

Example Synthesis

Inadequate Portrayals

In "Asian Women in Film: No Joy, No Luck" Jessica Hagedorn states that the way Asian women are portrayed in films as sex objects or helpless dolls is not the way they want to be seen by people outside their culture. In Emily Prager's essay, "Our Babies, Ourselves", she discussed the unrealistic and often degrading way Barbie represents women to society and, most importantly, young girls. Hagedorn's article focuses mainly on the direct issues of Asian women's portrayal in films, while Prager's essay centers more on the way Barbie represents women to society. Despite these different focuses of the essays, both authors are discussing the ramifications of the misrepresentation of a minority group of people to the majority in a way that is unflattering and untrue.

According to Hagedorn, Asian women are portrayed flatly and as objects rather than as people. She classifies this misrepresentation as the cause of the negative stereotype of Asian women by the rest of the world. She discussed the naive and stupid nature of Asian women in the movie *The World of Suzie Wong*. For example, the main character shows Asian women as passive when she thinks that a husband beating his wife is a sign of love and passion. In this film, the Asian women were also prostitutes that Hagedorn describes as, "cute, giggling, dancing sex machines with hearts of gold" (307). She considers examples like these as damaging to the way other cultures view Asian women. In the same way, Prager discusses the inadequate portrayal of women through the flaws in one of the most popular dolls, Barbie. She thinks that Barbie's unrealistic body proportions and "girls only shop" attitude can be damaging to little girls, giving them a false sense of what a real woman really is, and damaging to the self-esteem of women who don't fit the Barbie mold. She even questions whether or not the popularity of breast implants stem from "Barbie's thirty-nine inch bust and twenty-three inch waist" (375). It is examples like this from Prager along with Hagedorn's illustrations that show how it can be damaging to the minority by stereotyping groups of people.

Another area in which the authors agree is in the

difference between the way men are represented in all societies compared to women. In Prager's essay, she distinguishes between Ken's anatomy and Barbie's anatomy. She noticed how Barbie has breasts, but Ken doesn't have any genitals. She writes, "Here was Barbie with these humongous breasts, and that was OK with the toy company. And then there was Ken with his truncated, unidentifiable lump at his groin" (376). She asks why Barbie can have such sexual body parts, yet Ken cannot. She wonders if Ken has something "considered more powerful than hers, more worthy of the dignity of concealment" (376). At the same time Hagedorn notes how, in the 1961 musical, *Flower Drum Song*, the main character, Suzie Wong is a atypical woman of the times in Hollywood. Suzie Wong is dependent on men for everything, including money, love, and self-esteem. She seems to have no mind of her own. Hagedorn distinguishes between the airhead woman and the powerful, domineering man. It is all right for women to be ditsy, dumb or passive, but me must be powerful and independent. While Hagedorn is speaking primarily about Asian woman, her reference to American women in musicals of the sixties is similar to Prager's discussion of the overall differences of the sexes. Hagedorn is just more specific throughout the rest of her article, and limits it to Asian women, and not women in general as Prager does. Hagedorn writes on a specific group of Prager's topic; the general category of women divided into Asian women. Despite the different encompass of subjects of their essays, both writers are making a point of the stereotyping of any group of people.

Both authors use autoethnography and transculturation in the writing of their essays. Mary Louise Pratt defines these rhetorical patterns in her essay entitled "Arts of the Contact Zone." She describes autoethnography as "a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them" (497). Hagedorn and Prager are both autoethnographic because they both belong to the group in which they write about, trying to dispel or discredit myths that have been created for them. Hagedorn, being an Asian woman herself, writes of the way she has been portrayed in film. Prager is writing about all the stereotypes Barbie has created for her, being a woman. Also, Pratt also defines transculturation as "processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by dominate or metropolitan

culture" (501). Pratt talks about an ancient writer, Guaman Poma, and his now known essay on the relationship between the Inca Indians and the Spanish peoples. Pratt uses Guaman Poma to give an example of transculturation in her essay by talking about the second half of his writing entitled "Good Government and Justice". Poma is an example of transculturation because he was a member of a minority culture, the Incas, who was writing to the majority, in this case the Spanish, about the way the Spanish treated the Incas. He poked fun of the Spanish, and looked at the larger picture painted by the majority although he did not belong to their culture. Hagedorn's essay is transcultural because she is in the minority of Asian women and is writing to the majority of Americans who unjustly represents her people to everyone. She points that out to the target audience, and is thus a member of the minority speaking to the majority about their views and actions. Prager is also transcultural even though she may not be writing to men in particular or purposely. She is, however, a part of the minority of women who wrote an essay that stands up to the minority's conception of females in general. She is looking at the large picture even though it wasn't one of her fellow females who painted it. The main theme of her essay is that it was indeed a man who created Barbie, and she picks out the flaws.

One of the major differences between these two articles is that Prager does see some merit in Barbie while Hagedorn cannot state one film in which she thinks Asian women are done justice. Prager says that while there are faults with Barbie, there are a few things that are not so bad. She even recounts how, despite the obvious flaws in Barbie, she still liked her. She writes, "I loved my Barbie. Secretly, I still believe that neon pink and turquoise blue are the only colors in which to decorate a duplex condo. And like many others of my generation, I've never married, simply because I cannot find a man who looks as good in clam diggers as Ken" (375). Although she is just being ironic in this statement, she is hinting that she did, in fact, enjoy playing with her Barbie; most little girls do. Hagedorn, on the other hand, says, "When there are characters who look like us represented in a movie, we have also learned to view between the lines, or add what is missing" (313). She means that since she has not found a movie that she feels has done her justice, she has learned to make them seem to be flattering. She does not give the credit of adequate portrayals to any films, unlike Prager's few good

thoughts on Barbie. Prager seems to be more able to accept that while Barbie can be offensive, she enjoyed it when she was young, while Hagedorn cannot accept any film containing Asian women as an adequate portrayal. Both women agree on the offensiveness of these things, Hagedorn sees not merit for any film, and makes not exceptions, while Prager can accept the fact that it is fun for little girls to play with; if it weren't, there would be no market for Barbie.

Although Hagedorn and Prager are writing on two different subjects, they both agree that misrepresenting a group of people can be bad for the image others carry around about them. Prager knows that most little girls have experience with a doll that is essentially nothing like a real woman, and that can hurt their picture of women in general. Hagedorn sees that the way Asian women are portrayed to the Western society makes them believe all Asian women are exactly how they are portrayed in film. They both seem to feel cheated in a way that is expressive through their own, personal essays, but combine under the larger point stating the dangers of inadequately and even wrongly characterizing a group of people who, in the long run, deserve better. They share the ability to be united on this point despite the uniqueness of each of their topics, writing styles, and personal opinions.