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Media Representation of Identity and Social Issues in the Series *Wednesday*

Abstract

This paper focuses on the representation of identity and social issues in the episodic drama *Wednesday*, which addresses several taboo and marginalised topics, such as bullying, discrimination, social stigmatisation, and gender and social differences. The research is based on representation theory and other communication concepts that highlight the performative nature of identity and the mechanisms of “othering”. *Wednesday* uses narrative and characters to initiate conversations about marginalisation and journeys of self-discovery in the context of contemporary social trends and media influences. The paper also emphasizes the importance of the media as a tool for social education, prevention, and for building an inclusive society. It examines specific scenes and narratives from the first and second season that illustrate the dynamics of marginalisation, the struggle for self-definition and the overcoming of social barriers. Additionally, it examines how

Netflix’s audiovisual production influences public opinion, promotes social inclusion, and encourages more ethical content production. Contemporary episodic works are an important means of raising social awareness and cultivating empathy within popular culture.

Key words

Episodic Series. Media Representation. Netflix. Self-Identifications. Social Issues. *Wednesday*.

Introduction

Netflix is renowned for its commitment to diversity and inclusion, a value that is reflected in the content of its audiovisual production. Several of its titles address contemporary social issues that are either overlooked in society or considered taboo. Around the turn of 2015 and 2016, the company began to systematically and strategically incorporate social issues, diversity, and inclusion into its content. This was a response to evolving social expectations, growing social movements for equality and

diversity, and the necessity to adapt to the global market and a more diverse audience. During this period, there were also significant changes to the company’s production policy to support the development of such content (Wayne, 2022; Lotz, 2020; Jenner, 2018). A significant impetus for strengthening inclusion and social responsibility policies in the media industry was the Kevin Spacey scandal in 2017. This prompted Netflix and other platforms to consider issues of marginalisation, abuse and inequality more intensively, which was reflected directly in their content production (Wayne, 2022).

The rapid development of social media is currently crucial, as it contributes to the swift dissemination of new cultural trends, influences audience behaviour and strengthens societal discussions about values (Ioanăs & Stoica, 2014). As part of its communication strategy, Netflix promotes diversity and inclusivity as core values, thereby legitimising its presence on the global market and reflecting evolving social needs (Asmar et al., 2025). Netflix is one of the most powerful tools of cultural production, shaping public awareness and social discourse on a



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global scale. It provides artists and creators with a platform on which to explore themes that raise important questions and stimulate debate. At the same time, it enables its broad audience to engage with these topics, regardless of geographical or social barriers (del Río & Moran, 2020).

Lotz argues that Netflix’s current shows are more mature and open to controversial topics than programmes created for linear television. She highlights Netflix’s work with sensitive, commonly offensive, and taboo subjects in particular. However, she claims that the intention is not to cause controversy, but rather to avoid self-limitation and shy away from topics that some groups consider “sensitive” (Lotz, 2020). Many of these productions approach topics such as sexuality with what could be termed “European sensitivity”, as seen in *Sex Education*, *13 Reasons Why* or *Orange Is the New Black*. While these are not perceived as controversial in more liberal societies, such as those in Europe, in more conservative regions, such as Central America, they can provoke resistance, censorship, or even a complete ban.

1 Media Representation of Identity and Social Issues

In today’s media landscape, television series are significant cultural phenomena that shape social discourse and public opinion. Popular television productions reflect and address social issues that are often taboo or marginalised, such as questions of identity, bullying, discrimination, and gender and social

differences (Hall, 1997; Butler, 2006; Abbott, 2025). One example is the series *Wednesday*, which uses its characters and narratives to initiate discussion about such issues.

