

Extended Essay

English B: category 2

The representation of the American society portrayed by Hollywood in the film

Spider Man: Into the Spider-Verse



In what sense the film Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse represents the new
Hollywood's perspective of the today's American society?

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Introduction

In this work, I will have the objective of connecting how the film Spiderman Into the Spider-Verse, a cultural artefact, portrays the perspective of Hollywood on the American society in the scenes of this movie. To contextualize, today's American society is connected to the problems, ideals and culture that they have in this new era. Spiderman Into the Spider-Verse is an animated film that was written by Phil Lord and Chris Miller. Produced by Sony Pictures Animation and released on December 14, 2018, the film has also won an Oscar and a Golden Globe for best animated film. Based on Spiderman's comics, the plot of the film revolves around the different versions of the superhero uniting to stop the villain Kingpin.

The story of Spiderman, created by Steve Ditko and Stan Lee was first introduced in 1963, brought as a representation of responsibility, is a hero that is constantly learning lessons from his own mistakes, something that all the teenagers, regardless of their age, could relate making this character one of the most famous Marvel heroes. However, in the film we are shown a variant of the original comic entitled "Ultimate Spiderman" where the center of attention becomes Miles Morales, a young man of African American and Puerto Rican heritage. I am going to analyze the message of this movie that teaches to appreciate the differences of each of the heroes, accept them and motivate us to have great expectations of our future no matter the ethnicity or gender we have, being represented by the scenes and the character. This falls into one of the perspectives that Hollywood is trying to portray about American current society, acceptance of diversity of cultures and genders giving a message of acceptance and love to the society.

Moreover, other perspective that Hollywood portrays in this film is the consumerism, this is represented not only by scenes but also by products created for the film that later took places in the market of today's society, expanding the representation of the film in the American society.

This study acquired my attention because, as I began to analyze the scenes of the film, I noticed a tendency that I have repeatedly captured in other films, a progressive perspective of American culture represented by Hollywood. Through the study I will focus on the positive behaviors of the target culture that could lead to negative aspects of the society. Trying to carry the study in the positive impacts of the consumerism and the acceptance of diversity of gender and cultures, I will describe and analyze the situations comparing them with formal examples from reliable sources. Also, this product related to the English-speaking culture, specifically the American society will be analyzed by areas like mathematics being fundamental in the analyzation of statistics related to their behavior and important information related to the case, and also the area of social science that would be connected by the study of the behavior on the American society.

The representation of the modern life in America

This character will be based on Hollywood movies, specifically on the acceptance and adaptation of diversity of cultures and genders in mayor roles being a representation of the American values related to diversity and the adaptation of Hollywood regarding the globalization (Olson, 2000). Also mention that movies, on the last decade, have anticipated

the decline some ideologies, that, with the election of Obama as the president in the US in 2008, open the gates to reinforced more freedom of speech, allowing an alternative ideology to germinate and take root (Westwell, 2013). In this part I will analyze two scenes that are linked each other, whereby it's dialogue or situation denote the impact of trends and changes that the newest generations are accomplishing in relation with cultural diversity, showing the priority of American values for citizens and foreigner in the country. On the other hand, this is also related to the increase of attendance among African American and Asians through 2015 and 2016 that lead a pattern of increasing progress for the next years by getting the public more movies to relate on (Zara, 2017).

The message of this movie is represented in the quote that Miles Morales said: "Anyone can wear the mask" showing for the first time not a Spider-Man with the mask on, but, a Spider-Man with the mask off (Newby, 2018). By connecting to the public, the co-directors of the films said that the idea of the film was to create a character that consider cultural values and not only to create a standard Spider-man with color attributes that makes this movie a cheap bid of a multicultural film (Lee, 2018). On the other hand, when the idea of the film was shown in 2011's Comic Con, the public saw this film as too politically correct, receiving backlash, including some from Glenn Beck, a political commentator (Garcia, 2019). Jake Johnson, the actor that play Peter B. Parker in the film, said in an interview to vulture that "This movie is not a political movie," and that "this is a multicultural world we live in, this is a multicultural movie. It's a gender equality movie." (Lee, 2018).

In scene a:1) we see how multiple different versions of Spiderman reach the secret base of the late Peter Parker. Once there they realize the diversity of this character and all in unison say the phrase "You are like me". It is a message that reinforces the idea explored

above, anyone can be Spiderman regardless of their background or differences. At the very end what the characters recognize is how similar they are.

