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Anatomy of a Scene: Season 2, Episode 1, “Nosedive”

Aly Paul

Two college girls, both from the same hometown, are trying to get back home for Fall Break. There is only one seat left on the plane. Girl one has two thousand followers on Instagram; girl two has two hundred. Who gets the seat? In modern society, many people would answer ‘whoever gets there first.’ Sure, some people may value others based on social ranking, but corporations such as airlines do not. That would be illegal discrimination. However, *Black Mirror*, a television show known for tackling the dystopian future of technology, turns the tables and projects a world where online status is exactly equivalent to real life worth in an episode called *Nosedive*. The closing scene in *Nosedive* serves to sway the audience against putting social media and status before personal wellbeing and happiness through color psychology, symbolism, and character arcs.

Nosedive follows Lacie, a woman living in a world where everything is determined by her online rating. This rating is decided upon by anyone who meets her or sees her social media profiles. They give her a score out of five stars, and an algorithm averages it out. Lacie works painstakingly hard and becomes consumed in trying to be as perfect as possible in order to receive high marks. She is constantly faking a smile or laugh, staging a picture, and conducting herself in any way that leads to the mass’s approval. This goes to extremes at times, like when Lacie stops talking to a co-worker because he went through a break up and the rest of the office sided against him. Lacie seems content in her world and argues with her brother often about his lack of enthusiasm or care about his score. However, as the episode goes on, Lacie’s world slowly begins to morph from a daydream to a nightmare. Lacie gets into a dispute in the airport after a canceled flight, which causes her score to drop a full point. She then begins to spiral, losing out on usual perks like fine rental cars and nice treatment due to her rating. Lacie becomes erratic and drops her score down even lower, causing her friend to ban her from her elite wedding. Lacie shows up anyways, tries to give her maid of honor speech, and ends up disgusting people so much that her score drops into the negatives. She has a mental breakdown, screaming at her friend Naomi for treating her so poorly. Lacie gets sent to jail, where an incredibly moving ending scene takes place. Flaws in the ranking society are then put on full

blast, particularly in the final scene.

The scene begins with two guards leading Lacie into a jail cell. Everything is grey: the walls, the guards, the ceiling, and the floor. The only trace of actual color lies in Lacie's blush pink bridesmaids dress, which lies disheveled on her body. It is a very subtle and muted pink, and it represents her ties to society. The outside world had always been represented as vibrant and colorful throughout the episode. Editors used an intense filter that lightened, illuminated, and brightened colors so they stood out. Blue was an icy mint, yellow a bright ray of sun. The contrast between the coloring of the rest of the episode and the last scene is conspicuously apparent. It is meant to showcase Lucie's newfound disillusionment with society and the ranking system. Lucie used to be obsessed with her world, trying so painfully hard to improve her rating. Everything she did revolved around what could get her five stars. However, in the midst her downward spiral, Lucie broke down and changed her mindset. While giving her maid of honor speech, she went absolutely crazy and began to lash out at Naomi for all of the terrible stuff she put her through, like sleeping with a guy she cared about and promoting her eating disorder. Lucie began to realize the rating system is not all it is made out to be; people with high rankings are not any better, nicer, or kinder than anyone else. She also realizes that throughout her whole life, popularity has always been unobtainable. Naomi was always more desirable than her, no matter what she did. In the final scene, nothing is as bright and cheerful to Lucie as it once was.

After the guards guide Lacie into her cell, they quickly exit. They do not look her in the eyes, say anything, or show any hints of humanity. This depicts that Lacie's status has dropped to an all-time low. No one values her or humanizes her in the slightest, all because enough people gave her a one-star rating. After the guards have exited, Lacie glances around her cell, looking much like a deer in headlights. She also walks around timidly. This represents how Lacie is lost without her ranking. In the past, Lacie's rating is what made her who she was. Now, Lacie does not know how to live. Everything is foreign to her. Another blatant form of symbolism lies in the cell windows, which are clear and easily seen through. This is ironic, because it shows complete transparency. In the past, Lacie always had to put up a front with others, faking a smile and pretending to be perfect. Now, she is in her rawest form, no longer having anyone to impress. She has nothing to hide, because there is nothing to gain from her fakeness.

As the scene continues, Lacie takes off her dirty, wrinkled bridesmaid dress, bunching it into a ball on the floor. This symbolizes Lacie losing the last remanence of her previous world. Lacie is now in a white slip, which matches the white and grey color scheme of the scene. Lacie has completely lost touch with the outside world and its color. She sees the true evil that lies with the rating system. This represents a major character arc, since just a few

minutes earlier Lacie was so defensive of the rating system that she blew up at her brother for not supporting it. She used to take every single rating to heart, incredibly disappointed anytime someone gave her less than five stars. The fact that Lacie finally sees the corruption in everything speaks volumes to the dystopia in her world. Lacie's character arc sends a powerful wave of critique towards the downfalls of society placing value on a person due to their social media status.

Next, Lacie takes seat on her cell bench and looks up. Tiny white particles, presumably dust, are seen falling from the ceiling. This causes tears to well up in Lacie's eyes. Lacie has always been so busy striving for perfection, trying to take perfect picture, and attempting to boost her rating. The dust symbolizes two milestones for her. The first milestone is seeing something imperfect. Dust clutters rooms and is despised by most, so after living in a society where everything had to be perfect, seeing the world be content with something so imperfect is refreshing. The second landmark lies in the fact that dust is an incredibly small detail. Lacie was always focused on one task, such as taking a picture or schmoozing strangers, so she never got to appreciate the small things in life. In her past, she would have been too engaged and busy online to notice the dust. Lacie is brought to tears from this sight, and also lets out her fist genuine smile. The stress of her past is lifted off and Lacie is finally able to feel true joy. She laughs, knowing she can now experience and enjoy all of life, including its flaws and shortcomings.

