
Complexities of Cultural Identity in Frozen River

FROZEN RIVER AND COMPLEXITIES OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Frozen River reflects the complexities of cultural identities in America by showing us many examples of privilege, hard times, problems, racism, prejudice and alliance. It shows us different perspectives on multiple problems. In the time and society that the movie was taken place in shows a lot of examples of white privilege. For example, when Ray and Lila crossed the border from Canada and back into America, Lila mentioned to Ray that she had nothing to be scared of. What Lila meant was that Ray should not be scared of the cops. Ray is white; therefore, she is less likely to get pulled over. Another example of white privilege is at the end of the movie, when Lila would have had to go to jail for five years because she is a Mohawk Indian, while Ray would only have to go for four months for the same crime. White privilege, including racism and prejudice has not been only a thing of the past, it still happens in America today and the movie does a good job portraying it.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LILA AND RAY

Even though Lila and Ray's lives are very separate, they are also parallel as well. Lila and Ray are both connected in the movie because they are both decent and hard working mothers that struggle day-to-day life. They both do not have romantic lovers but they both have kids of their own that eventually create an understanding of motherhood. They did not see eye to eye until they got to know one another more. Cultural processes such as being from complete different ethnic backgrounds slowed the process of Lila and Ray getting to know each other fully. They both had stereotypes about each other before getting to know each other. This is mainly because the Indian people and Caucasian people both had their own societies within society. Ray will probably never get to experience or fully know what it is like to be Indian while Lila will never know what it is like to be living in society as a Caucasian woman. At the end of the day both women do whatever they can to provide for their families. They are also faced with poverty so they both make poor decisions that form a budding friendship.

MORAL DIMENSIONS ACTIVATED IN LILA AND RAY

Care/harm: This moral dimension represents attachment, kindness and nurturance. The first example of this foundation would be when TJ, Ray's older son, wants to help his mother by dropping out of school, looking after his younger brother Ricky and getting a job to help the family out. Ray and TJ get into an argument because Ray does not want Ricky to drop out of school. I believe that TJ mentioned to help the family because he was old enough to realize that his mother was struggling and he wanted to help her out.

Ray's nurturance as practically a single mother for her children would also be an example care. Another example of this moral dimension would be when Lila picks her son from her mother in law's house at the end of the movie. Both mothers are showing a form of devoted attachment. At the end of the movie when Ray chooses to go to prison instead of Lila and insists that Lila takes care of her son's while she is away in prison would also be considered as an example of care. Lila and Ray are able to feel the pain of each other as mothers.

The kids eat popcorn and tang while Ray is not at home. At first, the audience considered this as harm to the kids. As the audience finds out that Ray is out there battling and going against the norms of society to find a way to feed her children real food, we change our mind. It is then considered as care. All parents will do whatever they can to make sure there is food on the table.

Fairness/cheating: This moral dimension promotes fairness and equality. During the movie when Lila and Ray would drive across the Canada border and be back in USA, Ray would always be nervous for cops but Lila would assure her that she had nothing to worry about since she was “white.” When Ray did get pulled over the first time, she was questioned to why Lila, an “Indian” was in her car. Ray had to lie and say that Lila was her babysitter to get through the situation without being interrogated more. The cop’s stereotypical actions perceived by Lila and the questioning of why Lila was in Ray’s car are all examples of inequality between the people of color and law enforcement. This example goes against all the rules of this moral dimension.

Loyalty/betrayal: This foundation promotes patriotism and self-sacrifice. An example of this would be when Ray offers to go to prison for four months so Lila doesn’t have to go for five year. Ray’s action underlines a form of self-sacrifice in her relationship with Lila, which forms a bond of loyalty and trust in their friendship.

Authority/subversion: In the movie, there were two forms of authority that were present. There was the Indian reservation and the cops. Both have power depending on what part of the land they are stepping on. At one point in the movie, Lila and Ray take the route into the Indian reservation to avoid detection of any cops. This made it seem like both forms of authority stayed out of each other’s way. The reservation has power mainly of the Indian people/tribes that live on their land. They have the power to invite people in and kick people out. The cops have power on the land outside of the reservations. Law enforcement and reservations seem to be able to negotiate when noticeable crimes occur.

Liberty/oppression: In the movie Lila had a lot of resentment for not being with her son after the moment he was born. Her mother in law dominated and restricted her son from her for so long that Lila felt like she was banned from raising him.

Sanctity/degradation: The foundation of sanctity/degradation means that the body is like a temple and it can be contaminated by immoral activities. During the time Ray got shot in the ear at the strip club in Canada is an example of this foundation. The foundation is basically saying that she was doing an illegal crime of trafficking humans; therefore, she got herself into a sticky situation (moralfoundations.org).

MIGRANTS

There is an irony in the trafficking of the migrants across the river. The people being trafficked across the river are paying everything they got so they can start a new life in America, meanwhile Lila and Ray are two Americans who are breaking the law so they can get by to live their lives in America. The Asian people being trafficked into the USA are risking all they have got for the hope to live a better life while Lila and Ray are risking their lives by breaking the law in order to live a better life as well.

