

Grace Knudsen
Dr. Smith
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Project 3: Ryan Murphy's *Hollywood*

Introduction

In the past decade, Hollywood's annual award season brings about discussions of diversity in the films that are nominated for esteemed awards. However, the problem of diversity extends far beyond award nominations, and one of the most important contributing factors to this problem is the lack of opportunity for people of color, women, and the LGBTQ+ community to have their voice acknowledged in film and television. Ryan Murphy's Netflix series *Hollywood* addresses this issue and provides an explanation of the diversity issue in Hollywood while also extending a hand to the show's audience to voice their concerns as well.

Artifact Description

In May of 2020, Netflix released *Hollywood*, the limited television series created by famous screenwriter Ryan Murphy. The television series is a revisionist historical drama of the film industry in post World War II era Hollywood. Created for mature audiences, the television show presents the story of multiple characters who strive to gain success in Hollywood, and the different effects that race, gender, and sexual orientation have on their opportunity to succeed in the industry. The series is presented to an audience of avid movie-goers, perhaps directed towards younger audiences who are not familiar with the so-called "Golden Age" of Hollywood, or for audiences who are familiar with the time period and want to see drastically the film industry has changed since then.

In terms of logos, pathos, and ethos, *Hollywood* provides insight into the presence of people with diverse backgrounds who are present in the Hollywood industry. Logos is used in the series by presenting the amount of high-level producers and directors in the Hollywood industry who are gay, showing the audience that there are many gay members of the industry who are capable of the job that they are striving for. Pathos and ethos are shown hand-in-hand when the series delves into the lives of the people of color in the series. Camille and Archie, two black characters who are nominated for Academy Awards, give acceptance speeches that focus on the fact that there are many stories to be told from people of color, and that they should have the same opportunities to succeed as the rest of the industry because they are all human. Ethos is used in the statements that the winners make, and pathos is implemented in the series' storyline that shows their journey in the industry in order to achieve the Academy awards.

The main message that the series poses to the audience is the importance of diversity in the industry and the impact that diversity has on American culture as a whole. The end of the series focuses on a fictionalized version of the Academy Awards, where the major awards are won by people of color, women, and gay nominees. The show serves as a response to the current narratives in American society revolving around opportunities and nominations for people of diverse backgrounds in the entertainment industry. The message is conveyed through the portrayal of the characters who are struggling to succeed, along with highlighting how beneficial their work can be to the world as long as they are given the opportunity. The language in the series is used to present both sides of the argument for more diversity in Hollywood: some characters fight for a more traditional, economically beneficial pursuit of success at the detriment

of minorities, and other characters argue for the inclusion of more diverse perspectives in film. In the end, the show presents that including diversity in Hollywood is more beneficial.

Critical Analysis of the Artifact

The elements of the series that stood out to me the most was the notion of secrecy that was implemented. In post-World War II Hollywood, there was not actually a problem with the lack of diversity behind the camera, but a problem with the forces that kept the diversity a secret. Two particular scenes in the series present this fact. The first scene involves Roy, a white actor who is seeking out a manager in order to find acting roles. The manager points out to Roy that he can tell that he is gay from the moment that he walked into the room. Roy is scared at first, because he believes that he will not be signed to a contract because of this fact. His manager, however, tells him that there are hundreds of gay men in the film industry and that all Roy has to do is keep his sexuality a secret. A second scene shows that there are a large number of minority screenwriters and directors in the film industry, but their names are changed in post-production in order to appeal to white audiences who do not want people of color to be involved in the industry.

In the series, the styles of language that are mainly implemented are symbolism and metaphor. The main characters of the show are fighting to create a movie about a girl who jumps off of the Hollywood sign after losing her role in a major film. Each of the characters in the show find themselves relating to this story, angry that Hollywood is idolized as a place for opportunity but has actually become the reason for their personal downfalls. Satire and irony play a large role in the series as well, as the series highlights the fact that the people who are praised in Hollywood for their good work are actually hiding very dark secrets that account for their

acquisition of power in the film industry. Both of these methods help send the message that diversity is needed in Hollywood as it can offset the oppression that has been done to people who are rejected from the industry. Hollywood is not a perfect place, even though it pretends to be.

The series also focuses on the complexity of including more diverse casts in the film industry as well. Diversity is important, but it has many layers. The series addresses issues such as stereotypical roles for people of color, and the ways that a person of color who is able to “hide” their racial background through their appearance are able to gain power rather than a person of color whose racial background is strongly evident in their physical appearance. Diversity is a tricky subject to discuss, but the television series acknowledges this fact and uses as many examples as possible to try and educate the audience on the issue.

There are two different ways that audiences can respond to the series. Those who would respond positively to the show would belong to the majority of people in our culture who are adamant about more effort being used to produce more opportunities for diversity in Hollywood. Those who would respond negatively would be those who believe that the series is stretching the truth about how little representation there is in Hollywood, those who believe that Hollywood is already diverse enough, or those who believe that the series is villainizing the characters who have already gained success in the industry because of their race, gender, and sexual orientation.

The way that the series seeks to overcome the viewers who are opposed to its message is by appealing to the cultural and social values of the viewers. The reasoning behind including diversity in Hollywood is majorly based on the social norm that everyone should be treated equally and that individuality reigns over conformity. However, the values and norms that the series uses to appeal to viewers can also act as one of its detrimental factors. One of the biggest

potential mistakes that the series takes is in the treatment of gay characters. The series promotes gay characters in the same way that it promotes people of color, which can appeal to viewers who do not have religious reservations about the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people in Hollywood. However, it is much easier for those opposed to the series to accept the message of inclusion for people of color than it is for them to accept the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people. The series seems to forget that their messages about people of color and people who are LGBTQ+ need to be crafted separately in some cases rather than joined together.

Overall, the message of Murphy's show is very clear: the film industry would be better off if more voices and perspectives were heard in the production and filming of movies. Despite having some difficulty convincing the audience to agree with that sentiment, the show does a great job in portraying the lives of diverse characters and the obstacles that face them in their pursuit of success. Murphy acknowledges these obstacles, and provides a revisionist history that imagines a world where these obstacles do not have to exist and there is opportunity for all people to achieve their goals.

Conclusion

Researching and analyzing this topic was different from what I did throughout the rest of this semester because I was able to use society as a whole as the sample for my research rather than focusing my work on my college campus. Hollywood and the film industry are things that the majority of the population know about and have opinions on, so it was interesting to see how an artifact like a fully produced television series provides commentary on the issue of diversity. Rather than hearing opinions about the issue from the people around me, I was able to hear the opinions of the people in power who directed, produced, wrote, and starred in the series.

The issue of diversity in Hollywood is usually spoken about during the awards seasons, usually by the audiences of films. This series holds a larger significance of the problem because it shows the efforts done behind the scenes to work on the issue of diversity in film. Not only did executives in Hollywood talk about the problem of diversity, they created an entire television series to bring awareness to it as well. This series, even though it just recently came out, draws an even larger awareness to the issue of diversity and creates an even larger narrative about how the industry can work to improve.

References

Murphy, Ryan (producer). (2020). *Hollywood* [television series]. Hollywood: Netflix.