In the next shot, a fellow inmate is shown in the cell across the hall. He had previously been unseen and hidden. This is a conscious choice made by the director, as the scene first had to accomplish Lacie's growth and character arc. Now that her views have changed and she is flooded with disillusionment, it is the perfect time to showcase how this experience has changed her and how she now conducts herself. When Lacie first sees the man, she looks rather scared. Since the rules of society have now been lifted, Lacie no longer knows how she should act around others. Lacie stands up and goes through the hand motions of rating the inmate five stars. Lacie could have done this out of habit, or as closure since she can no longer rate anyone. Regardless, it doesn't work since she does not have her technology anymore. Lacie looks down at her hand sadly, realizing life will never be the same. However, a glimmer creeps into her eyes and her face lightens. A mood of acceptance washes through the screen. Lacie lets go completely, ready to dive into her next chapter of life.

Lacie locks eyes with the inmate. She curses at him, saying "What the f*** are you looking at?" ("Nosedive"). Lacie was never allowed to curse or be rude, or else she would be docked points and would lose social status. Now, she is free to treat people any way she chooses. Although it may be unfair, Lacie takes out all of her pent-up emotions on the man. It is presumed that he has been alone in the prison for a while, as he actively hurls back

insults. Both seem to be releasing everything they have suppressed, and the interaction is clearly therapeutic. Even though they are making insulting comments, their tones and body language are devoid of anger. They almost seem joyous. It is a completely cathartic experience for them. The duo begins to escalate their insults, and the man says, “You look like a lost little lamb that just found out there’s no Santa Claus” (“Nosedive”). This comment is ironically spot on, as Lacie has just found out the world that she was once obsessed with is actually corrupt. She also realizes the rating system she has built her life around has no real meaning. It is subjective; one interaction with someone can not define a person and nobody is perfect, no matter how hard they try. Lacie is in fact lost like a little lamb, and she most definitely found out something she loved is not all it is cracked up to be.

As the scene comes to a head, Lacie and the man get playful with their insults and begin to laugh. A bond is formed, and they experience the feeling of complete freedom. No consequences come from their rude comments or cursing. This seems like an oxymoron, since while they are in prison, they are the freest. It turns out that their outside world and rating systems had been imprisoning them their whole lives. They continue to lash out at each other, beginning to incorporate more and more curse words. Throughout the episode, Lacie occasionally lets curse words spill out. However, she is instantly mortified as she knows they are forbidden. In the airport, Lacie gets put on probation and docked a whole point because of her cursing. It is clear that cursing is an outlet for anger and stress for Lacie. The scene ends with them both yelling, “F*** you!” (“Nosedive”). They scream this, and then everything goes completely silent. It is the calm after the storm.

The entire scene depicts the downfall of the ranking system, the issues of placing self-value in ratings, and the horrors technology can bring. It plays hand in hand with obsession, which is a major point of discussion in today’s society when it comes to social media. People fixate on different aspects of the online world, whether it be likes, followers, comments, or retweets. This obsession can take over people’s lives to the point where they spend a major chunk of time trying to stage the perfect photo, so they can achieve optimal engagement. In *It’s Complicated*, danah boyd discusses a teen named Andrew who actually deleted his Facebook because he felt it had an overwhelming control over his life (77). Andrew is not alone in his struggles, as many teens face the pressure of social media and maintaining an online persona. Boyd continues to touch social media addiction throughout the chapter, making it clear that not all teens are addicted like media might have you think, but those who are allow it to “wreak havoc on their lives, affecting school performance and stunting emotional development” (boyd 78). By saying this, boyd showcases how social media addiction is dangerous. People are not allowed to grow when they are addicted, and it causes them to fall behind in other

aspects of life.

Similarly, “Nosedive” showcases this same effect by showing how Lacie’s emotions and relationships were suppressed. Throughout the episode, Lacie had to fake joy and therefore lost control of her emotions and could not develop them. Her whole life, all she had known was a fake smile. Also, the pressure of maintaining social status caused her to ostracize her brother, since he did not have a high ranking. Lacie’s addiction to her social media caused great harm, and she only felt free in the final scene when she could let go and be herself. The episode agrees with boyd’s thoughts on addiction being negative.

There is extreme power and influence in the last scene of *Black Mirror*’s “Nosedive.” The scene utilizes lighting, colors, story arcs, and symbolism to show the downside of the increasing presence and power of social media. From the beginning of the scene, there is minimal color to drown out the supposed happiness of Lacie’s world and to reveal the true disillusionment she discovers. The entire scenario is caused by a major change in Lacie’s mindset, where she realizes that she is not happy with the ranking system and does not want to fake her true thoughts and lifestyle in order to please others. Finally, there is a great deal of symbolism, from Lacie taking off her bridesmaid dress to the dust falling from the ceiling. There is a clear message of warning and disgust towards a world revolving around social media status. We are lucky to live in a world where a girl with 200 followers has the same right to a plane ticket as a girl with 2,000 followers.

Works Cited

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