

Answer one of the following questions in a 1000-1250 word essay:

~ Question #1 ~

How does John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* articulate notions of “queerness” as proposed by Alexander Doty? How does the film function to challenge traditional notions of masculinity and femininity? Discuss specific examples of non-straight sexuality and non-normative representations of gender, and analyze the ways in which they operate to engender a queer viewing position.

~ Question #2 ~

In her essay “Gender Terror/Gender Rage,” Kate Bornstein calls for “more positive images of transgendered individuals and groups.” Discuss the representation of transgender in *Tangerine*. How does the film function to challenge traditional representations of transgender identity? How does the film articulate transgender as something much more complex than what is typically depicted in mainstream films?

~ Question #3 ~

Discuss the representation of Native Americans in *Smoke Signals*. How does the film challenge stereotypical notions of Native identity in Hollywood, and how does the film seek to address specific issues aimed towards Native communities?

~ Question #4 ~

Analyze the representation of Hispanics and Hispanic Americans in *Stand and Deliver*. How does the film function to challenge the six traditional Hispanic stereotypes identified by Charles Ramirez-Berg? Point to specific characters in the film, and discuss their behaviors/traits as examples to support your analysis.

essay guidelines

The following essay is an example of an *A* paper turned in by a student. It provides thoughtful, detailed analysis of the question at hand, while using specific examples to support the writer’s ideas. Some further formatting guidelines you should be following include:

- ~ Use specific, detailed examples from the film to support your analysis. This is crucial for writing successfully in this class.
- ~ Avoid using too much summary/exposition. Assume the reader (me) has seen the films, and understands them intimately (because I have, and do).
- ~ Dispatch of any review-type language (ex: The film is a blockbuster extravaganza!).
- ~ Do not ask rhetorical questions, and do not raise questions you do not attempt to answer. Also, do not talk about what the film doesn’t do, but rather, what the film *does* do. Be critical and express your ideas.
- ~ Use *italics* for all film titles, i.e. *Citizen Kane* not **Citizen Kane** or Citizen Kane.
- ~ Do not qualify your analysis (ex: I think, perhaps, probably, sort of, etc.). Do not be afraid to make statements and support them with examples/analysis.
- ~ If you refer to a character in the film, research their name (as well as directors, writers, etc.). www.IMDB.com is a great site for information about the films (though not an outside source; see below).

- ~ Don't use quotes as stand-alone analysis, but rather, as support for your own thoughts about the films. I'm interested in *your* perspective, not someone else's.
- ~ Do not simply copy down the readings/interpretations of your fellow students during the discussion and pass them off as your own. If we talk about something in class, I expect you to elaborate with your own perspective to support.
- ~ Use present tense for film criticism (ex: *Citizen Kane* is a good example of... not, *Citizen Kane* was a good example of...).

You are also required to use **at least two** written sources to support your ideas in your papers. For each paper you are to use **a)** one of the chapters/essays read in class as a source, along with **b)** a source outside of the class materials that you have researched either in the library, or online. Wikipedia is not a source. In addition to your two written sources, you may also use other shows/texts as references. Be sure to cite your references appropriately using any citation method of your choosing (MLA Style, Chicago Style, etc.).

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You are responsible for emailing me your papers by the start of class time on the assigned due dates. Upon receipt of your paper I will email back a response that I received it, and will email back your graded paper with comments, usually a week after I receive them. If I don't email you back, assume I have not received your paper, and re-send it to me. You are not bothering me if I receive your paper multiple times; it's better to be safe than sorry!

sample essay

In her essay "Gay and Lesbian Criticism," Anneke Smelik calls for an "emphasis on the affirmation of gay identity" in popular forms of cinema. Discuss the representation of lesbian identity in Lisa Cholodenko's *The Kids Are All Right* (2010). How does the film go about constructing a more diverse representation of lesbian characters? Discuss the ways that the film subverts the traditionally negative representation of lesbian identity in popular mainstream cinema.

Representing Lesbian Identity in Lisa Cholodenko's *The Kids Are All Right* (2010)

Hollywood has a pronounced history of imposing negative stereotypes on the LGBTQ community, and because of this, a progressive director's initial instinct may be to portray lesbians in an entirely positive way. In reality, this type of film is just as static and limiting as the negative films it attempts to oppose. In *The Kids Are All Right* (2010) director Lisa Cholodenko avoids steering the two married lesbian protagonists, Nic and Jules (played by Annette Bening and Julianne Moore, respectively), in either direction, and chooses to instead portray their relationship in a realistic and dynamic way. Making lesbian characters more nuanced and individual not only benefits the LGBTQ community, but also makes lesbian films more accessible and relatable to straight audiences. Dan Savage, the openly gay author, editorial director of Seattle newsweekly *The Stranger*, and a father himself, regards the film as "the first film about a family headed by a same-sex couple that treats our existence as a fact and us as human beings," showing that gay people do not wish to be seen as perfect, and prefer a realistic depiction of their lives rather than a glorification of their sexuality (Savage, 1).

