi struggles to gain any companions when the Heroes gather groups to train efficiently for the coming waves. One person however does decide to defect from another Heroes group to join Naofumi. After spending some of the funds they had been given to start their adventure Naofumi and his new companion Myne fight some lesser monsters and then return to town for the night, this is where things take a dark turn. Once they return to town, they stop at a weapons store to buy Myne better equipment, but Myne picks out quite expensive gear. When Naofumi tries to have Myne pick something cheaper she convinces him by saying the stronger she is the more money they will make, and then she moves in toward him as the camera does a closeup of her cuddling his arm and pans up to his embarrassed reaction. After they are done shopping, they eat dinner at the tavern where they will be staying the night. Myne asks Naofumi if he will be drinking his wine, but Naofumi says he doesn’t like alcohol as we get a closeup of his face and the wine glass Myne is holding. Myne tries to convince him anyways and takes a drink of her wine, and then the camera cuts to a close-up of Myne seductively relishing the flavor of the wine. Despite her invitations, Naofumi doesn’t drink any of his wine and heads to bed early thanking Myne as he heads upstairs. Upon waking Naofumi finds all of his possessions have been stolen and he begins to panic only to be met by a brigade of castle guards that drag him off to the castle. Here is where the first big controversy is; Myne was only pretending to befriend Naofumi and is now accusing him of drunkenly trying to sexually assault her, and the guards are in on

it bringing evidence against him and making it impossible for him to prove his innocence. But Naofumi is one of the Heroes needed to protect the world from impending destruction so his punishment is the negative reputation gained from his guilty verdict, leaving him the Shield Hero with no offensive capability to try and kill monsters on his own in order to become strong enough to survive. The second part of the controversy happens in the last minutes of the episode; Naofumi is approached by an eccentric man dressed almost like a circus ringmaster, the man offers Naofumi a solution to his problem. The man turns out to be a slave trader and explains how in this country other races known as demi-humans are discriminated against and primarily kept as slaves.



[Screencap from \*The Rising of The Shield Hero\*, Episode 1](#)

The negative response to *Shield Hero* among fans and critics revolves around the false sexual assault charges and slavery plot points, so I will go over some of the ideas behind the negative reaction and the responses to it followed by my own opinions. Here are some negative quotes from Steve Jones on ANN “With a premise predicated on a glorification of misogyny and slavery, it earns all the ire directed towards it.”, and then Jessi Silver on S1E1 “The first and most important thing worth mentioning is that false

rape accusations of this nature aren't really a thing (think about the social consequences for women even when their accusations are extremely credible; people don't do this kind of thing for fun). It's as if Myne's actions sprung fully-formed out of a misinformed, misanthropic incel fantasy". Now a more positive reaction that references Silvers review from before "False rape accusations happen, even if they are relatively rare. False accusations rate around 5% of reports (Avalos, 2018). Women are much more likely to be accused of false reporting (about half of cases are seen as false despite the real number hovering about 5%), which adds a hurdle to victims coming to the police; Silver has a point about how making a report affects women, but in this case, Myne appears to be making a power play for reasons we do not know yet. It plays into the distaste the people already have for the Shield Hero."



Screencap from *The Rising of the Shield Hero*, Episode 1

There are very current real-world problems with how cases of sexual assault are handled in America, but much of those problems are tied to our justice system. It could also be said that painting a woman in such negative light might lead viewers to be more distrustful of women, but she is one of the only female characters in the anime to be portrayed as someone with such villainous intent.

But I think it's also important for everyone to understand how false rape accusations can affect men, and to put a negative light on the failures of those who abuse their power since Myne is revealed to be the princess of the country not long after the first episode. There is also the bit of irony that shortly after the negative reviews on ANN their founder was falsely accused of being a sex offender. In response to "glorification of slavery" I have to say that the first episode only just introduces that the country allows it shows very little to jump to such a conclusion, Naofumi does indeed purchase a young demi-human girl as a slave but not with foul intent. The girl is coughing and the slave trader tells Naofumi she probably won't live long. In the first episode Naofumi finds out one of his special talents is improving the quality of medical herbs, so he is making the best of his situation by saving her and gaining an ally who can help him survive. Of course, he is still quite forceful at first but he is trying his hardest to be able to return to his own world and is unfortunately willing to be "the bad guy" to do so.

*Shield Hero* doesn't dive too deeply into differences in ability but Naofumi faces prejudice because of the Shield Hero's innate lack of offensive capability in combat. We can see from the very beginning that he is not held in as high of esteem as the other three Heroes with his presence hardly being acknowledged. Even in his interactions with the other Heroes who have experienced a world similar to the one they are now in through games they had played in their own alternate realities point out how weak his weapon is. Naofumi is the only one of the four Heroes to have no former knowledge of this world, and because of this the opinions of those around him only worsen. Despite the other reasons why people view Naofumi negatively becoming more prominent than his lack of ability it is something that permeates the story, later on when Naofumi acquires a power the other Heroes have never seen before and surpasses them they accuse him of being a cheater. So even after proving himself they still try to belittle him to make themselves look better.

