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## A Critical Review Of The Movie The Boy In The Striped Pajamas

A young, fun-loving 8-year-old boy lives his days to the fullest in the city of Berlin, Germany where his family resides in the 1940s. This all changes when his father is promoted to commandant of the German Nazi army. Now, Bruno and his family must uproot their lives in Berlin and move to the country as required by his father's job. Bruno, being an explorer and adventure-seeker at heart becomes bored and lonely at the new house to which he is bound to only certain areas. Naturally, while his family is preoccupied, his curiosity gets the best of him and he ventures out. He wanders through the woods and comes upon the fence of the "farm" that he had seen from his bedroom window, which is later determined to be the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Here he meets Shmuel, the boy in the striped pajamas, who is the same age as Bruno and equally unaware of the horrors of the camp. They strike up an unusual friendship, unbeknownst to and forbidden by Bruno's family as well as most of German society. Amidst Bruno's adventures to see his new friend, he and his sister Gretel meet with a tutor whose curriculum is full of anti-Semitic ideologies. As time goes by, Bruno's mother becomes privy to details of her husband's job and decides that their new home and its associated environment is no place to raise a family. Bruno's father makes arrangements for Bruno and Gretel along with their mother to reside with a close relative until further notice. After learning he will be leaving his new home, Bruno embarks on one last adventure with Shmuel that ends with quite the unexpected outcome.

The overarching moral of this story is how as humans, people are more similar than they are different. Individuals share more commonalities than they do differences in their physical, religious or cultural variations arbitrarily termed race. Sociologists often use the term race in quotation marks to convey that it carries very little meaning. Race is seen as a socially constructed idea that rarely categorizes individuals accurately. This moral is conveyed through both the commonalities between Bruno and Shmuel and ironically as well as through the insinuated differences between the German and the Jewish people. Through their friendship, it can be determined that racism is a learned belief nurtured by culture. Research has shown that children exposed to cultures different from their own become more racially tolerant. Because race is a socially constructed idea, racism and racial prejudice and the associated hatred are culturally fostered attitudes.

To further expose this moral, the producers juxtapose the symbolic interactionist perspective used to approach the relationship between Bruno and Shmuel and with the use of the conflict perspective to portray the relationship between German society and the Jews. The symbolic

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interactionist perspective is portrayed by showing the boys having equal status, pursuing the same goals and cooperating with one another to achieve those goals and in return receiving positive feedback from one another. Both Bruno and Shmuel are eight years old, an age in which their societal roles are still based on them being under the authority of their parents. They are portrayed as equal though the audience knows they have been forced into dominant and subordinate groups, respectively, by society. They pursue friendship with one another, and following their initial meeting establish their friendship with a handshake. They are shown throughout the film cooperating to achieve this goal by associating as often as possible, communicating and playing board games though they are separated by a large fence. Ironically, this fence symbolizes the social orders in place to prevent their friendship, such as racism and racial prejudice leading to racial discrimination and social inequality.

Whereas the symbolic interactionist perspective examines only the relationship between the Bruno and Shmuel and their roles in society using microlevel analysis, the conflict perspective uses macrolevel analysis to acknowledge the dynamics of the dominant Aryan race and subordinate Jewish race. Historically, before World War II began, Hitler became the leader of the Nazi party, a socialist political party, and was eventually appointed Chancellor of Germany. Through his position he dismantled democracy, instituting a dictatorship in its place and established the Reich. Hitler upheld profound pride for Germany and the Aryan race as well as deep-rooted anti-Semitic ideology. The book points out that powerful people often “use ideologies to maintain their [dominant] positions at the expense of others.” Hitler did just that. He ensured social control and the endorsement of these his ideologies using violence and intimidation. This created a culture of direct institutionalized discrimination against Jews and those disloyal to the nation which supported the idea that these people should be persecuted and exterminated. Due to the extreme hatred and discrimination of the Jews, the notion was formed that they were “unworthy to live,” resulting in the genocide of the Jewish race. This culture is depicted throughout the entirety of the film. In the beginning of the film, the commandant’s mother voiced her disapproval of her son’s choices to him and he insisted she keep her opinions to herself. Later in the movie, during dinner one night, Lt. Kotler disclosed that his father had fled from Germany when the war began signifying his disloyalty to the country. He lost his position in the army because he had not notified his superiors that his father was a non-conformist to the Nazi regime. The film also depicts this ideology being taught to both Gretel and Bruno by their tutor. Gretel buys into these beliefs and begins to act accordingly by getting rid of her dolls and becoming invested in the war efforts. Bruno has a harder time accepting this ideology as he has formed a relationship with Shmuel, a Jew, and the stereotypes he is being taught about the Jews because the characteristics he is being taught do not match with that of which he has been exposed. Intolerance and hatred of the Jews is shown through the physical interactions of Lt. Kotler with Pavel and Shmuel, as well as the stigma associated with being a Jew verbally implied by statement from the members of Nazi army and Bruno’s tutor, as well as by Shmuel himself. This perspective highlighted the implied

