

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting in a movie theater. The man, on the left, has a beard and glasses, and is looking upwards and to the left. The woman, on the right, is looking upwards and to the right. They are both wearing casual clothing. In the background, other people are visible, some holding up phones to record. The lighting is dim, typical of a movie theater.

Lillian Comas-Díaz
Rehman Abdulrehman
Danny Wedding

Movies, Miniseries, and Multiculturalism

Using Films and Television to Understand
Culture and Social Justice

Movies, Miniseries, and Multiculturalism

About the Authors

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Foreword

Narratives of Liberation, Narratives of Oppression, or Both: Considering Media Psychology and Multicultural Psychology

As an African American woman, poet, filmmaker, minister, and psychologist, I appreciate the power of story. I am recommending this book to you because it exemplifies the ways that stories can give voice and visibility to the neglected, underserved, and marginalized. More specifically, the authors show how stories can shift mindsets, open hearts, and empower the disenfranchised. Films and television series can take the form of activism – art and activism – with an intentional commitment to promote healing and liberation. On the contrary, media can also be and has been used to stereotype, justify harm, dehumanize, and erase. In this powerful and innovative book, media analysis is utilized to illuminate important themes of multicultural psychology including but not limited to notions of identity, belonging, justice, and transformation.

My relationship with the co-authors spans over two decades. I have worked with them in advocating for mental health rights, access, and quality globally. I have also learned from them and taught with them key aspects of global psychology both through peer-reviewed publications and also peer-reviewed and invited convention addresses. They are leaders in the field of global psychology in practice, research, consultation, education, and training who have published thought-provoking and field-shifting texts on multicultural psychology, global psychology, and intersectional liberation psychology. I am pleased to share that one of them, Dr. Lillian Comas-Díaz, was the co-strategist for my campaign to become the 2023 president of the American Psychological Association. She helped to maximize the mobilization and actualization of my dreams to disseminate decolonial, liberation, and intersectional feminist psychology through the American Psychological Association.

To begin this journey in which the authors have crafted a book that will engage you intellectually and culturally, I invite you to think about one of your favorite films. Some factors to consider are: (1) In what ways does the main character reflect your identities and in what ways are they different? (2) Whose voice is central in the film and whose voice is marginalized? (3) Who is presented as desirable, attractive, smart, capable, and popular and who is not? And (4) if the film were to motivate or inspire you to take some sort of action what would that action be and who would benefit from it? I know some of us may think, “It’s not that deep. I just like it because it’s funny or romantic or exciting.” On some level that is accurate and simultaneously there is always a deeper story regarding what appeals to us and why. Media is a tool of communication and it is effective in presenting and convincing the public of particular narratives. Millions of dollars are spent to present the message, whether it is a G-rated children’s animation or porn. The writer, producer, director, editor, distributor, casting director, and cast are cooperating to create and disseminate messages that shape and influence us.

Throughout this book, the authors demonstrate the ways that media is a very influential socializing agent and can be empowering to some and disempowering to others. Consider how people of a particular race, gender, sexuality, body type, religion, age, disability, and even accent are depicted. What does the leading lady, criminal, comedy relief character typically look like and how does that mirror the way persons of a similar background are often treated in society? These media depictions can stretch us and cause us to decolonize our minds or they can reinforce stereotypes that we have been fed all of our lives.

Within these pages, the authors illuminate the fact that to adopt a critical lens and to advance your media literacy, it is helpful to consider not only who is positioned in front of the camera but also who is behind the film. It may not surprise you to know that White men in the United States are usually the ones given the opportunity to green light film projects. In this way, their taste, assumptions, political perspectives, and comfort level can often determine whether diverse stories are told and which stories are widely distributed. To amplify the need to look beyond the culture of the cast, consider if the cast is all Asian but the writer, producer, director, and editor are all White. The ways this Asian American story is told will be curated from an outsider’s perspective. Likewise, if a lesbian love story is written, directed, produced, and edited by straight White men it will shift the narrative to fit their gaze instead of the gaze of those who are supposedly at the center of the narrative. Of course, you can imagine or simply recall how people who don’t subscribe to a faith tradition have depicted practitioners of Indigenous Religions, Jews,

Christians, and Muslims in film. These examples highlight the fact that while representation on the screen matters, it is not sufficient. You can have diverse people on the screen and still promote and perpetuate harmful, stereotypical narratives. Humanity, nuance, voice, and agency are all important parts of creating liberating narratives. People, families, and communities don't have to be perfect to be liberating but they do need to display a full range of emotion, connection, possibility, and choices.