Race plays quite a large part of *Shield Hero* but not with traditional races we have in our own world. Instead, there are regular humans, demi-humans, and beastmen (both demi-humans and beastmen are generally referred to as demi-humans). All of these races are capable of complex human thought and emotion and demi-humans look exactly like humans with the exception of having animal ears and tails, beastmen as their name implies look less like humans and more like animals. On page 2 of *Race, Language, and Morality* “Tolkien did not use race as a deliberate technique to make value statements about his different characters, racism operates on a broader scale than simply individuals’ intentions. Rather, Essed explains that racism is a semi-coherent “ideology, structure, and process in which inequalities inherent in the wider social structure are related, in a deterministic way, to biological and cultural factors attributed to those who are seen as different “race” or “ethnic group”” (qtd. in Wodak and Reisigl 179).” so even fantasy races can be used to compare to real-world racism. The country where most of the anime takes place is called Melromarc. Melromarc is a matriarchal and human supremacist country so demi-humans are most often enslaved if they find themselves within its borders, and those made into slaves in this world are bound by magic that makes disobedience lead to painful death. One of the main reasons why Naofumi is treated so poorly is because the *Shield Hero* is traditionally the Hero who treats the demi-humans most fairly, and as we learn later on the religious figures that lead Melromarc to advocate human supremacy play a big role in demonising him and the demi-humans. The church has in our reality at times allowed for similar things to happen in America in a manner similar to labeling a race demi-humans, we in the past denied that people of other races were human. Later in the series, Naofumi and his companions fight to free slaves from their oppressors and move to try and give them a safe place to call home.

The big part of DPD in *Shield Hero* would probably have to be

power, this is where the medieval setting makes big connections to our own world. First and foremost the actions of Myne are all a bid for power, she is the older of two sisters but second in line for the throne. So she demonises Naofumi in order to gain support from the church and even attempts to have her sister killed in later episodes. Royal power struggles are common throughout history and even in current times those with power struggle against one another, fortunately, this is done less violently now but taking action to gain powerful backers is still common. There are a few different types of nobles shown in the anime, there are several who are honest good people and a few who are twisted and greedy. We see that those who support the position of the church are the most powerful regardless of their actions, there were times in European history when the church was more powerful than the monarchs of countries. Fortunately, the church in Melromarc while powerful is not that powerful, but it is powerful enough to persecute those who threaten their beliefs. Near the seasons' conclusion with the help of his companions, the other three Heroes and the queen of Melromarc they are able to punish the church leadership for their misdeeds and reform the church. Power struggles like this happen in our world whether it can be political, religious, business, and likely more. There will likely always be people who abuse the power they have to seek more or maintain what they have, but it's through gaining awareness of these happenings that we can prevent tragedies by coming together when necessary.

*Shield Hero* uses many classic anime stereotypes for the personalities of its Heroes but portrays some of the problems with characters that are so one dimensional. Many of these stereotypes are very similar to patriarchal stereotypes present in American films that are used to enforce male dominance. Naofumi is overly trusting at kind to a fault at first, but he quickly learns not everyone can be trusted. The Spear Hero is the classic jock stereotype and follows his sense of justice, but because he is easily fooled he is used to by those in power. The Sword Hero is a cool loner stereotype



who goes around fighting large monsters to challenge himself, but there are consequences to the local people because of this. The Bow Hero is younger and naive so he helps a band of rebels overtake a local lord, but this throws the area into chaos and forces villagers to leave their homes to survive. Another trope that isekai anime often have is where the main character has multiple possible love interests among his companions, but *Shield Hero* portrays Naofumi more as a father figure than a lover. *Shield Hero* takes a pre-established formula and tries to almost turn it on its head, instead of these characters being flawless Heroes they are humans who make mistakes with big repercussions.

*The Rising of The Shield Hero* is an isekai anime that takes a darker turn than many and tries to show that no reality is without hardships. *Shield Hero* may use many old tropes for some of its characters but it tries to be progressive while using them. It makes us sympathize with the main character as he is mistreated and then again as he is made out to be a villain, we see the conflict within him as he is both stern and kind to his companions. We see the terrible things that racism can allow if it is supported by those in power, and how those in power can often do unscrupulous things to remain in power. *Shield Hero* uses standard tropes for the personalities of its heroes but shows us the repercussions of their reckless ideals of heroism, and progresses Naofumi more as a father figure instead of the more common harem. From my perspective *Shield Hero* takes the isekai genre in a more progressive direction while still using the classic formula to retain its audience, it does this by being aware of the DPD problems that are a part of most isekai anime. There are times where it may step too far but those times are mostly in their rough start, but I think even those can be used to help us be aware of how bad it is to frame someone for a crime. From doing research for this paper I feel I better understand why there was a negative reception for *Shield Hero* at first, but in the end, I blame the failings of our justice system for making things more difficult than they need to be. I would recommend *Shield Hero* to anyone who

likes anime, and even if you've never watched an anime before it's a good place to start if the first few episodes don't deter.

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## 27. Watchmen (2019-2020)

*Watchmen* (2019-2020): TV's Masterpiece of Representing America's Discrimination towards African-Americans

By Adison Emerick

HBO's *Watchmen* series commentates throughout the show on this idea of generational trauma and specifically trauma created by racism. In Episode 6: "This Extraordinary Being," we get a unique and possibly the most painful origin story we've seen in Television history. It transports us to a time in our history where racism was still prevalent and gives us a perspective we've never seen before. This episode does an excellent job of representing discrimination through the use of realism by having powerful acting through the use of the actors' facial expressions. Along with realistic dialogue and using camera angles that put us in the position of the main character Will Reeves. These cinematic elements bring the world to life and the pain of discrimination to life. This episode is truly remarkable, and people need to see this episode so that they truly understand the power behind these cinematic techniques.

In this episode, we follow the origin story of Hooded Justice, a famous vigilante who was previously thought to be white. The main character, the man under the hood, is Will Reeves. He's in his early thirties and at the start of the episode newly working as a police officer in the late 1930's New York City, one of few African-American officers at the time. When he was a child, he survived the horrific 1921 Tulsa Massacre by his parents sacrificing their lives to save him. This was a real massacre where white mobs slaughtered black people, destroyed their homes and businesses. It's considered today to be one of the single worst incidents of racial violence in American History. With such a traumatic past Will does his best to cope with it by forgetting his past and dismissing the horrific events. By doing

this he can only hold in his anger for so long. The scenes that best display the impact of discrimination and how realism is used to display are as follows:

1. The police inauguration where Will is getting his badge to officially be a police officer.
2. The dinner date between Will and June as they discuss how angry Will is and his denial of his past. June is an African American reporter who is Will's love interest.
3. When Will is walking home from work and is followed by his fellow police officers who are white and is eventually beaten up then lynched.
4. When Will is walking home from the lynching and hears screams for help he beats up the muggers trying to rob a couple in an alley.
5. When Will makes it home and admits his anger and is forced to take matters into his own hands and become a vigilante.



