

Strictly ballroom

Literature



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Our sense of belonging is derived from our experiences throughout life which can have both negative and positive impacts as a result of the people we associate with and the community in which we place ourselves. Individuals have a need to fit in and be accepted within a group of people, and will sometimes completely disregard their own beliefs and conform to expectations of the established order to be recognized.

These relationships built between people can lead the feeling of safety and love, which will positively impact on one's self esteem, whereas the isolation and neglect of an individual will have a negative degrading impact of their self-worth. Strictly Ballroom the 1992 satirical comedy directed by Baz Luhrmann represents the idea that the surrounding context of an individual shapes their feeling of inclusion and the growth of Scott Hastings. Through the story line of a young Spanish female Fran struggling to be accepted into the Ballroom Dance federation.

Luhrmann conveys the idea that there is an obsession in people to belong and due to this they live in fear of what others will say and are incapable of thinking for themselves. The film represents the idea of there being an authentic and artificial portrayal of belonging due to the conformity of some groups, which influences the loss of individual identity. 'Through the Tunnel' a short story written by Dorris Lessing portrays the idea that individuals develop an identity by stepping out of their boundaries and exploring the unknown.

This is depicted through the character Jerry who longs to fit in with the older boys who swim at the dangerous rocky bay. Lessin illustrates the idea that

individuals strive to fit in with people around them to remove the feeling of not having their own place. The short story conveys the idea that individuals will go out of their comfort zone in order to find themselves. The main idea throughout this short story is that finding your own identity and your place among society is crucial to fulfil the ever present need for human beings to belong.

Luhrmann conveys the idea that there is an obsession in people to belong and due to this they live in fear of what others will say and are incapable of thinking for themselves. Shirley worries that Scott will no longer have a future in ballroom dancing if he does not conform to the rules and regulations of the dance federation. Liz and Wayne conform to the expected costuming and designed steps as they fear rejection isolation like Fran.

Luhrmann represents this pressure of conformity through characterisation of Barry Fife being an angry, scary and powerful man. This is posed through the close up shots of Barry Fife's face seen multiple times through the film, where the audience sees his big fat red face that symbolises the terror and power of Barry. Luhrmann signifies the fear in Shirley through her dialogue with other characters. Shirley is constantly putting Doug down for his dancing for example when Shirley says " Stop that shuffling you stupid man" which portrays the negative attitude Shirley has towards dancing different steps.

This film represents how individuals like Liz and Shirley fear for being outsiders and are forced to conform to the Dance Federations rules and how people who do not conform like Fran are isolated and neglected due to their difference. Through Dorris Lessing's short story ' Through the Tunnel' Jerry

longs to be like the other boys, which represents the need and thirst to fit in with others around you to eliminate the feeling of isolation.

The French boys are displayed as superior to Jerry through the characterisation created by Lessing. The French boys are depicted as tall tanned, and are portrayed as men as they are able to make it through the tunnel quite easily. Jerry sees how the boys make it through the underwater tunnel and believes that if he can do this they will no longer see him as a little boy but a grown up as they are. This desire to complete this dangerous, life threatening journey is portrayed through the dialogue and description of Jerry's thoughts.

This quote from the text "...craving that filled his whole body", interprets this feeling overtaking his whole body, and the fact that is such an important catalyst to his coming of age. Jerry is so determined to make this tunnel so he can break away from his old identity being under the protection of his mother at the safe beach, and discover his new sense of who he really is by pushing the boundaries. The film Strictly Ballroom represents the idea of there being an authentic and artificial portrayal of belonging due to the conformity of some groups, which influences the loss of individual identity.

Through Strictly Ballroom Lurhmann represents this idea of two styles of belonging with the dance federation being manufactured and Fran's Spanish Family being natural. This difference is portrayed through the an authentic and artificial portrayal of belonging due to the conformity of some groups. The Dance Federation is always seen inside either, Les and Shirley's Dance Studio or in the Auditoriums where the competitions are held. This setting

symbolises how unnatural the Dance Federation is always staying inside anmade structures, with high key lighting and bright colours.

The inside settings are juxtaposed with the setting of the Spanish family which is always outside, with natural light from the sun and softer colours. This is symbolic of their authentic sense of belonging outside in nature as they are in the backyard and sunlight. The difference of these two groups is also represented through the costuming of the Dance Federation Dancer and the traditional Spanish outfits worn by Fran and Scott in the final Dance Sequence.

The Dancers have bright, sparkly dresses with feathers and crystals, which have been clearly manufactured for each separate dance. Whereas Fran is wearing a dark red dress with black stitching and Scott is wearing a gold jackets, both traditional Spanish clothing for dance which portrays the natural culture. The dancers are forced to wear these over the top dresses which make them look fake, and Scott and Fran choose to wear Traditional Spanish clothing representing the Spanish heritage of the Dance Paso Doble.

This depicts the two ideas of authentic and artificial belonging which is represented in the juxtaposition if the setting and costuming of the groups of characters. In the short story Jerry ventures away from the confinement of his mother and the big beach, which depicts the idea that individuals will got out of their comfort zone in order to find their true identity. The danger of the bay that Jerry ventures to without his mother it portrayed through the juxtaposition of both settings, representing how Jerry Is enhancing the development of his identity by broadening his spectrum of life.

The beach his mother stays on is called the “ big beach”, which is highly populated with people and long stretches of white sand, that is symbolic of safety and home where Jerry has spent all of his life so far and is all that he knows. This is contrasted with the bay, a symbol of risk and self-determination of Jerry to push the boundaries which it posed by the imagery of the “ wild bay” with sharp red brown rocks everywhere.

A simile is also used to paint the image of the scary beach in the line “... rocks lay like discoloured monsters...” which depicts the danger Jerry is in at this beach by himself. Luhrmann and Lessing put forward the notion that our sense of belonging is shaped by context of the individual which has major influences on whom we are, or who we choose to be. In the beginning of the film we see Shirley who worries for her son Scott, as she is afraid he will go against The Dance Federation and choose to neglect their rules he too, will be isolated as Fran is.

Through the foundations of Fran and Scott’s group being Fran’s Spanish family which is compared to the Dance Federation, Luhrmann shows how conformity leads to fake perceptions of individuals as a result of the people they choose to reside with, and how individuality and staying true to your own ideas is the only way to maintain you own sense of identity. Straight away in the beginning of the short story we are made aware of Jerry’s desire to fit in with the older boys at the bay and feel excepted and apart of the social group leaving him feeling happy and that he can identify with them.

In doing this he has left the safe confinements of his mother to explore the unfamiliar Bay where he discovers himself in a dangerous life threatening

situation. In the end Jerry does not become friends with the older boys but he finds that conforming to these boys is not going to achieve realisation of who he is, as Scott does in Strictly Ballroom when he comes to the conclusion that he does not need to shape his identity to fit the dance federations but develop his own.