The authors illuminate the fact that looking at multicultural psychology from the vantage point of liberation psychology also calls for us to not only consider the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals but also reflect on the socio-political and even intergenerational context of characters. For example, to tell a narrative of youth involved in gang activity and to present them as just making bad choices without any framework regarding poverty, discrimination, and intergenerational oppression is to tell a fraction of the story. Multicultural film analysis requires that we enter the world of the story which gives space and voice to the various interlocking systems affecting the characters as well as their internal and interpersonal worlds. Before you conclude that this is asking too much of the filmmaker, think about a film that you have seen that you feel did an effective job of bringing you into both the psychological world of the characters and the larger society that is shaping their lives. Even when this is not done effectively, you as viewer can be empowered to ask those critical questions, interrogate the narrative, and pull the insights out of the narrative. In this way, the liberating aspect of the film is not only about the story that is told, the way it is told, but also the way in which it is consumed. Promoting media literacy is an important role that psychologists can play in addition to using media in teaching, practice, research, and consultation.

In narrative therapy, clients are encouraged to not only think about how other people have shaped their lives, ranging from abusers to mentors, but also to consider their voice and agency. In light of this, the authors of this groundbreaking book show us the importance of not just being passive recipients of the messages presented overtly and covertly but also viewing media from an empowered and liberating vantage point. Finally, in appreciation of this captivating book, I invite you to consider your current or future role as a content creator. Whether you are active on social media, take pictures of memorable events, or engage in creative writing, make a commitment to using your voice and vision to promote liberating messages. We are all worthy of stories that honor our truth, dignity, and humanity. The authors have the training and decades of experience to guide us on this thoughtful journey through media and multicultural psychology. This text is one I will use for

myself, my clients, and my students. I recommend it strongly if you are committed to growing your knowledge and application of psychology in a way that will enhance people's lives.

Thema Bryant, PhD
2023 President of the American Psychological Association

Preface

**“Movies are something people see all over the world –
because there is a certain need for it.”**

Wim Wenders

Do you like movies? Do you like television miniseries? Would you like to know more about culture and multiculturalism? If your answer is *yes* to these questions, this book is for you. We wrote *Movies, Miniseries, and Multiculturalism* to help you understand multiculturalism through films and miniseries.

We are mental health professionals who love movies and television. We do not separate being psychologists from being cinephiles. These two identities inform and enrich our lives and work.

Ang Lee, the 2006 Oscar winner for Best Director, declared that movies are a way of understanding the world and ourselves. In our experience, movies and miniseries also can be therapeutic, and we sometimes prescribe films for our patients to watch. We believe we deepen our knowledge and understanding of human behavior when we watch films and miniseries. In short, *movies teach us about life*. No wonder actress Audrey Hepburn said that everything she learned, she learned from the movies.

Since human behavior is culturally rooted, films and miniseries expand our knowledge of self and others. Because multiculturalism promotes transformation as well as an openness to others (Fowers & Davidov, 2006), it helps to understand our cultural embeddedness and to embrace flexibility (Comas-Díaz, 2024). When we watch multicultural films and miniseries, we unconsciously, preconsciously, and consciously witness ourselves and others. Movies help us reflect on who we are as well as on who others are. Since multiculturalism supports the integration of multiple healing systems (Fowers & Davidov, 2006), watching multicultural films and miniseries nurtures healing. According to film director Tim Burton, films are like therapy. Watching multicultural films and miniseries not only reflects who we are, but more importantly, it nurtures who we are becoming. Multicultural movies and

miniseries promote growth and transformation, and watching multicultural movies and miniseries illuminates multiple ways of being in the world. In our experience, watching multicultural films and miniseries can be enlightening and promote personal growth. Entertainment media is much like initially seeing an iceberg, and realizing most of it is submerged; watching multicultural films and miniseries, thinking about them, and discussing them with friends, family, and colleagues help us appreciate the deeper aspects of life's iceberg.

I think cinema, movies, and magic have always been closely associated.
The very earliest people who made film were magicians.

Francis Ford Coppola

We are three different individuals connected by our profession (clinical psychology) and our love of films and miniseries. Like Italian American film director Francis Ford Coppola, we strongly believe that movies *are* magic. We share this perspective even though we are culturally different from each other. Our positionalities further explain our differences.