Smart Phone Photo of Will after the police chief didn't give Will his badge.

Jovan Adepo's job of acting as Will Reeves brings the seriousness,

the realism, and the pain of racism to the screen through his use of facial expression. This phenomenal job gave us the viewer a glimpse into the life of the oppressed in a world full of discrimination. The intro is a good place to start, the police inauguration. We see Will Reeves waiting to get his badge from the police chief. Jovan is visibly happy. He has a smile and his eyes give off this joyous feeling, as Will is about to get his badge and finally become a police officer. The police chief who's white is giving badges to the other newly inaugurated police officers who are also white, and he's physically happy, smiling and wishing them good luck. When the police chief finally gets to Will, he gives him a straight face and walks past him. Jovan's face is then visibly upset, you can see his smile fade, and the disappointment and sadness reach into his eyes. Then Lieutenant Battle whose black walks up to Will and gives him his badge. Jovan is then again visibly happy grinning. This physical communication between the police chief and Will gives us our first look at discrimination in this episode. By having the police chief give badges to all the other new police officers who are all white and having him look at Will and walk past him tells us that the police chief intentionally missed Will so we can assume he's a racist. Most importantly though it shows that discrimination is not always verbal. The police chief didn't say anything to express this, but his actions spoke loudly. Then with Jovan's facial expressions you see the sadness it brings to Will you see how non-verbal racism can be just as harmful as verbal. The realism of this situation makes your heart sink because it opens your eyes to the small things that are done to minorities to perpetuate this idea of less than white. This realism is something Adepo was striving to project to the screen. In an interview with Thrillist, Adepo explained. "It was our responsibility to tell this moment in history with sincerity, and to not be afraid of the uncomfortable, because telling it in all of this ugliness and all of this truth is the only way to really do it." That's exactly what this episode did, in the realism of the ugliness of racism and discrimination you felt the pain and emotion from Jovan's facial expressions. The police chief isn't giving Will the satisfaction of

being equal to him as he is to the other white officers. Not giving Will his badge and staring right at Will in his eyes is saying you're less than me, you don't deserve the honor of having me give you a badge, and wish you luck. This subtleness of racism later disappears as we see how the cinematography puts it front and center for us the viewer.



Smart Phone Photo of White policemen looking at Will telling him to keep out of white people's business.

The cinematography in this episode brought not only the late 1930's to life but put us the viewer in the position of the main character Will Reeves. By having the camera in the position of Will we saw the world through his eyes and through his eyes we experienced these difficult situations. Doing this allowed us the viewer to sympathize with Will on a deeper level because in a way the discriminatory acts appeared to be happening to us. Then also we have a glimpse into the anger he feels from these discriminatory acts. From 19:08 to 20:36 the camera is in the position of Will so the characters are talking to the camera and we're seeing the world through his eyes. During this sequence, Will is beaten up and then hung from a tree. Having the camera be in the position of Will during this horrific act continues the use of realism in the episode.

As the viewer, we can't escape the lynching by looking somewhere else and it makes us experience this racism as if it's happening to us. This it finishes off with the police officer telling Will to keep his nose out of white folks' business and again the character is talking to the camera. It immerses us in Will's world, a world of fiction in the show but real in our world and our history. You've possibly seen a documentary in which lynchings happened, but I've never seen one where the viewer is in the position of the person being lynched. By doing this it makes us sympathize with Will but also in a fraction of a way feel his anger and deep remorse for those who were lynched. While this show is fiction, these horrific acts were real, and it forces us to examine our own history with racism and the byproduct of lynching its legacy of trauma.



Smart Phone Photo of the couple is thanking their hooded savior, Will.

It then makes sense why the proceeding scene will happen. Will walks down an alley and hears a woman scream for help, a classic superhero trope. He's consumed with anger for what's all happened to him and he makes eye holes in the hood and puts it over his face so that he can finally be free to let out his anger. As the camera follows Will fighting the muggers, he moves left and right and the camera dollies left and right. Refusing to allow the viewer look

elsewhere so that they're as consumed with this fight as Will is. Then as the fight finishes and you get the shot of Will in the foreground with his eyes all wide and deep with anger and you see the couple in the background. You begin to understand that by having the camera on Will and not the couple throughout the shot the fight is for him, not the couple. It's for him to finally let out his anger for the terrible, sickening things that have happened to him because of how he was treated based off the color of his skin: his parents murdered by KKK members in the Tulsa massacre, not getting his badge presented by the police chief, catching a criminal and being lynched for it. All these terrible things building up in him and he explodes as any normal person would.

Trying to properly tell a story about our racist history and connect it to a superhero plot is incredibly challenging. Not only because of trying to get the proper slang of the time but because you're dealing with such a sensitive issue of racism in America. In order to properly deal with these issues, head writer for *Watchmen* Damon Lindelof created a diverse team of writers, "The room was half black and half women" (Vulture). By having such a huge portion of the writing staff being black it helped the overall team create dialogue that was true to the story and the experiences. The heaviest and most impactful use of dialogue was the scene right after Will beat up the muggers where Will makes his way to June's apartment and admits his anger and is putting on white makeup to become Hooded Justice. At 26:20 June asks Will "What color were those townsfolk?" Will replies "White" and June says "You ain't get justice with a badge Will Reeves, you gone get it with that hood, and if you want to stay a hero, townsfolk gonna need to think one of their owns' under it." This scene shows something that I don't believe has ever been explored in TV or Movies. The concept that even the vigilante has to put on makeup to hide their identity even more. And it's not because they want to fool everyone it's because they HAVE to. If there's a black vigilante, then he's considered a criminal and will most likely be murdered but if there's a white



vigilante then he's a hero. It's something you'd never think about but because this episode is true to the time and so true to real life, they explore it. It's the dialogue that sticks with you long after the episode because it's an incredibly depressing truth. Black people for a large portion of America's history have been treated less than human, from beatings, verbal assaults, lack of opportunities, and sadly so much more. The dialogue in this episode makes you feel uncomfortable, it makes you feel sad, it'll even make you angry because it's realistic. It makes us confront our past so that we keep it our past.