During the smuggling of the Pakistani couple, Ray and Lila are concerned about the duffle bag they had. Ray made a comment on how the couple must be bringing a bomb into the country so they threw the duffle bag out the car onto the frozen river. Later they realized that there was a baby in the duffle bag so they went to go find the duffle bag. In this scenario, Lila and Ray assumed that duffle bag had something dangerous in it by stereotyping the Pakistani couple. In reality, there was just an innocent, harmless child that Lila and Ray felt obligated to find due to their motherly instincts.

THE IMPACT OF INEQUALITY

The roles of inequality portrayed in the movie are the numerous issues between the Native American society and the legal system. There are four examples shown in the movie that represent unfairness toward Lila due to the fact that she is Native American. First, when Ray was being paranoid after smuggling immigrants onto American land, she would panic and get a lot of anxiety when she would see a cop. Lila said to Ray, "They're not going to stop you. You're white." This shows that Lila thinks that cops are biased towards Native American people and are more likely to pull them over. Second, when Ray got pulled over by a cop, the cop immediately asked Ray why Lila was in the car with her. Usually you do not question people's company but seeing Lila and Ray together seemed taboo to the cop.

Third, Lila mentioned that she had a son but does not live or take care of him because her mother-in-law took him right after she gave birth. She wants to play a motherly figure in her son's life but she feels hopeless in her situation. When Lila tells Ray the news about her son, Ray is shocked and immediately asks Lila why she has not reported the situation to the cops. Lila immediately tells Ray that she feels that the cops will not care or do much. Cops and the legal system are supposed to help people in society but in this case Lila is already convinced that dealing with the legal system will do nothing.

Lastly, at the end of the movie someone had to take the blame for trafficking the humans into America. Lila would get sentenced to five years of prison while Ray would only serve four months of prison. This shows inequality between ethnic backgrounds. It is unfair that one person has to do four times more jail time for the same crime.

THE IMPACT OF MATERIALISM

Some of the materialism that was presented in Ray's house was the big flat screen TV, bath salts, and the family's vision of their new home. The big nice flat TV was not necessary to buy, in Ray's situation I would have bought a fairly cheaper TV. She even mentions that she has bath salts that wants to put to good use. When the movie first started, I noticed that the bathroom was very dirty and in a bad condition. That is probably the reason why she talked about using them in her future home. Ray's family had a roof over their heads but they still wanted a new house. This is another example of materialism. As a society, most of us strive for bigger and nicer; therefore, I can see why Ray and her children wanted a new house even though they did not have the money to buy one.

For Christmas, Ray's older son got a random woman's credit card information to buy his little brother the hot wheels set that he wanted for Christmas. This is also another example of materialism in Ray's family. The older son could have given the younger son a gift without it

having to be materialistic. For example, he could have made a hand made gift or taken his younger brother out on an adventure to a park or a special place as his present.

Since Ray's family is very poverty-stricken, it could have psychologically driven them to like nice things. You are automatically going to crave for better, nicer things when you are barely getting by. As a society, we all want to be wealthy so we can live comfortably. Some people are not very materialistic, as in having really nice cars and clothes but at the end of the day all of us are money driven because we want nice things. For example, some people might drive a really nice car but live in an apartment, while others might have a normal car and live in a mansion. The definition of materialism is different for all of us but everyone at the end of the day wants to live satisfied.

TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF MULTICULTURALISM

Lila and Ray overcome the cultural stereotypes and assumptions in their relationship by working together to get the immigrants across the border. As they got to know one another better, they realized that they are more similar than different. The moment that was a building block in their relationship was the moment Ray and Lila went back to pick up the baby in the duffle bag. Lila thought the baby was dead but Ray did not want to lose hope. Together, they saved the baby. Their relationship points to a new understanding of multicultural society and identity through motherhood. The message of that scenario was that motherhood is timeless and it stretches across all borders. Lila, Ray and the Pakistani immigrant are all connected as mothers as they find themselves trying to save their kids as well as themselves.

There is a new understanding between multicultural society and identity between Lila and Ray when Ray runs back to the reservation after Lila volunteered to go to prison instead of Ray. This is the moment that Lila and Ray see each other more as human beings other than a "white" or "Indian" woman. They do not look at each other the same as they used to, now they see each other as mothers, sisters and friends. There is a common understanding between them two. Ray makes Lila in charge of her kids until she is back from prison. As the audience you see the trust and bond that they have created.

PERSONAL INSIGHT(S)

Even though Lila and Ray made poor decisions to traffic human across the border, I still sympathize with them and I do not view them as bad people. I would have probably done the same if I were in their situation. This movie shows a good representation of poverty and why people take part in illegal activities. I was just reading an article about a woman who started selling drugs because she could not support her family of five after her husband passed away. She had three children and her mother that she supported on her own. Her mother could not go to work because she did not know any English. The woman worked all day, every day of the week with two jobs and yet she was barely getting by. When she started selling drugs, she made a lot of money. She never did any of the drugs herself; she only sold them because she started making five times her working salary in a short amount of time. She said she did it for her kids because she wanted food on the table and she did not want to be homeless. This woman ended up getting caught and she had to serve a prison sentence that was about two decades long. The article I read relates a lot to the movie because it really does not matter what race or culture you come from, all humans have basic needs and drives for survival and we will

do whatever it takes to keep our families together.

I also really liked the ending scene when TJ, Ray's son apologized to the woman that he stole the credit card information from. The ending shows that it is okay to accept apologizes for people's negative or criminalizing behavior that they have committed in the past.

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