The way minority groups and social issues are represented in the media plays a key role in shaping perceptions of them. According to representation theory, the media does not mirror reality; it constructs it. Therefore, media portrayals are the result of selection and emphasis. By creating meanings and images of “others”, often in the form of stereotypes, the media reinforce existing social patterns, and offer space for new understandings of identity and social inclusion (Hall, 1997; Wheatley, 2024). In the context of television series, representation becomes a strategy that shapes viewers’ understanding of social issues and conveys the perspectives through which they interpret social reality (Wheatley, 2024; Fiveable, 2024a, 2024b).

This is followed by the concept of identity, which is not a static category, but rather a process that is constantly being constructed through cultural narratives. Media representation provides models of self-understanding and social classification (Messina, 2014; Media Studies, n.d.). Through mechanisms of stigmatisation and the process of “othering”, identities are often defined in opposition to “others”, with the media either reproducing or questioning these processes (Fiveable, 2024a; Earnshaw et al., 2018). However, Butler (2006) emphasises that identity is performative; it is formed through a dialogue between social norms

and personal reflection. This is why the portrayal of “outsider” in the media significantly contributes to the formation of ideas about marginalised groups.

Another key aspect is the depiction of bullying, discrimination, and marginalisation. Works such as *Adolescence*, *Dear White People*, and *When They See Us* capture these issues as both realistic social problems and narrative motifs that foster empathy and aesthetic contemplation. In this way, the media reflects social realities and can be used as a tool for the prevention of bullying, discrimination, and marginalisation, as well as for education and support in the creation of an inclusive society.

The portrayal of bullying often draws on mobbing and social stigma. Mobbing involves repeated negative behaviour that causes psychological harm to the victim (Arnautović, 2013). Social stigma theory explains how society excludes individuals labelled as different, thereby legitimising power norms (Earnshaw et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2019). Media representations can reinforce or deconstruct these processes, thereby influencing the understanding of social inequality. In this context, cultivation theory suggests that long-term exposure to images of violence and discrimination can influence audience attitudes, with more frequent viewers tending to internalise the depicted behavioural patterns more readily (Miller, 2024).

This paper aims to examine the social and cultural themes reflected in *Wednesday*’s episodic work in the

context of contemporary society and popular culture. We intend to emphasise the importance of these representations within current media trends and social discourse.

The study's methodology involves combining a narrative and thematic analysis of selected episodes of the series *Wednesday*, examining specific scenes that reflect social issues such as bullying, discrimination, identity exploration, and power imbalance. The research is based on representation theory, which suggests that the media actively construct the meaning of social themes, and on the concept of performative identity, which analyses the process of self-discovery of characters. The methodology emphasises comparing series motifs with real social phenomena and critically analysing their media representation.

2 Social Issues and Their Reflection in the Narrative of *Wednesday*

Wednesday received a positive response from viewers. They were drawn in by the acting performances, the story of the main character, the individual plot twists, and the social issues it reflects. The series addresses several taboo, controversial or under-represented social issues: interpersonal relationships, self-identity, bullying, racism, discrimination, atypical family structures, blackmail, and stalking. In this subchapter, we explore selected scenes and situations from both seasons of *Wednesday* that build on these themes.

The first season focuses on themes such as bullying, racism, oppression and discrimination, reflected in the conflict between the ordinary residents of Jericho and the "outcasts". There are several scenes depicting physical or psychological violence against students at Nevermore Academy, including attempted mass murder and sabotage. These conflicts serve as metaphors for the real-life social problems of discriminating against and excluding people who are considered "different" because of their race, faith, sexuality, or identity.

In the story, Enid is in conflict with her mother, who wants her to attend Lycantrophy Conversion Camp in the hope that she will finally turn into a werewolf and become "normal". In her mother's eyes, Enid is perceived as "broken" and unable to fit in. The term *conversion camp* refers to a form of conversion therapy, a method employed by fundamentalist churches in the US. This unethical and pseudoscientific treatment is designed to help people with minority sexual orientations get rid of their undesirable preferences. The goal is to "cure" them and help them become socially accepted heterosexuals (Sreenivas, 2024).