Although they both identify as lesbians, Nic and Jules have far more differences than similarities, sexuality included. Nic is a more traditional person than Jules, and a more archetypal lesbian. She is practical and independent. Her sexuality is never questioned, partially because she is more noticeable as a lesbian through iconography, a classic device used in films where "[v]isual and aural details can be used to **typify** homosexuality immediately" to alert the audience and make them aware of homosexuality and all of the stereotypes it **typically** entails (Smelik 136). Nic is also seen as more "butch" because she values her job and her family more than romance and sex. Because of her more masculine appearance and values that embrace sociologist Herbert Marcuse's performance principle, it would appear that Nic takes on the paternal role in her family. Some would argue that this perpetuates heteronormativity, but Nic's masculine traits do not serve her well. Most of Nic's flaws stem from her trying to fulfill the

man's role in a heterosexual marriage and singlehandedly provide for and control her family. She relies on alcohol in order to avoid expressing her emotions to her family, showing that she does not want to seem weak or traditionally feminine, and leaves Jules in the middle of a romantic evening in the bathtub in favor of her job as an obstetrician, showing that she **values** the control and power she gains from being the working parent more than she **values** pleasure. Nic is only able to resolve her issues with Jules and her children by releasing her control over them. She must allow her daughter Joni to be independent and go to college, and she must allow her wife Jules to pursue her own career and have equal control in their family, which is shown when she lets Jules take the wheel (both figuratively and literally) and drive the family home from taking Joni to college.

Jules, on the other hand, is more progressive than Nic. She supports an organic lifestyle and composting, but suppresses her beliefs for most of the film in order to accommodate Nic. Her approach to parenting is more emotional, and she supports her children by making sure they are happy and allowing them to be free rather than controlling them. She embraces the traditionally feminine pleasure principle, but fulfilling this role is also where conflict arises for Jules. She thrives on the spontaneity and primal satisfaction of her affair with Paul, but this liaison almost ruins her relationship with her children and her wife. In order to regain respect from her family, she must find the strength to confront the problem head-on, stand before the entire family, and ask for their forgiveness. This displays power and independence rather than accommodation and support, showing that she no longer wished to be the stereotypical woman who stands to the side and waits for her spouse. Jules' sexuality is also a point of distinction between her and Nic. While Nic is entirely homosexual, Jules sexual orientation is less straightforward. She identifies as a lesbian, and appears to have only been in relationships with other women, but is obviously comfortable sleeping with a man, and admits to being sexually attracted to Paul. The difference between homosexuality and homoromanticism is not often

acknowledged in Hollywood films, and Jules is an excellent example of the difference between the two. Cholodenko shows that there is diversity within homosexuality, and denies the dichotomy that Hollywood imposes upon its audience, while also showing that lesbians in a committed relationship are most successful when they accept that their relationship is not traditional instead of trying to conform to heterosexual stereotypes.

Despite their non-typical family, Nic and Jules have a very stereotypical marriage. Nic is the working parent who struggles with alcoholism and Jules is the stay-at-home mom who feels bored and unappreciated. Their relationship displays “all the usual struggles around relationships and intimacy, children and career, mid-life misery, too much wine, not enough sex. The only spot the difference is that the women are gay” (Winterson 2). Their lifestyle is especially traditional in comparison to Paul’s. Paul has a sexual relationship with his coworker Tanya that is as inconsistent as it is unprofessional. He never finished college and his closest friend is his motorcycle. He values spontaneity and freedom in the same way that Nic values order and stability. Nic and Jules struggle to keep their relationship as fresh and passionate as it was when they met in college because it has become so normal and monotonous. While a typical Hollywood film would try to advocate for a more fun and exciting lifestyle, this film’s resolution is that marriage is, in reality, a lot of work. There is no cure-all for spicing up a long-term relationship, and the solution is not to try to find passion elsewhere, but to acknowledge the relationship’s issues and promise to work toward improving the relationship as a committed team. There is no way to keep a relationship from changing, but acceptance, communication, and honesty can maintain the fundamental love and support that are the foundation for a stable marriage. This theme is not exclusive to lesbian relationships, and unites people of all sexualities. Tammie Kennedy, a journalist for *The Journal of Lesbian Studies*, explains that the film “transcends sexual orientation and gender identity and gets at what is ‘really’ important: family,” which speaks to the fact that a film’s purpose is not representation, but understanding. Whether the audience is gay

or not, they are able to relate to the protagonists in the same they would relate to the protagonist of a classical Hollywood film (Kennedy, 59). Cholodenko is able to push the boundaries of the Hollywood film without sacrificing the qualities that make movies so well-loved.

Works Cited

- Kennedy, Tammie M. "Sustaining White Homonormativity: The Kids Are All Right as Public Pedagogy." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. 18.2 (2014) 59. Web.
- Savage, Dan. "The Kids Are All Right Backs Away from the Truth about Gay Families." *New York Times* 21 July 2010. Web. 7 April 2016.
- Smelik, Anneke. "Gay and Lesbian Criticism," *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Winterson, Jeanette. "Kids Are All Right." *Journalism*. Jeanette Winterson.com. 3 Nov 2010. Web. 7 April 2016.