It is important to emphasize that this scene and others in which multiculturalism is included and celebrated are not forced. A common mistake Hollywood makes is trying to force equality when it is part of society and should feel natural. Co-director Peter Ramsey mentioned: "So there's a lot of details of Miles' life, where he grows up, what his family life is like, what school is like, (...) (Ramsey, 2018). All those things to create a character who is not just diverse but feels real. Something that Spider-man had even when was first created was the connection with the public, that the background someone has isn't the important thing, anyone can be a hero after all, he was a normal man and that is what the co-directors took advantage, creating a new version that can relate not only with the average American but the minorities of it (Garcia, 2019) (Ramsey, 2018). This is the importance of what Spider Man means, a man that got his powers by mistake but decide to use them for the good of the society. A character that is wearing a suit and was never exposed as a hero without it, only a representation, a symbol that they took to create multiple Spider representations that connect with cultures that diverse in America.

In scene a:2) we see the introduction of Gwen Stacy, she arrives to rescue Miles and Peter who were about to fall to the ground after an attack. Gwen manages to defeat the enemy and then tells them how she became Spider-Woman, a completely independent female hero. Gwen saved his father, but couldn't stop her best friend Peter nor prevent his death. It is relevant to include this scene because of the meaning it has rather than the content. Here we move from a multicultural to a gender inclusion, women, "can also be Spiderman". In the last 5 years, women have acquired a leading and independent role in cinema, every day more and

more films arrive where the woman is the protagonist without the need to use a provocative or suggestive approach. What the Wonder Woman film showed is that women are even braver than men, something that Captain Marvel or Storm from the X-men all have in common. They are representing women in the superhero films, by showing how strong they can be, as an example, Captain Marvel is "the strongest avenger" or even Storm, being one of the strongest characters in the X-men universe. That is something that Hollywood is letting the cinema world know, the result is that more than a dozen superhero film projects with a female as the role character are in process from Sony, Fox, Disney's Marvel Studios and Warner Bros (Boucher, 2018).

Nowadays, films, specifically superhero films, are becoming more related to the teaching of values, giving always a good message for society specially the new generation. Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse isn't only giving a message about everyone can wear a mask or that everyone is different but that is the special thing about us, they are trying to represent values like unity, friendship, guidance and even love. Presented by quotes around all the film, they represent not only support like the quote of Miles Morales's mom "Our family doesn't run from things." that is a clear example of the strength of unity, but also the importance of teamwork and sharing with the ones that support you, like the quote of Gwen Stacy to Miles that say "We are probably the only ones who... understand.", even though they have all differences, they represent a team that have something in common, help each other to complete their goals. The message of this seems to be focused on trusting each other, something that the new generations are doing less, with the dependence of social media, teenagers are less open and create a different image of themselves for the public because of social pressure. This film teaches us a lot of things about the development of this trust, especially in teens, by sharing the importance of resilience for the main character,

encouraging him to stand up and never give up. An example of this is shown in a quote that Peter tells Miles: “No matter how many hits I take, I always find a way to come back.”, as viewers we see how Miles is developing his superhero abilities at the same time he is developing the trust that he needs on himself to use these abilities to become a hero (Martyn, 2019). Values that are important for the growth of heroes and people, a comparison that the film is presenting, that we as humans are heroes in development.

Spider Man, the bridge to consumerism

At the beginning of the film there are three scenes that portray Hollywood's representation of consumerism and how capitalism has taken advantage of any given situation and made it an excuse to introduce more products into the market. Movies are becoming the perfect site for advertising products as a marketing strategy due to the millions of people that go to the cinema every year (Nagar, 2016). In 2016, 246 million people went to movie theaters in the United States and Canada (Zara, 2017). In order to launch one or more products for sale, the source of the idea is not considered and this goes unnoticed by people due to the lack of sensitivity of current times, the majority of Americans are exposed to 4,000 to 10,000 ads every day (Simpson, 2017). Spiderman Into The Spider Verse shows us how this consumerist system has taken advantage of the superhero environment to take over the market and advertise new products, something similar to what is currently happening with Marvel Studios by Disney (Jenkins, 2014).

A fact that makes us wonder the reason for Hollywood to choose this specific character, apart the fame and public that Spider Man brings, he has more of a cultural impact in society. As said before this character can connect with society, being more relatable but also the message that represent him, the superpower of responsibility. This was something that Hollywood used because of the importance that consumerism has in America. Even though this term seems for many people as something bad, consumerism is one of the pillars that the American culture has to support their business ethos and ventures on society, and the connection that people can create through products and ideals (Portes, 1996).