In the first season, we also encounter the issue of bullying. We see it in the form of high school students tying up Pugsley and shutting him in a locker. Later, we see a group of teenagers from Jericho bullying Eugene and Xavier. Wednesday herself fights against bullying and defends those who are bullied. She usually punishes the bullies with comparable cruelty and violence.

A form of oppression and abuse can also be seen in several scenes in the second season where Pugsley "controls" Slurp (the zombie/Isaac Night) by giving him electric shocks. This type of bullying is similar to that experienced by peers, which is often motivated by the victim's and aggressor's social status. From the first season, we know that Pugsley was often the victim of bullying, and this may be his way of venting his frustration. At the same time, this is the first time that he has had power over someone else.

From the story, we also learn that the outcasts, who were supposedly dead, are being held at Willow Hill. Their deaths had been faked by Augustus Stonehearst, who was using them in a secret programme called LOIS. This programme aimed to transfer the abilities of the outcasts to "normies". This motif symbolises the segregation, discrimination, and abuse of vulnerable groups, reflecting real historical and contemporary social issues in which marginalised people are oppressed or abused for the benefit of the powerful (for more, see Column, 2025).

In the second season, we encounter manipulation, stalking and blackmail with the introduction of a new character: Agnes, an obsessive fan of *Wednesday*. She is manipulative and interferes in Wednesday's relationships. She uses social pressures in Nevermore to create distrust between Wednesday and Enid. She uses her invisibility to stalk Wednesday. First, she sends her anonymous messages; then she steals the manuscript of her novel. She kidnaps

Enid and Bruno, ties them up amongst hanging weapons, and presents Wednesday with a riddle to solve in order to save them. After Wednesday exposes her, Agnes confesses that she did everything just to get her attention and affection. The story thus highlights the issue of stalking, which is very common in today's society. This motif illustrates how such behaviour can interfere with the normal lives of victims, creating a sense of threat, fear, or isolation.

Blackmail and exploitation are also key themes in the second season. Principal Dort asks Bianca (the siren) to organise a gala evening. He tells her, "You have the sizzle factor I've been looking for" (Addams et al., 2025a). We later learn that this refers to her ability to control people with her siren voice. He blackmails her by cancelling scholarships for students, including hers. In subsequent episodes, he orders her to use her siren voice to influence both Morticia and her mother, Hester Frump, to obtain her money. This motif highlights the power imbalance between individuals (such as Bianca) and institutions or powerful figures (such as Principal Dort). In the real world, this imbalance is manifested as abuse of power and corruption, even in cultures where people are forced into obedience under threat of losing their basic rights or benefits. Thus, the work aptly reflects and criticises the widespread practices of manipulation, blackmail and abuse

¹ Authors' note: The monologue occurs in the time frame 00:32:48 - 00:32:55.

of power in contemporary social and work contexts. It highlights the need for greater transparency, ethics, and protection of vulnerable individuals within systems of power.

The most prominent social theme in the series is the search for one's own identity. We perceive this on three main levels:

Self-acceptance and control of one's abilities

In the first season, Wednesday discovers her unique abilities. Initially, she is too afraid to talk to anyone about them, but later she opens up to her loved ones and learns to control them. In the process, she realises what makes her special and how she can use her abilities to her advantage. However, in the second season, she loses her abilities, causing a deep identity and self-confidence crisis. She must realise what it means to be herself without the power that sets her apart from others. During this period, she experiences frustration and insecurity, and occasionally becomes withdrawn, but she also shows determination and perseverance.

Enid's search for identity is linked to her acceptance of herself as a werewolf who does not meet the expectations of her family. During the first season, she struggles with the question of whether and when her werewolf abilities will fully develop, and what that will mean for her. She wants to be accepted, yet she is also afraid to reveal her werewolf side. She also feels pressured by her mother's expectations. Over time, however, she comes to realise her uniqueness

and strength. She learns to accept herself and gradually forges her own path; independent of the prejudices and roles she has been forced to accept. This is evident in her personal relationships, for example, with Wednesday.