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differences between these two groups of people, insinuating that the two had more differences than similarities and could not coexist.

The overarching social problem in this film was the Holocaust involving the persecution and genocide of the Jewish race. This social problem was fueled by racism in the form of racial discrimination, prejudice and ultimately hatred. Due to the way the movie ended, there were no solutions presented for these social problems, only the thought of what could have been and potentially the realization and a first-hand account of the atrocities being committed. Throughout the movie, and in history, differences between the two races were sought out to the extent that they no longer saw the Jews as people anymore. They failed to realize that they too were humans, seeking friendship, love and others joys of life. They refused to acknowledge that they shared more commonalities as humans than they did differences in their physical characteristics and religious beliefs.

The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rated the audience demographic for this movie as PG-13 signifying parental guidance is advised for children under 13 years of age.

Due to the historical context backing this movie yet relativity to today, I would say this movie is suited for a wide audience demographic. The movie itself would probably be suitable for young adults and older and potentially older children with parental guidance, as suggested by the MPAA. Those interested in history, as well as action and drama movies might like to view this film. I personally would suggest that one know the basic details of the Holocaust before watching this movie to prevent forming incorrect notions about this historic event from this fictional movie.

Personally, I thought *They Boy in the Striped Pajamas* was an excellent film. When it first came out, I was unsure whether or not I wanted to watch it. Due to the nature of the historical event it is based on, I questioned whether it would anger me because it did not accurately portray what happened, or if it would be gruesomely accurate inciting sorrow. However, I think it was accurately depicted, insinuating the horrors of the Holocaust but not exposing viewers to gruesome images or scenes. Though the movie and original book are not based on a true story, I certainly don't find it far-fetched that many of the scenes captured in the movie could have occurred. I think the producers did a great job of fashioning this movie in a way that respects what took place not so long ago in our world and producing a box-office success.

On a five-star scale (five being paramount), I would give this movie 4.7 stars. I must commend the producers for their perceptive interpretation of such a sensitive matter. Their idea to take a look at this event through the eyes of a young German boy was brilliant. Since most know the highlights of the event that occurred not so long ago focus on the atrocities that the Jews suffered, it was innovative to add dynamic by viewing the other side of the story while still

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acknowledging the unsettling realities of the Holocaust. The actors embodied their characters as if they were actually experiencing this event first-hand. I thought it was a quality movie with a profound message. My only criticisms would be that it could be slightly melodramatic in some scenes, and I felt as though it was promoted as a children's movie. Though I agree, it is important for children to know about the Holocaust, I believe they need to have awareness of the event before watching the movie so as to not draw incorrect conclusions about the Holocaust from a fictional depiction of the event. Other than that, I found it to be emotionally captivating and thought-provoking, two qualities that I personally think make a film exceptional.

Charles Colton once said, "We hate some persons because we do not know them; and we will not know them because we hate them." Though I believe the ultimate solution to the social issue of racism including racial discrimination, prejudice and hatred is a heart change, acceptance of differences in others is a solid start. For this to happen we must get to know one another. We must cultivate a culture in which we can communicate effectively and ask questions to get to know each other without worrying about offending someone. Bruno and Shmuel depicted the perfect example of this, befriending others on the basis of their personal qualities, not their skin color or religion. This is especially important in the medical field. There is no room for racism in the medical field as it affects quality of care. To prevent this, medical staff must get to know their patients in order to treat them effectively. Once they know their patients for who they are and not what they look like, one is more likely to treat them to the best of their abilities to increase their patient's quality of life. At the heart of the matter, we must realize that as humans, we are more similar than we are different.

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