

Free Love, Discrimination, Sex Drugs and Rock and Roll...Oh and AIDS.

The Dallas Buyers Club was an interesting movie. It was a unique story happening during one of the most difficult times in our countries history. One thing that this movie captured very well was the truth in the lives of these people brought together by this disaster. This story touches on the LGBT community (Free Love), the stigma by society and the abuse of the FDA (Discrimination), and how people were living in the eighties (Sex Drugs and Rock and Roll). The actors were great but here we will discuss how the real people of that generation were reflected in this story.

Coming off of the sixties and into the seventies the youth of that generation was experiencing something new. The use of drugs and a new free spirited mentality was becoming a new norm with the youth of that era. Starting with the stonewall riots and the new exposure of the gay lifestyle into the mainstream society in america the country was becoming more aware of the LGBT community and what the lifestyle was about. People were having unprotected sex and enjoying life without realizing what this could do to them in the long run. Add to this the fact that people still had to stay in the closet and have sex in seedy locations and it was a perfect breeding ground for an epidemic.

The character of Ray, played by Jared Leto, was a transgender female living in a town and dealing with a lot of these issues. She was unapologetically herself but was also addicted to drugs as were many people during the eighties, particularly in the LGBT community. The movie touches on why so many people in the LGBT were living in that way. Whether it was due to family issues or being rejected from society as a whole, many people in the community turned to drugs and alcohol to cope with the pressures of life. An example of this was shown when Ray had to put on a suit and dress up as "Raymond" in order to just have a conversation with her father. When you are forced to live your life in secret it leads you to make that the norm which is why so many people early on did not have the knowledge about or value taking care of their bodies or their own health.

There will always be discrimination in our world, that is a fact. One form of discrimination that was portrayed in the movie very well was HIV Stigma. It was brought up many times and is still something that is very prevalent today. HIV Stigma is something that is unfounded if people are educated, however during this time period many people were not due to the virus being something new and so many people dropping dead left and right. The disease was seen as something that only affected gay men but the main character in the movie, played by Matthew McConaughey, you can clearly see how this disease brought together people from all walks of life since it can affect everyone.

The pharmaceutical companies were just as guilty of HIV Stigma as society was during these times. The movie did a great job portraying this by using the fight with the FDA and their prevention of the import of drugs not approved in the US from other countries that were actually helping people and saving lives. They were taking advantage of the situation to line their pockets and politicians had stakes in the “game” of approving these drugs. The movie showed how discrimination can come in all forms and how it can cost many people their lives. By taking matters into their own hands these characters, and the people of that time they represented, essentially did some major good by violating the law in order to get drugs and save lives.

During the seventies and eighties in major cities throughout the US drug use was rampant. Many people blamed this on the new free love movement but there were a number of factors that contributed to the rise in drug use. A poll run by Gallup in 1986 showed that the problem people found the most concerning in America was crack and other forms of cocaine. At 42%, "crack" and "other forms of cocaine" beat "alcohol abuse" by eight percentage points, even though there were far more alcoholics than crack addicts. The main issue was that these types of drugs were cheap and very addictive. Eventually these types of drugs spread throughout the US and were taken intravenously which, through sharing needles, helped to spread the virus even more. The rising culture of glam rock helped feed into this idea of “live fast die young” and the lack of education on drug use in our education system left people vulnerable to the spread of the disease.

Since so many new drugs were being created the US had to find a way to fight this new war on drugs. This was difficult because so many new drugs were being created that you could not criminalize them until you could identify them and the harm they did to people. It wasn't until the late eighties that companies even started to do drug testing for it's employees. Although legislation that had been enacted in 1984 included some anti-drug provisions, the 1986 legislation represented the first effort by Congress in 15 years to enact a major anti-drug law. In the movie you could see how drug use was a part of everyone's lives, even the characters who were HIV-positive and on medication were still struggling with major drug use.

Overall this movie was not only well acted and entertaining, but it helped to paint a real picture of what living during the AIDS epidemic was actually like. People were desperate to get any sort of help just to keep from dying. Breaking laws and cutting through bureaucratic red tape was nothing to people fighting to survive. People also had to find ways to make a living, especially when there were no laws to protect the LGBT community, not to mention the community of people with AIDS. In this day and age we

have made some progress but movies like this are needed to show us just how serious this issue was and how much progress still needs to be made.

Works Cited

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