Lillian

I am a Latinx cisgender mixed-race decolonial liberation feminist woman. I was born in Chicago and was transplanted to Puerto Rico at age 6. Like many Puerto Ricans, my parents engaged in circular migration between the island and the continental United States with my younger brother David. I remained on the island living with my maternal grandparents. My parents and David moved back to the island, and we were reunited as a nuclear family. Growing up in Puerto Rico was a blessing. I was exposed to multiple intersecting cultures including those of the Caribbean, Spain, and North, Central, and South America. We lived in the beautiful little town of Yabucoa, located on the eastern south coast of the island, and we had gorgeous views of the Caribbean Sea and the mountains. However, living in a colony taught me the realities of oppression, and it nurtured a thirst for social justice, decolonization, and liberation. Movies became an elixir. Yabucoa had a movie theater, and Henry, the theater owner, loved movies, especially foreign movies. Movies were a panacea. Accompanied by David, cousins, and close friends, I went every weekend to watch serious cinema from all around the world. This experience whetted my appetite for movies. Growing up in Puerto Rico and watching

movies nurtured my “harbor mind.” Harbor mind refers to the ability to manage multiple realities resulting in pluralism (Nicolson, 2023). My harbor mind encouraged multiculturalism as well as the engagement in critical consciousness, liberation, and decolonization. I returned to the continental United States to work and to complete a doctoral degree in clinical psychology. I remained there and met my husband, Fred, an American man who experienced significant ethnocultural translocation. As lovers of movies, we enjoy watching and talking about movies. This practice blends magic into our shared lives.

Rehman

I am a Muslim Canadian of Zanzibari descent with a mixed ethnic heritage. Following the Zanzibar revolution, my parents and large portions of my family fled to the mainland of the now amalgamated country of Tanzania, and I was born and lived in Dar es Salaam until I was 7 years old. I remember our neighbor, nicknamed Baby, in Dar es Salaam having an entire room dedicated to organized and categorized Betamax video cassettes of movies, and my being in awe of the rows and rows of towering stories organized on shelves. I remember sitting down with her to watch a film on the Holocaust. The images of men, women, and children, naked and being forced into the gas chambers, are seared into my mind, and I realize now how impactful film was in creating an awareness of social justice for me even as a child. I also remember my parents taking me to the drive-in theaters in the heat of African summers and seeing Bambi’s mother die from a hunter’s gun. Once again, the issue of social justice became salient for me. I also remember moving to Canada when I was 7, my parents having adopted an old but large console television from an uncle’s friend, in a wooden box, with a whole 13 channels. But at that time in Canada, movies were a luxury for immigrants, and instead I followed television and early Saturday morning cartoons, accompanied by sugary cereal and milk. These were hopeful shows about superheroes who were defenders of justice (all of them White). Although those shows did not have people that looked like me, they made me feel very Canadian and a part of a culture I had only read about in books as a child in Dar es Salaam. When I fast-forward to the present, my young son watches many of those series and shows today, delving deeper into stories with more diverse casts that now include people like him. And he is better for it, as his generation has an opportunity to learn about social justice, with characters that look, act, and feel like him (and me). And so naturally, as film has increasingly moved toward miniseries and television to tell more in-depth narratives infused with nuances of

culture and social justice, it also made sense for us to review television miniseries that can allow us to share experiences with a broader audience like never before.

Just as film and television have been an important part of my life, so too has psychology. I've had the pleasure to return "home" to teach and develop mental health resources in low-resource settings in both Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar with three universities in the region. I've served on the International Relations Committee for the American Psychological Association and been the chair of this committee. And I've helped larger media organizations such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Google/YouTube address issues of inclusion and bias so they can improve the inclusion of stories watched by my son and others like him.

Stories, one way or another, have become a significant part of my work. Narrative storytelling is important in therapy, in workshops, and in training but also in relaying humanity. I've had the honor to give a TEDx talk on unconscious bias, exploring the question, "But Where Are You Really From?" You now know the answer. I've been a published poet, and still write poetry. I wrote a book titled *Developing Anti-Racist Cultural Competence* (Abdulrehman, 2024), and a newly released novel about the supernatural folklore of the jinn in Zanzibari and Arab culture, entitled *Jinn in the Family* (Abdulrehman, 2025). I am also the editor of a new anthology of poetry for people of color, which is currently in progress, titled *The Poetry of Angry Black and Brown People*. I was also a guest editor for a *Consulting Psychology Journal* special edition, titled "Beyond the generic Brown: South Asian and Arab people in the workplace."

Danny

I am a 76-year-old cisgender White guy who knows far less about multiculturalism than my two colleagues (both of whom have international reputations for their multicultural work). However, I knew I needed to learn more about culture, and working with Lillian and Rehman has been a tremendous learning experience.

I am also an enthusiastic film aficionado, and my love of films is reflected in the current book, in two editions of *Positive Psychology at the Movies* (Niemiec & Wedding, 2013), and in five editions of *Movies and Mental Illness* (Wedding, 2024).

My passion for film grew out of my neurotic need to be *accomplishing something*; simply enjoying good films wasn't enough, so I got in the habit of

taking notes while watching movies, and these notes eventually turned into books, chapters, and articles. Both of my previous movie books have been translated into multiple languages.