What's extraordinary about this episode is that it's given an origin story that popular culture has rarely seen. Not only is the main character black but it goes straight into America's history with racism and tells a realistic story from what I can tell. Being white I in no way shape or form relate on a personal or even imagine the things these characters have gone through. With the show being so realistic it's given a voice to the voiceless and has shared a story that I'm sure can relate to many African American people and that's amazing. As I discussed earlier Will has to put white makeup on his face because if there's a black vigilante in 1930's America he's perceived as a criminal and will probably be murdered. But if there's a white vigilante then he's a hero. This commentates on our popular culture today and the whiteness of our superheroes. This idea was brought up by Mazin, the host of The Official Watchmen Podcast, at 36:20 when Mazin said "In popular culture, our superheroes are white white white." It's incredibly true only till recently with Black Panther that we got a big production movie for a black superhero.

The world around the characters is much so connected to the plot and characters. Will Reeves is a black police officer in the late 1930's and so the racial prejudice towards black people at the time makes the world a scarier and angrier place. The whole situation of Will having to deal with racism directly relates to my thesis. The realism of the world and the situations Will gets in are real and they destroy

any sense of suspension of disbelief. The issues of racism are real and prevalent at that time so this episode expresses that by putting us in the perspective of the oppressed, Will.

This episode from the *Watchmen* TV series shies away from nothing and gives us the viewer a unique origin story that tells not only a story about the character but our history of discrimination. Through the uses of excellent acting and facial expressions, realistic dialogue, and camera angles that put us in the shoes of Will. It transports us to a time and culture once fantasized for the classical music and old-timey clothes are quickly overshadowed by the horrific and commonality of discrimination towards black people.

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## 28. The Half of It (2020)

The Impacts of Subtlety in *The Half of It* (2020)

By Kyra Cole

Alice Wu has brought yet another movie that evaluates issues of identity in more ways than one. In short and lacking detail, the movie stars Ellie Chu who is an intelligent high school student who is paid to write love letters by a jock named Paul Munksey. The letters are all directed to his crush aka the intelligent and popular kid, Aster Flores. Each character is an outsider in their own right. Paul Munksey was labeled as the slow kid with a large family. Ellie Chu is an immigrant in a primarily white town and is queer in a traditional religious town. Lastly, Aster Flores is the only other immigrant shown in the film. She is popular among the students purely because of her beauty but is looked down upon because she is Hispanic and not wealthy. This is a very simple film that has a lot of twists that relate to the human identity which makes it a fun and interesting movie. This film explores the realm of varying sexual identities, backgrounds, as well as social statuses in relation to race and wealth.

The movie explores the issues that older and young immigrants have to face as well as addresses LGBTQ+ issues in the subtle visual design seen throughout the movie. This makes this film a prime example of how current times can change the path films follow. The cliché romantic-coming-of-age story is changed to just a coming-of-age story about self and platonic love. The characters are learning to bypass the religious environment they live in but in modern-day films like this one, the religious themes are significantly less inviting (Anker). Whether it is living in a closed-minded community or dealing with prejudiced people on the daily,

this film expresses these matters fluidly without hyperfocusing on the issues that make people individuals.



Screengrab from *The Half of It*.

The moment the first scene plays, it is obvious that this town is not the most diverse. The small town of Squamish in the state of Washington is a traditional religious community. Meaning that there is still pressure to marry at a young age and not for love. The unmovable belief that “man shall not lay with man”, and the inherent racism that tends to be a part of the secluded predominantly white towns. The main character, Ellie Chu, is an independent and talented Chinese immigrant. She moved to America when she was five years old with her family so her dad can get a better job opportunity. For them, Squahamish was, as she put it, “a stepping off point” until they had a better opportunity. However, as she recounts her story to Paul in the movie, it is revealed that Ellie’s father speaking English well, trumps having a Ph.D. in Engineering when applying for a job. This is just one of many moments where the audience realizes that this movie is much more than just a teen romance.

These characters have depth and diverse backgrounds as well

as personalities that many movies featuring queer and BIPOC characters don't have in other films. Many times films have their queer character or BIPOC character and that is all they are. In this film, their sexuality and race is not the main reason for the character. This film may be centered around high school and contains the drama that one regularly sees but also goes into the depths of discrimination in the younger age groups while still relating it to the older age groups. One example of this is Edwin Chu. Though there are other subtle examples of racism towards the teenagers, Ellie's dad is a prime example of an immigrant coming to America for a better opportunity.

There was a scene where he was telling Paul, who does not speak mandarin, his story in his native language. He had a heartfelt monologue in his native language and it was directed towards the audience who can read the subtitles or understand mandarin. He was explaining the experience he has had as an immigrant father of a teenage girl, his story is full of loss and uncertainty since he lost his wife and had to raise Ellie alone all while losing the job he moved for and mourning the loss of his life partner. He never learned English fully thus prohibiting him from paying bills on time due to his accent as well as joining the community and making friends because of his lack of wealth and proper English. There are also many examples of microaggressions from the younger peers towards Ellie. Such as the group of boys driving by Ellie riding her bike, screaming "choo choo" or simply calling her the "Chinese girl". Instead of blatantly showing racism as everyone learns it in history class, this film shows what everyday life could be like for an immigrant and a teenager of color in high school. People can live day to day and not realize they can be racist with "teasing" instead. However, reality is that microaggressions are extremely common in our day-to-day life.



