

Student Name

English 380

Dr. Marchbanks

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*Pumpkin*

The film *Pumpkin* is a humorous account of a girl who falls in love with a disabled boy. Through their journey, they overcome obstacles and learn to ignore society's rejection of their relationship. Although the tone of the film is humorous, the film also represents the darker side of disability and the challenges and stereotypes it attracts. The directors of the movie want the viewer to look past the stereotypes that are so heavily portrayed in the film and to see disability as something that is not as disabling as society makes it out to be.

The overall tone of the movie is comical, but it invites the characters in the movie to stereotype disability. One example of this is when Janine, Carolyn's best friend, runs away from her challenged athlete screaming from fear. The way she runs away is portrayed as humorous; when in reality it stigmatizes the athletes as monsters. She fears their disability before she even gets to know them, which is a major problem in society today. She also represents many people's uncomfortable feeling towards disability. Although many people may not run away screaming from the disabled, they do cringe or feel uneasy and fearful of the person with the disability.

Comment: "in"

Comment: nicely put

Pumpkin is stereotyped as being dumb, incapable of love, and dependent. His mother promotes these stereotypes by holding him back and not recognizing him as an independent man. One example of this in the film is when Pumpkin's mother catches him reading his father's dirty magazines. Upon finding him, she exclaims that "this stimulations isn't good for you" and that

Comment: "occurs" ?

he doesn't have natural restraints. This is the first time Pumpkin confronts his mother to tell her that he is no longer a child, but an able-bodied man. She enforces his dependability on her even more when she refuses to allow him to make a phone call to Carolyn, stating that it is not good for him and that "challenged athletes don't think about sex," even though she knows they didn't do anything. By making these comments, his mother is enforcing the stereotype that the disabled cannot be sexually intimate and are incapable of love. This is seen again when his mother accuses Carolyn of raping her son after they had consensual sex. By holding Pumpkin back from becoming an independent man, she stereotypes him and prevents him from living what she sees as a normal life.

In Erving Goffman's *Stigma*, he describes a stigma as an attribute and a stereotype. According to Goffman, "...the term stigma [is] to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (131). Pumpkin's mother stigmatizes him and sees his disability as a negative. It inhibits him from living a "normal" life. This includes having an intimate relationship with a "normal" person, such as Carolyn. Because of the stigmas his mother creates, he is [stagnant in his position and image in society](#) until he meets Carolyn.

While Pumpkin's mother enforces the stereotype, Carolyn breaks it down. She is juxtaposed against Pumpkin as a "perfect" human being. She is pretty, popular, and everything that Pumpkin is not. When she first met Pumpkin, she stated, "I can't stand him looking at me or touching me." Her initial reaction to him was of fear and frustration. They couldn't communicate [nor](#) relate to one another. Once she sees Pumpkin as a caring, deep individual, she breaks down the stigma, sometimes ignoring it all together. One example of this is when she sets Pumpkin up on a blind date. She sees him as a "normal" boy who deserves to go on a date. She

**Comment:** how about "involved" ?

innocently believes that Pumpkin and Cece will get along because they are both lonely and they both suffer, therefore they have a lot to talk about. Unfortunately, by ignoring that he has a disability, she hurts her relationship with her friend, boyfriend, and Pumpkin. Her good intentions become a horrible mistake. The scene where Carolyn sees a psychologist also shows how she is rebelling against the stereotype. It is in this scene where she starts to realize that she is in love with Pumpkin. The shrink on the other hand believes that is just a fantasy and that she needs to ground herself with her relationship with her “normal” boyfriend. The physiologist does not believe that a “mentally retarded” person can have a physical, loving relationship with a “perfect” person. She eventually ignores his advice and pursues their relationship even further, disregarding what the psychologist said. Anther example of this is when she has sex with Pumpkin. In this scene, she looks past the disability after finally acknowledging her love for him. Here, she is breaking the stereotype that disabled people cannot be sexually active and intimate. She judges him based on his character and actions towards her and not his disability.