I have also loved being a peripatetic psychologist, and my love of film has supported considerable international travel. I lectured widely on movies during two Senior Scholar Fulbrights: The first involved teaching psychotherapy to psychiatry residents at the Chiang Mai University School of Medicine (Thailand); 10 years later a second Fulbright allowed me to spend a year teaching graduate students in psychology at Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea. Like all Fulbright Scholars, I was expected to lecture widely, and I did, presenting at universities in Thailand, Cambodia, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, China, Okinawa, and mainland Japan. Most of these talks were about movies.

I was delighted to learn that many of my Thai and Korean students had watched – and loved – dozens of movies that I had enjoyed, and I cherish the long discussions with my students about whether given films (e.g., *A Beautiful Mind*) present accurate portrayals of mental illness, addiction, or developmental disabilities. I have always secretly wanted to be a film critic; being a psychologist who writes about movies is almost as good! (And I’ve finally gotten there – my reviews of psychologically relevant films can be found by Googling “A Clinical Psychologist Goes to the Movies.”)

We genuinely appreciate the hundreds of colleagues who have taken time to recommend movies to include in this book. Some of the films are dated (e.g., *Walkabout*); however, each film discussed is included because we believe watching the film will make you more culturally sensitive, sophisticated, and literate – in short, more *multicultural*!

All three of us also spent considerable time using Rotten Tomatoes and the Internet Movie DataBase (iMDB) to identify films and television miniseries that would provide a good springboard for multicultural learning and meaningful class discussions. Once word got out that we were writing a book about movies and multiculturalism, our colleagues brought dozens of recommendations for films that could potentially be good teaching tools.

Despite our cultural differences, sharing a mutual passion for movies and miniseries helped us navigate these differences, enriching our lives and infusing this book with multicultural content. And we believed that a book like this was necessary to promote discussion of multicultural narratives in film and television. As Toni Morrison said, “If there is a book you want to read, and it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.” So we did.

Our goal is to help you expand your multicultural knowledge. Specifically, we aim to help you develop a taste for multiculturalism while you are being

entertained. Since the world is becoming more multicultural, this volume can help you to better understand yourself and others through the lens of movies and miniseries. We aimed to summon magic in this book – we hope we have succeeded.

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Meena: What about me? What about me? I've never asked you for anything! Never expected anything! I'm 24 years old, and I'm still here! Stuck here! You think I'm happy? I love him. That's not a crime, is it?

Kinnu: You call this love? When all you have done is bring such shame upon our heads?

Meena: I didn't do anything! They barged in!

Jay: Don't answer back! At least have the decency to be sorry!

Meena: I am sorry about this mess, but I'm not sorry I'm in love with him.

Meena's Indian parents are convinced that her love for a Black man will bring shame upon the family in *Mississippi Masala*.

history of racial stereotyping. Billy Bob Thornton is unforgettable as the suffering father, and Halle Berry won an Oscar for Best Actress in a Leading Role for playing Leticia.

Cultural Identity, Acculturation, Assimilation

Mississippi Masala (1991) is a somewhat dated but still powerful film starring Denzel Washington as Demetrius, an ambitious young Black man who owns a carpet cleaning business, and Sarit Choudhury as Meena, the beautiful 24-year-old daughter of a prosperous Indian couple who had to leave their home and property in Uganda when Idi Amin came to power and forced all emigrants to leave the country in 1972 because he desired a pure "Black Africa." (The British brought Indian workers to Uganda to help build railroads; many stayed and became prosperous landowners who were often more successful and more wealthy than indigenous people in Uganda.) *Masala* is a Hindu word referring to mixed spices, a mixture producing richer flavor than could ever be produced by a single spice.

Jay, Meena's father, is a proud man who was trained as a lawyer; however, after emigrating to the United States, he is reduced to owning a small, shabby roadside motel in Greenwood, Mississippi, with his wife and daughter cleaning toilets and making beds. He deeply resents having his property confiscated and being expelled from his home in Uganda, and his hatred extends well past Idi Amin to all Blacks.

There is a close, cohesive, and extended Indian network in Greenwood, and the entire community becomes concerned when a romantic relationship

develops between Demetrius and Meena. The Black community is initially friendly, but eventually just as concerned about this complicated interracial relationship, especially after the Indians boycott Demetrius's rug cleaning business.