Enid undergoes a significant change in the second series. At the beginning, we see that she has found her pack. Later, she discovers that she is showing signs of becoming an Alpha. This frightens her because it means that she will lose her human form and be forced to live alone, hunted by other werewolves. Initially, she tries to avoid this fate, but ultimately transforms in order to help Wednesday, thereby confirming her destiny and escaping Jericho. Wednesday then sets out to find and help her. We can expect this story in the third season of the series.

During the second season, Thing also searches for his own identity in light of the revelations about his past and origins. By the end of the story, we discover that Thing is actually Isaac Night's hand. Isaac sews Thing back onto his arm against Thing's will. However, at the end of the episode, Thing defends himself, tears the stitches that connect them and kills Isaac. Later, Wednesday tells him, "You can't control the past. But the future is in your own hand. What's is going to be?"² (Addams et al., 2025b). Thing then throws Isaac's ring in the bin and realises where he belongs. He has

² Authors' note: The monologue occurs in the time frame 00:35:44 - 00:36:08.



Figure 1: Wednesday's Vision

Source: Addams et al. (2025a)

discovered his past, but at the same time he has found out who he is now, thus finding his essence and identity.

Ever since discovering he was a Hyde, Tyler has been struggling with his dual identity. He is trying to come to terms with his abilities and his family's past. He is torn between his human and Hyde personalities, constantly fighting to maintain control while trying to accept the darker, stronger side of himself. This internal conflict causes him great emotional and psychological distress, as he fears losing himself or hurting his loved ones. He is searching for a way to remain himself despite the Hyde's influence.

Finding one's own path beyond family expectations

Although Wednesday is part of the Addams family, she does not blindly follow their traditions and expectations. She fights for autonomy and strives to define herself independently of what others say about her. Wednesday has a complicated relationship with her mother, Morticia, who plays a major

role in her life. Morticia expects Wednesday to continue the family line, but Wednesday wants to express her uniqueness and not conform to predetermined roles.

After she loses her abilities, Wednesday fights to get them back. This is not only an internal struggle, but also a conflict with her mother, who disagrees with her. This complicates their mother-daughter relationship, creating a generational and value conflict. Wednesday even goes as far as to challenge her own mother to a duel, which she loses. This situation is a significant emotional trial for Wednesday, evoking feelings of betrayal and isolation, and further emphasising her struggle for self-definition and independence. Her struggle to regain her abilities is not only about power, but also about personal freedom and being recognised as an individual, rather than as someone who simply conforms to her mother's expectations.

Relationships and social integration

At first, Wednesday is isolated in

Nevermore, rejecting friendship and cooperating with others. However, she gradually realises that fitting into a community and forming relationships can strengthen her, leading to self-discovery. Her relationship with Enid plays a key role in her development. Enid teaches her empathy, sharing, and openness towards others, which contrasts with Wednesday's natural tendency to be closed off and independent.

During the second season, Wednesday protects Enid because she has a vision predicting her death. Wednesday tries to distance herself from Enid, not wanting her help because she is afraid for her. A significant moment in their relationship occurs when their souls are switched, allowing Wednesday to experience Enid's perspective. Wednesday, in Enid's body, turns into a werewolf and experiences all the feelings and emotions that Enid experiences during the transformation. Later, we see a scene in which the characters' souls return to their bodies. For this to happen, they must reveal the secret of the life they have entered. Enid is the first to reveal Wednesday's secret: "You know what I love about being Wednesday? Your fearlessness. Except when it comes to your mom. But... I get it. She can be a lot. You're afraid she'll never accept you for who you truly are. That your darkness is even too much for her to grasp. You'll become the disappointment she'll never want to speak of. Just like your aunt. I can feel it in your bones. That's why you push her away. But maybe she has more to