Screengrab from *The Half of It*.

DPD is representative of all types of differences and discrimination. The main character, though she is intelligent and talented, was in this country. The community that she lived in did not treat her well and assumed the stereotypes that went along with her race. In other words, since she is Asian, she must be intelligent. Though she was intelligent and did write other students' essays for them for a price, she was always considered an outsider and never part of a group. This went for Astrid Flores as well. Although she was part of a group, she was constantly reminded that her presence in the group was a privilege and that since she wasn't as wealthy, she was lucky to even be a part of their group. Despite the prejudices seen in this film, Paul is representative of someone who grew up in environment but "when exposed to various ethnic groups and the queer environment, these prejudices are broken down" (Yuen). This is seen at the end of the movie where he went from, "you're going to hell" when he found Ellie liked Aster who he had liked as well, to defending her at the church and helping her dad when she was working.

As for visual design, throughout the entire movie, the placement of the characters as well as the environment around them showed

just how their relationships were building and how each character was isolated due to many different reasons. One example of this is when Ellie and Paul were striking a deal about the love letter he was paying her to write. They were inside an abandoned train and even then they were separated by a line of seats. Throughout the rest of the movie, they were separated by a net on the ping pong table or they were in a confessional booth with a wall in between. This was to symbolize the fact that Ellie was an outsider while Paul was in line with the community at large. Paul stood for everything the town believed in, such as religious beliefs or social standing beliefs. However Paul, unlike the others, was open-minded and the audience realized he was acting upon what he was taught, not what he will soon believe in. An example of this is when he realizes Ellie likes Aster and he says, “you’re going to hell”. Instead of being angry and thinking she deserved it, he was sad and frustrated that this could happen to a friend and the audience could tell that those words were said with a heavy heart. They had stopped talking for weeks until he did his own research and stood up for her when it mattered most. Despite his character having a religious background like most characters in this film, “characters can’t be ‘too good’ or ‘too evil’ and must struggle with the same choices common to most people” or otherwise known as the balancing act in films that is an attempt to mirror reality as expressed by an anonymous reviewer. This shows that despite beliefs, there is room for change and acceptance.

I chose this film because of its representation of both the queer community and people of color. Not only did it include both but it also did it in a way where it can be directed to young people, who need representation in their lives, as well as make the characters relatable and entertaining for everybody. This is also one of the few films where it doesn’t end in the guy getting the girl or the girl getting a girl, it ends with everybody getting something they had needed in their lives rather than wanting. Paul gets to have a say in his family’s restaurant, while Ellie gets to go to college and

leave the small town of Squamish, and Aster gets a chance at Art School even though she previously gave up art. This film gave me hope for films in the future to have something other than the cliché romantic-coming-of-age story as well as more of a representation in films regarding race, sexuality, and disabilities. It is also important for films to be directed by people from these groups so that representation can be accurate. This film was directed by Alice Wu who is an Asian American, she had designed this movie to be inclusive and has successfully done so in a time where “most images of Asians and Asian Americans on screen weren’t created by Asians or Asian Americans, but by people who don’t know much about them” (Schacht).

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PART II

# 2020-2021 STUDENT ESSAYS

Coming Fall 2021



29.

Essays submitted by student authors from the 2020-2021 academic year (Fall 2020-Summer 2021) will be published Fall 2021.



## DPD Essay Project Overview and Contributor Guidelines:

The capstone project for ENG 223 is an 8-10 paragraph research and analysis essay exploring the representation of DPD issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and/or ability in your choice of a single film, television episode (or show), video game, comic book or other visual media. I am excited to share that thanks to the support of an LBCC Faculty Innovator Grant, you will have the option of publishing your completed essay as part of a non-profit Creative Commons web-based ebook that will be published by Spring 2021 similar to this book – [Culture and the Sitcom](#) – created by students at Wake Forest University. You will have the option of submitting your assignment privately on Canvas if you do not wish to participate in the publication project. Your essay will include an analysis of the film's visual and sound techniques and use research from the LBCC library website (and the internet) to provide background and contextual information about your film. Movie reviews, books, and essays by scholars who have analyzed race, gender, etc in other films can offer guidance on how to explore your film and a wide range of sources to learn more about the writer, director, cast, and crew.

- For **Part 1** of this project, you will choose your film or television show from the list of free movie websites below or from your own streaming services or DVD collection and use the [Film Analysis Guide developed by Yale University](#) to take notes like a film studies student over a short sequence of shots to help you establish patterns of editing, cinematography, visual design (also called mise en scene), and sound in the film or other visual media you are analyzing. Your entire essay does

not have to focus just on the scene you examine for these notes but your notes will be a key starting place and help you practice visual analysis to generate ideas for your essay. You are welcome to use portions of your notes directly in your essay. **Note, if preferable you may swap the Part 1 and 2 deadlines.**

- For **Part 2** of this project, you will use the [ENG 223 Library Research Guide](#) created for us by research librarian Richenda Hawkins to create an annotated bibliography of 6 potential sources you might be able to use in your essay to provide supporting research and evidence and offer additional context for your analysis. **Note, if preferable you may swap the Part 1 and 2 deadlines.**
- For **Part 3**, you will write a complete first draft of your 8-10 paragraph essay for workshopping, peer review, and required submission to the [LBCC Online Writing Center](#) for feedback.
- For **Part 4**, you will submit your final draft for assessment and (with your consent) inclusion in the class publication project. This will be your capstone project for the course.