Like many Indians, Meena's parents had expected her to marry someone in the Greenwood Indian community, preferably someone of their choosing. However, they are concerned that she might be "too dark" to find a suitable husband, demonstrating colorism in many communities of color, including the South Asian community. The folly of her parents' obsession with her skin tone is underscored by her infatuation with the much darker Demetrius; however, she is warned that a woman who needs a husband can be poor and light-skinned, or rich and dark-skinned – but *never* poor and dark-skinned! The significance of skin color is reviewed in a scholarly book by Kimberly Norwood titled *Color Matters: Skin Tone Bias and the Myth of a Postracial America* (2014). Writing in *PsycCRITIQUES*, Martha Banks (2014, n.p.) noted:

Colorism, similar to racism, is an ongoing consequence of the myth of White superiority, manifested as "the allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one's skin" . . . and "the tendency to perceive or



Figure 2.3. *Mississippi Masala* (1992, Studio Canal Souss, Black River Productions, Channel Four Films, Mirabai Films, Cinecom Pictures, Movie Works). Produced by Lydia Dean Pilcher, Mitch Epstein, Mira Nair, and Michael Nozik. Directed by Mira Nair. Food is always an integral part of culture. *Mississippi Masala* revolves around the intersection of three distinct cultures in three parts of the world: India, Uganda, and Mississippi. This powerful movie deals with racism, class struggle, colorism, displacement, and interracial love.

Chapter 4

Community

“And he came on the back of a whale. A man to lead a new people. Our ancestor, Paikea. But now we are waiting for the firstborn of the new generation, for the descendant of the whale rider. For the boy who would be chief.”

Whale Rider

Questions to Consider While Watching *Whale Rider* (2002)

- Do you think leadership qualities are gender specific? If so, how?
- Are there differences in style between a male leadership and a female leadership?
- Why do you think most leaders historically have been male?
- How does culture inform who can be a leader?
- How do you think Koro feels about Pai (Paikea) surviving her mother's and twin brother's death?
- How do you understand Koro's complicated relationship with his granddaughter Pai?
- Pai's father moved to Germany leaving her behind with Koro, her grandfather. How do you understand this?
- What was the effect of Koro prohibiting Pai from learning Māori martial arts?
- What do you think about how Pai circumnavigated her grandfather's prohibition?
- What is the significance of history among Indigenous communities?
- What is the function of demarcating gender roles in communities?

Community and Culture

The concept of community refers to interactions between individuals who share a set of values, beliefs, and expectations that inform their behavior. Out of this process cultural values and norms emerge to guide the behavior of community members. Indeed, culture is embedded in the concept of community. However, community is a complex construct. To illustrate, a community is more than its residents. Instead, it is a sociopsychological construct. Community members may be born in a specific physical location, or in another place. Moreover, members may have moved out of the community, hoping to return, but be unable to do so. In short, community is the unit of an efficient human group.

Community and *Whale Rider*

Based on a novel by Witi Ihimaera, *Whale Rider* (2002) is a New Zealand–German film written and directed by Niki Caro. It stars Keisha Castle-Hughes as Paikea (Pai), who was nominated for the Academy Award Best Actress category at age 13 in this extraordinary film. The movie is about a contemporary New Zealand Māori community whose members are expecting a leader to be born to lead them into greatness.

Paikea (Pai) is a 12-year-old Māori girl. She was born a twin, but her twin brother died at childbirth. Sadly, her mother also died giving birth. After this tragedy, Pai's father moved to Germany. He left the community because Koro (his father) was pressuring him to take leadership of the tribe. Disappointed with his son, Koro assumes the leadership of his community. Nanny and Koro, Pai's grandparents, raise her. Koro develops an affectionate but ambivalent relationship with his granddaughter. He carries Pai to school every day on his bicycle. Pai expresses her interest in becoming her community's leader:

A long time ago, my ancestor Paikea came to this place on the back of a whale. Since then, in every generation of my family, the firstborn son has carried his name and become the leader of our tribe ... until now.

Koro vigorously opposes Pai's wish to become the community's leader – solely because she is female. Pai is hurt by her grandfather's rigid patriarchal position. She feels mistreated by Koro, and when her father comes to visit, she decides to go to Germany to live with him. While riding in the car with her father, Pai senses that the whales are calling her back. She changes her mind and decides to stay in the village.

- How do you think Don Shirley's intersectional identities with regard to race, sexual orientation, gender, education, and high socioeconomic class affected him?
- What does the phrase “driving while Black” conjure up for you?
- Why do you think Tony Vallelonga got angry and hit a southern policeman when the policeman accused him of being part Black?

Politics and Culture

Politics and culture are inextricably linked, and they have a reciprocal relationship. In other words, politics informs culture, and culture informs politics. Politicians need to respond to the needs of their communities, otherwise, they do not get elected or re-elected. However, historically, the needs of multicultural communities and people of color have not been well represented in US politics. Let us take a brief look at the history of the country's politics with people of color.