**Comment:** “suffer; therefore, they must have a lot to talk about.”

**Comment:** “relationships”

**Comment:** enclose with commas

**Comment:** “in”

The Challenged Games represent a fictitious representation of the Special Olympics.

Here, the athletes are portrayed as incapable and many are being taught their event, without acknowledging that these athletes are usually extremely skilled in their particular event. Lennard Davis’ *Enforcing Normalcy* addresses the fact that society often creates the disability. Davis claims, “The problem of course is that the manner in which this society defines disability in fact creates the category” (7). The portrayal of the games creates the disability and leads the audience to believe that Pumpkin is incapable of basic movement and speech, ~~when an~~ **assumption** he later proves to be false. The Challenge Games are not taken as seriously as the Special Olympics are, **which is seen through** Hansie and his mother. Once Pumpkin overcame

**Comment:** good point

society's portrayal of himself and his abilities, he was able to prove that he can be independent, in a relationship, and a successful athlete.

After meeting Carolyn, Pumpkin tries to "pass" as normal. He wants to be treated as a man, not a child, by his mother. He also wants to become strong to impress Carolyn and starts to work out regularly. While at McDonald's his mother sees how Carolyn has inspired him to "pass" and he is described as a meat eater, a gentleman, and "amazingly physical". This scene infers that the disabled cannot be any of these; therefore they cannot "pass." In Brenda Brueggeman's *On Almost Passing*, she describes the challenges of being labeled as disabled. She states, "Sometimes I feel like shattering the mirror: it shows me as a 'cripple,' as 'disabled' in my dependence" (326). Once Carolyn realizes that she has forgotten Pumpkin at the beach and her life is crumbling on top of her, she describes her pain as a broken mirror. Pumpkin then realizes that he too feels like a broken mirror. This refers to the mirror that Brueggeman refers to and how it does not portray the image that people with disabilities want to be portrayed as. They are caught in [this reflection of dependency and alienation](#) that society creates in the mirror.

The movie *Pumpkin* offers humorous insight on a touchy subject. Pumpkin and Carolyn show the audience that disabled people can function as "normal" humans and are able to have intimate relationships. Although the way some of the stereotypes of disabled are portrayed in the movie may cross the line, [such as them being monsters and disgusting](#), they do show many of the flawed stereotypes that are assigned to disabled people. Carolyn helps break down these stereotypes to show the reader that the disabled are only as disabled as society makes them out to be.

**Comment:** yes

**Comment:** place chapters and articles in quotation marks (since they are a part of a larger work), instead of in italics

**Comment:** awkwardly phrased; also, Brueggeman's article was probably not read by the directors (the way you phrase this sentence implies it was).

### Works Cited

1. Brueggeman, Brenda. "On (Almot) Passing." *The Disability Studies Reader*. Ed. Lennard J. Davis. New York: Routledge, 2006. 321-330.
2. Davis, Lennard. *Enforcing Normalcy*. New York: Verso, 1995.
3. Goffman, Erving. "Stigma." *The Disability Studies Reader*. Ed. Lennard J. Davis. New York: Routledge 2006. 131-140.
4. *Pumpkin*. Dir. Anthony Abrams and Adam Larson Broder. Perf. Christina Ricci, Hank Harris, and Brenda Blethyn. MGM 2002.

### Content

- Your analysis of the directors' attempt to exaggerate stereotypes in order to explode them and show their hollowness convinces this reader, though it would be helpful also to admit that this interrogation of stigma and stereotype is itself satirized in the film's closing moments . . .

### Organization

- very tightly structured, particularly at the beginning

### Style & Grammar

- initially, your essay boasted the most grammatically clean and stylistically effective prose I've seen thus far, but later some odd phrasing and typos began to crop up

### Use of Disability Criticism & Ideas

- effective use of articles by Davis and Brueggeman, though the mirror metaphor bit was a bit stilted

### Format

- use MLA style for your Works Cited page

**Score: 9.3 of 10**