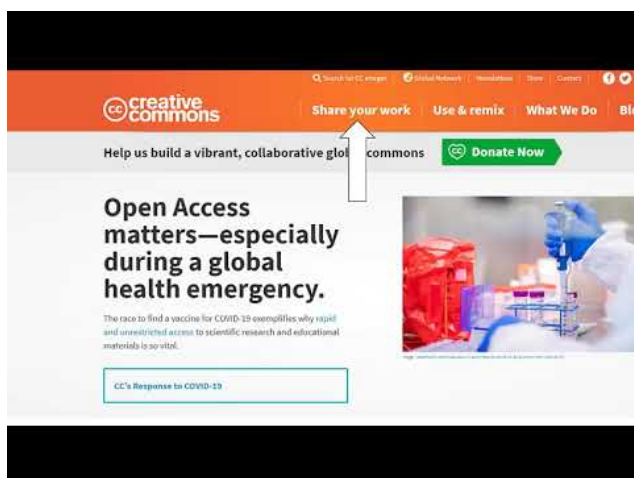
**Keys to Success:** Think about the keywords “encoding and decoding” from Chapter 1 of *America on Film* as you reflect on what messages (intentionally or unintentionally) were encoded into the film by the people that made it and what messages you decoded (intentionally or unintentionally) as you watched and rewatched the film. Also think about how you can use examples of all five elements

of cinematic form – literary design, visual design, cinematography, sound design, and editing – as you analyze the film.

## What are Creative Commons and Open Pedagogy?

Our course project will be published as a shareable, non-commercial Creative Commons publication made available for free on the internet through the [Open Oregon](#) website. This means we are publishing our writing for free to anyone that would like to read it, such as Oregon high school students studying difference, power, and discrimination in their courses. My approach to teaching has increasingly included [Open Pedagogy](#), meaning that I am dedicated to sharing what I am teaching and you are learning and creating in class with our local LBCC, Willamette Valley, state, national, and global communities.

Before proceeding to Part 1 of the final project, please read this [ENG 223 Creative Handout](#) and watch the video below to help you start planning ahead to decide if you feel comfortable sharing your final draft with the world along with other English 223 students: [LBCC Creative Commons Projects Video Tutorial \(by OER librarian Michaela Willi Hooper\)](#).



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/dpdfilm/?p=6>

## Part 1 Task: Shot by Shot Notes

To develop your comfort level using cinema studies vocabulary in your writing, will take shot-by-shot notes on one short but important sequence from your movie or television show in order to practice the key skills of film analysis and identify examples you can use in your essay. Your essay will not be limited in focus to this one short sequence in the film, but you should make use of these notes somewhere in your essay.

**Step 1** – Click this link to the [Film Analysis Guide](#). The link will take you to Part 6 of the guide; then click the links to look at the example notes over the films *Rocco and His Brothers* and *Il*



*Grido* (don't worry if you haven't seen them, the key is to look at how the vocabulary terms used in the students' notes and to see how they used screen snipping to grab sequential shots from the movie). Once you choose your movie or tv show, you will model your notes after these examples. Parts 1-5 of the film guide offer a complete glossary of film studies terms organized by basic terms, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound which you are encouraged to read through to help you take the best notes possible on your film.

**Step 2** – Open a Google doc or Microsoft Word doc and at the top put your name, the name of the movie/show, and a chapter title or your own name and a timestamp (example, 1hr:24min:43sec – 1hr:25min:54sec) . Then Insert a 3-column table with 9 rows. Label the top row across the columns: **Image, Shot Description, Analysis**. If you wish to take hand-written notes you may submit jpg or pdf image of them as long as their relatively legible.

**Step 3** – Open your movie or show in Firefox or Chrome Browser and pause the film on the frame that will be your first shot and use your “Snipping tool” (or Command+Shift+4 for Mac users) to snip the image and then copy and paste it into the second row of your document table in the Image column. Please note that for a small number of computer users, this function may be blocked by your spyware/adware protection. Netflix, Disney+, etc may also try to block you from using snipping but it does work on most laptops and desktops. If it does not work for you, you are welcome to just mark the time in the film or show instead of the images and then use your notes to describe it.

**Step 4** – Move slowly through the rest of your short sequence, pausing and rewinding as needed. Clap your hands, blink, your eyes, or snap your fingers every time there is an **edit** or **shot transition** and pause the movie to take another screen snip. You'll be surprised how fast this goes and how little of the film's you will describe in

your notes; remember this is just a starting point for your essay to help you practice key vocabulary.

**Step 5** – Once you have 8-10 sequential shots from the film or show in your notes, you can start filling in the Shot Description and Analysis sections. For the Shot Description, the key is to look at (and listen for) all the techniques being used (editing, sound, cinematography, and mise-en-scene). Feel free to use abbreviations for the students for terms like MCU (Medium Close-up) or XLS (Extreme Long Shot) and small font sizes like 10 or 11 to save space. For the Analysis, the key is to brainstorm how those techniques help you better understand the plot, characters, and themes of the movie or show – especially things connected to DPD issues.

**Step 6** – If you wish to go beyond 8-10 sequential shots in order to expand your notes to a longer scene or other places in the movie or show feel free but only after you've provided me this in-depth look into a microcosm of the overall movie or show

**Step 7** – Save your document often and post it here when you're done.

#### **List of Websites with Free Movies:**

Tubi: <https://tubitv.com>

[LBCC Academic Films on Demand](#) from LBCC Library website

[LBCC Sony Pictures Classics Collection](#) (300+ acclaimed Sony films)

Sony Crackle: <https://www.sonycrackle.com>

Vudu: <https://www.vudu.com>

IMDBtv: <https://www.imdb.com/tv>

Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/movies>

Popcorn Flix: <https://www.popcornflix.com>

SnagFilms: <https://www.snagfilms.com>

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/channels>

Yidio: <https://www.yidio.com>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com>

OpenCulture.com: <http://www.openculture.com/freemoviesonline>

Library of Congress: Selections from the National Film Registry: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/selections-from-the-national-film-registry/>

National Film Board of Canada: <https://www.nfb.ca/films/>

## Part 2 Task: Annotated Bibliography

For **Part 2** of this project, you will use the [ENG 223 Library Research Guide](#) created for us by research librarian Richenda Hawkins to create an annotated bibliography of 6+ potential sources you might be able to use in your essay to provide supporting research and evidence and offer additional context for your analysis. Format your document as a Google doc or Microsoft Word doc for submission. Contact Richenda at [hawkinr@linnbenton.edu](mailto:hawkinr@linnbenton.edu) early in the week to get research help if you have any difficulty with this task.