In the scene b:1), during the first nine minutes of the film, we are introduced to the story of Miles Morales, a young American living in Brooklyn and future Spiderman. On the way to his "elitist" school, as he calls it, there are several examples that make this scene a bridge between consumerism and society. Before leaving for school he finds himself listening to music with Sony headphones, the same company that produces the film, in addition, the song he listens to is part of an album specifically made for the movie. The album reached the number 1 position in "US Top Soundtracks (Billboard)" and remains in the chart for seventeen weeks (Revisited on April 19th), in addition the song "Sunflower" has 3,255,732 reproductions on the platform Spotify (Revisited on March 13th). Spiderman Into the Spider Verse is one of the many movies that follow the trend of creating a series of songs as a marketing strategy, however, is also a way to satisfy the public and give them more products to consume related to the film. Currently these products range from the creation of an original soundtrack for the film to the case below (Mundy,1999).

In scene b:2), Peter Parker (Chris Pine) shows us how he became the hero he has been for 10 years. His story begins when he is bitten by a radioactive spider and this gives him his

powers, inspired by the death of his uncle and the wisdom his uncle imparted to him, he decides to become a superhero and save the city on more than one occasion. When he has been a superhero for so long it is impossible to think that no product has been released that makes a reference to Spiderman, this is why Peter shows us five different products that have become popular during his career as a hero. The first one is a comic book that narrates the life and adventures of Spiderman, in fact, the character of Peter Parker is inspired by the comics originally created by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. However, as mentioned before, this different version of Spiderman is due to changes in the comic industry today due to various factors such as the Internet, in addition to the fight for equality. The film exploits this idea by introducing us to different versions of the superhero, expanding their market to more frontiers but also to being recognize from giving a good message to society.

The second product we are shown is a cereal called "Spidey - O's", we see a little girl in her pajamas eating this cereal with a box next to her that shows Spiderman doing the same thing. This cereal doesn't exist and hasn't existed outside of the film but it shows how people who love the hero crave to see it and consume it in any form or packaging. This happens often in the United States and a clear example is the brand General Mills that, in 2014, together with Warner Bros. Consumer products and DC launched limited editions of 6 different cereals with the Justice League theme in family size only. This encouraged the public to consume more General Mills products and at the same time promote the DC Comics characters. In 2016 the sales of cereal went down 17% in contrast to the sales in 2009 (Peltz, 2016). This down on sales had been increasing throughout those years and General Mills tried to connect with the DC fan base, creating this collaboration as a marketing strategy to increase the sales of their products, specifically targeting the young and middle-aged adult audience (18-44 years old), that seem to be a big percentage of the fan base where 54 and 56

percent of them respectively classify themselves as fans of DC (Statista Research Department, 2019). On the other hand, DC benefits by the publicity that the cereals gave them, increasing their popularity.

Talking about products specifically designed to promote a film and satisfy the public in this case, the launch of new limited-edition models of Nike Air Jordan take place. They were released two weeks after the premiere of the movie and were an adaptation of the shoes that our protagonist Miles Morales wears during the film, these were being sold at a retail price of \$160 (Briguglio, 2018). To put it in context, Air Jordan is a brand produced by Nike known for its expensive basketball sneakers, so I wonder, what is Air Jordan doing launching these sneakers related to a superhero movie? Here I found a pattern in the film and that is how it relates to the hunger of people to consume products that relate to each other. On the other hand, this is other example of the collaboration between two industries completely different, trying to connect their public and gain popularity by creating new products to sale (Ofiaza, 2018).

The third product that Peter shows us is a Christmas-themed album with five Christmas carols interpreted by the voice actors of the film. Due to the fact that the premiere of the film was close to Christmas time (December 14th), the producers announced that the album would be released on December 21st. The trend of releasing a Christmas album is not something modern, artists like Mariah Carey, Céline Dion, and Elvis Presley, have done the same, the last one selling 10 million units since its release in 1970 ("Gold & Platinum - RIAA", 2011).

In scene b:3) we have already been introduced to the character of Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) who briefly met Peter Parker as Spiderman during a fight in which this superhero was seriously injured only finishes with Spiderman's life. In what is understood as the next morning, all the news programs have already covered the story and we see televisions, screens and cell phones reporting the death of the superhero. Finally, we see Miles in a costume shop where a situation shows us how consumerism has reached an extreme where we cannot control which situations or events should not be used for profit. However, a second situation shows us that there is still the possibility of redeeming oneself and being sincere in a consumerist environment.