teach you than you think"³ (Addams et al., 2025c). These words affect Wednesday, influencing her emotional and psychological development. She never admitted that she was afraid of being judged by her own mother, often hiding behind cynicism and aloofness. During this scene, however, she felt accepted and understood. Having her fear recognised by a loved one gives her the courage to confront her feelings towards her mother without shame or resentment. Wednesday continues with Enid's secret: "The best thing about being Enid is your quiet strength. You think being an Alpha will mean you'll be alone again. I won't let that happen. And you need to stop trying so hard for people who don't deserve it. Like Bruno, who mistook your kindness for weakness. It's not. It's your power. Which I could barely handle for one night. I regret ever underestimating you"⁴ (Addams et al., 2025c). Wednesday appreciates Enid's kindness and her extraordinary strength, which not even Wednesday could control. At the same time, she clearly states that she will never be alone. She is willing to fight for Enid and save her if necessary. These words are crucial for Enid. Despite Wednesday's coldness and distance, Enid knows that she likes and cares about her.

The relationship between Wednesday and Tyler also plays a significant part. His interest in her and their

interactions prompt her to face her own feelings and vulnerability, which is important for her emotional growth. This relationship also helps her to understand how to express her emotions better. During the second season, Wednesday has several opportunities to kill Tyler. However, she never does, always choosing to free him instead, thereby demonstrating her capacity for mercy and empathy. Perhaps her greatest sacrifice was when she was willing to become his master, knowing that a Hyde could not live without one: "What if I lied about my feelings? You were right. I was attracted to you. But you do know there's only one way we can truly be together. Say hello to your new master"⁵ (Addams et al., 2025d). In this scene, Wednesday publicly admits for the first time that she has romantic feelings for Tyler. Their romantic relationship had no future; instead, they shared a complicated bond of understanding, dark empathy, and compassion resulting from their shared suffering. It can be seen as an evolutionary step for her character in the work to choose justice over revenge.

Conclusion

The series *Wednesday* makes a significant contribution to social discourse on identity, bullying, discrimination, and marginalisation by actively constructing meanings through its media representation,

rather than just passively mirroring reality. The series highlights the complex internal and external conflicts experienced by characters trying to find their identity and place in society, while facing stigmatisation and social exclusion. By reflecting social problems within popular culture, the series creates space for the development of empathy and understanding among viewers, enabling the media to serve as an effective tool for prevention and raising social awareness.

Additionally, a key feature of the series is the way it interweaves personal narratives with wider themes of power, inequality, and cultural norms. These themes are evident in the conflicts between characters and the narrative structure. Media productions such as this encourage viewers to reflect on their own attitudes and social prejudices, and can promote more inclusive social attitudes. At the same time, the series illustrates the importance of the media in shaping viewers' attitudes: long-term exposure to similar themes can lead to the internalisation or questioning of stereotypes and prejudices.

Research confirms that series, such as *Wednesday*, are highly significant in today's media landscape. They are not only a form of entertainment, but also a means of promoting social change, social inclusion and diversity. Streaming platforms, e.g., Netflix, are in an authoritative position to intervene in global discourses and expand access to sensitive topics for a wide audience. This deepens our

³ Authors' note: The monologue occurs in the time frame 01:00:26 - 01:01:36.

⁴ Authors' note: The monologue occurs in the time frame 01:00:26 - 01:01:36.

⁵ Authors' note: The monologue occurs in the time frame 00:41:39 - 00:41:58.



Figure 2: Mastering the Monster

Source: Addams et al. (2025d)

understanding of the power of the media in shaping social values and highlights the need for responsible, ethical, and inclusive media production.

The success of the series *Wednesday* confirms the importance of investing in content that reflects social change and diversity. By appropriately addressing social issues, Netflix strengthens its position as a culturally relevant leader, opens up new opportunities for collaboration with experts and communities, and promotes an ethical and inclusive approach to content creation. This serves as an example of how culture can contribute effectively to raising social awareness, and promoting inclusion and the development of social values.

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