US national politics have been ambivalent, and at times, conflictive regarding the needs of **people of color and indigenous individuals** (POCI; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Early on, the US governmental political position toward the indigenous populations resulted in war against them, genocidal attacks, and displacement (making indigenous people immigrants in their own country). The history of slavery in the United States accentuated racism toward African Americans. Moreover, belief in **US Manifest Destiny** – the 19th century belief that US settlers were destined to expand across the continent – fostered the Mexican American War, and the annexation of Texas, California, and other Mexican lands. Additionally, the Spanish American War in 1898 ended with the US annexation of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam. In effect, the United States colonized the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico (Comas-Díaz, 2007). Even more, the history of US immigration laws shows evidence of the racial exclusion of Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Haitians, and other people of color (Johnson, 1998). Consequently, the political relationship between the US government and people of color has been complicated and conflicted.

Politics and *Green Book*

Green Book (2018) is a movie about Donald Shirley (played by Mahershala Ali), an African American classical and jazz virtuoso pianist and composer,

As political opposites T'Challa represents isolation, while Killmonger stands for inclusion. Watch this empowering movie and witness how T'Challa learns from Killmonger to challenge Wakanda's traditional social norms in order to help the world.

Stereotyping

The movie *BlacKkKlansman* (2018) follows the true story of Ron Stallworth, the first African American detective in the Colorado Springs Police Department. The film is based on Stallworth's memoir *Black Klansman* and focuses on Stallworth's penetration and exposure of the local Ku Klux Klan. Spike Lee directed and co-wrote the movie with Charlie Wachtel, David Rabinowitz, and Kevin Willmott. The actors in the film are John David Washington (as Ron Stallworth), Adam Driver (as Detective Phillip "Flip" Zimmerman), Laura Harrier (as Patrice Dumas), Alec Baldwin (as Dr. Kennebrew Beauregard), and Topher Grace (as David Duke). There is a cameo appearance by the venerable singer/actor/activist Harry Belafonte as Jerome Turner. The movie received numerous award nominations and won an Oscar for the Best Adapted Screenplay at the 91st Academy Awards.

BlacKkKlansman shows how an African American detective infiltrates the Ku Klux Klan, pretending to be White. Stallworth is hired as the first African

Ron Stallworth: Hello, this is Ron Stallworth calling. Who am I speaking with?

David Duke: This is David Duke.

Ron Stallworth: The Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, *that* David Duke?

David Duke: The last time I checked. What can I do for you?

Ron Stallworth: Well since you asked, I hate niggers, I hate Jews. Spics and micks. Italians and chinks. But my mouth to God's ears, I really hate those Black rats, and anyone else that doesn't have pure White Aryan blood running through their veins!

David Duke: I'm happy to be talking to a true White American.

Ron Stallworth: God bless White America.

A hilarious and conning exchange between Ron Stallworth, an African American man pretending to be a White racist during a conversation with David Duke (head of the Ku Klux Klan) in order to entrap Duke in the film *BlacKkKlansman*.

altruistic. In fact, it becomes clear that he is nothing more than shallow and narcissistic. This stereotype or **halo effect** for White people is further explored and challenged in Episode 5, where Homelander aligns himself and becomes romantically involved with a superhero named Stormfront (played by Aya Cash), who despite appearing to be young, was born in 1919 in Germany and was a Nazi. Further challenging the stereotypes of White supremacy, the show reveals that Stormfront was also married to Frederick Vought, the Nazi scientist who founded the corporation Vought Industries that created all supes including the super terrorist Naqib. This show is shocking and is explicit in its graphic nature and in the concepts it explores.

Indigenous People

True Detective: Night Country (2024) is a powerful and haunting HBO series that explores the eerie disappearance of eight men in the remote Arctic and their connection to unresolved issues of missing and murdered Indigenous women in the community. This is the fourth season of the *True Detective* franchise created by Issa Lopez and Nic Pizzolatto and can be watched separately as each season is a different story. It stars Jody Foster and Kali Reis as detectives Liz Danvers and Evangeline Navarro. Although *Night Country* is framed as a mystery/detective show, it fits within both the cultural Indigenous perspective and the supernatural. Ghosts and spirits are often referenced and are helpful in resolving the mystery. The show explores elements of multigenerational trauma and the impact of colonialism and industry on the Indigenous way of life and shows how they reflect sustained trauma against Indigenous people. As is the case in all shows and films reviewed in this chapter, the supernatural is not the frightening thing in the show, but rather the horror that is committed because of **colonial White supremacy**. There are only six episodes in this miniseries, and the entire show is worth watching. But if you need to focus on a limited number of episodes, Episodes 2–4 show Navarro, an Indigenous woman, working hard to advocate for the continued investigation and justice for the brutal death of an Inupiat woman, where her case along with the cases of many other missing and murdered Indigenous women is largely ignored in comparison with cases involving White people. This is a common phenomenon termed “**missing White woman syndrome**,” a situation in which missing White women and girls are responded to far more swiftly than in the case of women of color (Skaloff & Fradella, 2019). In this process the team of Navarro and Danvers discovers the naked and frozen remains of several White scientists who were