- An [annotated bibliography](#) starts with a regular bibliography (a list of sources you are reading while working on an essay or presentation). The annotation includes additional information about the source and how it might be useful for your research (whether you cite it in your essay or not doesn't matter at this point). For each entry in your annotated bibliography, you will include:
  - A full [MLA style citation](#) for the source, followed by...
  - a short paragraph of 3-4 sentences summarizing the source,
  - a short paragraph of 3-4 sentences evaluating the credibility of the source and author or publisher, and

- a short paragraph of 3-4 sentences brainstorming how the source might be useful to your research
- Your job is to include **six** sources. At least two of these have to come from the [ENG 223 Library Research Guide](#). The other three may come from web sources like Google Scholar, IMDB.com or online websites like *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*.
    - At least one source must be a book that is not your textbook
    - At least one source must be written someone you can identify as scholar/teacher of film or television (for example, they have a PhD, teach at a university or college, etc)
    - At least one source must be a movie review or critical analysis of the movie
    - At least one source must focus on DPD issues raised by the movie or show you are analyzing (even if not about the movie itself)
    - You are welcome to cite your textbook for your course essay but NOT for this research assignment

**Library Reference and Student Help Desk services are available.**

- Call the Reference Desk at (541) 917-4645 or the Student Help Desk at (541) 917-4630.
- Email the Reference Desk at [libref@linnbenton.edu](mailto:libref@linnbenton.edu) or the Student Help Desk at [student.helpdesk@linnbenton.edu](mailto:student.helpdesk@linnbenton.edu)
- Text the Reference Desk at (650) 667-6620 or the Student Help Desk at (541) 704-7001.
- Give us a video call via Zoom at <https://linnbenton.zoom.us/j/243933025> ([privacy info](#))

## Part 3 Task: Rough Draft, Writing Center Feedback, and Peer Review

### Task 3a: Rough Draft

Draft an 8-10 paragraph essay analyzing how issues of DPD are represented in this film. As you write your essay, remember you are writing to a reader that may not have seen the movie you are discussing. However, try not to fall into the trap of simply summarizing the entire plot of the film for people. **You are required to directly quote and cite at least three different sources in this essay and include a works-cited list at the end of all the sources you cite.** You may use the course textbook as one of these sources and up to six (max) additional research sources using the LBCC library website and the internet. You should use at least one of the sources you initially researched for your Annotated Bibliography.

**\*\*ENG 223 LBCC Library Guide:** <http://library.linnbenton.edu/film>

**\*\*As soon as you post your rough draft to this assignment board, make sure you also send it to the [LBCC Online Writing Lab](#) for feedback. You are welcome to complete your writing lab submission early in your writing process with an outline or very rough draft or wait until you have a fully developed rough draft before submitting it. You will post the feedback you receive from the Writing Center to the DPD Essay Part 3: Writing Center Feedback assignment on Canvas by Wednesday, June 3.**

**Organizing your Essay:** The following paragraphs provide a suggested outline for the essay. As 200-level students trust you to have the experience of writing essays for other classes like WR

121 to make your own decisions about how to keep your writing organized. I suggest writing an outline or rough draft using some or all of the paragraph ideas below, then use the writing skills you have developed in other courses (or professional experience) to organize and revise your final draft into the format you feel is best for your analysis.

**\* first paragraph:**

- Why are you excited about this movie or show, and why should other people care? In the first few sentences, try to get your readers interested in this work, even if it's new to them.
- What is your central theme or argument (your thesis)? Address this in the first paragraph or two. Your thesis should relate to how effectively and/or ineffectively the film represents issues of difference, power, and discrimination and how that representation is accomplished through specific visual and audio techniques (editing, sound design, visual design/mise en scene, cinematography, and/or literary design).

**\* body paragraph idea 1:** What is the context for the piece you're analyzing? For example, are the plots and characters related to important things happening in the world at that time? Did anything in the making of the work relate to your thesis, or to DPD (for example, was everyone in the cast/crew presented as white, straight, and able-bodied?)

**\* body paragraph idea 2:** What specific scenes, characters, themes and cinematic techniques are most useful to help you explain how representations of **Difference** are encoded into the text? As you decode the text, do you find yourself generally in agreement with the film's point of view or is your own view more oppositional or negotiated? What elements did you include in your

notes that help explain? Are there movie reviews, cast information, or scholarly articles on this film or related films to be particularly useful? An outside source quotation or paraphrase with a citation is recommended for this paragraph to support your textual analysis.

\* **body paragraph idea 3:** consider how **Power** can be expressed in many different ways both within the diegetic world of the film's narrative and on/off the set during production. What specific scenes, characters, themes and cinematic techniques are most useful to help you explain how representations of power are encoded into the text? As you decode the text, do you find yourself generally in agreement with the film's point of view or is your own view more oppositional or negotiated? What elements did you include in your notes that help explain? Are there movie reviews, cast information, or scholarly articles on this film or related films to be particularly useful? An outside source quotation or paraphrase with a citation is recommended for this paragraph to support your textual analysis.