The first indication that consumerism has reached an uncontrollable extreme is given by people who see the news of Spiderman's death and the costume shop, since after the death of the superhero many people who considered him a threat or a vigilante are moved by the situation, such as the Miles father, the store takes advantage of this situation and sells many suits and masks of the superhero clarifying that no refunds are accepted. What the salesman (Stan Lee) is doing is taking advantage of the popularity that death brings to the hero and using it to sell more of his products. Analyzing similar cases in today's reality, I realized that this is very similar to what happens with artists or celebrities, especially in the music industry. Taking the following example of Jahseh Dwayne Ricardo Onfroy, also known as his artistic nickname "X", where he sold more than 22 million copies of his records after his death, this number, in comparison of the approximately 1 million copies he has sold prior to his death, reflects the consumerism taking advantage of the increase popularity of X. The American rapper died on June 18, 2018, the circumstances of his death and the life he lived are not of interest to analyze in this case, but how it helped to increase his popularity (Heller, 2019).

Those who show us the possibility of redeeming ourselves are the same people from Brooklyn who attend an event organized by Mary Jane (Zoë Kravitz), most wearing the mask of the superhero. This at first leads us to think that it is a situation where consumerism has once again taken over people, yet it is more than that. Despite these consumerist practices that are grounded in the way people and society are, those who attend the event are there showing respect for who was a hero to all of them in life. Their intentions are good and even though consumerism has gone too far, redemption is still possible. The fact of being part of this consumerist network should not prevent us from doing good for society, as an example we have Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft and second richest person in the world, as well as the president of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. To date, he has donated \$35.8 billion of Microsoft stock to this foundation, which is the longest private charitable foundation in the world (Forbes, 2019).

Conclusion

In order to conclude, this film is portraying situations that represent Hollywood's perspective of today's American society. However, I considered that this work is based on the author's point of view about this culture during the 2010s. On the other hand, this is also seen in some of the articles used in this analysis related to the message of the film, making this work reliable not only for the American culture, but also the English-speaking cultures.

By analyzing some aspects that the film is portraying; first was about how consumerism is taking the film industry, being the bridge between products and consumers. Second, is about the values that America is trying to connect with the new generations, especially on the acceptance and adaptation of diversity of cultures and genders. Also, an analysis about values, but specifically values that are better represented by superheroes, this is because these values are related to a good message that the new generations, like kids, have to learn, like unity, friendship, resilience, guidance and even love. I learned a lot about the American society, especially the thoughts and values that they represent to the world. This work helped me not only learn about one of my favorite superheroes but also learn about the diverse culture that the United States have, this is something this community tries to incentivize, their responsibility regarding this topic is probably the reason of the industry to use this specific character, Spiderman, the one with the superpower of responsibility, a relatable hero for everyone.

To Finish, Hollywood and the film industry is communicating through their films their perspective of the American society, not for them but for the world. On the other hand, they present a good message for societies by portraying values that the world needs not only for living in a peaceful environment, but also to teach them how everyone and even the world needs our help, to prevent and solve the problems that could become a danger in the future, this is the importance of the phrase “Anyone can wear the mask”, the mask of a hero is something that all of us can wear to protect others and our world. However, these films are not only the representation of good values of the American society, these are also used to present a part of the American culture that is causing problems to the environment and the people, the consumerism is something that like it or not is taking part of every entertainment and is becoming something more than just advertise new products. These movies at the end

are something more than entertainment, but even though Hollywood is trying to portray today's American society it isn't, because it's really portraying society in general. After all are the movies a representation of what we want to see or need to see? Are all the cultures related to how we act not as society but as humanity.

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Annexes

Title	Situation on movie	Time	Description
a:1) The multiculturalist	Every Spider Man present themselves	1: 02:15	it shows the diversity that one hero can have
a:2) Girl power	Gwen saves the principal characters	54:30	She shows how a girl can also be powerful
b:1) A new hero or new products?	Miles is presented with some products made for the public	02:35	He is connected to brands to relate with the consumerist society
b:2) The presentation of the hero or the brand?	The original Spider Man is presented	01:20	Variety of products are shown with the character
b:3) Sometimes, a misfortune brings opportunity?	Spider Man dies, stores take advantage of this to sell	31:24	Brings a perspective of how sellers try to connect with emotions