Figure 8.4. *True Detective: Night Country* (2024, HBO Entertainment, Neon Black, Pastel, Parliament of Owls et al.). Produced by Layla Blackman, Sam Breckman, Blake Brown, Richard Brown, et al. Directed by Issa López. Kali Reis and Jodie Foster are magnificent as Officer Evangeline Navdarro and Police Chief Elizabeth Danvers in the HBO crime drama.

working in the remote community, one of whom has a spiral symbol carved into his forehead. Several issues including those of land rights, environmental exploitation, colonialism, and the strength of survival of Indigenous women in the community are raised. The horror or fantasy elements is once again tied not to the spirits that Navarro sees through visions, with an uncertainty of whether they are real or in her mind, but to the trauma of the murder and further lack of justice for Indigenous women and the community in Western society, even in remote land and country meant to be theirs. The directors do an excellent job of balancing the issue of disempowered murdered Indigenous women with a strong female cast, both of whom are leaders in this show. It should also be noted that between Danvers and Navarro the power dynamic between a White woman not taking an Indigenous woman seriously is played out, as experts on White feminism often point out in their work (Hamad, 2020). But the supernatural, used by the creator of this and the other seasons in this series, does what Alitheia Binnie, from *Three Thousand Years of Longing*, says; they use “gods and monsters” to create meaning out of the real horrors faced by marginalized people of color.

Additional Films and Miniseries About Horror and Fantasy

The number of horror and fantasy movies and miniseries that reflect culture, diversity, and social justice is growing. There are times when the themes are directly reflected in the plot, and other times when they are indirect. Some of our favorite horror movies and miniseries include *Blood Quantum* (2019), *Ravenous* (2017) (both Canadian films), *Lovecraft Country* (2020), *The Babadook* (2014), *Candyman* (1992 and 2021), *Djinn* (2019) (by Toby Hooper, who directed *Poltergeist*), *Under the Shadows* (2016), *The Host* (2006), *Parasite* (2019), *Tigers Are Not Afraid* (2017), *Beloved* (1998), *The Vigil* (2019), *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2019), *Stigmata* (1999), *The Angry Black Girl and Her Monster* (2023), *The Orphanage* (2007), and *Sinners* (2025), a recent film that uses the vampire narrative as a metaphor for Jim Crow racism.

Some of our favorite movies and television shows that are focused on fantasy include *American Gods* (2017), *Ms. Marvel* (2022), *Moon Knight* (2022), *Black Panther* (2018), *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022), *Pachinko* (2022), *The Shape of Water* (2017), *Moana* (2016), *Avatar: The Last Airbender* (2024, live action), and *Wicked* (2024).

Critical Thinking Questions About Horror, Fantasy, and Culture

- In the presence of real-life global crises and human rights violations broadcast 24 hours a day on social media, are ghost stories an out-of-touch form of horror stories?
- When the true crime genre is gaining popularity, are we more entertained by the real-life terrors than mythology?
- Has our social media access to horrific war crimes and mass human suffering numbed us to the point that we must turn to fantasy and old-fashioned ghost stories to detach from the actual horrors of the real world?
- Have you ever heard of any ghost or jinn stories from cultures outside of North America? How are they different and are they more frightening? Why or why not?
- Is it essential to incorporate different cultural lore and tradition into television and movies to ensure greater representation?
- Are we so challenged to incorporate the culture of racialized people that we can only do so when viewing films about horror or fantasy?

Chapter 9

Star Wars and Social Justice

Indara: We are concerned that you are training children, which is against Republic law.
Aniseya: Brendok is not part of the Republic.

Indara, a Jedi Master visiting the planet Brendok without permission of its inhabitants, questions Aniseya, a local mother and head of a coven, about training children against the Republic Law in *The Acolyte*.

Questions to Consider While Watching *The Acolyte* (2024)

- Is it a wise decision to change the lore of a well-established series, such as *Star Wars*, to ensure it is more culturally relevant and appropriate? Or does this give in to cancel culture?
- Was the old *Star Wars* trilogy racist? Why or why not?
- Does addressing issues of social justice indirectly through fantasy and science fiction minimize or water down the issues?
- Are the Jedi good or are they supremacist colonial powers infringing on Indigenous people's right for self-determination?
- What are the parallels between the witches and Indigenous populations around the world?
- Is the Jedi Order that removes children from their families to train them as Jedi and protectors of the galaxy a form of colonial residential schooling? Why or why not?