\* **body paragraph idea 4:** While difference and power are always present in media texts, Discrimination is not always overtly represented on screen. For this paragraph, ask yourself whether **Discrimination** may be directly and/or indirectly represented on screen? Could discrimination have occurred in casting or during production? What specific scenes, characters, themes and cinematic techniques are most useful to help you explain how representations of Discrimination are encoded into the text? As you decode the text, do you find yourself generally in agreement with the film's point of view or is your own view more oppositional or negotiated? What elements did you include in your notes that help explain? Are there movie reviews, cast information, or scholarly articles on this film or related films to be particularly useful? An outside source quotation or paraphrase with a citation is recommended for this paragraph to support your textual analysis.

\* **body paragraph idea 5:** What are some alternative or even counterargument perspectives on this film have your classmates brought or that that you found in a review or user comment online or from a classmate that has also watched this media text. Or you might use this paragraph to share more research you found about how the film was made or how the specific DPD issues you have analyzed thus far intersect with other DPD issues or just other social/historical issues you know about or have learned about in another class.

\* **body paragraph idea 6:** Why was this the one text **you** chose out of the gazillions of things out there for you to watch and consume. You could share a story from your personal life, work, or school that makes this text interesting, you could relate this film to other texts in this genre that you've seen and share your opinions about trends you're seeing in this genre, you could wax philosophical about what this film inspires you to think about, you could .... well, you get the idea.

\* **Conclusion paragraphs:** Any good paper should circle back to where the reader entered the writer's perspective, so be sure to remind the reader about the scene, story, example, etc. that started your essay and use that as a transition into a **conclusion** that ties together the loose threads and helps the reader understand why the issues represented in this film are relevant and also whether or not you would recommend the film to your reader.

Helpful advice:

\* Papers that cite sources need to also include a list of works cited at the end in [MLA format](#)

\* Be creative in how you organize your paragraphs and use good transition sentences to tie sections of the paper together for the reader.



## Task 3b: Writing Center Feedback

- **Schedule a visit with the [LBCC Writing Center](#) and post your feedback to the course website.**

## Task 3c: Peer Review

Review and provide feedback on the rough drafts of at least two classmates, in class or online depending on how the course is conducted. Peer Review is a core component of academic publishing.

**Peer review guidelines:** As a peer reviewer for this project I want you to think like a book editor. Your goal is to help get this essay ready for publication in the class project not to punish or make them feel rejected for not having a perfect first draft. A good peer review offers constructive criticism with the goal of helping the author complete the best possible essay. This does not mean that you simply pat them on the back and say good effort; a good peer review offers both praise and critique that is specific and focused. As a writer, it's important to learn to take criticism and know that it's not personal, just the reviewer's sincere effort to see the best final version of this paper.

For each person whose essay you review please answer each of the following questions in 3-4 sentences. Make sure to quote directly from your peers' essays and be sure to identify the page and paragraph for any places you are referencing to suggest changes or give compliments.

- How well has the writer hooked you into the essay and maintained a sense of flow and organization all the way through the conclusion? Are there places where the flow of the

essay is particularly dynamic or where the write drifts onto a tangent or simply need sharper transitions between paragraphs? Does it feel like the essay has a clearly identifiable beginning, middle, and end?

- Identify the thesis sentence in the essay that provides the main idea. Is this thesis written as an argument where the writer is taking a position that other people may have a different perspective on or is the writer kind of just pointing out a fact or making a circular argument? Is the thesis narrow enough that the writer can adequately develop and defend it in an essay of 8-10 paragraphs or is it so broad that it might take 20 or 30 pages to fully explain?
- Identify places in the essay where the writer is describing the movie or television show they have selected and take note of how many specific film studies vocabulary terms (terms associated with editing, sound, cinematography, visual design, and literary design) are used in the essay. Let your peer know which parts of their description are the most effective at this point and which things need more description or better use of specific technical filmmaking terms to make the writing sound more professional.
- How effectively is the writer demonstrating their knowledge of DPD issues and using that knowledge to enhance your understanding of the movie or show they're writing about? Think about all the issues we've covered in the textbook this term and also your own understanding of them? Is this essay clearly focused on the representation of at least one important DPD topic such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, gender, or ability? If the writer is discussing two or more different DPD topics are the connections between them make clear?
- How effectively does the writer incorporate outside sources

into the essay in order to enhance your understanding of the topics and movie/show being analyzed? If you were to find this essay posted to an online blog or website, would you say that the writer had clearly done their research? Click on the links or use the web to check all of the sources used in the paper and evaluate the overall quality level of the sources. Is the essay scholarly enough for a 200-level course without sounding too stuffy or packed with unnecessary sources?

- Keep it/Toss it – End your review by focusing on what you feel are the best parts of the essay that the writer should definitely keep in their final draft and what are the one or two most important things that you would advise changing or maybe dropping altogether.
- Final thoughts – optional final thoughts, or other notes of anything you wanted to mention about the essay that you didn't include for one of the other questions.

## DPD Essay Final Draft and Class Project Submission

An important step before you submit your final draft:

\*If you are willing to allow me to publish your essay with those from other students in ENG 223 in Spring 2021, please include the following phrase in all caps at top of your essay or very end: **CREATIVE COMMONS APPROVED**. Consent forms also provided in c.ass.

\*If you do not wish to participate in the class project, simply turn in your essay without the Creative Commons phrase. Essay grades are not tied to your decision to participate or not in the class

project. Please reach out at [rusts@linnbenton.edu](mailto:rusts@linnbenton.edu) if you have any questions.

## Assessment

Assessment information and rubrics provided for students on the course website.

## Final Draft Formatting and Images

As you complete your final draft, please insert up to 4 (max) screengrabs from your film or tv show in your essay with captions. Look at the example essays in [Culture and the Sitcom](#) to see what I mean. Make sure to indicate whether your images are screen snips or if you found them on the web so they can be properly cited when I prepare the project for publication. You can also use *Culture and the Sitcom* model to format your font, title, and other elements of your essay.