

A Critique of Finding Nemo By Ben Bar

Finding Nemo is one of the most problematic films I've ever seen. Where do I begin?

In the film's very first scene, we learn that Coral had no input into or knowledge of Marlin's process of finding the new home she was going to share with him and their future children. Right off the bat, this film flaunts its misogyny in our faces. Lay viewers may have assumed this dynamic between Coral and Marlin was simply the film's way of providing a scientifically accurate portrayal of the sex roles of clownfish, but it is no such thing, as clownfish do not adhere to any such dynamic. By contrast, if this film were to truly represent the sex roles of clownfish, Nemo would hatch as a hermaphrodite instead of a male, Marlin would respond to the death of Coral by transforming from a male to a female, Nemo would respond to the fact that the rest of the clownfish population is 100% female (his female father is the only other clownfish in the entire film by that point) by transforming into a male, and then Nemo would mate with Marlin. But hatred of women is, unfortunately, far from the only thing of which this film is guilty.

Bruce, Anchor, and Chum are members of a cult of anorexia; its presence in the film is completely uncalled for, and inexplicable. Boasting a three-week-long fast, Bruce is disturbingly hailed by the others as a role model, while Dory enables and even encourages their abstinence

from food. Although sharks can live for many months without eating, due to the nutrient-rich oil they store in their livers, which gives them energy in such times, the adverse effects of Bruce's anorexia on his mental health are extremely evident, as at one point the mere scent of food sends him into a ravenous frenzy during which Anchor and Chum physically restrain him in a futile attempt at preventing him from literally murdering Marlin and Dory, whom he had befriended. When the impact of self-harm causes an individual to become so dysfunctional that they are a danger to others, rock bottom is imminent. It should not be left unsaid that the manner in which the cult functions lends it a likeness to Alcoholics Anonymous, of which the cult is a tasteless parody. To make matters worse, this is not the only time *Finding Nemo* pokes fun at the disease of alcoholism.

In the latter half of the film, while Gerald's friends are nonchalantly watching him gag and stumble on a dock (which in and of itself is a horrific instance of gallows humor), instead of saving him from certain asphyxiation, they presume he is drunk to the point of nausea, and make disparaging comments about how his addiction is manifesting itself so early in the morning. Though this may be a clever nod to Walter Brennan's Eddie in *To Have and Have Not*, this film has no right to belittle those who suffer from alcoholism. However, in a move that defies expectation, this film features another inappropriate cult.

The Tank Gang's initiation ceremony is so phenomenally offensive that the fact that it made it to the final cut of the

film is nothing short of mind boggling. Gurgle, Bubbles, and Bloat, wearing faux-tribal leaf loincloths and headdresses, chant “Ha-Ho-Hwa-Hwee-Ha-Ho-Ho-Ho!” and “Ooh-Ha-Ha!” while goading Nemo to swim through the “ring of fire” of “Mount Wannahockalooie”. The reasons why these things are not okay should be more than self-evident, so I’m not going to list them out in painstaking detail, but I will note that this film’s vicious mockery of the cultures of native peoples takes place in Australia, a country whose indigenous population was systematically massacred by local police, colonizers, and the British Army throughout its bloody and embarrassing history. Lastly, even if this scene did not appropriate other cultures, the Tank Gang still hazes Nemo, which is immoral and harmful, not to mention illegal in many parts of the United States (for example, per Massachusetts general law, hazing is punishable by a fine of up to \$3,000.00 and imprisonment for up to one year). Unlike Gill’s exploitation of Nemo’s naïveté when he convinces Nemo to risk his own life in a mission to bring the tank’s water filter to a grinding halt, this act of hazing is not later viewed by any of its perpetrators with a hint of remorse. But the issues with the Tank Gang in *Finding Nemo* do not end there.

Several members of the Tank Gang suffer from some pathology or another that renders them debilitated in some fashion, which the film uses as a form of comic relief: Deb is wracked by delusion, perceiving her own reflection as a fish whom she refers to as Flo and who she believes is her sister; Gurgle is a textbook germophobe, as evidenced by

his fear of Nemo's "contamination", his disproportionate displeasure with the dirty tank, and his claim that "the human mouth is a disgusting place"; Jacques exhibits uncontrollable cleaning behaviors, as seen when involuntarily cleans the tank, thereby threatening the success of Gill's escape plan and nearly dooming himself and the rest of the Tank Gang; Bubbles, perhaps the least functional of all, is rendered catatonic by the bubbles emitted from a false treasure chest in the tank.

Additionally, one may take the fact that Bubbles and Jacques have the fewest lines of any of the Tank Gang members as a sign that their cognition is impacted more severely. This is further indicated by the lines themselves, which include, "Bubbles! Bubbles! My bubbles", "I am ashamed", and "Oops!"

The final *Finding Nemo* crime that I will list is its stigmatization of corrective orthodontics. The film employs several dramatic tactics to paint a despicable picture of its only true villain, Darla (the nameless barracuda who appears for just a few frames is more of a *deus ex machina*). Gurgle and Peach allege that she is the killer of Chuckles. When she makes her non *in effigie* debut, the theme from Hitchcock's *Psycho* plays. And, to top it all off, she sports braces complete with headgear. Clearly, subtlety is not this film's strong suit, but the real trouble here comes from how *Finding Nemo* depicts persons undergoing corrective orthodontic treatment.

In summation, *Finding Nemo* manages to - in the short span of 104 minutes - attack numerous groups of various

kinds, which it does without any sense of irony or self-awareness, and for this I believe Pixar should be held accountable.