Critical Thinking Questions About Genocide, Apartheid, Civil Rights, and Colonialism

- Why do issues of civil rights of people of color in one part of the world correlate so strongly with the rights of a different group of people of color in another part of the world? For example, why was Malcolm X so interested in the rights of Palestinians?
- Have you paid attention to the role of colonialism in many global issues? If so, what have you noticed? If not, what has prevented you from noticing?
- Do you feel like in today's modern world we create exceptions for the application of human rights for all to some group of people? If so, why do you think that is? For example,
 - Do you believe that politics interferes with the basic human rights of people of color? Why or why not?
 - Do you believe that some governments and political systems use stereotypes of some people?
- How do politics sustain colonialism and apartheid, and how does political conflict lead to genocide of a people?
- There is criticism of how the Western world carries on with business as usual while people of color and the Global South are impacted negatively. What do you think contributes to the need to avoid these difficult issues?
- Indigenous people have been fighting for their basic human rights since contact with Europeans. What systems and beliefs have contributed to sustain their marginalization for so long?
- Dehumanizing terminology like “vermin” (used to describe Jews during the Holocaust); “savages” (used to describe Indigenous people); “chattel” and the N-word for Black people in America; “barbaric” and “human animals” to describe Palestinians; and “terrorists” to describe Arabs, Muslims, and the broader Middle East were all readily accepted by the broader public to manufacture consent to engage in harm and even kill many of these people. Why do you believe dehumanization of these and other people was so effective?

Further Exploration

If you only have time for one article, read:

Albanese, F. (2024, October 1). *Genocide as colonial erasure: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/genocide-as-colonial-erasure-report-francesca-albanese-01oct24/>

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Peer Commentaries

By examining cinema from a cultural perspective, this book changes (and often challenges) the way we view contemporary narrative. It makes us re-think the stories we've seen before and deepens our understanding of the ways in which they reflect our culture. It's also an amazing journey through cinematic history, written with a profound love and depth of understanding.

Deborah Chow, Director and Executive Producer of the TV miniseries *Obi-Wan Kenobi*; Director of episodes of the TV series *The Mandalorian*

Movies, Miniseries, and Multiculturalism highlights important contemporary social justice themes by providing insightful analysis of dozens of thoughtfully selected films and television shows and posing questions that push the reader to think critically about community, culture, equity, difference, values, and identity. Similar to Wedding's other texts, the accessibility of media is used to examine socio-cultural concepts, build connections, and bring attention to the power and purpose of a story. While entertaining, the illustrated media examples and the stories they contain also prove to be valuable vehicles for acknowledging shared humanity, building compassion, and giving voice to the lived experiences of others, and bringing awareness of the viewer as an agent of positive social change. Kudos to the authors for delivering a lucid, well-structured, and unique teaching tool that will undoubtedly expand students' thinking and ability to make meaning of important stories in a creative, absorbing, culturally humble, and engaging manner.

Jeremiah Dickerson, MD, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, University of Vermont – Larner College of Medicine

Reading Movies, Miniseries, and Multiculturalism is like going to the movies with three experts on psychology, culture, and film. Comas-Díaz, Abdulrehman, and Wedding have curated an impressive range of films and miniseries on topics ranging from family and relationships to colonialism and social justice. The context and plot of films are offered without providing spoilers, which whets the reader's appetite to watch or rewatch these films. The authors discuss psychological principles (e.g., internalized racism, racial socialization, acculturation) illustrated in the films and provide references for those interested in an in-depth examination of the principles. Each chapter presents multiple questions to consider while watching the films to get the reader to think more deeply about the multicultural aspects of films. The authors are not afraid to discuss shortcomings of some of the

films, including failures to realistically portray communities of color and to challenge stereotypes of groups. The book is of interest to multiple audiences, including psychologists, teachers, students, therapists, clients, filmmakers, and film enthusiasts.

Gordon C. Nagayama Hall, PhD, Past President of APA Division 45: Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity and Race; Author of *Multicultural Psychology*

This book could not be more important! As our world grows increasingly interconnected, we find ourselves immersed in the richness of an immense variety of countless cultures. Nevertheless, we struggle to even sit in the same room as those who are different, let alone engage in curious and civil discussions. This book, therefore, is a gift. Through the magic of narrative and the universality of film in the theater or the living room, the authors remind the audience that art helps us to celebrate our similarities and to marvel at everything that makes us unique.

Steven C. Schlozman, MD, Medical Director Vermont Center for Children, Youth and Families at University of Vermont – Larner College of Medicine

What an extraordinary and outstanding treasure! If you love movies and miniseries and would like to increase your understanding of multiculturalism via those, you will be open to the magic in this book. I appreciated being reminded how multicultural themes in films can be enlightening and promote personal growth. Questions designed by the wisdom, expertise, and knowledge of three outstanding scholars/authors encourage critical thinking and inspired me to view some of the films again – and to discover new ones!

Melba J. T. Vasquez, PhD, ABPP, President, American Psychological Foundation; Former President, American Psychological Association